

Staff support and the quality of care in children's and adults' residential care

A research partnership between Unison and Community Care



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Introduction

Common sense might dictate that happy and supported staff are better able to care for vulnerable people than unhappy and poorly supported staff.

Yet our research shows many residential care homes in both the children's and adults' sectors continue to fail in this area.

This is despite the fact that poor staff support can, in most cases, predict an inadequate Ofsted or CQC rating, our findings reveal.

Our analysis of Ofsted and CQC reports shows that across both the children's and adult residential care sectors staff support is the one common factor which determines the quality of any social care service.

Poor supervision, poor training, and poor management were common issues among inadequate care homes across both sectors, while those with high ratings were significantly better in these particular areas.

In addition, we spoke to a range of care workers in both sectors to understand what good care looks like from their perspective and the role staff support plays.

We have detailed the results from both in this report, which we hope will add to a body of evidence that can help improve care and conditions in the sector.

Judy Cooper, Editor, Community Care

Heather Wakefield, Head of local government, Unison





Staff support and the quality of care in residential homes for adults

Methodology

We examined the findings of 100 residential and nursing home inspections by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) – 50 rated 'good', 25 rated 'requires improvement' and 25 rated 'inadequate'.



We also interviewed care workers working in both residential care and nursing homes across England.

Key Findings

Staff shortages

The most glaring issue identified in the research was the strong link between insufficient staffing and a poor Care Quality Commission rating.

In care homes that fell short of a 'good' rating, ('inadequate' and 'requires improvement') 62% did not have enough staff on duty to meet residents' needs. In the 25 services rated 'inadequate' 80% did not have sufficient staffing levels.

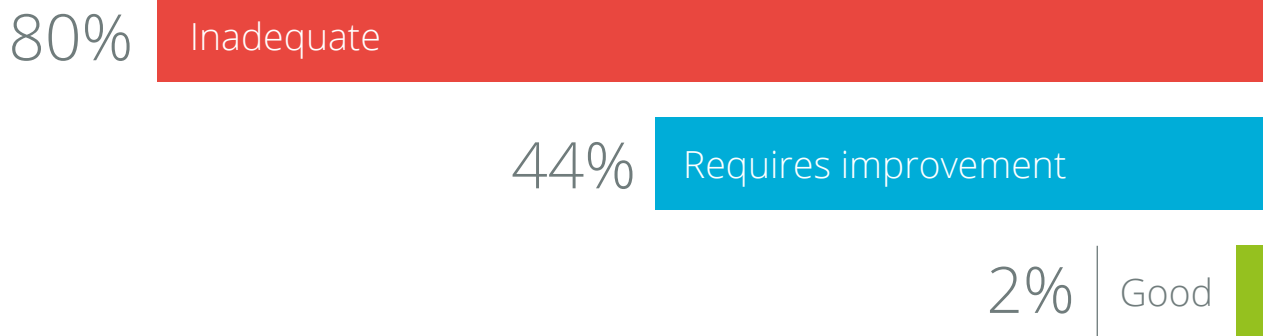
In contrast this was an issue in just 2% of 'good' homes.

"If a service does not have enough staff to deliver safe and effective care...then that is going to have a huge impact on the quality of life for people using that service,"

Andrea Sutcliffe, chief inspector for adult social care at the CQC.



Care homes that did not have enough staff on duty to meet the needs of residents, by CQC rating



Residential care worker Kate* told us that inadequate staffing meant neglected residents.

"I support one lady who is nervous about walking. I don't have the time to help her walk a short distance to get her confidence back and this has resulted in her developing a pressure sore," she says.

"I feel like I've failed this lady because I can't give her the time she needs."

Sutcliffe says the CQC is concerned that too many homes are relying on agency workers to cope with the shortages of permanent staff.

"This has an impact on individuals using the service, because they don't have the continuity of care and agency staff don't understand their needs."

Heather Wakefield, head of local government for Unison, likens the staffing issues in residential care to the notorious 15-minute visits in the home care sector. *"In effect it's the same thing, because it's about the amount of time people have. Staffing levels affect the time spent with residents, which is fundamental to good care."*

"You have people who call in sick because they can't cope and so that's bringing staffing levels down even further."

Residential care worker with 4 years' experience



Lack of support for staff

Some 52% of homes rated below good do not provide their staff with regular training but every single 'good' rated home examined did.

While 90% of good homes offered their workers regular one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals, only 44% of homes rated as 'needing improvement' or 'inadequate' did.

Employees pay a heavy price when there is a lack of support. Kate* says the pressure of work and poor support means she often leaves work in tears.

"I don't have regular supervision or an annual appraisal. I don't know where I'm going wrong or if I need to improve, what's expected of me, or equally if I'm doing things right."

Care worker with 4 years' experience

Good support can make all the difference says Holly*, who works in a nursing home where there is regular supervision and team meetings.

"The support we get makes you actually want to go to work and you look forward to your shifts," she says. "It makes work a much nicer place to be."

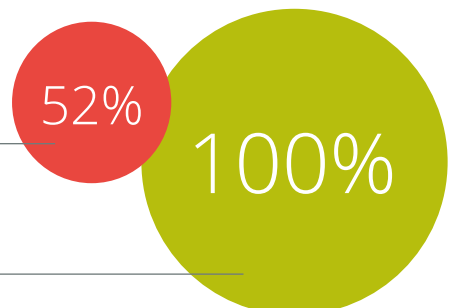
Sutcliffe says that in the face of intense financial pressure, the evidence shows providers are looking to cut back on things that are 'nice to do' rather than 'essential'. Her main concern is that some providers might put staff training and supervision into this bracket.

But she says those who do so should expect poorer ratings.

"As far as I'm concerned, these are must-dos and this is absolutely blindingly clear in terms of our expectations of what a good service looks like and in terms of what providers should be doing under statute. These things are not new, it is very clear that this is what is expected and it should be delivered."

Training

52% of homes rated 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' give their staff regular training



100% of 'good' rated homes give their staff regular training

Supervision

90% of 'good' rated homes offer staff regular one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals

90%

44% of homes rated below good offer staff regular one-to-one supervision and annual appraisals

44%

Management gaps

Number of 'good' rated homes with a registered manager in place

96%

Number of homes rated as 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement' with a registered manager in place

52%

"Having a great manager can make a big difference" says Jennifer, who works in a care home for older people. "All staff have regular appraisals, supervision and on-going training. The support is great too. I would have left ages ago if it was any different."*

Low pay

Pay is a key factor behind current shortages of staff in care homes. Even care workers who are happy with their workplace cite this as an issue.

"My only complaint is the pay is rubbish," says Jennifer. "I'm on minimum wage and for the work carers do and the emotional rollercoaster we go through, I think we should be paid more."*



What does good look like?

Sutcliffe is clear that our findings are consistent with the expectations she has of all services and inspection findings.

“Happy staff can lead to happy residents. The way that staff are treated, if they are valued, listened to, supported in their own training, all of these things will have a really positive impact on the experience of the individuals working there and then absolutely on the people who are living in the service.”

Wakefield agrees the findings are very stark.

“It’s very clear that access to training, supervision, having a registered manager, engaging with staff leads to better quality care. It couldn’t be much clearer.”

She says the findings also show the need for an Ethical Care Charter (ECC) in residential care.

“Our ECC for home care workers has really brought that message home to providers and we want to do the same in residential care.”



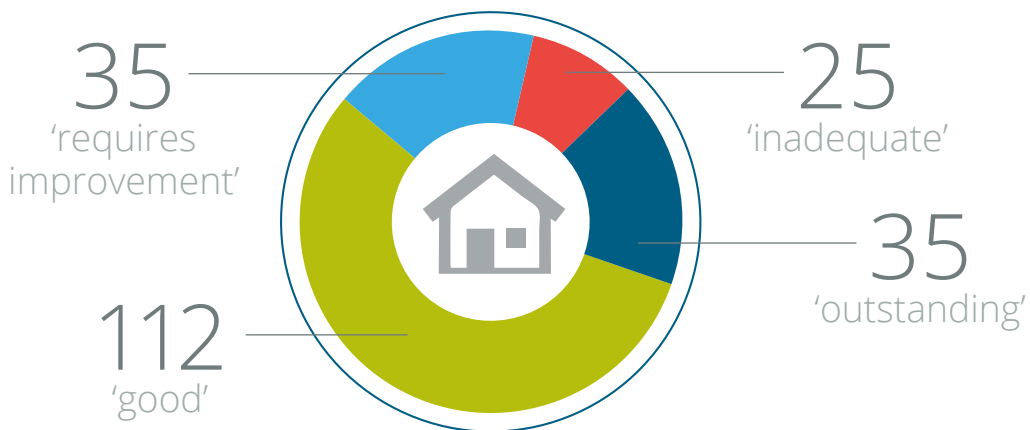
Staff support
and the quality
of care in
children's homes



Methodology

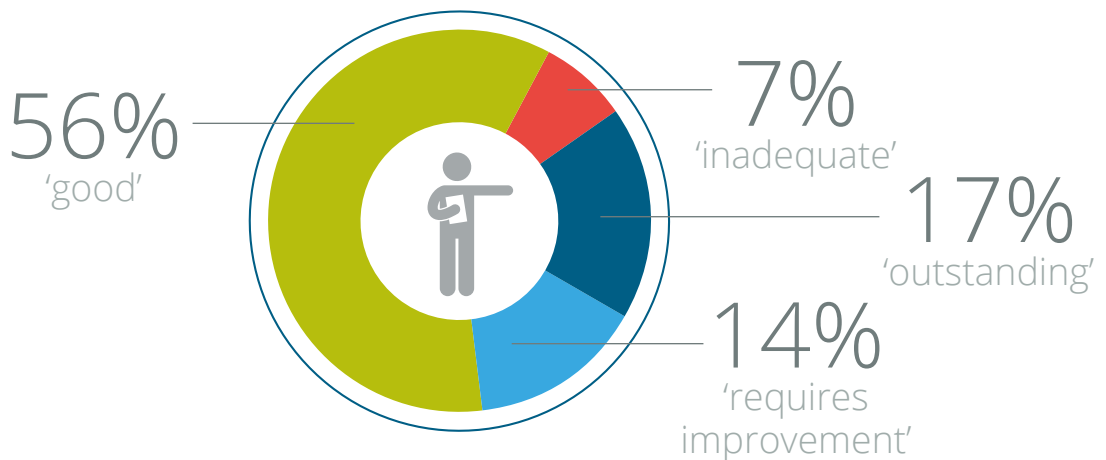
The recommendations of 200 Ofsted reports were examined and cross-referenced.

They included 35 rated 'outstanding', 112 rated 'good', 35 rated 'requires improvement' and 18 rated 'inadequate'.



A survey was also sent to 2,053 Unison members working in children's residential care and 260 responses analysed.

Among respondents, 17% worked in 'outstanding' homes, 56% in 'good', 14% in 'requires improvement' and 7% in 'inadequate'. The remaining 6% were unsure of their workplace's rating.



Key Findings

Supervision and support

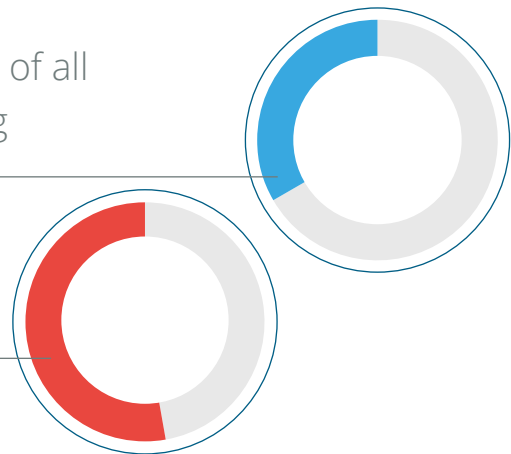
“When we carried out a review of all requirements made in every home between April 2015 and March 2016, the highest number were around support for staff.”

Helen Humphries, lead Ofsted inspector for residential care

There is a clear link between the quality of management and supervision in a children’s home and its Ofsted rating.

Ofsted’s inspection reports show that a third of all homes need to improve the support, training and development of their workers.

However, among those homes rated ‘inadequate’ more than half (53%) needed to make improvements in this area.



Common problems in children’s homes that required improvement include poor risk management and unsatisfactory recruitment processes.

‘Good’ and ‘outstanding’ homes were usually asked to rectify ‘tick boxy’ appraisals and delays in staff completing their residential childcare diploma, which they need to do within two years.

Only 44% of workers we surveyed felt the training they got was always relevant to meeting young people’s needs. Many felt their training was too basic or generic but some warned there was a lack of training in key areas such as self-harm and sexual exploitation.

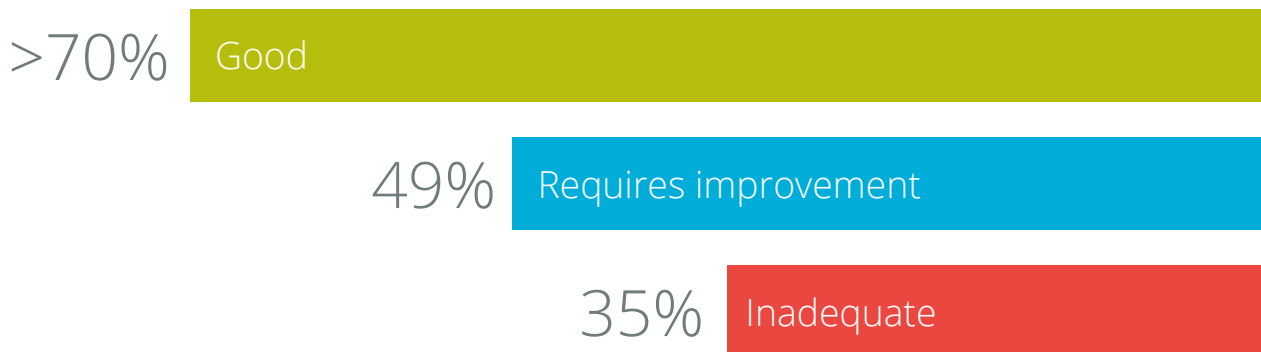
The children’s home workers we interviewed could not overstate the importance of having a strong registered manager in place.

A frontline worker highlighted the importance of good management by sharing how her good-rated home had suffered since the departure of a strong manager: *“[Off-site senior managers] are employing inexperienced staff. The kids we get are coming from secure units – they are extremely violent, prolific self-harmers – and staff are leaving on the spot.”*

She now fears that the home will get a lower rating when Ofsted return.



Understanding of care plans and supporting young people



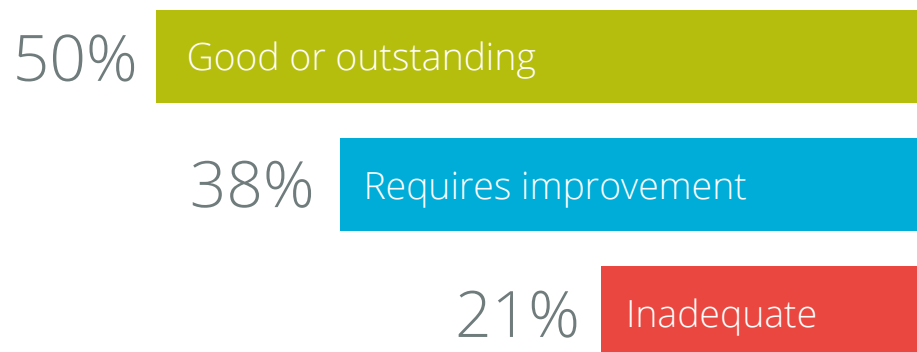
More than 70% of workers in 'good' or 'outstanding' children's home say managers have an excellent or good understanding of care plans and supporting young people.

49% of workers in homes 'requiring improvement' agreed.

35% of workers in 'inadequate' rated homes agreed.

Excellent or good supervision

50% of workers in 'good' or 'outstanding' homes say they have excellent or good supervision compared to 38% in homes that 'require improvement' and 21% in 'inadequate' rated homes.



Pay and conditions

“Recently we had a team leader leave to become a dog walker – the money was much better.”

A residential worker in a good-rated home in the South East.

What do frontline residential care workers earn?

In the private sector homes: £9 an hour

£9

In local authority homes: £12 an hour

£12

Some of the workers surveyed felt private providers paid less because there was a bigger focus on maintaining profits. But other private sector workers said their employer was struggling to stay afloat and under pressure to fill places with young people who may be a poor match for their home.

Many also work without breaks. Almost 40% said they got “zero” minutes’ break during a typical shift, excluding sleepover hours. Most staff we interviewed felt that having time to recharge was an on-off luxury in their workplace.

“Show me someone who works 37 hours a week in care – I pick up overtime to top my pay up.”

This combination of low pay and high stress was cited as a key reason why many homes suffer from high turnover of staff.

“You get a section when there’s a core of people, and then one person gets peed off and leaves, someone else will [follow], and then you’ve got an unsettled period,” said one private-sector worker.

“Ofsted may see a completed rota, but sometimes that doesn’t reflect a full week where staff members are working 60, 70 hours,” said one team leader in a good-rated home.



What does good look like?

These findings underline how good employment practices and quality care go hand-in-hand, says Unison's national secretary for local government Heather Wakefield.

"Decent pay and working conditions, appropriate staffing levels and good management are all shown to be critical factors in delivering what is best for children. Where they are missing, homes tend to be rated less favourably," she says.

"The funding crisis in care needs to be tackled urgently, so that all looked-after children can get the best care from well-treated staff."

The last word

"It's quite flexible here: we look after each other, people take time off in lieu, recognise when they're stressed."

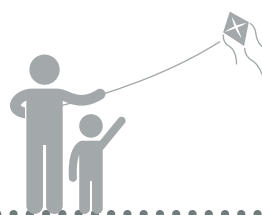
Manager at an 'outstanding' council-run home in London.

"I go into homes and meet people who bowl me over. A child might be highly anxious and dangerous, breaking windows and trying to attack staff. And you get people who can just go in there and without touching them, just talking, can get them to calm down, and do a debrief, and over time through working with them that child changes. They prevent so many incidents, and we don't appreciate that."

Marie Tucker, independent children's home visitor and consultant.

"We had about 10 to 12 staff; they had different shifts, your key worker, the manager. It was their diversity that stands out – and just being able to relate to us young people, in a way that we could understand. I was able to clear my mind and focus on what I needed to do in order to improve my situation."

Anna*, care leaver







*names have been changed

If you would like more information on this research then please contact
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