



A FAIR START

for young parents
& their babies



Creating intergenerational change for young parent families in Cornwall and across the UK

UK context: Young Parenthood

My age does not compare to the love in my heart

What is going well...

- more political interest in early years, first 1001 days funding and policy, All Party Parliamentary Group on babies
- NHS 10-year plan aims to move from crisis intervention to prevention

What are we worried about...

- national concern about numbers of young people experiencing mental ill health
- perinatal suicidality in young mums and birthing people increasing across the UK
- 42% of repeat removals are young parents



UK context: No Wonder



It feels like everything is stacked against you

- Young parents are twice as likely to have experienced sexual abuse, more likely to have been in care, been absent from school, and experienced childhood conflict, violence and poverty.
- Young dads are more likely to have experienced childhood violent punishment, criminal justice involvement, and have pre-existing depression, anxiety and conduct issues.
- Young mums experience three times the rate of perinatal mental illness, two thirds have relationship breakdown, and recent increase in teenage maternal suicide.



UK context: WILD

- largest UK young parent organisation
- reach 400+ families each year
- over 20,000 individuals across three decades
- lead national Young Parent Network
- a small, yet mighty team



At the heart of our work is a simple, powerful vision: a fair start for young parents and their babies.

- every baby born to a young parent gets an equitable, fulfilling chance at life
- every young parent, with all their different experiences and needs, can be the parent they want to be, free from blame or shame
- adversity is not experienced through the generations of young parent families
- we all benefit from the talent, skills, and love they bring
- everyone believes in young parent families

Our focus is to...



EXPLORE

Find the best, most effective, and useful evidence

PRACTICE

Work directly with young parents and their babies to understand what works, to reflect, learn and add to the evidence base

SHARE

Collaborate with young parents to tell their stories, build understanding of their experiences, and campaign for a better future for them and their babies

CHANGE

Create system conditions that enable a fair start for young parent families



So that everyone...

**wants to see
and make change**

**understands and accepts
the case for change**

**knows what they should
do and are able to do it**

**believes in
young parent families**



Our model

I can survive

- My rights to exist and thrive, free from discrimination, are upheld
- I am equal, protected and empowered
- I have a safe home, food, and clean air
- I can access safe spaces

I understand (what humans need)

- My parents know what I need
- My parents understand how their behaviours affect me
- My parents are not scared or scary
- My activities and routines help me develop

I can get help

- I can get help that meets my needs
- I can access services where I feel welcome
- I get help early, before things get worse

I have inner strength

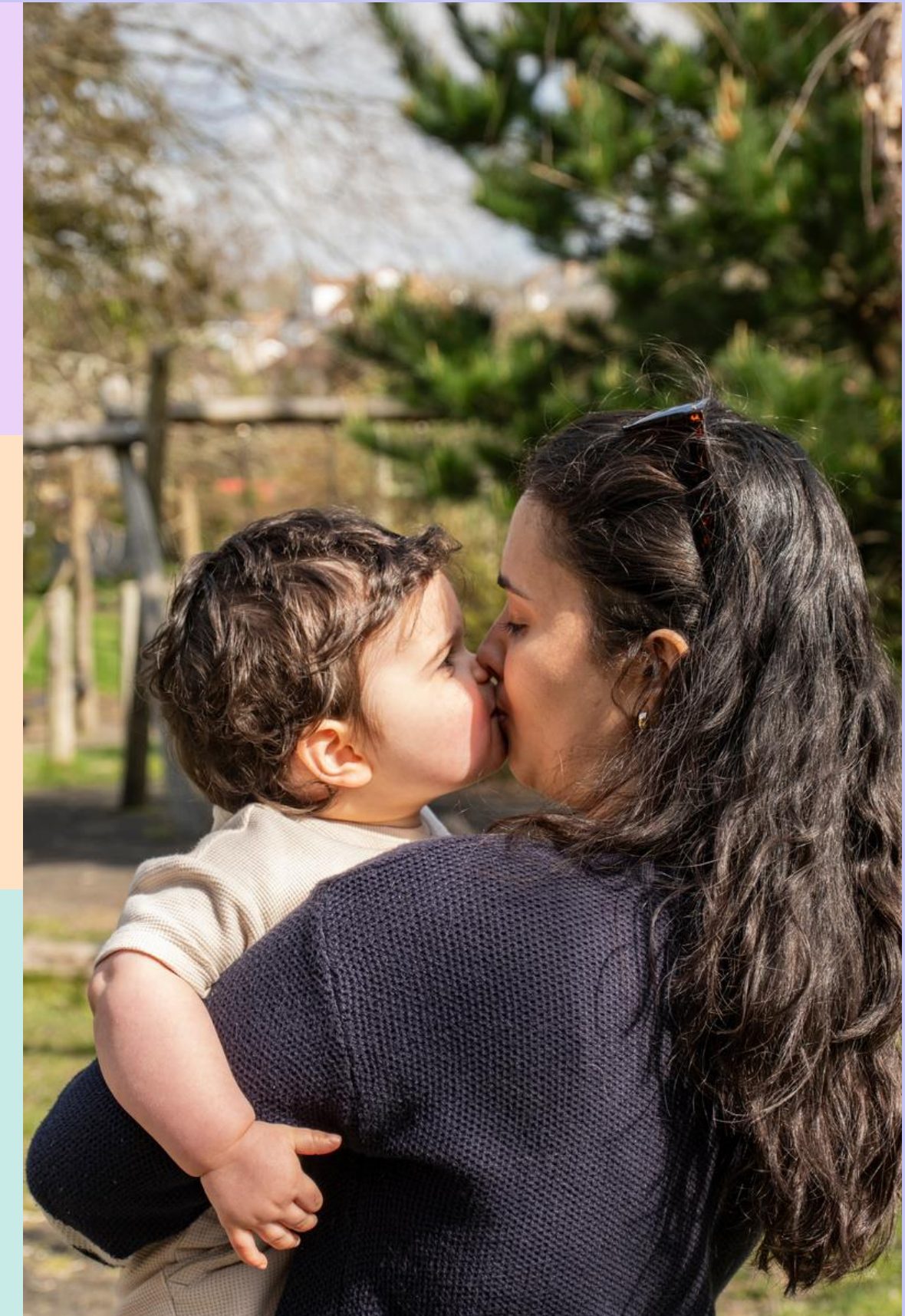
- My parents help me regulate my emotions
- My family reflect on our feelings
- I am helped to recover after I'm upset
- I believe in myself

I belong

- I share joyful, fun interactions and rituals with others
- I have positive role models
- I feel valued, accepted, listened to and heard

I feel love

- **My parents make me feel loved**
- **I can rely on my family**
- **I enjoy positive relationships with other people I trust**



What our work tells us



From our local and national work, from our lived, learned and imagined experience we hear about:

- stigma
- statutory thresholds
- early years access
- partner violence prevalence
- mental health need
- housing precarity
- experiences of systems

Our youngest parents, some of them still children themselves, are culturally misrepresented as 'problematic', and held individually responsible for the impact of generations of trauma, inequalities, poverty and discrimination.

What our work tells us



Building Futures:

Supporting young parent families to stay together



Through everything you stayed. When I was scared, upset and angry you stayed.

You didn't have to, but you did anyway.

I have never had anyone guide me through challenging times, and it means the absolute world.

5% of babies in the UK are born to young parents,
but;

- 42% women who had repeat removals of children were young mothers
- 60% babies subject to multiagency reviews had young mothers
- once one child has been removed, there is a 25% chance of further children being removed rises, which rises to 33% for young women
- child removal is the leading correlating factor in suicide in the first 12-months post birth, and numbers are rising for our youngest mums

Building Futures:

Supporting young parent families to stay together



Helping with...

- behaviour change
- reflective thinking & communication
- understanding the impact of trauma
- emotional regulation
- forward planning
- court and safeguarding meeting advocacy
- housing
- money and budgeting
- co-parenting negotiations
- accessing legal support
- emotional hand-holding through care proceedings
- access to community and young parent support

“Life since the project has been good. I’m stronger, I’m happier, I’m more confident. I can deal with issues I know I wouldn’t have been able to deal with back then. I can hold my head high as a woman, as a mum, as me. I’ve now got two children. My life is so much better now, it really is amazing.”

Building Futures: Young Parents experience of complexity

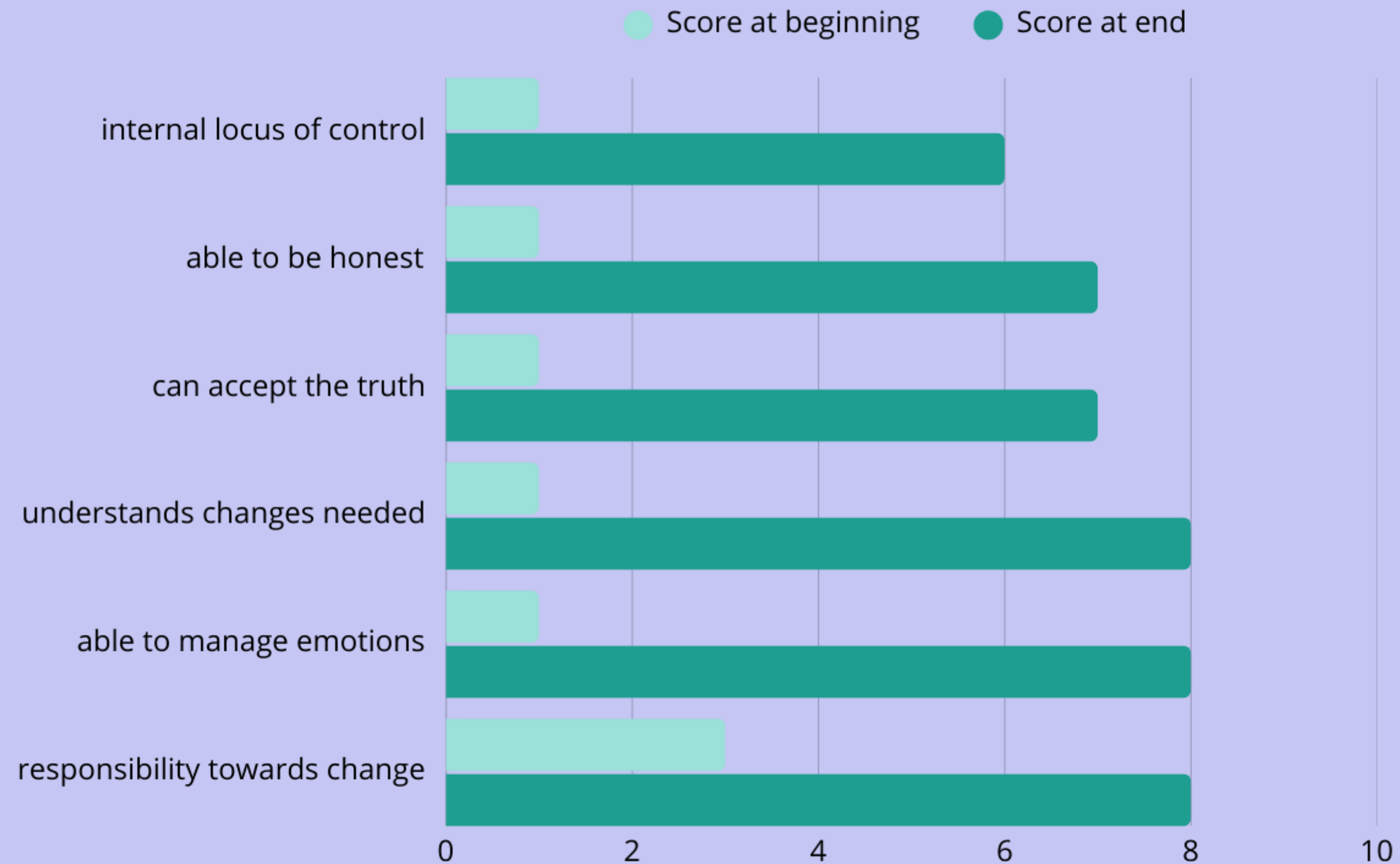
Higher rates than wider young parents:

- 95% complex childhood trauma and adversity
- 89% mental ill health and behavioural issues
- 50% care experience
- 'intimate terrorism' domestic abuse typology
- disability

“My coping strategies kind of became looking for love in the wrong places, and wanting to take care of people in turn of how I wanted to be taken care of.”

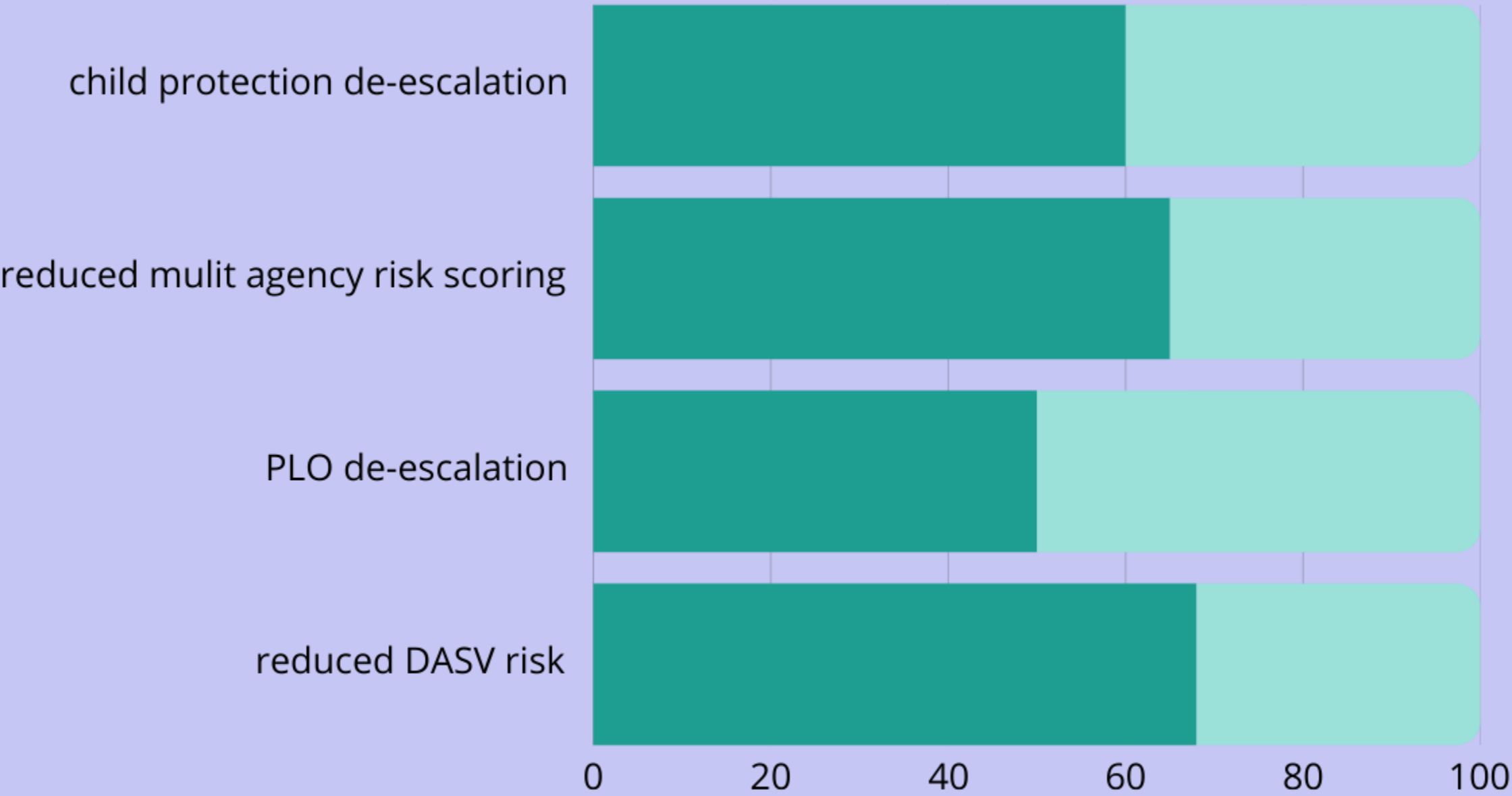


Building Futures: Improved parental adaptive skills



A typical picture of in our Building Futures work, max score 10

Building Futures: Reduced risk for babies



Building Futures:

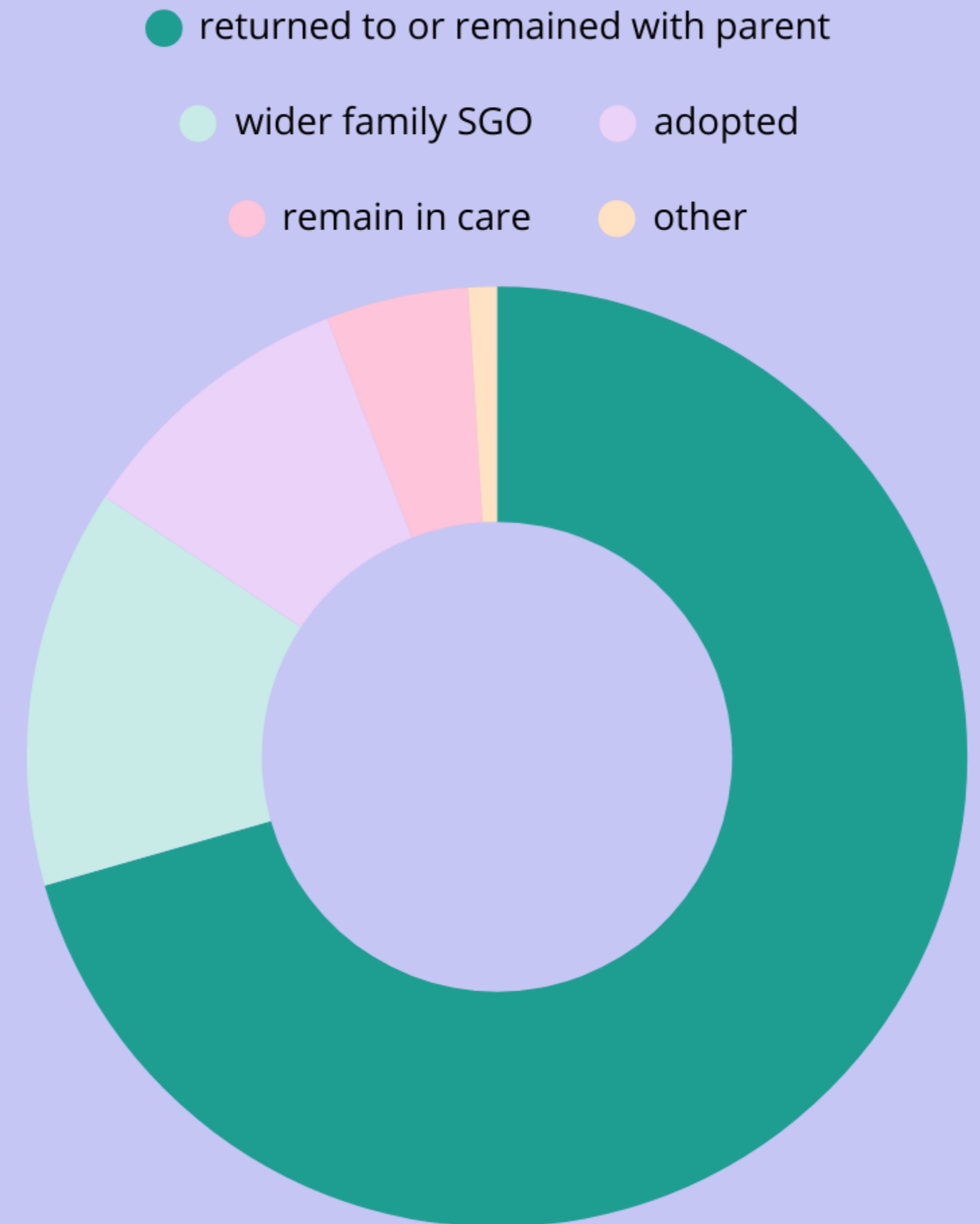
Supporting families to stay together

Our 5 year evaluation report showed that, of our first 170 children, 72% returned to or remained in their parents care.

What works?

- Epistemic Trust
- Long term
- Trauma-responsive
- Whole family
- Finding hope
- Little and often
- Self-expression
- Belonging

“Often we meet parents who put on a brave face, a kind of protective mask, because letting that slip feels too risky. What we’ve learned is that these behaviours aren’t about not caring; they’re usually signs of fear, overwhelm, or past hurt. When we take the time to understand what’s underneath, that’s when trust can finally begin to grow.”



What works: UK research findings



- Positive change in intimate partner relationship and wider networks
- Ability to reflect and learn from experience
- Better professional help and making better use of that help
- Commitment to children, both those removed and those in their care
- Sense of purpose and ability to plan for a different future
- Access to post proceedings counselling and/or mental health services

"the best solution to the possible pattern of repeat proceedings once a child has been removed would be to offer all parents in that situation intensive and tailored support to rebuild their lives."

Nuffield Observatory

Our plans



...to change hearts and minds, and encourage communities and system leaders to take responsibility for change for young parent families

...to make an effective and compelling case for support that attracts buy-in, investment and increased resource

...a whole system able to better support young parents, with a framework that clarifies how to do this across all services



**With thanks from everyone at WILD, and on behalf of the young parents
and their children, for inviting us to share our work towards
a fair start for young parent families.**

www.wildproject.org.uk

[WILD Instagram](#)

[WILD Facebook](#)

All photos copyright WILD Young Parents Project, with kind permission of WILD families