Social Work Practices (SWPs) are a new way of organising work with looked after children and care leavers. Some people we spoke with thought these SWPs were better than standard council provided social services. Other people said there was no difference, or that the SWP in their area was not so good at some things. Some SWPs did better than others.

My foster carers look after me and if something goes wrong they always see if I am OK.

I'm meeting lots of new people... new people and new experience.

Workers focus on getting contact right.

Staff are easy to get hold of.

Children have workers they like that don't change.

Children, young people and families know the team.

Workers spend enough time in direct work.

The building is easy to get to and friendly to use.

There were no big differences between SWPs and other social services.

These things make a social work service successful.

A good relationship with the local council.

For more information contact: NStanley@uclan.ac.uk

September 2012

Thanks to the young people from Voice and Involve YP who helped design this short report.
Some differences between SWPs and other social services

Workers have more time

Workers in SWPs were more likely to feel they had enough time to spend with children, families and carers. They felt they had more support from their managers and members of their team.

*Having a smaller caseload frees me up to work more directly with not only the young person but with foster carers, parents and other professionals*

SWP Social Worker

Fewer changes in where we live

In some SWPs, children and young people had fewer moves than children and young people with other social services. This meant that in 3 out of 5 SWPs, children and young people did not change as much between different carers, homes or independent accommodation.

Happier Carers

When children and young people had a social worker from an SWP, more carers were satisfied with the support they got. Most carers were happy with support from social workers in both SWP and other social services. Carers were particularly happy with the support from the SWP social workers with health, education, leisure activities and contact. Some SWPs did better at this than others.

*The social worker helped her to understand her rights about contact and talked through these making her feel as though she had some power instead of mum*

Foster Carer

Contact with birth families

Some SWPs gave extra support with contact. Slightly more children and young people in SWPs were happy with the amount of contact they had with their birth families. Parents appreciated being involved in decisions about contact.

*the Social Worker had appointments with myself, my husband and [the carers] and with [the children] as well to make sure everyone was happy with the way it was going, any concerns that were raised, it was talked through…*

Parent

Offices are welcoming and easy to drop in to

In some SWPs children, young people and their families felt the SWP offices were welcoming and easy to drop into and get help. Some SWP offices provided a friendly place for contact.

It was particularly good if the building was

- Central and easy to get to
- Well decorated and had computers, TV and games
- Did not have security barriers

...here we can cook a meal together or we can go on the computers or we can have a game of pool...I can do more things with him, so he’s not bored so quickly...It’s more fun here...it’s not like down at the other place where the staff are shut behind a wall ... here you do get to see them all and you talk to them all…*

Parent

No big differences in ...

Support

Most children and young people said their carers, or other people they lived with, gave them help and support.

More than 4 out of 5 of all the children and young people we talked to felt listened to and cared about by their workers.

About 1 in 4 children and young people said they didn’t have as much help as they wanted. For example, not enough help with contact, education, employment, leaving care or emotional support. But some workers, in SWPs and other social services, went out of their way to give extra help.

Getting hold of workers

Young people contacted their worker by telephone (office number or mobile), texts, and occasionally email. Over half said it was easy to get hold of their worker. More than 3 out of 4 of all the children and young people we talked to said they saw enough of their workers. In SWPs and in other social services, some workers responded to texts or phone calls out of hours.

*I called her out of hours and [to my] amazement she rang me back within the next twenty minutes…*

17-19 year old girl

Being happy with where we live

More than 3 out of 4 of all children and young people felt happy with where they were living.

Joining in and having a say

Most children and young people, in both SWPs and other social services had a say in their care plan, pathway plan or review meeting. Some young people also joined in participation groups and helped do things like choose staff or plan events for other young people.