

Information from CELCIS (Centre of Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland)

Who is a looked after child?

Many children have experiences which result in the need for extra care, support or protection from public agencies. And in very serious cases, some children become 'looked after'. This means a local authority takes on some legal responsibility for the care and wellbeing of the child. This process most often happens through Scotland's unique Children's Hearings System, but the law courts also have relevant powers, and in many cases the arrangement is made on a voluntary basis between the child's family and their local authority.

Children who are 'looked after' are considered to be either 'looked after at home' (living with a parent in the regular place of residence), or looked after away from home (living with carers provided, or financially supported, by the local authority).

There are just under 16,000 looked after children in Scotland, ranging from 0 to 21 years of age. And the latest statistics tell us that the number of girls and boys are roughly the same.

Looked after children and young people are among the most disadvantaged children in society. The specific reasons why a child becomes looked after varies. But in every case children will have been through a traumatic or difficult life experience which can result in instability, distress, poor emotional and physical health, or lack of social and educational development. Overall, looked after children do not enjoy the same positive advantages, experiences and outcomes as other children. These are children in need of society's most conscientious support and understanding.

Looked after at home

A child is looked after at home when he or she has been placed under a supervision requirement with 'no condition of residence' as part of the Children's Hearing process.

These children may have experienced neglect, physical, mental or emotional abuse, or may live with parents with substance abuse issues, or poor parenting skills. They continue to live at home because it is hoped that by providing support to child and family, the problems affecting the child can be resolved, without the need to separate them from their family.

Looked after away from home

Children who are looked after away from home live away from home with either foster or kinship carers, prospective adopters, in residential care homes, or in a group care setting (residential schools or secure units).

Children may be looked after away from home for numerous reasons:

- their parents cannot look after them
- they may have complex disabilities or special learning needs
- some will have been trafficked or are seeking asylum
- in a small number of cases, as a result of criminal behaviour.