




**Support and respect  
care-experienced children  
and their belongings  
when they move**

<b>Forewords</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Survey results</b>	
<b>Local authorities</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Professionals</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Children and Young People</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Combined</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Signing up to the 'My Things Matter' Pledge</b>	<b>20</b>

 This report includes quotes from children and young people who NYAS support and case studies from NYAS professionals across England and Wales. Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

# Forewords

**Moving house can be a very stressful time in our lives, but imagine if you had to put everything you care about into bin bags? What if you were given less than 24 hours to pack up all your belongings? Imagine how devastating it would be if the removal company lost your most precious and irreplaceable possessions along the way!**

All too often for children in care, this is their experience when moving from one home to another, and it's not good enough. That is why the NYAS 'My Things Matter' campaign is working with local authorities to help make the moving experience as good as it can be for children and young people. An experience that respects and cares for the young person and their belongings.

**Rita Waters**  
NYAS Group Chief Executive



In the spring of 2014 while I was attending an introduction to fostering course, I was shown a video interview with a young girl in a wheelchair who made the following statement:

**Local Authorities don't provide suitcases. Sometimes foster carers loan us a suitcase but more often our belongings are moved in black plastic bin bags and we lose our dignity.**

This statement really stuck with me, and for the remainder of the evening I thought of nothing else but the fact that these children's belongings are being transferred in bin bags. I was moved immediately to think of ways in which I could help these vulnerable children make their way with dignity.

As I began my research and considered many possible solutions I was continually drawn to the value and worth of children and young people in care and the fact that they deserve to make their way with dignity. I was also drawn to the fact that the widespread use of bin bags to move the belongings of children and young people in care is a national and global issue.

It was at this point **Madlug™** (Make a Difference Luggage) was born. A buy one give one bag brand that empowers its customers to give dignity to children in care. With every bag we sell we give a pack away travel bag to a child in care. To date we have funded over 50,000 pack away travel bags to children across the UK and Ireland.

I am excited to be partnering with NYAS in the 'My Things Matter' campaign because we can increase awareness of the bin bag issue, challenge local authorities to treat their incredible children with value, worth and dignity, along with providing a practical solution to enable the execution of their commitment.

**Dave Linton**  
Madlug Founder/CEO



## Executive Summary

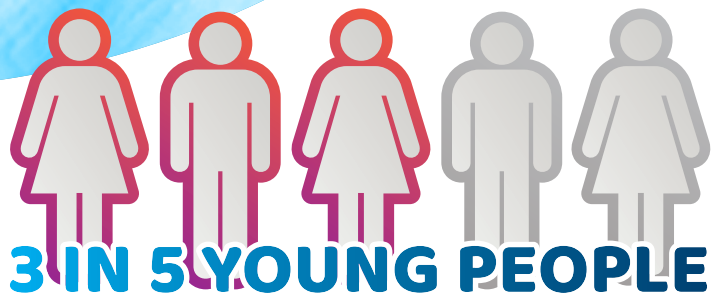
For more than 40 years, NYAS has provided independent advocacy support to care-experienced children and young people across England and Wales, empowering their wishes and feelings to be listened to and taken seriously by decision-makers. Every year, NYAS receives over 10,000 referrals to advocate for care-experienced children and young people, and we know that moving when in care can cause serious problems for many who make contact with NYAS.

One in every three care-experienced children will move home this year. That is over 26,000 children in England and 2,200 children in Wales.

**Every 20 minutes, a child in care moves home.**

When the move is in the best interest of the child, NYAS wants that experience to be as good as it can be.

NYAS created the 'My Things Matter' campaign based on our research into what children and young people want to see improve when they move during their time in care. Opposite is what NYAS' research revealed...



said that at least one, but often more of their personal belongings had been lost or damaged when moving home while living in care.

**4 IN 5 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

who responded to our survey said their belongings were moved in binbags during their time in care.

**JUST OVER 3 IN 5 PROFESSIONALS**


had seen binbags being used to move any or all of the belongings of a child or young person with whom they had worked in the last five years.

**4 IN 5 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

said they were not contacted by someone from their local authority to ask for their views about how the move went.

**ONLY 1 IN 3 LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

have formal written guidance used to support their staff or carers to help children and young people to move successfully.



**Having my stuff moved in binbags felt humiliating, it made me feel like I was worthless just as rubbish is. How can a child who has gone through years of trauma be treated in such an inhumane way?**

**Moving my whole life, sentimental items gifted by my mum in black binbags made me feel like I was the issue. People identified I was in care. A suitcase would have made me feel safe. I would have felt like a human, a person who was cared for.**

DANIEL, 18 YEARS OLD

**The findings of our report clearly show that change is needed. That is why NYAS are asking local authorities to make a pledge to children and young people in their care.**



**Will your local authority sign up to the My Things Matter pledge?**

- 1 We will help you to keep your most precious belongings with you safely during your move and promise they will not be moved in binbags.**
- 2 We will provide written guidance for you and anyone helping you to move, which we will publish on our website.**
- 3 We will never move or throw away your belongings without your consent and will always respect your personal property.**
- 4 We will support you to make a complaint if any of your belongings have been lost or damaged during your move.**
- 5 We will communicate with you about your move and ask you how the move went.**

**#MyThingsMatter**

# Research Methods

Before carrying out external research, NYAS ran several in-house focus groups with our Campaigns Advisory Group, 12 care-experienced young people from across England and Wales, to identify key issues to focus on. The Campaigns Advisers shaped our research approach.

## **Freedom of Information requests to local authorities**

**NYAS issued Freedom of Information requests to 173 local authorities.**

**Out of the 151 local authorities across England, 126 (84.1%) responded.**

**Across Wales, 22 local authorities were contacted by NYAS, with all but one (95.45%) responding.**

## **Surveys for children, young people, and professionals**

NYAS also ran two surveys: one targeted towards care-experienced children and young people, and the other towards any professionals with experience of supporting care-experienced children and young people during a move. Professionals who responded included social workers, personal advisors, foster carers, residential care workers, advocates and more.

Both surveys were open for a period of eight weeks from 22nd June to 17th August 2021. The total number of people who responded to our surveys was 97.

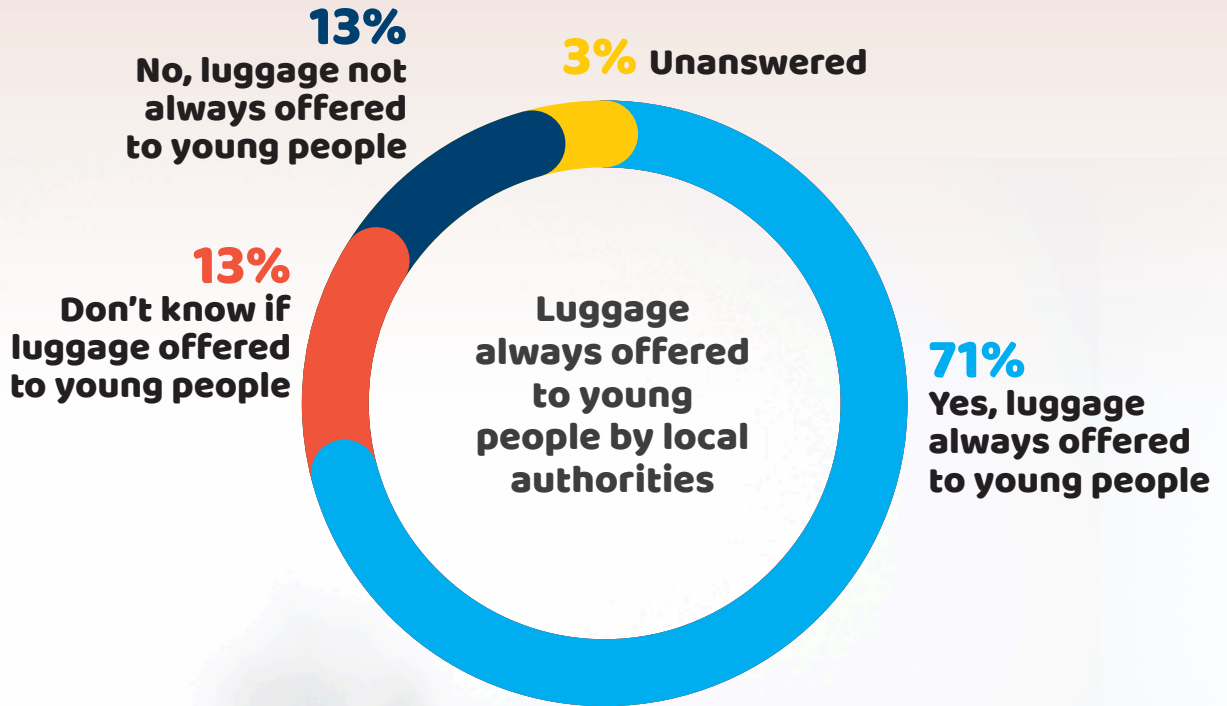
Participants could opt out of the survey or skip all questions at any point. All survey responses were anonymous to protect participants' identities and allow them to feel safe when sharing their views and experiences.



# Survey results: Local authorities

# Q1

When a looked after child (in the care of your local authority) moves placement, are sturdy suitcases or luggage always offered to assist with transporting their belongings?



# Q2

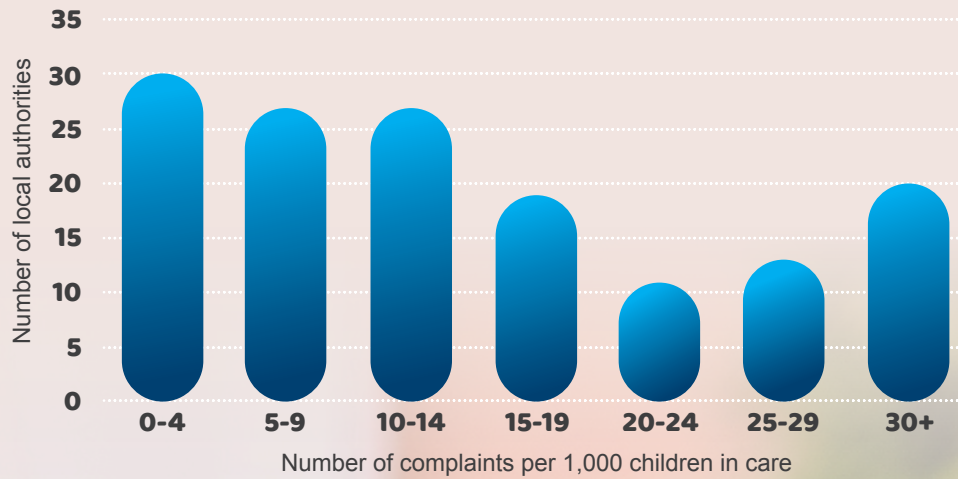
From 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020, how many complaints were made by looked after children against your local authority's children's services?

## Total complaints

Of the local authorities responding to our Freedom of Information request, an estimated total of **933 complaints by children in care** had been made during 2020.

## Complaint rate

Rate of complaints per 1,000 children in care



This chart shows the distribution of complaints. Most local authorities had between **0 and 14 complaints**, although four local authorities had more than **70 complaints** per 1,000 children in care.





# Q3

**From 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2020, how many complaints made by looked after children against your local authority's children's services were related to a child moving placement?**

Throughout the year 2020, there were a total of

**184 complaints by children in care**

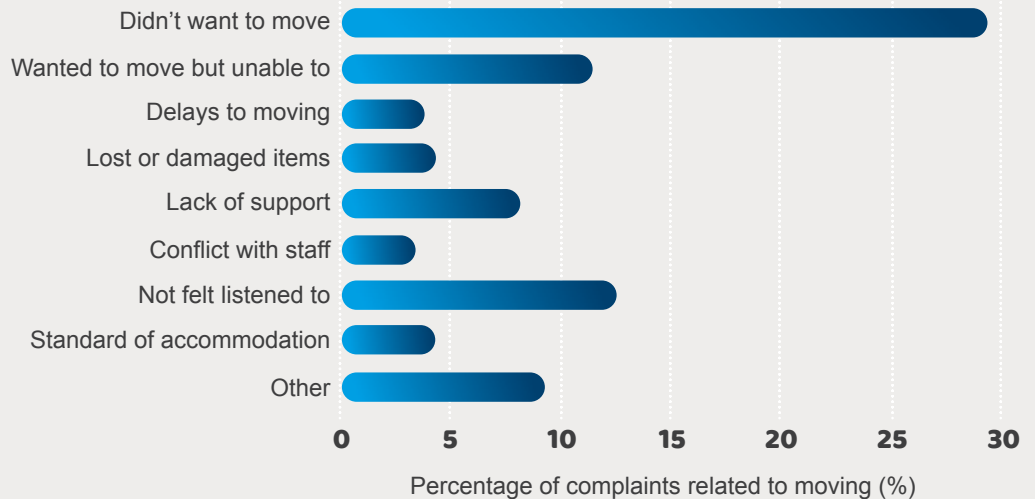
against local authority's children's services related to moving home – that is **1 in 5 (20.9%)** of all complaints.

# Q4

**If you hold data relating to the nature or issue of complaints made against your local authority's children's services, please share the breakdown of these based on the total number of children in the question above.**

## Reasons for complaints related to moving in 2020

Categories of complaints related to moving



While NYAS knows that 3 in 5 young people reported their belongings being lost or damaged during a move while in care, the rate of formal complaints is relatively low as shown in the above graph.

**When their things were lost, the young person responded in an accepting way almost as if this is normal and didn't bother them. I believe they were bothered, but I know this had happened to them many times before.**

INDEPENDENT ADVOCATE

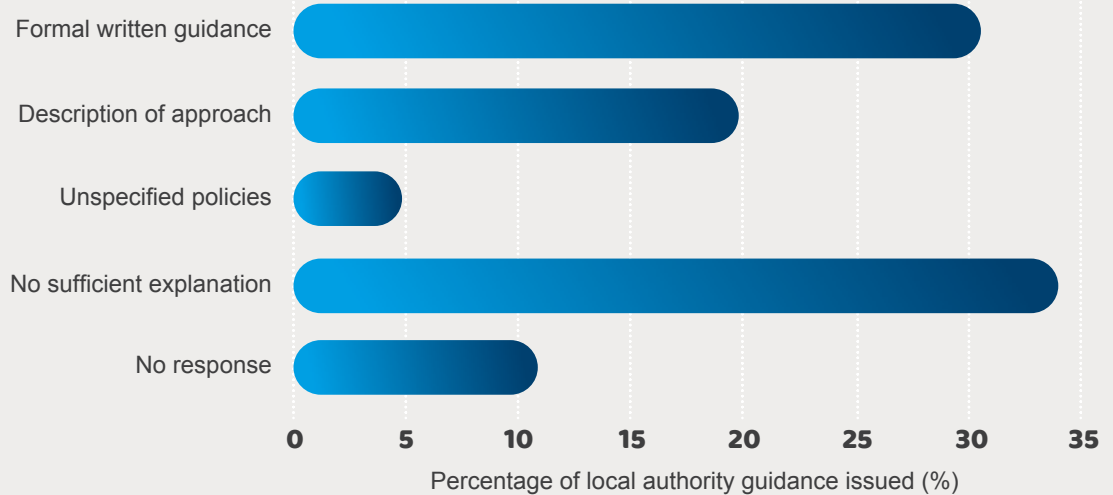
**I worked with a young person who told me that when they were packing their belongings they were told not to worry about their things; their social worker would sort out what they need and what they don't and get rid of it for them. Not considering that they might just want all of their belongings.**

NYAS CYMRU MANAGER

## Q5

Please share any formal or informal guidance your local authority currently uses for staff/carers/looked after children that is focused on looked after children moving placement.

### Type of local authority guidance on moving



#### Formal written guidance

Out of the 147 local authorities that responded to our Freedom of Information request, only 45 (30.4%) provided us with formal written guidance about moving for staff, carers, or children and young people.

44 out of 126 local authorities in England (34.9%) had formal written guidance on moving, whereas only 1 out of 21 local authorities in Wales (4.54%) did.

When local authorities did issue guidance, the vast majority was for staff – and less often carers – to refer to. Very few local authorities shared child-friendly documents telling children and young people what to expect when moving.

#### Informal description of moving approach

29 local authorities out of 147 (19.71%) provided us with an informal description of their approach when children and young people are moving. While it was useful to see recognised expectations, it is difficult to determine how consistent these approaches are in the absence of formal guidance.

#### General policies specified only

In the absence of guidance, seven local authorities (4.76%) provided a link to key children's rights legislation such as the Children Act 1989. Key legislation and rights are vital; however, they should be supported by guidance specific to when children and young people are moving.

#### No sufficient explanation

66 local authorities (44.92%) were unable to provide either clear written guidance or an explanation of their approach when children and young people are moving. Their local practice is unknown.

Out of these 66 local authorities, 16 local authorities (10.88%) did not respond to our question. The other 50 local authorities (34.04%) either attached generic documentation used for training which were not focused on moving or stated that their local authorities had no such guidance.

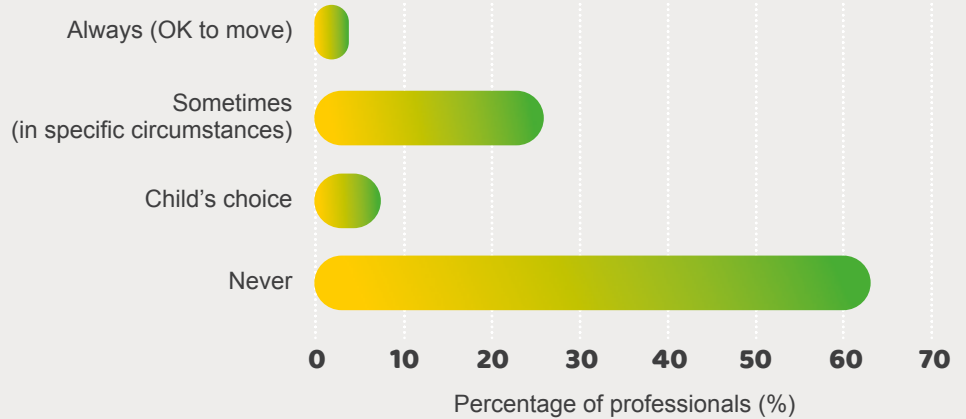
# Survey results: Professionals

NYAS asked questions to the professionals who support care-experienced children and young people. These included social workers, personal advisors, foster carers, residential care workers, advocates and more.

# Q1

## In what circumstances would you expect a child or young person to have to move their belongings in binbags?

**Circumstances in which professionals would expect children and young people to move their belongings in binbags**



**I do not feel bin bags should be used, however sometimes there is no other option, especially if it is an unplanned move.**

PERSONAL ADVISOR

**No circumstances. It is completely unacceptable. I have always challenged it but I have been told bin bags are quick and easy. It is degrading. I have taken boxes and wrapping and bubble paper myself and helped them pack things nicely and label them.**

ADVOCATE

**They have moved in with bin bags but never leave with bin bags.**

SENIOR RESIDENTIAL CARE WORKER

**“If it was an emergency move from parents and it had to be completed very quickly due to risk towards professionals and children, who may not have the appropriate bags/suitcases. Otherwise never.”**

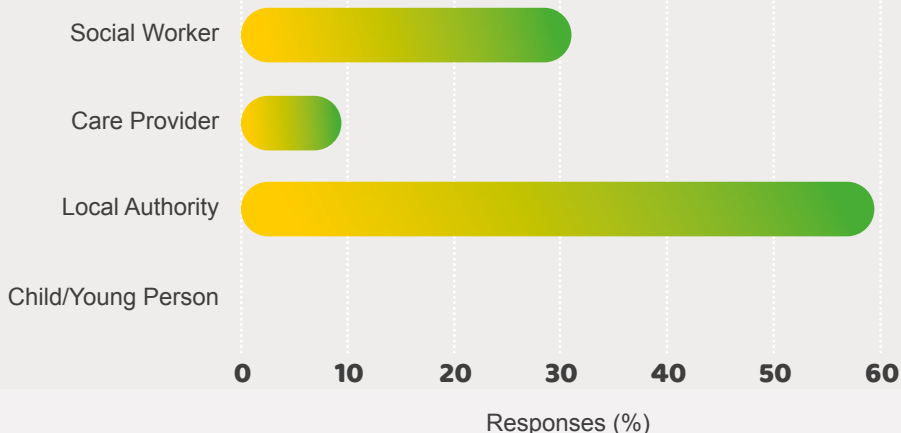
SOCIAL WORKER

# Q2

If a child or young person's belongings are lost during a placement move, who do you believe should take responsibility for recovering or replacing these items? Please select one of the options below.

The social worker, care provider, local authority and child/young person were included as choices.

Who professionals think should take responsibility for recovering or replacing lost belongings



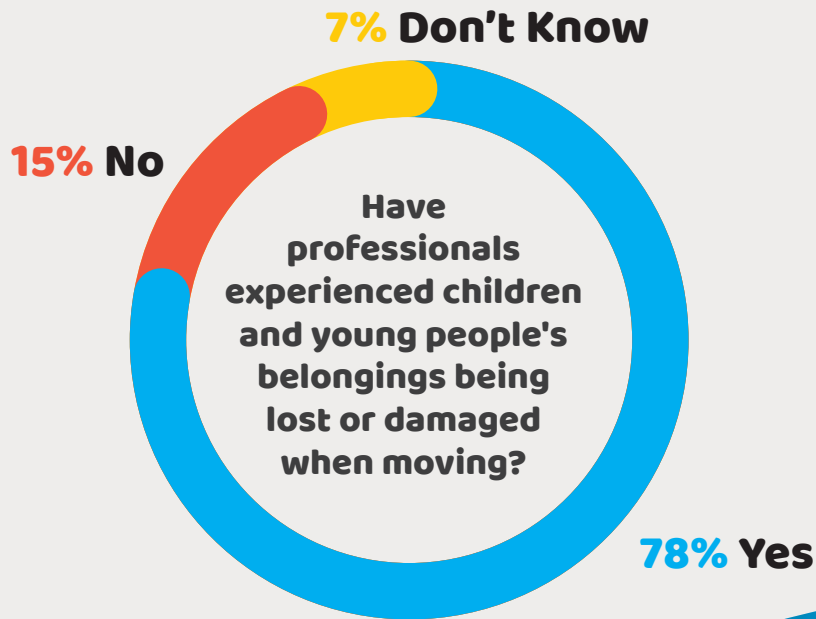
## 9 out of 10

professionals (90.63%) felt the local authority or social worker should take responsibility for recovering or replacing lost belongings.



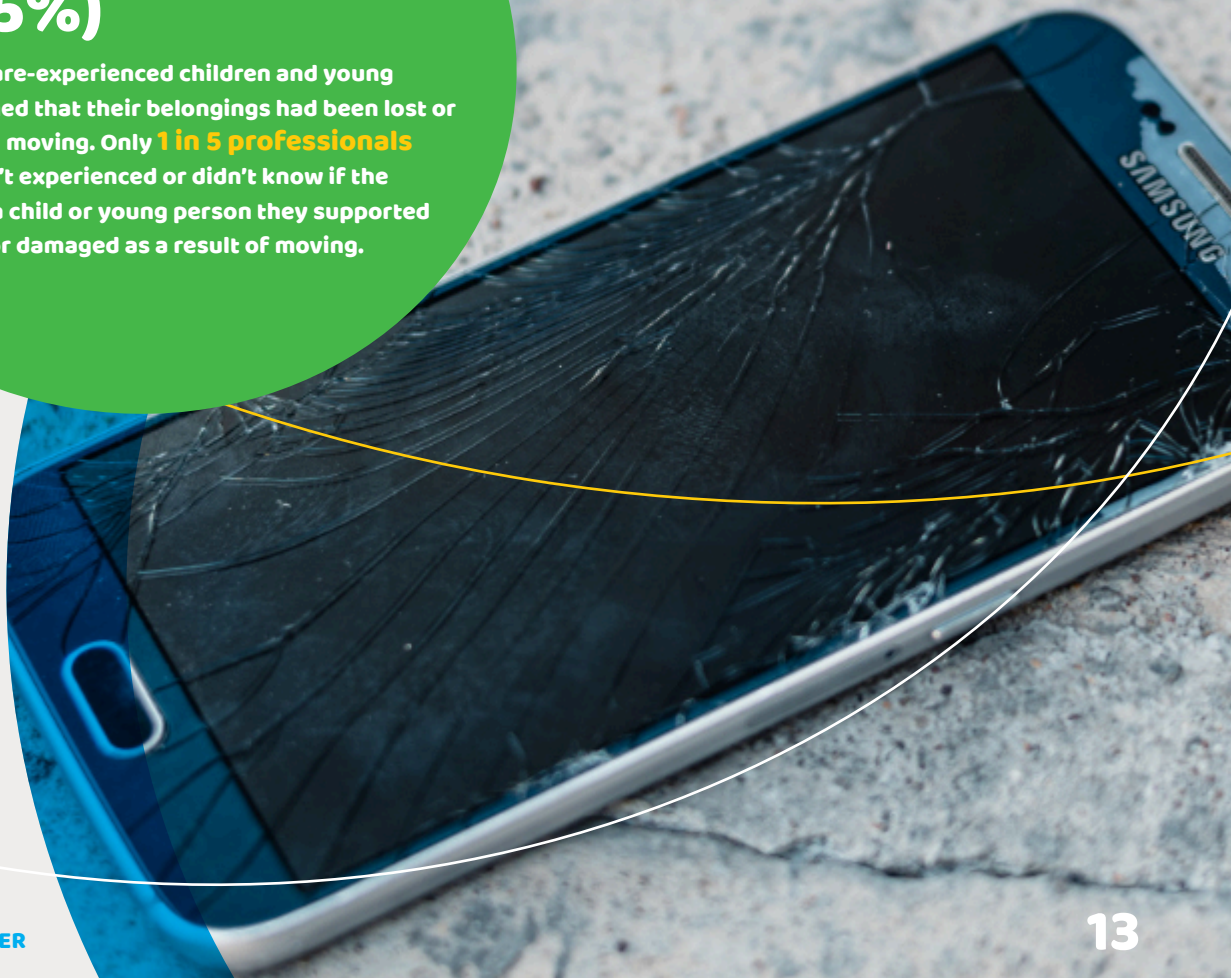
# Q3

Have any belongings of a looked after child you have supported ever become lost, damaged, or broken while they were moving placement?



Just under  
**4 in 5 professionals**  
**(78.05%)**

who support care-experienced children and young people confirmed that their belongings had been lost or damaged when moving. Only **1 in 5 professionals (21.95%)** hadn't experienced or didn't know if the belongings of a child or young person they supported had been lost or damaged as a result of moving.



# Survey results: Children and Young People

NYAS asked questions to care-experienced children and young people aged up to 25.

# Q1

How did having your belongings moved in binbags make you feel?

**WORTHLESS** **NO ONE** **ANGRY** **HOMELESS** **CARED** **AS** **SAD** **IRRITATED** **BURDEN** **UNIMPORTANT** **ANNOYED**

Every single time I moved in care, it was using **bin bags** or **plastic bags**... it's all I've known.

CHARLIE, 21 YEARS OLD

I felt like I had no identity, everything I owned was in a **bin bag**. I felt like nobody cared.

BETH, 20 YEARS OLD

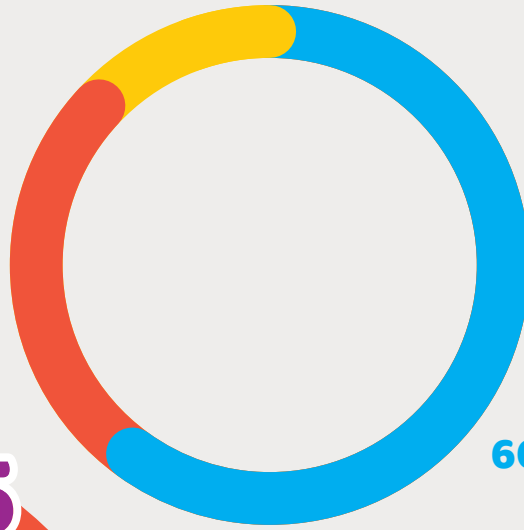
# Q2

Have any of your items ever become lost, damaged, or broken when you moved while living in care?

13% Don't Know

Have you experienced your belongings being lost or damaged during a move while living in care?

27% No



60% Yes

## 3 out of 5

children and young people who responded to the NYAS survey (60%) had one or more of their belongings lost or damaged when moving home while living in care.

In a follow-up question, **two-thirds of children and young people told us it was very difficult (66.67%)** and **one-third said it was quite difficult (33.33%)** to get their missing or damaged belongings returned or replaced.

No child or young person responding to our survey felt that it had been easy to get their missing or damaged belongings returned or replaced.



# Q3

## Can you describe which of your item(s) went missing and/or were damaged?

Children and young people told us about their belongings that were lost or damaged when they moved:



**My grandfather's pictures got lost when I moved, as well as some really important files. It took me two and a half years to get the files back from the local authority. My pictures were lost forever.**

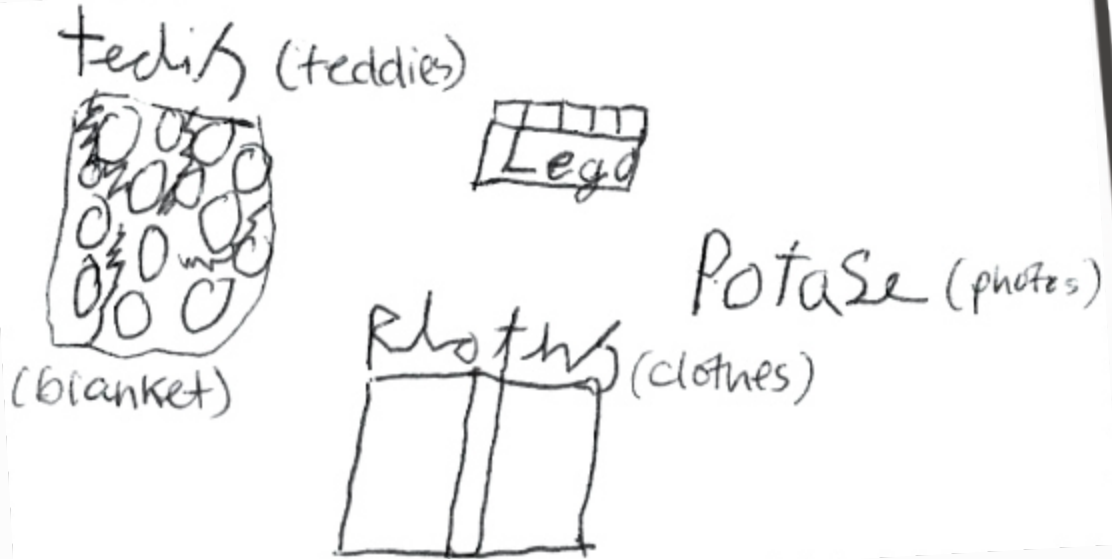
GRACE, 11 YEARS OLD

**I didn't get them back, I asked about it but nothing happened. I didn't ask again.**

ANNA, 18



10 year old Alex, drew for us the things that they would pack first if moving...



**NYAS advocates are often asked to support young people who have belongings lost or damaged during moves.**

**They shared the following experiences:**

**A boy's memory box was lost in a placement move as it was in a suitcase that was left behind. As his advocate, it was not something that I could just get the money back for, it was so special to him.**

NYAS ADVOCATE

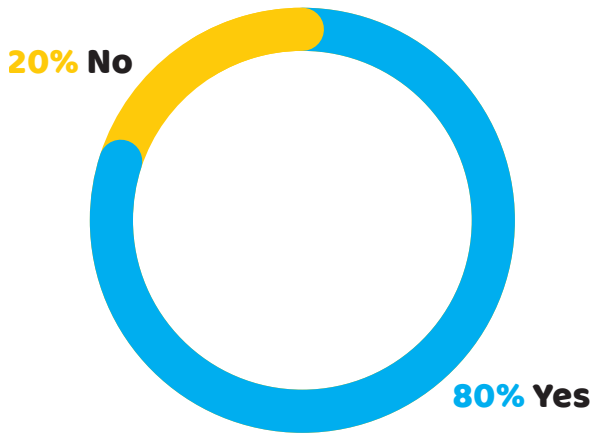
**I advocated for a boy whose bicycle was lost between placement moves. He had saved up for it over time and bought for himself. It took me many months to get the money back from the local authority, and even then, they did not give him back the amount the bike cost.**

NYAS ADVOCATE

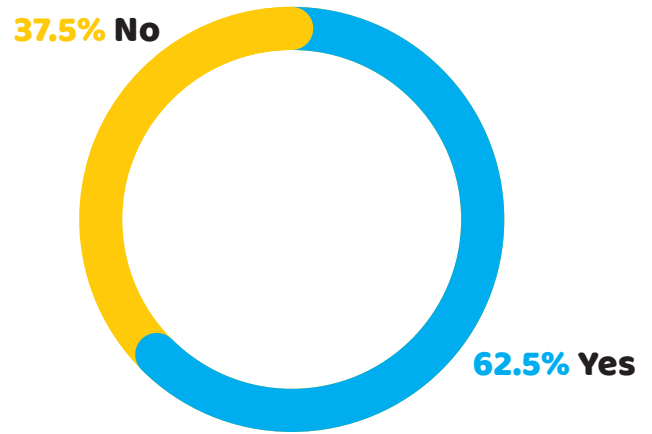
# Survey results: Combined

NYAS paired two questions in the separate surveys, so as to directly compare the views of professionals with those of children and young people. The responses have been set alongside one another below.

**Q1 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:**  
Have your belongings ever been moved in binbags?



**Q1 PROFESSIONALS:**  
In the last five years, have binbags been used to move any or all belongings of a child or young person you have worked with?



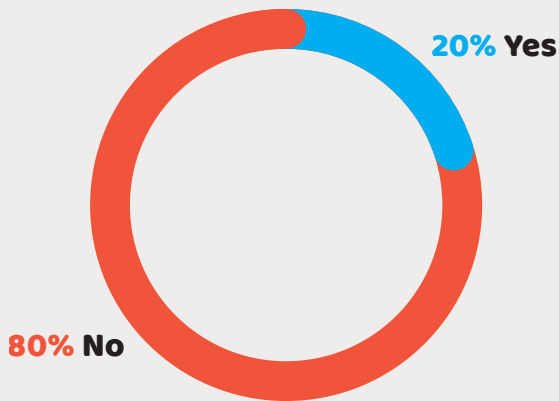
**Four out of five (80%) care-experienced children and young people**

said their belongings had been moved in binbags. This compared to **just over three out of five professionals (62.50%)** who knew that binbags had been used to move belongings of children or young people with whom they had worked in the last five years.

# Q2

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

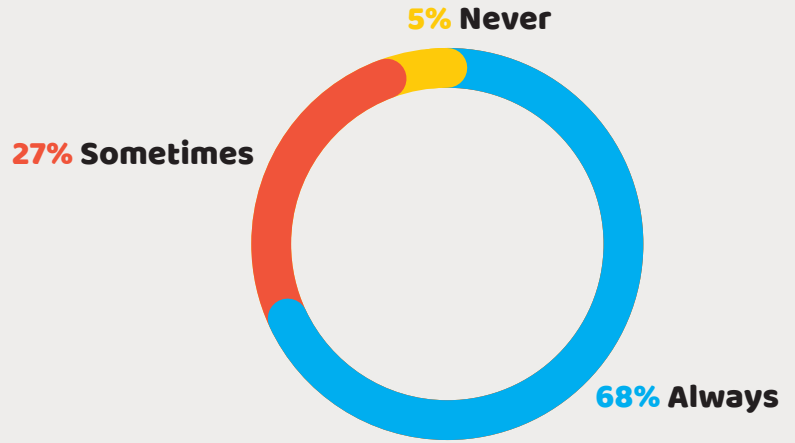
After your last move, were you contacted by anyone from your local authority to ask for your opinions on how the move went?



# Q2

## PROFESSIONALS:

DO YOU GIVE THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE FEEDBACK ON THEIR EXPERIENCE AFTER YOU HAVE SUPPORTED THEM TO MOVE PLACEMENT?



## Only one out of five (20%) of children and young people

surveyed said they were contacted by someone from their local authority to ask for their opinions on how their last move went.

This is at odds with the professionals' perspective, where over two-thirds (68.29%) told us that they always give the children and young people they support the chance to give feedback on their experience after supporting them to move home.

**“ A successful move in my experience is where it has been planned, when it takes into account the young person’s needs, when the young person is at the heart of the move, so fully involved and communicated with and most importantly where their views, wishes and feelings have been sought prior to any decisions being made. ”**

PROJECT COORDINATOR



**matter**  
**pledge**  
to children and  
young people

1

**We will help you to keep your most precious belongings with you safely during your move and promise they will not be moved in binbags.**

2

**We will provide written guidance for you and anyone helping you to move, which we will publish on our website.**

3

**We will never move or throw away your belongings without your consent and will always respect your personal property.**

4

**We will support you to make a complaint if any of your belongings have been lost or damaged during your move.**

5

**We will communicate with you about your move and ask you how the move went.**

# Acknowledgements

**NYAS thanks the children, young people, professionals and local authorities who shared the information, experiences and views that are the bedrock of this campaign.**

NYAS would also like to acknowledge the incredible time and effort of our campaigns advisers in shaping this report and using their own experiences of the care system to promote the well-being of all care-experienced children and young people.

This campaign builds on the work of A National Voice and Voices from Care Cymru, who ran separate campaigns in 2004 and 2007 to end the use of binbags when children in care move home.

We are proud of the tireless work of NYAS staff, volunteers and contractors, and grateful to Madlug for joining with us in this campaign to make an enormous practical difference for care-experienced children when they move.

## Thank you





I was working with a young person who had her belongings picked up from a supported lodgings placement that had broken down.

This was done by someone who was 'available' and not by her worker which meant she had a stranger picking up and packing her belongings. It was also made to be a burden of their time.

When I went with her to collect her belongings they were bagged up with some items in suitcases and some in shopping bags, but they were stored in the toilets of one of the Local Authority buildings which everyone had access to.

I was shocked that **the life of this vulnerable care-experienced young person was in bags in a toilet** with little to no care and respect.

NYAS PROJECT COORDINATOR



Telephone 0808 808 1001 Email [help@nyas.net](mailto:help@nyas.net)

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[in NYAS \(National Youth Advocacy Service\)](#)

**#MyThingsMatter**

[www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)

This campaign report was written by  
**Jennifer Downie and Ben Twomey**

A NYAS campaign  
in partnership with



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