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Establishing children's placements

John De Maio and Daryl Higgins, Australian Institute of Family Studies

This chapter examines how the current out-of-home care (OOHC) placement for children in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) at Wave 1 was established. It describes the information provided to the current caregivers about the study child, preparations made by the caregiver for the child's arrival, the extent to which the child's cultural background had been maintained, as well as the degree to which the child had settled into the household. Chapter 9 examines differing aspects of children's placements focusing on the current caregiver demographics, household characteristics and neighbourhood context. The POCLS Wave 1 interview took place, on average, 17 months after the child first entered OOHC and provides baseline data relevant to Key Research Question 8: *'What are the placement characteristics and placement stability of the children, and how do these influence their outcomes?'*¹.

Placement characteristics and stability can significantly influence outcomes for children in OOHC. Placement instability in the early years of OOHC has been shown to have a negative effect on children's long-term outcomes and wellbeing. Webster, Barth and Needle (2000), for example, reported that two or more placement changes during the first year of OOHC were associated with greater placement instability in the long term. A high number of OOHC placements is associated with compromised developmental outcomes across a range of domains (e.g., Newton, Litrownik & Landsverk, 2000; Wulczyn & Chen, 2010). These findings point to the importance of establishing enduring and nurturing placements for children upon their entry into care.

¹ Please see Chapter 2 for a description of the data analysis undertaken in this report.

It is not just the frequency of placement changes, however, but also their timing that may be important. For example, in the Philadelphia Children's Stability and Well-being longitudinal study of 400 children in foster care, placement stability is defined not only by the number of times a child moves, but also by the timeframes within which stability is achieved. In the first 18 months of a child's placement in OOHC, Noonan, Rubin, Mekonnen, Zlotnik and O'Reilly (2009) identified three categories: (a) *early stability*, where a child achieves a stable placement within 45 days of entering care; (b) *later stability*, where a child achieves a stable placement beyond 45 days but within nine months of entering care; and (c) *instability*, where a child does not achieve a stable placement. If early instability is due to the unsuitability of the placement in meeting the child's needs, but a good match is subsequently found and a period of significant stability ensues, positive outcomes may still be achieved.

Placement instability is related to a number of factors, including the presence of child behavioural or emotional problems (Redding, Fried & Bitner, 2000), older child age (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, Landsverk, Fisher & Stoolmiller, 2006), and the type of care experienced, with children in relative/kinship care found to be less likely to experience placement instability than those in foster care (Chamberlain et al, 2006). While it can be difficult to disentangle the direction of associations, for example whether child behavioural or emotional problems increase the risk of placement instability or placement instability increases the risk of child problems, the review by Jones and colleagues (2011) suggested that placement stability was a mediator of the relationship between child emotional and behaviour problems and long-term outcomes.

The duration of POCLS children's current placement at the time of the Wave 1 interview is likely to reflect the study design. As described in Chapter 2, the Wave 1 data were collected over 27 months, with interviews staggered based on the child's age, with the early stages of the Wave 1 data collection exclusively for children aged 9–35 months.

The most prevalent length of time children aged 9–35 months had been in their current placement at the Wave 1 interview was 6–11 months (38%) compared with 12–17 year olds, for whom it was 18 months or longer (42%). Overall, the most common length of time POCLS children had been residing in their current placement at the time of the Wave 1 interview was 12–17 months. Placement length and stability will be examined in depth in subsequent reports.

4.1 Setting up the child's current placement

One third of the caregivers reported that they had no contact with the child before the placement commenced, while 40% reported more than one overnight stay, and 37% reported that the child had more than a one-day visit before the placement commenced. Younger children tended to have experienced fewer overnight visits than older children. For example, 58% of caregivers of 6–11 year olds and 48% of caregivers of 12–17 year olds reported more than one overnight stay, compared with 24% of those caring for children aged 9–35 months. As might be expected, a higher percentage of children in foster and residential care had no contact with the caregiver prior to the placement, compared with children in relative/kinship care (65% and 55% respectively compared with 8% of children in relative/kinship care).

One quarter of caregivers reported that the child was already living with them at the time of official placement, while almost half (47%) reported that the placement was long term (Table 4.1). Just over a quarter of children were in emergency or respite placements when they were officially placed with the caregivers, and these children continued to reside in these placements at the time of the Wave 1 interview. In terms of age variations, fewer 12–17 year olds (17%) had been living with the current caregiver when they were officially placed compared with the younger age groups. A smaller percentage of children aged 9–35 months (24%) were in emergency or respite placements when they were officially placed with the current caregiver, compared with children aged 3–5 years (32%) and children aged 12–17 years (33%).

Overall, two thirds (67%) of caregivers interviewed at Wave 1 reported that they were told that the placement would last until the child turned 18 years². Initially some caregivers were told that the placement would only be for a few days or weeks (5%), a few months (5%) or a few years (3%), and then children remained in these placements for longer periods. For 20% of caregivers, no timeframe was given at the start of the placement in relation to the expected placement length. There appear to be minimal differences in placement timeframes across age groups.

Just over half (53%) of the caregivers interviewed reported that they were unrelated to the child. Children were most commonly living with grandparents (29%) when placed with relatives, while a further 13% were with aunts and/or uncles. There appear to be some age differences, with a slightly higher proportion of the two youngest age groups being placed with unrelated caregivers (57% of 9–35 month olds and 53% of 3–5 year olds) compared with the two older age groups (47% of both 6–11 and 12–17 year olds). A higher proportion of 3–5 and 6–11 year olds were placed with a grandparent (30% and 35%) compared with 12–17 year olds (21%). Placement with an aunt or uncle was more common among 12–17 year olds (24%) than younger children (12–13%).

² As explained in Chapter 2, POCLS children restored before the Wave 1 interview was scheduled were not included in the Wave 1 data collection.

Table 4.1: Caregiver reports on various aspects of establishing the placement, by child age

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Type of contact with child prior to placement¹										
More than one overnight stay	135	23.8	125	47.2	192	58.4	60	48.4	512	39.8
Only one overnight stay	30	5.3	13	4.9	6	1.8	1	0.8	50	3.9
More than one day visit	226	39.9	88	33.2	111	33.7	45	36.3	470	36.6
Only one day visit	51	9.0	15	5.7	15	4.6	8	6.5	89	6.9
No contact	208	36.7	87	32.8	88	26.7	42	33.9	425	33.1
Total	567		265		329		124		1,285	
Status of the placement when child officially placed										
Planned long-term placement	283	50.4	109	41.6	146	44.9	60	50.0	598	47.2
Emergency or respite placement	133	23.7	83	31.7	92	28.3	40	33.3	348	27.4
Child already living with caregiver when matter went to Court	145	25.8	70	26.7	87	26.8	20	16.7	322	25.4
Total	561		262		325		120		1,268	
How long caregivers told child would be staying										
Few days	4	0.7	4	1.6	2	0.6	4	3.3	14	1.1
Few weeks	21	3.8	8	3.2	14	4.4	2	1.7	45	3.6
Few months	31	5.7	12	4.8	13	4.1	4	3.3	60	4.9
Few years	15	2.7	8	3.2	11	3.5	5	4.1	39	3.2
Until child turns 18 years	361	66.1	167	66.3	221	69.9	81	66.9	830	67.2
No timeframe given	114	20.9	53	21.0	55	17.4	25	20.7	247	20.0
Total	546		252		316		121		1,235	
Caregiver's relationship to the child²										
Unrelated	321	56.6	139	52.5	155	47.1	46	46.9	661	52.5
Grandparent	153	27.0	80	30.2	114	34.7	21	21.4	368	29.2
Aunt/Uncle	71	12.5	32	12.1	41	12.5	23	23.5	167	13.3
Other relative ³	22	3.9	14	5.3	19	5.8	8	8.2	63	5.0
Total	567		265		329		98		1,259	

1 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as children could have both daytime and overnight stays. Children in residential care are not included in this table (n=26).

2 The 'caregiver' refers to the caregiver of the study child who was interviewed for Wave 1 of the POCLS, but it cannot be assumed that the other caregiver has the same relationship to the study child in cases where there was a second caregiver in the household.

3 This includes siblings, cousins, great grandparents, great aunts/uncles, step-parents, step-grandparents.

Table 4.2 shows that the most common changes that caregivers made to their household to prepare for the child’s arrival were a modification to caregivers’ routines, the purchase of furniture/equipment, and the rearrangement of bedrooms, with 57–60% of all caregivers reporting they had needed to make these changes. A change to the family’s routine was also relatively common, with this required in approximately 40% of households.

There appear to be only minor differences in caregivers’ reports of the changes needed to accommodate children aged 9 months to 11 years. However, caregivers of children aged 12–17 years were considerably less likely to report that any of these changes were needed, with differences particularly evident in changes to their own or the family’s routine, and purchase of furniture/equipment or a larger car.

Table 4.2: Caregiver reports of changes made to the household to prepare for the child’s arrival, by child age¹

	9–35 months		3–5 years		6–11 years		12–17 years		Total ²	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Change in caregiver’s routine	360	63.5	158	59.6	187	56.8	44	44.9	749	59.5
Purchase furniture or equipment	342	60.3	161	60.8	198	60.2	48	49.0	749	59.5
Rearrange bedrooms	325	57.3	153	57.7	191	58.1	51	52.0	720	57.2
Change in family routine	257	45.3	120	45.3	134	40.7	21	21.4	532	42.3
Purchase/hire car safety seat or a pram ³	295	52.0	115	43.4	31	9.4	0	0.0	441	35.0
Childproof the house ⁴	235	41.4	63	23.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	298	23.7
Purchase a larger car/ additional car	114	20.1	58	21.9	73	22.2	8	8.2	253	20.1
Other reason - Stopped or reduced work/ study ⁵	39	6.9	11	4.2	13	4.0	1	1.0	64	5.1
Other reason - Moved or extended house ⁵	13	2.3	15	5.7	9	2.7	6	6.1	43	3.4
Total	567		265		329		98		1,259	

1 Residential care workers (n=26) were not asked this question.

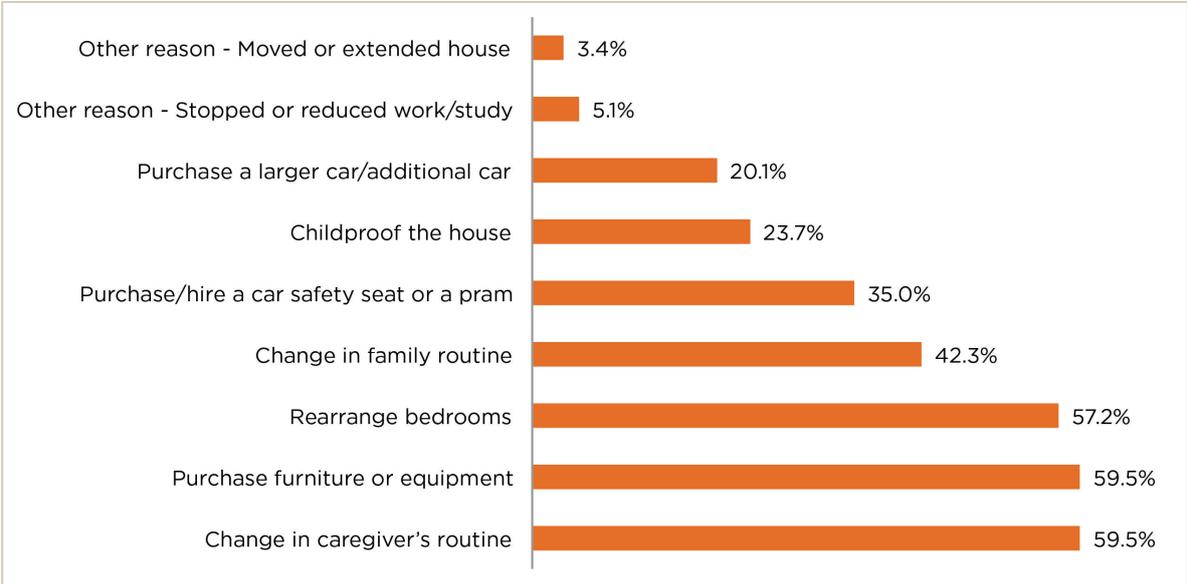
2 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of change may have been made.

3 Only asked if the child was 9 months to 7 years.

4 Only asked if the child was 9 months to 5 years.

5 These responses were coded from *Other (specify)* responses.

Figure 4.1: Caregiver reports of changes made to the household to prepare for the child’s arrival



1 Residential care workers (n=26) were not asked this question.
 2 Percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of change may have been made.
 3 'Purchase/hire a car safety seat or a pram' only asked if the child was 9 months to 7 years.
 4 'Childproof the house' only asked if the child was 9 months to 5 years.
 5 'Moved or extended house' and 'stopped or reduced work' was coded from *Other (specify)* responses.

A higher percentage of relative/kinship carers appeared to make changes on all the aspects measured when compared with foster carers (Table 4.3). For example, two thirds (66–67%) of relative/kinship carers had made changes to their own routines or had purchased furniture/equipment, compared with just over half (53–54%) of foster carers.

Table 4.3: Caregiver reports of changes made to the household to prepare for the child’s arrival, by placement type¹

	Foster care ²		Relative/Kinship care ²	
	n	%	n	%
Change in caregiver’s routine	348	52.6	401	67.1
Purchase furniture/equipment	354	53.6	395	66.1
Rearrange bedrooms	357	54.0	363	60.7
Change in family routine	268	40.5	264	44.1
Purchase/hire car safety seat or a pram ³	230	34.8	211	35.3
Childproof the house ⁴	150	22.7	149	24.9
Purchase a larger car/additional car	123	18.6	130	21.7
Other reason - Stopped or reduced work/study ⁵	28	4.2	36	6.0
Other reason - Moved or extended house ⁵	3	0.5	40	6.7
Total	661		598	

1 Residential care workers (n=26) were not asked this question.

2 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of change may have been made.

3 Only asked if the child was 9 months to 7 years.

4 Only asked if the child was 9 months to 5 years.

5 These responses were coded from Other (specify) responses.

4.2 Information and support provided at the start of the placement

The proportion of caregivers who were provided with official documents since the start of the placement is shown in Table 4.4. The majority (89%) of all caregivers reported receiving the Confirmation of the Placement, 65% had received the child’s Court Order, 48% had received a Placement Agreement, and 34% had received a Placement Information Sheet. The proportion of caregivers receiving documentation and information tended to increase as child age increased, with the exception of the Confirmation of Placement, for which it was lower for caregivers of children aged 12–17 years by comparison with caregivers of younger children.

In terms of other forms of support provided when the child first came to live with them, caregivers most commonly reported receiving the carer allowance payment (93%), time and advice from their child’s caseworker or manager (64%), and access to a carer support group (53%). Findings were generally consistent across age groups with the exceptions of access to a carer support group (highest among carers of 9–35 month olds and lowest among carers of 3–5 year olds), and the provision of contingency money (which decreased as child age increased).

Across all caregivers, over half (58%) reported needing at least one type of further support when the child was first placed with them. There were age differences, however, with more caregivers of 3–5 and 6–11 year olds and fewer caregivers of 9–35 month and 12–17 year olds feeling that they had needed additional support. Looking next at specific needs, caregivers of children aged 3 years and over were more likely to indicate that they would have liked to receive contingency money

(31–35% of caregivers of children aged 3 to 17 years compared with 25% of carers of 9–35 month olds). While the proportion of caregivers reporting such needs was not high, a larger percentage of caregivers of 3–5 year olds than caregivers of other age groups would have liked time and advice from their child’s caseworker or manager, access to a carer support group, and time and advice from carer support workers.

Across the whole sample, the most common issues that caregivers had learnt about the child but had not been aware of at the start of the placement were emotional and behavioural issues (29%); physical health issues (26%); and learning needs (20%). Caregivers of older age groups more frequently reported that they had learnt about the child’s emotional and behavioural issues, learning needs, social/living skills and peer relationships, and personal identity than caregivers of younger age groups. For example, 36% of caregivers of 12–17 year olds identified learning needs, compared to 30% and 24% of caregivers of 6–11 year olds and 3–5 year olds respectively. Similarly, a greater proportion of caregivers of the oldest age group had learnt more about the children’s social/living skills and peer relationships (34%) compared with only 5% of the youngest age group. The main exception to this trend was the child’s physical health, where proportionately fewer caregivers of the older age groups had learnt about this issue than caregivers of younger age groups (e.g., 17% of carers of 12–17 year olds compared with 31% of carers of 9–35 month olds).

Table 4.4: Caregiver reports of information and support received/not received, and learnings about the child, by child age

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Information provided to carer										
Confirmation of Placement	492	89.0	236	91.5	285	89.1	91	79.8	1,104	88.7
Child’s Court Order	331	60.2	166	63.4	221	69.5	91	75.8	809	64.7
Placement Agreement	250	46.5	116	47.5	146	48.8	54	50.0	566	47.6
Placement Information Sheet	162	31.6	75	32.3	117	38.7	41	39.1	395	34.3
Total	512–553		232–262		299–320		105–120		1,151–1,250	
Other forms of support										
Carer allowance payment	531	93.7	246	93.2	304	92.7	91	92.9	1,172	93.2
Time and advice from study child’s caseworker or managers	360	63.9	165	63.0	209	63.5	61	63.5	795	63.6
Access to a carer support group	322	57.1	126	47.9	166	50.8	49	52.1	663	53.1
Contingency money	286	50.6	125	47.2	148	45.1	42	42.9	601	47.9
Time and advice from carer support workers	219	39.3	88	33.9	115	35.2	36	40.0	458	37.1
Other	25	4.4	7	2.7	5	1.5	1	1.0	38	3.0
Total	558–567		260–265		327–329		90–97		1,235–1,257	

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total ¹	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Support they would have liked but did not get										
Carer allowance payment	23	4.1	15	5.7	19	5.8	5	5.2	62	4.9
Time and advice from study child's caseworker or managers	139	24.5	74	28.1	82	25.1	21	21.7	316	25.2
Access to a carer support group	72	12.7	45	17.1	41	12.5	7	7.2	165	13.2
Contingency money	140	24.7	85	32.3	115	35.2	30	30.9	370	29.5
Time and advice from carer support workers	63	11.1	40	15.2	39	11.9	8	8.3	150	12.0
Other	109	19.2	46	17.4	67	20.5	16	16.5	238	19.0
At least one of supports listed	302	53.3	163	61.7	207	63.3	54	55.7	726	57.9
Total	567		263-265		327-329		97		1,254-1,255	
Learnt about child since placement										
Emotional and behavioural issues	85	15.0	97	36.6	140	42.6	49	39.5	371	28.9
Physical health issues e.g., allergies, asthma	173	30.6	78	29.4	67	20.4	21	16.9	339	26.4
Learning needs	53	9.4	64	24.2	97	29.5	44	35.5	258	20.1
Social/living skills and peer relationships	30	5.3	57	21.5	93	28.3	42	33.9	222	17.3
Personal identity	18	3.2	16	6.1	27	8.2	16	13.1	77	6.0
Cultural identity and background	20	4.5	14	5.3	17	5.2	9	7.3	60	5.2
Legal issues	58	10.3	21	7.9	14	4.3	10	8.1	103	8.0
Other	18	3.2	11	4.2	7	2.1	6	4.8	42	3.3
Total	442-566		263-265		329		123-124		1,158-1,284	

¹ Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of information, support or learning may have been applicable.

Among caregivers who were provided with information at the commencement of the placement, between 34% and 61% reported receiving an explanation of the various types of information from their caseworkers or relevant professionals (Table 4.5). According to caregiver reports, explanations had more frequently been provided for the family contact plan (61%), the child's Lifestory Book (58%), and the child's case plan (55%), but less frequently for the cultural care plan (34%). The proportion of caregivers who thought the case plan met their child's needs 'very well' or 'fairly well' was 87% (see Chapter 8, Figure 8.1).

Table 4.5: Caregiver reports of whether caseworker or relevant professional has explained the information provided

	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Case plan	633	54.7	524	45.3	1,157	100.0
Health plan	578	50.0	577	50.0	1,155	100.0
Family contact plan	715	60.6	465	39.4	1,180	100.0
Lifestory Book	700	57.8	512	42.2	1,212	100.0
Cultural care plan (if child is Aboriginal)	136	33.6	269	66.4	405	100.0

Children aged 12–17 years were also asked whether they had been involved in developing their case plan, and whether they had been given a copy of the plan (not tabulated). Of the sub-sample who answered these questions (n=53, 43% of all 12–17 year olds), 55% reported being involved in developing their plan, and 28% had been given a copy.

Finally, across all caregivers, 74% were very satisfied or satisfied with being given enough information about the study child at the start of the placement (Table 4.6). There was a small variation (71–78%) between caregivers of children of different age groups.

Table 4.6: Caregiver reports of satisfaction with having enough information about the child at the start of the placement, by child age

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Very satisfied	203	35.8	101	38.1	133	40.4	48	38.7	485	37.7
Satisfied	210	37.0	88	33.2	114	34.7	49	39.5	461	35.9
Unsure	42	7.4	14	5.3	16	4.9	9	7.3	81	6.3
Dissatisfied	87	15.3	43	16.2	50	15.2	11	8.9	191	14.9
Very dissatisfied	25	4.4	19	7.2	16	4.9	7	5.6	67	5.2
Total	567	100.0	265	100.0	329	100.0	124	100.0	1,285	100.0

4.3 Promoting the child's identity and connection with their culture

As Table 4.7 shows, the great majority (85%) of children possessed photographs of their birth family and, for close to half (46%), a Lifestory Book had been created or updated. In terms of actions taken for Aboriginal children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds, the continued use of the child's birth name was most frequent, with this occurring for 89% of children. Other commonly reported actions to maintain the child's identity were use of the child's birth language (53%), the child's cultural identity and heritage being discussed, and consumption of food appropriate to the child's culture and religion (both 44%). Approximately one third of children had been given the opportunity to socialise with their birth family's cultural community or attend cultural or religious festivals/events. Only 7% of caregivers reported that none of these actions were undertaken to connect the child with their cultural background.

The likelihood of children having photographs of their birth family tended to correspond to the child's age, with older children more likely to have photographs. It appears that a Lifestory Book had been created or updated more often for younger than for older children (48% of 9–35 month olds and 49% of 3–5 year olds, compared with 45% of 6–11 year olds and 38% of 12–17 year olds).

A higher percentage of caregivers of children aged 3 years or older had discussed with the child their cultural identity and heritage than caregivers of 9–35 month olds, which seems age appropriate. According to caregiver reports, proportionately fewer 12–17 year olds socialised with their birth family's cultural community, or attended key cultural and religious festivals and celebrations compared with other age groups, although this may be a function of the small sample of 12–17 year olds. Practice of the birth family's religion occurred more frequently among children aged 6–11 years than other age groups. A higher percentage of 6–11 year olds (28%) and 12–17 year olds (23%) were being helped to maintain an understanding of their religion compared with younger children aged 9 months to 5 years (14–16%). Overall, it seemed that the cultural connections of children aged 6–11 years were more frequently being maintained than those of other age groups.

Table 4.7: Caregiver reports of maintenance of the child’s cultural background, by child age¹

	9-35 months		3-5 years		6-11 years		12-17 years		Total ²	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Since child placed										
Child has photos of birth family	451	79.5	231	87.2	294	89.4	111	91.0	1,087	84.7
Total	567		265		329		122		1,283	
Lifestory Book created/ updated	272	48.3	128	48.5	147	44.8	45	37.5	592	46.4
Total	563		264		328		120		1,275	
Actions taken										
Birth name is maintained	254	86.4	139	89.1	194	91.1	76	91.6	663	88.9
Birth language is practised	152	51.7	83	53.2	110	51.6	47	56.6	392	52.6
Cultural identity and heritage is discussed	109	37.1	70	44.9	118	55.4	34	41.0	331	44.4
Food is appropriate to culture and religion	129	43.9	62	39.7	97	45.5	40	48.2	328	44.0
Socialises with community of birth culture	112	38.1	47	30.1	78	36.6	22	26.5	259	34.7
Attends key cultural and religious festivals and celebrations	94	32.0	52	33.3	78	36.6	20	24.1	244	32.7
Religious practice is observed	50	17.0	32	20.5	66	31.0	15	18.1	163	21.9
Maintains an understanding of his/ her religion	47	16.0	21	13.5	59	27.7	19	22.9	146	19.6
No connection to his/ her cultural background	23	7.7	11	7.1	13	6.1	4	4.8	51	6.8
Total	294		156		213		83		746	

1 All caregivers were asked about presence of photos and a Lifestory Book; only caregivers of Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children were asked about actions taken to maintain the child’s cultural background.

2 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of action may have been taken.

Figure 4.2: Caregiver reports of actions taken to maintain the child’s cultural background since the child was placed¹



¹ Percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of action may have been taken.

Differences between Aboriginal children and children from culturally diverse backgrounds are shown in Table 4.8. Similarly high percentages of children in these two placement types had photographs of their birth families (as did 85% of all other Australian children; not shown in Table 4.8). Fewer children from culturally diverse backgrounds had had a Lifestory Book created and updated for them (41%, compared with 50% of Aboriginal children and 46% of other Australian children).

In terms of actions taken by carers to maintain children’s cultural connections, there was a consistent trend for this to have been undertaken more often for children from culturally diverse backgrounds than for Aboriginal children, with differences particularly evident on observing the child’s religious practice (63% compared with 13%) and maintaining the child’s understanding of his/her religion (55% compared with 13%), opportunities to socialise with the child’s birth family community (59% compared with 39%), and preparation of food appropriate to the child’s culture or religion (69% compared to 42%). However, slightly fewer Aboriginal children reportedly had no connection to their cultural background (5%) than children from culturally diverse backgrounds (9%).

Table 4.8: Caregiver reports of maintenance of the child’s cultural background, by child’s cultural background¹

	Aboriginal children ²		Culturally diverse children ²	
	n	%	n	%
Since child placed				
Child has photos of birth family	390	83.2	92	82.9
Total	469		111	
Lifestory Book created/updated	234	50.3	45	40.5
Total	465		111	
Actions taken				
Birth name is maintained	387	90.6	87	88.8
Birth language is practised	223	52.2	59	60.2
Cultural identity and heritage is discussed	223	52.2	68	69.4
Food is appropriate to culture and religion	178	41.7	68	69.4
Socialises with community of birth culture	167	39.1	58	59.2
Attends key cultural and religious festivals and celebrations	165	38.6	50	51.0
Maintains an understanding of his/her religion	57	13.4	54	55.1
Religious practice is observed	55	12.9	62	63.3
No connection to his/her cultural background	20	4.7	9	9.2
Total	427		98	

1 All caregivers were asked about presence of photos and Lifestory Books; only carers of Aboriginal and culturally diverse children were asked about actions taken to maintain the child’s cultural background.

2 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as more than one type of action may have been undertaken.

Table 4.9 shows that caregivers responded quite positively regarding their ability to support children in maintaining their cultural links, with 69% perceiving that they did this ‘very well’ and 25% reporting ‘fairly well’.

According to caregivers, slightly more than one third of 5 to 17 year old children ‘very much’ identified with their birth family’s cultural background, and a further 26% identified ‘a fair amount’. In general, higher proportions of older children identified strongly with their cultural background when compared to younger children. Nevertheless, 21% of all caregivers indicated that the child ‘did not at all’ identify with their birth family’s cultural background.

Approximately 60% of caregivers of children with an Aboriginal cultural plan in place reported receiving support from other family members in keeping up the child’s cultural links and carrying out the cultural plan (these questions are not applicable for non-Aboriginal children). The next most frequent sources of help were the child’s community, and an Aboriginal or multicultural worker or organisation (both 25%). In approximately one fifth of cases, birth family members had helped. However, 13% of caregivers reported that they had no sources of help in maintaining cultural ties and implementing the cultural plan. There appeared to be some age-specific differences

(although sample sizes became quite small for some age groups, and hence findings may be of low reliability), but there was no clear pattern of age differences.

Table 4.9: Caregiver reports of support for the child’s cultural ties, by child age

	9–35 months		3–5 years		6–11 years		12–17 years		All children	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
How well caregiver can support child to maintain cultural links¹										
Very well	222	72.1	101	71.1	123	65.4	44	63.9	490	69.2
Fairly well	72	23.4	32	22.5	49	26.1	24	34.3	177	25.0
Not very well	10	3.3	7	4.9	14	7.5	2	2.9	33	4.7
Not at all well	4	1.3	2	1.4	2	1.1	0	0.0	8	1.1
Total	308		142		188		70		708	
Extent to which child identifies with birth family’s cultural background²										
Very much	-	-	10	25.0	78	39.4	26	35.1	114	36.5
A fair amount	-	-	9	22.5	48	24.2	25	33.8	82	26.3
Not very much	-	-	6	15.0	31	15.7	13	17.6	50	16.0
Not at all	-	-	15	37.5	41	20.7	10	13.5	66	21.2
Total			40		198		74		312	
Others helping child to link to culture and carry out cultural plan^{3,4,5}										
Caregiver’s family members helping	40	66.2	10	45.5	20	51.3	5	-	75	58.6
Child’s community helping	15	25.0	4	18.2	12	30.8	3	-	33	25.2
Aboriginal or multicultural worker or organisation	19	30.2	4	18.2	9	23.1	1	-	32	25.0
Child’s birth family members helping	13	21.7	5	22.7	8	20.5	2	-	28	21.9
Someone else	1	0.2	1	4.5	2	5.1	0	-	4	3.0
No-one else	6	10.0	7	31.8	3	7.7	0	-	16	12.5
Total	60–65		22		39		7		128–133	

1 This question was asked of all caregivers of Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children.

2 This question was asked of all caregivers of 5–17 year old Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children.

3 These items were asked of caregivers of Aboriginal children for whom a cultural plan was in place.

4 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as help may have been received from more than one source.

5 Percentages are not reported for the 12–17 year age group, as n is small (<20).

Table 4.10 shows that a higher percentage of caregivers of children from culturally diverse backgrounds felt that they were ‘very well’ able to support the child to maintain cultural links (74%, compared with 64% of caregivers of Aboriginal children). Similar patterns were evident in relation to the child’s identification with their birth family’s culture, with a higher percentage of those from culturally diverse backgrounds being reported to ‘very much’ identify with their culture (48% compared with 35% of Aboriginal children).

Table 4.10: Caregiver reports of support for the child’s cultural ties, by child’s cultural background

	Aboriginal children		Culturally diverse children	
	n	%	n	%
How well caregiver can support child to maintain cultural links¹				
Very well	280	63.9	74	74.0
Fairly well	124	28.3	21	21.0
Not very well	27	6.2	5	5.0
Not at all well	7	1.6	0	0.0
Total	438		100	
Extent to which child identifies with birth family’s cultural background²				
Very much	63	34.8	25	48.1
A fair amount	43	23.8	13	25.0
Not very much	31	17.1	10	19.2
Not at all	44	24.3	4	7.7
Total	181		52	

1 This question was asked of all caregivers of Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children.

2 This question was asked of all caregivers of 5–17 year old Aboriginal and culturally diverse children.

As shown in Table 4.11, a high proportion of relative/kinship carers and foster carers felt they were able to support the child in maintaining cultural links ‘very well’ (75% and 64% respectively). There appeared to be differences between foster and relative/kinship caregivers’ reports in regard to how much children identified with their birth family’s cultural background, with 50% of foster carers reporting that children identified ‘not very much’ or ‘not at all’ compared with 24% of children in relative/kinship care.

Turning to differences on how much support caregivers received from others in maintaining the child’s identity and carrying out the Aboriginal cultural plan, foster and relative/kinship carers received similar amounts of support from the two most common sources – the caregiver’s family members and an Aboriginal or multicultural worker or organisation. However, 33% of relative/kinship carers reportedly had support from the child’s community, compared with 21% of foster caregivers; and birth family members were also more frequently involved when children were in relative/kinship care (28% compared with 16% of those in foster care). On the other hand, relative/kinship carers also more often reported not receiving help (18% compared with 8% of foster caregivers).

Table 4.11: Caregiver reports of support for the child’s cultural ties, by placement type

	Foster care ¹		Relative/ Kinship care ¹	
	n	%	n	%
How well caregiver can support child to maintain cultural links¹				
Very well	228	64.2	255	74.6
Fairly well	97	27.3	77	22.5
Not very well	26	7.3	6	1.8
Not at all well	4	1.1	4	1.2
Total	355		342	
Extent to which child identifies with birth family’s cultural background²				
Very much	48	33.8	64	41.0
A fair amount	23	16.2	54	34.6
Not very much	27	19.0	20	12.8
Not at all	44	31.0	18	11.5
Total	142		156	
Others helping child to link to culture and carry out cultural plan^{3, 4}				
Caregiver’s family members helping	40	59.7	35	57.4
Aboriginal or multicultural worker or organisation	19	28.4	14	28.4
Child’s birth family members helping	11	16.4	17	27.9
Child’s community helping	14	20.9	20	32.8
Someone else	4	5.8	0	0.0
No-one else	5	7.5	11	18.0
Total	67–69		61–64	

1 This question was asked of all caregivers of Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children.

2 This question was asked of all caregivers of 5–17 year old Aboriginal children and culturally diverse children.

3 These items were asked of caregivers of Aboriginal children for whom a cultural plan was in place.

4 Column percentages do not add up to 100%, as help may have been received from more than one source.

4.4 How well the child settled into the current placement

How well children settle into the placement can be a critical influence on their long-term outcomes and personal wellbeing (Chamberlain et al, 2006). Table 4.12 shows that the majority of caregivers thought that the child had settled in less than a week; either taking a day or two (44%) or 3–6 days (10%). Some children took about one week (9%), and around a third (37%) took longer than this to settle. While most children tended to settle quickly, settling time increased as children’s age increased (i.e., more children aged 6 to 17 years took one or more months to settle compared with younger children, who typically settled within one to two weeks). A very small percentage of children were still not settled at the time of the Wave 1 interview (3%), and this was a little more common among older than among younger children (6–8% of 6–11 and 12–17 year olds compared to 1–2% of 9–35 month and 3–5 year olds).

Overall, when caregivers were asked to reflect on how well the child was currently settled, a very positive picture emerged, with 84% of caregivers reporting ‘very well’

and a further 14% of caregivers reporting 'fairly well'. A very small proportion of caregivers (<1%) reported the child was 'not at all well' settled. Slightly fewer caregivers of older children reported that the child was settled 'very well' or 'fairly well' than caregivers of younger children. For example, 62% of 12–17 year olds were 'very well' settled compared with 96% of 9–35 month olds.

Table 4.12: Caregiver reports of the child settling into the current household, by child age

	9–35 months		3–5 years		6–11 years		12–17 years		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Time to settle into household										
0–2 days	311	55.0	100	37.9	110	33.5	37	30.3	558	43.6
3–6 days	57	10.1	30	11.4	32	9.8	12	9.8	131	10.2
1 week	49	8.7	26	9.8	35	10.7	9	7.4	119	9.3
2 weeks	53	9.4	21	8.0	25	7.6	9	7.4	108	8.4
3–4 weeks	42	7.4	31	11.7	36	11.0	13	10.7	122	9.5
5–8 weeks	25	4.4	13	4.9	20	6.1	13	10.7	71	5.6
9–12 weeks	14	2.5	13	4.9	10	3.0	8	6.6	45	3.5
13–26 weeks	7	1.2	13	4.9	23	7.0	8	6.6	51	4.0
27–52 weeks	2	0.4	11	4.2	17	5.2	3	2.5	33	2.6
Still not settled	5	0.9	6	2.3	20	6.1	10	8.2	41	3.2
Total	565		264		328		122		1,279	
How settled the child is now										
Very well	544	95.9	219	82.6	239	72.6	77	62.1	1,079	84.0
Fairly well	18	3.2	40	15.1	79	24.0	38	30.7	175	13.6
Not very well	4	0.7	4	1.5	8	2.4	7	5.7	23	1.8
Not at all well	1	0.2	2	0.8	3	0.9	2	1.6	8	0.6
Total	567		265		329		124		1,285	

4.5 Summary of key findings

Setting up the child's current placement

- It appears that most children had been placed with the expectation that the placement would be until the child turned 18 years (67%).
- Contact with the caregiving family prior to placement was common. Two thirds of children had some form of contact, most commonly more than one overnight stay, or more than a one-day visit.
- Very young children aged 9–35 months had less frequently experienced overnight visits before the placement commenced than older children.
- Slightly more than half of the POCLS children had been placed with a family with whom they were not related. When placed with relatives, the most common arrangement was grandparent care.
- Older children aged 6–17 years tended to more often be placed with caregivers with whom they were related than younger children aged 9 months to 5 years.
- Most caregivers reported making some changes to their household in preparation for the child's arrival. The most common types of changes were a modification to the caregiver's routine, the purchase of equipment or furniture and rearrangement of bedrooms.
- The types and frequency of changes reported to be needed were similar for caregivers of children aged 9 months to 11 years, but fewer caregivers of 12–17 year olds had needed to make changes to accommodate the child.

Information and support at the start of the placement

- Almost nine tenths of carers had received Confirmation of the Placement, and almost two thirds had received the child's Court Order.
- Among caregivers who reported receiving information since the start of the placement, between 34% and 61% had received an explanation of the various types of information from their caseworkers or other professionals.
- Among children aged 12–17 years who responded to questions on this issue, just over half reported that they had been involved in developing their case plan and just over a quarter had been given a copy.
- The most common issues learnt by caregivers about the child that they had not been made aware of at the start of the placement were the child's emotional and behavioural issues, physical health issues and learning needs.
- The majority of caregivers were satisfied with the information received.

Promoting the child's identity and connection with their culture

- More than four fifths of children maintained connections to their birth family through their possession of photos, while nine tenths had retained their birth name.
- Older children more often had photographs of their birth family than younger children.
- Common actions undertaken by caregivers to help Aboriginal children and those from culturally diverse backgrounds maintain their cultural connections were: use of the child's birth language, the child's cultural identity and heritage being discussed, and consumption of food appropriate to the child's culture and religion.
- Most caregivers had positive views about their ability to support the child to maintain his/her cultural ties.
- Over half (59%) of caregivers of Aboriginal children reported that children identified with their birth family's culture 'very much' or 'a fair amount'.
- Caregivers generally reported receiving high levels of support from others in helping children to maintain cultural links, with support most often coming from the caregiver's family members, the child's community, and from an Aboriginal or multicultural worker or organisation.

How the child settled into their current placement

- Approximately half of caregivers reported that the child had settled into the placement in less than a week, with a further tenth reportedly taking a week.
- Settling time tended to be longer among older than among younger age groups.

4.6 Conclusion

The majority of the POCLS children had been living with the current caregiver household for more than a year at the time the Wave 1 interview was conducted. Approximately two thirds of the children were placed with the expectation that the placement would be a long-term arrangement until the child turned 18 years. Contact with the caregiving family prior to placement was quite common. Most caregivers had needed to make some changes to their household in preparation for the child's placement. At the time of the Wave 1 interview, just over half of the POCLS children were living with caregivers with whom they were not related. Many children identified with their cultural background, and most caregivers reported receiving support from others in helping children maintain these links. Most children had settled quickly when placed with the caregiver household and were very well settled at the time the Wave 1 interview was conducted.