

Breakout discussion themes

At the Community of Practice's recent webinar on Thursday 1 February, attendees went into two breakout discussions to consider some key questions. Here is a list of the points that were raised and a summary of thematic areas.

Responses to questions

What would this data tell you?

- There were some particular aspects of the data that stood out for people: how it was that siblings groups remained together, why children were not placed together, and children not knowing why they were placed apart.
- The data collected seem relevant to developing the CLAS return.

What would this data not tell you?

- Stories behind the data.
- What are young people telling us? Are young people able to define their own situation?
- Placement type of survey respondents.
- Information about siblings over the age of 18 and those who are not looked after. Need to look beyond 18 and relationships with adult siblings. Those relationships can be crucial in transitional support, including the possibility of (re)building relationships and kinship care from older siblings. Many instances where if there has been good connection with an adult sibling over 18, and that has been nurtured, it opens up support going forward.
- Challenge around how we unpick the more complex data beyond Siblings/Half Siblings, including reasons for them being separated.
- Need care in interpreting data.
- Need care in designing surveys to capture meaningful data.
- Need for longitudinal data. It doesn't for example tell us if a particular kinship home setting is sustained over time. CLAS should begin to illustrate change over time.
- Quality of family time, and whether this is well supported and meaningful for sibling groups.
- Some of the complexity of maintaining connections between siblings e.g. where there is differential parental contact.
- How many CYP are having sibling contact properly considering in Children's Hearings?
- Outcomes for sibling groups placed together in purchased placements.
- Question about whether the prevalence of separation within the 5–15-year-old age group reflects housing legislation in relation to different genders sharing rooms?
- Questions about how many children who aren't seeing their siblings are in kinship care? Are they having child's planning reviews?
- Challenges for SCRA with data where some siblings within the children's hearing system, and some not.
- We do not know how many children are asking to participate within hearings of their siblings but are not having their request actioned. There are a couple of local authorities who are using their advocacy data to support their siblings data. Different data systems need to communicate with each other to compile the data.
- Lack of data on sibling-like relationships.

Does this resonate?

- Very challenging to keep brothers and sisters together.
- Challenges are often related to resource issues. Some however feel that this should not be the emphasis.
- The growing importance of kinship resonates and raises questions about how to define kinship. Also disparity in support available between foster care and kinship care.
- Purchased placements often being used to keep sibling groups together.
- CI noted that the information in Ailsa's report resonates with their experiences of talking to children and young people about their level of understanding – highlighting the importance of decisions and the reasoning behind them to be revisited on a regular basis with C&YP.

Priorities for change?

- Need for accurate recording by practitioners.
- Many LAs are at the start of their journey in terms of siblings data – still working out what they need to know and how to get it.
- Need to get better at collecting data, and do this in a multi-agency way including education and housing. E.g. data from class returns.
- Connections with siblings who are adopted.
- Importance of identifying a “good practice model” and sharing this with others.
- Need to build on the increasing focus within children's hearings on sibling relationships and right by continuing to raise awareness and training.
- There is a need for a greater spotlight to be given on reporters, social workers, and panel members in relation to their roles in relation to siblings within hearings.
- There is a need for increased advocacy provision within the children's hearing system.
- Within SCRA, their recording systems do not have very good quality data in relation to the sibling relationships of children coming before hearings. This is a finding reflected in the staying connected report. Page 37 and recommendations 3 & 4 relate to this.
- Need for local solutions.
- Need to get better at understanding why children don't know why they are separated from their siblings.
- Development of recruitment and training agenda at multiple levels.
- Need to share learning e.g. use of child-friendly interactive tool to identify siblings.
- Importance of housing, benefits, and support for kinship.
- Need to recruit, assess, prepare and support foster carers to take sibling groups and support sibling connections. Link to updated PAR-S form.
- Need to ensure that formal plans are regularly revisited, reviewed, and monitored to ensure all involved are fully on board and supported.
- Need for consistency in professional relationships e.g. SWs, TLs, IROs. Related to recruitment and retention of social workers.
- Prisons – supporting young men to apply for a child visit to enable their younger siblings to visit.
- Assessment and upskilling of the workforce to be knowledgeable and confident in assessing relationships.
- Life-story work for children and young people.
- Engaging with all members of corporate parenting bodies alongside C&YP to develop mission statement and practice standards, highlighting the importance of community for children and young people.

- Potential role for a designated professional to support carers of separated siblings in relation to maintaining sibling connections.
- Need for good venues for family time.
- Do siblings need their awareness raised, as well as children and young people in general, of their rights as siblings?

How are you using data?

- Not sure whether data is being collected.
- Limited information on why siblings are not living together.
- Aberdeenshire example of audit and action plan, including project focussed on space.
- We need to start publicly telling the story of where we're at and what we're doing in local areas.
- Adoption is a key issue, how do we approach data in the right way around this?
- Some caution on collection of 'soft data' due to GDPR concerns.

How are you winning hearts and minds?

- Opportunities to share good practice.
- Use of advocacy-making sure its meaningful.
- Supporting carers better.
- Communicating importance of work to senior management.
- Community of Practice.
- Telling stories of change in local areas.
- Amplifying voice of care experience locally – however this doesn't always lead to substantive change.

Thematic areas

Data collection and interpretation

The presentation from West Dunbartonshire focussed upon the use of data, with data collection and interpretation being key themes. In terms of data collection, organisations are at different stages in terms of their development of recording of siblings data. There was emphasis on the importance of accurate recording of siblings by practitioners as being foundational to having good organisational data on siblings. Collection of this data also needs to be multi-agency, with different data sets being cross-referenced to get a good overview of the local picture for siblings. This can be challenging both between agencies as well as between local authorities due to the use of different IT systems. There were some aspects of the data collected from West Dun that stood out, including the reasons for being able to keep sibling groups together, the reasons why they would be separated, and children not knowing why they were placed apart. An important consideration was also which siblings might be left out of the data being collected to date. For example, in relation to children who are not looked after due to being in 'informal' kinship care or adopted, siblings over the age of 18, and sibling-like relationships. Participants thought it would be useful to have some longitudinal data that might show placement stability over time, and it is hoped that the CLAS data illustrates this as it develops. In relation to the survey data, placement type of respondents might have been informative when interpreting the data, and there was discussion about the limitations of what it could tell us, for example knowing how often family time is taking place does not tell us about the quality of it. It is important that data is supplemented by the 'stories' that lie behind the data, particularly from the perspective of children and young people.

Views and knowledge of children and young people

The Care Inspectorate noted that the information from West Dun about children and young peoples' understanding of the reasons why they were placed together or apart from siblings was consistent with what they are hearing from talking to children and young people through inspection processes. We need to get better at ensuring that children and young people have a good understanding of the reasons for decisions about their care. It would also be useful to understand young people's perspectives on their sibling relationships, whether we are asking the right questions of them, and whether the data we have is meaningful to them. This might be promoted by work to ensure that children and young people are aware of their rights as siblings.

Kinship care

The growing importance of kinship care for looked after children resonated with the experiences of organisations from across the country. Participants also raised questions about the consistency of how kinship care is being defined across different areas, and the disparity in support available for kinship and foster care respectively, and how this relates to the varying regulations between the two forms of care. There is a feeling that whilst kinship care has become the largest form of care for looked after children in Scotland, the support available for kinship carers has yet to catch up with that available within foster care. It is difficult to gather accurate data about children living within both 'formal' and 'informal' kinship families, with inconsistent recording across LAs. To fulfil the Promise to all brothers and sisters this needs to have a greater focus.

Sharing best practice and raising awareness

Much of the discussion reflected a view that there remains a need to raise awareness about the value of sibling relationships, and sibling rights, across Scotland. This relates not just to care-experienced children and young people, but for children and young people more generally. Awareness needs raised across the various agencies involved in providing support to looked after children and young people, and at all levels from practitioner to senior management and beyond. There is also a need for a greater spotlight to be placed upon children's reporters, social workers, and panel members and their roles in relation to siblings within children's hearings. Awareness raising also needs backed up by a training agenda. Participants valued the opportunity to share learning in forums such as the community of practice, and in hearing stories of local change. It will be important to be able to identify models of good practice and sharing this, such as the work going on in Glasgow in relation to Family Connections.