

# Looked after children data bulletin

## What can we learn from data on children who are looked after under the Children Act 1989 due to their disability?

### Key facts and stats<sup>1</sup>

- 2,250 children and young people were looked after due to their disability at March 2015 or 3% of looked after children (LAC), the same proportion in each of the last five years.
- At local authority level, numbers are low, typically between just 1-24 disabled LAC.
- Most children looked after due to their disability are boys and most are of secondary school age.
- Over two-thirds (68%) are looked after on a voluntary basis (section 20 of the Children Act), which is often used for children in full-time residential placements.
- Disabled LAC are nearly five times as likely to be in a residential placement, compared to all LAC (59% vs 12%), the great majority of them in children's homes and residential special schools. They are also more likely to be placed out of area than other LAC.
- Disabled care leavers are more likely to be in education, employment or training at age 19 years than all care leavers (60% vs 53%) but slightly less likely by 21 years (40% vs 42%).
- At age 19, 40% of care leavers whose main need was disability were living in community homes, 10 times the proportion across all care leavers (4%). Just over one in 10 (11%) were living independently, compared to one third (32%) of care leavers overall. By age 21, the proportion of disabled care leavers living independently has fallen to 10%, compared to 45% of care leavers overall. This suggests that this cohort includes many young people with complex needs.
- Data on the special educational needs of looked after children is shown in the SEN bulletin, section 2.

<sup>1</sup> Not shown in national data. Most recent data collected in 2008 by the SEN Regional Partnerships, in an 'Analysis of out of authority placements' (unpublished). Just over three-quarters of children in full-time residential placements were looked after at that time.

## Data notes

### Sources

1. SFR34-2015 (latest at the time of writing, September 2016).  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children>
2. Special request to DfE for further breakdowns of data on disabled LAC. This is available online at  
<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/data-report>

### Data limitations

1. A child is recorded as disabled only if that is the primary reason for being looked after. If abuse or neglect is involved, this will almost certainly constitute a child's primary need. This means that the total number of disabled looked after children is higher than these figures suggest, as children with other primary needs are not recorded as disabled.
2. Placements in residential special schools are recorded as children's homes, if settings are dual-registered as both a school and a home. Residential special schools offering 52-week placements must be dual-registered and the great majority of children in such placements are looked after<sup>1</sup>. So at present, this dataset under-represents residential school placements in favour of children's home placements. A clearer breakdown will be available in future, due to improvements in recording requirements.<sup>2</sup>

### Rounding conventions

The number of children is rounded to the nearest 10, in line with DfE conventions for data on LAC. Percentage figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point and low values are suppressed. Analysis of rounded figures can give rise to small differences (up to one percentage point), which would be avoided if unrounded data were available.

We have not tested the significance of these data, but where there are doubts about robustness, they are highlighted.

<sup>2</sup> From 2016, local authorities should provide a unique provider reference number, so type of provision can be validated.

**How many disabled children are looked after? What proportion of looked after children are disabled? Has this changed over time?<sup>3</sup>**

2,250 children looked after had disability as their main category of need at March 2015. This represents 3% of children looked after, the same proportion in each of the past five years (2011-2015 inclusive). Numbers have fluctuated from year to year, while the overall number of looked after children has risen by 6% during this period.

**How does this vary at local authority level?<sup>4</sup>**

At regional level, the number of looked after children whose main need is disability ranges from just 90 in the North East region (2% of LAC) to 400 in the South East (4% of LAC). The highest proportion is in the South West, where 5% of looked after children (270 children and young people) have disability as their main need.

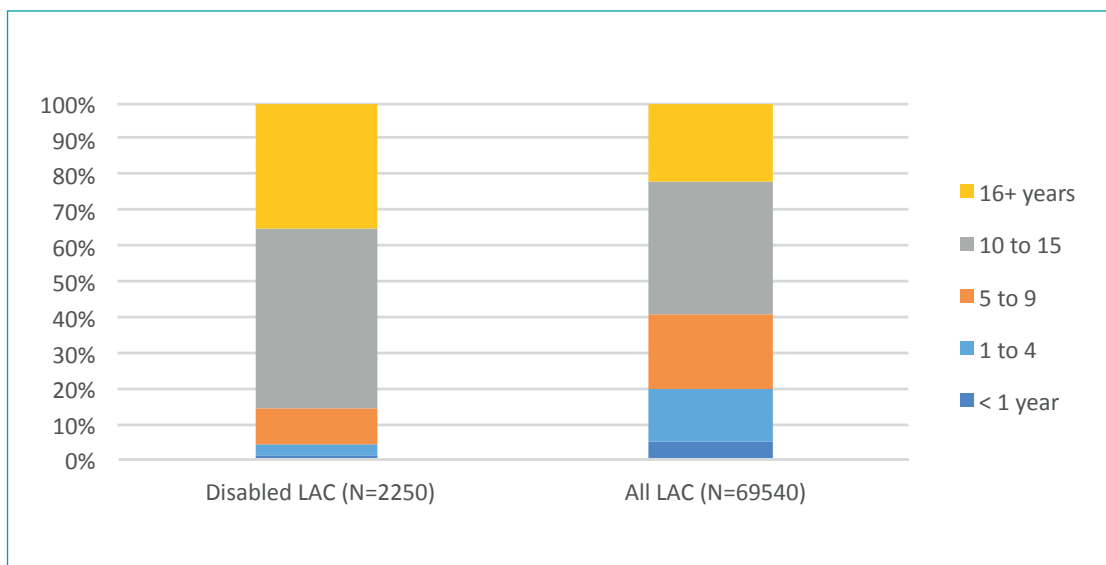
At local authority level, numbers are low, so figures are not available for every area and rounding (to the nearest five) may distort the picture.<sup>5</sup> With that proviso, the number of looked after children whose main need is disability ranged from zero in the three smallest authorities (City of London, Rutland & Isles of Scilly) to between 60 and 70 in four of the largest counties (Devon, Essex, Kent and Hampshire). The great majority of local authorities look after between 1 and 24 children whose main need is disability.

**What do we know about disabled children who are looked after?<sup>6</sup>**

**Gender**

69% of disabled looked after children are boys and 31% are girls, a greater gender gap than among the wider LAC cohort (55% male: 45% female). This is not surprising, as other national data show

**Age profile of disabled LAC compared to all LAC (March 2015, England)**



3 National tables, A1.

4 Local authority level data on LAC with a disability was not published, but was provided through a special request to DfE.

5 Rounding conventions (to nearest five at local authority level) and suppression of values between 1-5 inclusive (for 32 LAs) make it difficult to show this distribution graphically.

6 Data from a special request to DfE. Comparisons with the wider LAC cohort use SFR 34-2015 data, table 1.

consistently that there are more disabled boys than girls.

### Age

Over half (51%) of disabled LAC are aged between 10 and 15 years and more than one third (35%) are aged 16 or more. A much lower proportion of under-10s are looked after – only 15% of disabled LAC are aged nine or less, compared to 40% of LAC as a whole. This age profile may reflect the fact that most residential placements of children with special educational needs occur during secondary education.<sup>7</sup>

### Ethnicity

The ethnic profile of disabled children who are looked after is similar to all children looked after. Given low numbers and rounding, it was not possible to make valid comparisons, beyond the headline figures shown in the table below. These data suggest that disabled children who are looked after are slightly more likely to be white than other looked after children, and slightly less likely to be of mixed background.

### Legal status

The legal basis for looking after a child is defined by the Children Act 1989 [see box].

Under the Children Act 1989, a **care order** is as an order made by the court on the application of any local authority or authorised person to: (a) place a child in the care of a designated local authority; or (b) put him under the supervision of a designated local authority.

### A voluntary agreement under section 20 of the Children Act 1989

enables a local authority to provide accommodation for any child in need to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. This requires the consent of (i) those with parental responsibility where a child is <16; or (ii) the child is >16 years. A local authority is required to provide accommodation for a child within their area under s.20 if — (a) there is no person who has parental responsibility for him; (b) he is lost or abandoned; or (c) the person who is caring for him is prevented from providing suitable accommodation or care.

**Placement order** is a court order which gives a local authority the legal authority to place a child for adoption. The order continues in force until revoked, an adoption order is made, the child marries or forms a civil partnership or reaches 18.

Source: SFR 34-2015 commentary (abbreviated).

	Disabled LAC	All LAC
White	80%	77%
Mixed	6%	9%
Asian or Asian British	5%	4%
Black or Black British	7%	7%
Other ethnic groups	2%	2%
Other	x	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: X is shown where value of 1-5 was suppressed.

<sup>7</sup> See SEN data bulletin (short section on residential placements at the end of Section 3).

More than two-thirds of disabled children who are looked after (68%, 1,530 children) are under a voluntary agreement (known as a section 20). It is likely that many of these children are in full-time residential placements in dual-registered special schools and children's homes.

Disabled looked after children are much less likely to be taken into care (30% are under a care order, compared to 60% of all LAC) or to be under a placement order for adoption (2% of disabled LAC have a placement order, compared to 11% of all LAC).

However, as disability is only recorded if it is the main reason for being looked after, and almost certainly not if abuse or neglect are involved, these statistics probably under-represent the number of disabled LAC who are under a care order.

### What sort of placements are made for disabled looked after children?<sup>8</sup>

Overall disabled LAC are nearly five times as likely to be in a residential placement, compared to all LAC (59% vs 12%), the great majority of them in children's homes and residential special schools.

The table below provides a breakdown by type of placement. This shows that disabled LAC are:

- around half as likely to be in foster placements (38% disabled LAC vs 75% of all LAC). Disabled LAC are also less likely to be placed for adoption, with parents or in the community (i.e. in other non-residential placements).
- more than three times as likely to be in a children's home (38% disabled LAC vs 9% all LAC) and almost seventeen times more likely to be in a residential school (16%

	No. of disabled LAC	% Disabled LAC (N=2250)	% all LAC (N=69,540)
<b>Foster placements</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Placed for adoption</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Placement with parents</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Other placement in the community</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
Living independently	30	1	3
Residential employment	0	0	x
<b>Secure units, children's homes and hostels</b>	<b>850</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>9</b>
Secure unit inside Council boundary	x	x	-
Secure unit outside Council boundary <sup>3</sup>	x	x	-
Homes & hostels subject to CH regs in Council boundary	450	20	4
Homes & hostels subject to CH regs outside Council boundary	390	17	4
Homes and hostels not subject to CH regs	10	1	2
<b>Other residential settings</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
Residential care homes	90	4	1
NHS Trust providing medical/nursing care	20	1	-
Family centre or mother and baby unit	0	0	-
Young offenders institution or prison	0	0	-
<b>Residential schools</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other placement</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>x</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,250</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes: X is shown where figures were suppressed. '-' is shown where % figures were <0.5%. Numbers are rounded to nearest 10 or nearest whole percentage point, so totals may not equal sum of parts.

<sup>8</sup> Data from a special request to DfE. Comparisons with the wider LAC cohort use SFR 34-2015 data, table A2.

disabled LAC vs 1% all LAC). There is some overlap between these two categories, as many residential settings are dual-registered.<sup>9</sup>

### **Out of authority placements<sup>10</sup>**

Disabled LAC are also more likely to be placed outside the council boundary, some at a considerable distance from home. Overall, 51% of children looked after whose principal need is disability are placed in another local authority area, compared to 40% of all LAC.

The proportion out of area is higher for disabled LAC in residential special schools and children's homes, at 59% across these two types of settings. It would be interesting to know how many placements were further than 20 miles away (published for LAC as a whole<sup>11</sup>), but this breakdown is not currently available for disabled LAC. A recent survey of children in 52-week residential placements showed that 76% were placed more than 20 miles from the family home.<sup>12</sup>

### **Care leavers – activity and accommodation<sup>13</sup>**

There has been a great focus over the last decade on improving outcomes for looked after children, underpinned by improvements in the data collected and published on this cohort. This sheds some light on outcomes for disabled children and young people who have been looked after, many of them in residential placements.

Although the focus of this analysis is on children and young people aged 0-18 years, we requested this data as there is so little evidence on outcomes for this cohort.

Among 19, 20 and 21 year olds whose primary need was disability when they left care:

- 60% were in education, employment or training (EET) at age 19, the great majority of them (49%) continuing in education other than higher education. By age 21, 40% were still in EET, a similar proportion to the wider LAC cohort.
- 27% were not in EET at age 19 years (including 17% owing to illness or disability), rising to 37% by age 21 (at which time, 27% were not in education, employment or training (NEET), owing to illness or disability).
- There was no information on the rest – 14% of 19 year olds rising to 24% of 21 year olds.

Comparing these data to the broader care leavers cohort, disabled care leavers were more likely to be in EET at age 19 years (60% vs 53%) but slightly less likely by the time they reached 21 years (40% vs 42%). This may in part reflect residential special school placements, which tend to be maintained to around 19 years of age.

<sup>9</sup> See introductory data notes. At present, this dataset under-represents the true extent of residential special school placements, in favour of children's home placements. Type of provision is more clearly recorded from 2016 onwards.

<sup>10</sup> Data request to DfE, table LAC A3. Comparisons with the wider LAC cohort uses SFR 34-2015 data, table A5. <sup>11</sup> SFR34-2014 table A4.

<sup>11</sup> SFR34-2014 table A4.

<sup>12</sup> As yet unpublished survey data gathered by the Transforming Care Programme on children in 52-week residential placements in December 2015, see SEN data bulletin (end of section 3).

<sup>13</sup> Data from a special request to DfE, 'care leavers' tab. Note, analysis of rounded data in this section may have led to differences of +/- one percentage point, compared to results if unrounded data were available. Comparisons with the wider LAC cohort use SFR 34-2015 data, table F1.

Data on accommodation also shows some important differences, indicating that these disabled LAC include many with complex disabilities.

At age 19, 40% of care leavers whose main need was disability were living in community homes, ten times the proportion of non-disabled care leavers (4%). Just over one in ten (11%) were living independently, compared to one third (32%) of care leavers overall.

These differences are sustained at age 21 years, when 37% of disabled care leavers are living in community homes compared to just 4% of care leavers overall. By age 21, the proportion of disabled care leavers living independently has fallen to 10%, compared to 45% of care leavers overall.



The True Colours Trust

**Data bulletin of an exploratory analysis  
commissioned by the Council for Disabled Children  
and the True Colours Trust.**

**by Anne Pinney**

The full report and in-depth data bulletins can be found at  
[www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/helpresources/data-report](http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/helpresources/data-report)