

RETAINING FOSTER PARENTS: FACTORS
INFLUENCING RETENTION
AND ATTRITION

by

MISTY MARIE SAMYA

A DISSERTATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

AFAPA	Alabama Foster & Adoptive Parent Association
ASFA	Adoption and Safe Families Act
CFPSS	Current Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey
<i>df</i>	Degrees of freedom: number of values free to vary after certain restrictions have been placed on the data
DHR	Department of Human Resources
<i>F</i>	Fisher's <i>F</i> ratio: A ration of two variances
FFPSS	Former Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey
MEPA	Multiethnic Placement Act
M	Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set
NSC&FFP	National Survey of Current and Former Foster Parents
TPR	Termination of Parental Rights
SE	Social Exchange Theory
SWFPI	Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory
SD	Standard deviation: A measure of dispersion, the square root of the variance in the data set
p	Probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis of a value as extreme as or more extreme than the observed value
<i>r</i>	Pearson product-moment correlation

β Standardized regression coefficient that allows for comparison to be made between coefficients that try to explain the dependent variable

x The expected value of a random variable

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Bud Lowery, my parents, Rose and David Samya, my brothers, Patrick and Chris Samya, and my son, Justin Earley. For Martha Ackerman, my neighbor, role model, and friend who died when I was young, I thank her for her teachings: I was listening. My love for you all is immeasurable—we are connected such that my successes are yours. Enjoy!

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to uncover factors that contributed to the decision to continue or stop foster parenting from a social exchange theory perspective. The study sample consisted of 53 former foster parents and 101 current foster parents. Participants completed a survey designed to examine how four variables—quality and availability of services to support foster care provision, respect and recognition given by caseworkers, financial assistance and work benefits, and crisis response of caseworkers—related to foster parents' decisions to continue or give up fostering.

The first research hypothesis was that high or low satisfaction for these variables would predict those who continued to foster and those who had quit, respectively. Logistic regression analysis did not support this hypothesis. Further examination of those participants who had stopped fostering identified an over-representation of those who had fostered in order to adopt, a problem for the study since this group may not have set out to foster long term. Those participants were selected out and further analyses were conducted comparing mean scores of those who quit (and presumably were not fostering to adopt) and those still fostering. This further analysis also failed to support the hypothesis. The second hypothesis was that those who were still fostering and who indicated a commitment to continue would evidence higher satisfaction on the four variables. A within-group analysis employing simple regression supported a directional relationship between commitment to continue and all variables, except perceived

satisfaction with financial assistance and work benefits. The report concludes with a discussion and possible explanations for the findings and potential policy implications.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Foster care provides one of the major social services directed towards the needs of children in the U.S. (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004; Kirby, 1997). This dissertation addresses an important issue affecting both policy and practice: Why do some parents continue and some parents discontinue fostering?

Children may enter foster care for a host of reasons. For most, abuse and/or neglect set them on the path to becoming foster children. Children entering foster care, according to prevailing consensus, should be placed in a family setting whenever possible (Crosson-Tower, 2003; Martin, 2000). Today this is a major hurdle, as fewer citizens are willing to take on this essential role now than in the past. In fact, between 1984 and 1995, the number of children in foster care rose sixty-eight percent; at the same time, the number of foster parents decreased by four percent (Christian, 2002). Low retention of foster parents, especially during the first year of fostering, compounds the problem (Fees et al., 1998; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2004). Both recruitment of foster parents and high dropout rates are concerns for child welfare agencies (Cox, Orme, & Rhodes, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2001). However, retention of qualified foster families would decrease the need for constant recruitment while increasing the likelihood that children would be placed with experienced and highly skilled foster parents, ultimately resulting in more placement stability and

increased child wellbeing (Rhodes et al., 2001). Most who first inquire about becoming a foster parent never actually obtain a license (U.S. GAO, 2004). Perhaps their perception of what would be rewarding to them was at odds with the reality of fostering. Fees et al. (1998) studied foster parent satisfaction. They sought to uncover factors that seemed rewarding to foster parents. They found that “role demands satisfaction” (being happy with the tasks involved with fostering) and “personal needs satisfaction” (the good feelings associated with helping others) were rewarding. In other studies, the rewards of fostering included faith or support from church, a deep concern for children, wanting to take in children who needed loving parents, tolerance, a strong marriage, emotional support, and approval from the agency (Fees et al., 1998; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; Orme, Buehler, McSurdy, Rhodes, & Cox, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The foster care system within the United States is failing to meet the needs of children it is intended to serve (Evans, 1997). A national crisis in child protection services brought about by a lack of suitable foster family homes exacerbates the problem (Fees et al., 1998; Jackson-Cobb, 2008; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rindfleisch, Bean, & Denby, 1998). Between 1987 and 1997, 25 state, county, and local child welfare organizations faced class action lawsuits, resulting in efforts to reform child protective services. Yet, “foster care remains a poorly studied and poorly understood social service program” (Courtney, 1999, p. 129). While the status of foster care as generally understudied is alarming, within the associated literature there is a paucity of recent studies that focus specifically on foster parenting issues (Kirby, 1997). Those that do focus on these issues

largely report the motivations for fostering while failing to address such core issues as satisfaction and retention of foster parents (Evans, 1997). Foster parent retention continues to be an issue as many foster parents are quitting each year, and fewer citizens are now willing to take on this role than in the past (Barth, 2001; Fees et al., 1998; Orme et al., 2004).

The objective of this dissertation is to determine factors that contribute to the decision on the part of foster parents to continue or discontinue fostering. Social exchange theory (SE) frames, evaluates, and weighs the rewards and costs of fostering believed to have the most effect on the retention of foster parents. The goal of this dissertation is to inform effective retention strategies as a basis for recommending policy changes within the child welfare system.

A current review of the literature reveals no studies focusing on foster parents in Alabama. Meanwhile, the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) set a goal to increase the number of approved foster homes by 10% by the 2008 fiscal year (Alabama DHR, 2005), but it is not known whether this goal was met. This research may offer empirical guidance to the state's future efforts to increase the number of experienced foster homes. In particular, this study may help DHR and perhaps other foster care agencies around the country develop retention strategies aimed at maintaining an adequate number of qualified foster homes.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first section of the review includes an explanation of the theory that frames the research and discussion of foster care generally, followed by a discussion of foster care today, which highlights trends in placement. Next is a discussion of policies driving practice in this area, followed by discussion focused on foster children themselves, including reasons for entry into care, foster care drift, and expected outcomes for their adult futures. Discussion then centers on foster parenting and highlights motives for fostering, foster parent recruitment, and foster parent retention. A discussion of the study variables comes last.

Theory

After consideration of a number of theoretical perspectives, social exchange theory was selected to frame the research. Its central assumption is that the exchange of social and material resources is a fundamental form of human interaction. The study is premised on the position that this theory is best suited to help answer the question of why foster parents quit and why they continue, because SE attempts to account for the emergence, persistence, and sometimes failure of social relationships (Cook, 1987). For the purpose of this study, foster parents are the unit of analysis studied. Social exchange theory takes into consideration the relative rewards and costs of continuing a social role.

In this research, the role is that of a foster parent. Foster parents who choose to close their home to foster children may have come to believe that the costs were outweighing the benefits. According to the assumptions of SE, this was not the case originally, as no “rational” person would choose to become a foster parent in the first place under these conditions. Another rationale for using social exchange theory is that SE is parsimonious. A simple and powerful proposition is that an actor will choose the course of action that offers the greatest rewards relative to the costs (White & Klein, 2002).

Historical Roots of Social Exchange

Richard Emerson, George Homans, John Thibaut, Harold Kelley, and Peter Blau are the major contributors to the development of social exchange theory (Gibson, 2002). This perspective flourished in the fields of sociology and social psychology in the 1960s but has roots in earlier theories developed in cultural anthropology, psychology, and, of course, neoclassical economics (Gibson, 2002).

Blau (1961) and Homan (1946) were the chief contributors to contemporary social exchange theory. However, they differed in their approaches; Homans centered on the instrumental behaviors of social actors, whereas Blau focused specifically on the economic motives of social actors, emphasizing that SE is rooted in profit-seeking motivations. As such, Blau separated social exchange from economic exchange. Thus, when defining social exchange, he wrote that, “Social exchange...refers to voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others” (p. 91). Further, he asserted that a major difference between social and economic exchange is that, in economic exchanges, we

generally know what the price of a good is in advance, or at least have a general idea regarding the worth of a product. Social exchanges do not have an exact price. In other words, measurability is more difficult; we do not know exactly the cost of a social obligation (Blau, 1961). Consider the following example of an economic exchange, purchasing a gallon of milk. In this exchange, a specific measurable amount of money is required to buy the milk (Blau, 1961). Now, consider the next example of a social exchange: A social worker offers positive feedback to a new foster parent by saying, "You did a good job today." Obviously, this social exchange is difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, this positive feedback may be very rewarding to the foster parent.

Homans (1946), a sociologist, as an early developer of SE, applied the theory in the context of social relations on ships during wartime. He noted that though the captain of the ship had the legitimate authority of command, his effectiveness still depended in part on norms of reciprocity, or exchanges with the crew. In other words, the captain could not simply command and demand; he had to give something back to the crew in return, such as showing care for his men, helping them receive citations and promotions, and even protecting his men from arbitrary bureaucratic rules and bothersome formalities). Homans saw the ship as a microcosm of the larger society, in which order and civility are maintained by informal reciprocal exchanges. Of course, foster parents and their overseers face similar challenges. Social workers may have authority, but it is "by consent of the governed," the foster parent, that the system does or does not work effectively. The reasoning is that both formal and informal reciprocal exchanges and perceptions of the fairness of these exchanges (i.e., benefits relative to costs) are keys to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of foster parent retention.

Cook and Emerson (1978) further advanced and redefined SE in the late 1970s. They wrote that, “Past theory and research using the exchange approach have dealt with power at a distinctly micro analytic level. This is a theoretical flaw if social power is...a social structure phenomenon” (p. 721). Cook wrote that a core concept of SE is power differences. She maintained that rarely do we, in our relationships with others, have equal power. If two persons are unequally dependent on one another for valued outcomes, the less dependent person has a power advantage over the other, and the relation is a power imbalance. Based on the assumption of SE theory, a power imbalance leads to an imbalance in exchange, with the more dependent person giving more than they receive. This same imbalance may contribute to retention of foster parents. Foster parents are considered a temporary parent. The child is actually in the custody of the state. Thus, persons involved with DHR and the court system actually have the ultimate authority to decide what is in the best interest of the child, with regard to child placement. One could argue then, that foster parents generally have less power in the relationship. Findings from Rhodes et al. (2001) and Rindfleisch et al. (1998) indicated that foster parents contemplate quitting when they perceive this power imbalance is impacting them negatively. For example, in an instance when the foster parent disagrees with a social worker’s recommendation or the judge’s recommendation for moving a child to another placement, this is likely to bring attention to or perhaps even exaggerate this perceived power difference. Exploring this type of exchange was a key motive for choosing this theory.

Cook and Emerson (1987) maintained that if there is a clear sociological claim to be made about purposeful individual action, it is that socially determined values guide an

individual's actions. Identifying the values cherished by an individual should enable a reasonable prediction of that individual's actions. SE seeks to identify values and make predictions about social relationships. In the context of fostering children, identifying the values associated with why one chooses to become (or remain) a foster parent offers the groundwork for attempting to uncover why one may choose to stop. In this research, questions are designed to uncover aspects that are rewarding and costly and then test if and how they shape continuing or discontinuing the role.

Core Concepts and Assumptions of Social Exchange Theory

According to White and Klein (2002), the central focus of SE is motivation through self-interest. Motivation is what provokes a person to act. The focus then becomes what drives a person to choose a particular course of action over other alternatives. In this perspective, researchers must understand an individual's interests and values. These values and interests lead to an accounting of the costs and rewards, which in turn drive the person to make choices that maximize individual profits. The basic notion then is that a "rational actor" chooses a course of action that will produce the greatest benefit. Likewise, actors in a situation in which there are no rewards seek to minimize costs; this is the principle of least costs.

Social exchange theorists usually explain the existence and longevity of social groups, such as the family, by their appeal to the self-interest of individual members (Cook & Emerson, 1987). Individuals come together in groups to maximize their rewards. Of course, being a member of a family, one might have to compromise and

even incur costs at times. If the costs of a membership in the group exceed the rewards, then membership in the group is no longer a rational choice.

White and Klein (2002) posit the following assumptions for SE:

1. The actions of individuals construct groups, social structures, and normative culture.
Thus, if we understand the actions of individuals, we will understand these macro-social phenomena. In SE, the family is a collection of individuals.
2. Prediction comes from understanding an individual's motivation. Thus, knowing a person's values can lead to better prediction of his or her choices. Because families are a long-lasting social group, social exchange theorists believe that families are rewarding to individual members.
3. Actors are motivated by self-interest; thus, when a relationship becomes too costly to the individual, it will be terminated.
4. Actors are rational, and they have the ability to calculate the ratio of costs to rewards. As such, any two rational actors in the *same* situation with the *same* values and identical information would reach the *same* result in their calculations and would thus pursue the *same* behavior.

Social exchange is based on the rewards and costs of relationships. This theory is grounded in the following concepts: (White & Klein, 2002):

1. Rewards and costs: A reward can be anything perceived as favorable to an individual. As such, costs are the negative dimensions of rewards. One type of cost to consider is lost opportunities for rewards (missed opportunities). Rewards and costs can be either symbolic or concrete. Examples of concrete rewards are money and services. Examples of symbolic rewards are love, smiles, and praise.

2. Comparison levels: In complex situations, the assessment of rewards can develop in one of two ways. First is the comparison level. In this instance, a person asks what others in their position have and how well they are doing. The second is the comparison level for alternatives. In this case, one asks how they would be doing in their next best alternative.
3. Rationality: To understand a person's choice as rational, we need to know what that person considers rewarding and what they believe to be costly. In addition, we need to have some idea of the relative weight of those rewards and costs.
4. The exchanges are important: Equity is fairness or justice, i.e., relationships do not have to be "equal" to be fair; they can be perceived as fair. For example, social norms may require inequality, as in the example of marriage in the United States. Two spouses usually do not have equal power in the relationship. However, if the spouse who has less power in the relationship believes this is still fair, then it is fair. In addition, rationality may not be uniform across social actors. A person cannot always know how rewarding or costly something is to others.
5. Generalizable sources of rewards in social exchange are important: We can compute a general accounting of costs and rewards that would be most profitable for actors in a social system. Some of these include social acceptance, respect, power, love, and status.

Social Exchange Theory in Foster Parenting Research

In the past few years, a number of authors have studied foster parenting using social exchange theory to frame their research; in each study, SE was supported (Cox et

al., 2003; Timmer, Sedlar, & Urquiza, 2004). In one study, Cox et al. (2003) used resource theory (derived from social exchange theory) to explain foster parent retention. According to Cox et al., resource theory has primarily been used to understand interpersonal relationships; in particular, it has been used to investigate decision-making processes within marital relationships but is useful in understanding foster parent retention. The idea behind the research design was that foster families with more resources would more easily meet the demands of fostering and would be more likely to continue fostering. However, in the case of a foster parent who has more psychosocial problems, this may offset the advantages of having resources and decrease the likelihood of continuance. Findings indicated that almost 50% of families who started pre-service training did not complete it. Additionally, of the 131 families who completed training, 46% had quit or planned to quit. Families with a higher number of resources were more likely to continue fostering children, especially persons with higher incomes. If a family had high psychosocial problems and low resources, they were more likely to express uncertainty about continuing.

Timmer et al. (2004) used social exchange theory as a framework for examining kin and non-kin foster parents' perceptions of their foster children, their relationship with their foster children, and their own psychosocial functioning. Timmer and colleagues believed that SE could help predict the placement stability of foster children by analyzing the costs and benefits to a foster parent. Thus, for a child who had extreme behavior problems, placement disruption would become more likely. Findings indicated that non-kin foster parents perceived their foster children as having more intense behavior

problems. Kin foster parents show moderately higher levels of depressive symptoms, parental distress, and abuse potential than non-kin caregivers.

In this research by Timmer et al. (2004), equity theory was used to frame the research, which was designed to better understand the motivations and needs of foster parents in an effort to improve recruitment and retention. Findings indicated that satisfaction among foster parents was associated with their perceptions of teamwork, communication, confidence in the child welfare agency and its professionals. Foster parents reported altruistic motivations as being their key reason for fostering children. Conversely, a negative relationship with professionals from the agency was linked to reasons foster parents stopping fostering.

Research by Rogers, Cummings, and Leschied (2006) studied foster parents' motivations to foster using intrinsic and extrinsic factors (i.e., rewards and costs). They found foster parents were motivated by wanting to be loving parents and wanting to save children from further harm. Satisfaction was related to the belief that they were members of a team, good communication with caseworkers, and confidence in the social worker and the agency staff as professionals. While motives to foster were intrinsic rewards, motives to quit were related to the relationship with the agency.

Turning to a justification of SE as the theoretical foundation for this study, social exchange theory provides a predictive framework of benefits and costs. Not only does this theory emphasize the importance of the rewards and costs in maintaining relationships and roles, but also offers a way to calculate and weigh these rewards and costs. On a superficial level, benefits and costs would seem easy to detect. However, people perceive what is rewarding and what is not rewarding differently. The focus of

this study is to determine what and how perceptions of benefits and costs influence foster parents' decisions to continue or to stop fostering. While rewards and costs do vary from one social actor to another, using SE allows for an accounting, if you will, of what is rewarding and costly. Using this theory will uncover trends of rewards and costs across social actors, i.e., study participants. For example, foster parents receive a monthly board payment. In nearly all instances, money is a reward. Yet in several qualitative interviews with foster parents, two participants said the money was offensive because the amount was so low. In fact, they laughed out loud when the board payment was mentioned (Samya, 2004). Therefore, while intuitively one might think that offering money is rewarding to foster parents, overwhelmingly those interviewed said the board payment was not a factor in their decision to continue to foster children (Samya, 2004). DHR officials, however, may be operating on the assumption that board payments help with retention of foster parents when, in fact, they may not—at least at the levels currently given.

Foster Care

History of Foster Care

“Substitute care” for children, as foster care was termed historically, has a storied and extensive history. Substitute care can be traced back to ancient Jewish laws and customs, when it was common to board orphaned children with relatives or in what would now be termed church homes, as well as to early Native American tribes, which had an informal system to meet this need (Everett, 1997).

After the adoption of the English Poor Laws (1600 to 1776), children considered impoverished or neglected were ordered into indentured servitude to a master artisan until the age of 21 (Everett, 1997). During this time, this was considered substitute care. For the most part, public officials placed children in indentured servitude in lieu of providing aid. However, sometimes it was the parents who voluntarily entered into an agreement to place their children into indentured servitude (Hasci, 1995). Abuse and neglect of children in indentured servitude was common.

Substitute care transitioned during Colonial times as almshouses became the method of placing children in alternative settings. Included in the population of the homes were the poor, prisoners, mentally ill persons, and orphaned children. According to Hasci (1995), indentured servitude continued during this era. In fact, joint placement often occurred during this time, with children placed in both indentured servitude and an almshouse. In almshouses, there was rarely, if ever, any effort even to treat children humanely. On the contrary, children were “warehoused” with elderly, poor, mentally ill, and criminal adults.

In response to reports that children were neglected, many never even being taught to read while in almshouses, public and private agencies began to establish orphan asylums for special classes of children. These institutions accepted children who were blind, delinquent, homeless, and deaf (Everett, 1997). Still, children could be, and often were, indentured out while residing in an orphan asylum. Between the 1830s and 1860s, these asylums became the leading method of caring for dependent children (Hasci, 1995). By the mid 1800s, this type of care fell under heavy criticism. The most famous critic

was Charles Loring Brace, who advocated that children should be placed in homes, not institutions (Hasci, 1995). Under his guidance, a movement to do exactly that began.

In 1853, Charles Loring Brace started what many consider a movement towards modern foster care. Brace, who founded the New York Children's Aid Society, was critical of asylums, so he developed what he termed the “placing out” of children. Instead of sending children to live in almshouses, Brace transported poor or orphaned children by train to live with farmers or trades people. In fact, it was not uncommon for him to have agents conduct “street sweeps” in search of children who did not have homes (Hasci, 1995). Authorities would then transport these children to the West and South for home placement.

The guiding principle behind this movement was an assumption that children should live in homes and not institutions. Although, his actions were meant to be a move away from children being placed in situations where they were either warehoused or expected to work and towards offering them a family, in the end this method of placing out, in some ways, was not that different. Children in many cases were still expected to work for food and room and board (Everett, 1997). Consequently, many charity workers condemned this method of substitute care and were quick to criticize Brace, as the children were essentially “free labor.” The fact that there was no follow-up care after placing children in homes brought even more criticism to his cause. The children literally exited a train, stood in line on a stage, and, if chosen, left right away to go and live with the family that picked them. If not chosen, they went on to the next stop. No effort was made to keep sibling groups together or to ever reunite them with their original families.

In response to criticisms of Brace's methods of placing out children, Charles Birtwell, director of Boston's Children's Aid Society (1886-1911), formulated the idea that the child's needs should be the focus of any placement. He put forth the idea that follow-up should become routine and that children, whenever possible, should be reunited with their families. Substitute care at this point was evolving into something akin to the modern system.

In 1959, the book *Children in Need of Parents* (Mass & Engler, 1959) was released. Its release began an onslaught of controversy (Everett, 1997). Mass and Engler found that foster care had become essentially a "holding tank" for children. Following the exposé, researchers, for the first time, began to analyze the foster care system critically from an empirical perspective. Therefore, there was a shifting away from foster care practice executed almost solely based on religious and moral values, and the emphasis in practice turned towards "best practice," as established by academic research and practice evaluation.

After the release of Mass and Engler's (1959) exposé on foster care, policies were developed mandating that agencies provide intense services- and goal-oriented casework. In addition, establishing permanency became a major goal of substitute care (Everett, 1997). Before this book, the idea of permanency was certainly not new; however, after the book, permanency became standard practice. One way that policy makers and practitioners aided in establishing permanency was via the removal of many of the barriers to adoption. Now, for the first time, case plans included the biological parents of the child.

Although foster care evolved during this century from policies of placing children with prisoners and mentally ill adults to goal-oriented practices focusing on the needs of the child, it was not until 1961 that the first federal legislation was enacted with the passage of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (P.L. 87-31). AFDC was established for children who could no longer safely remain in their homes (Allen & Bissell, 2004). With its passage, a federal payment for foster home care of dependent children was established. However, before allocating the funds, lawmakers had to first define foster family homes. A definition of foster care emerged as family homes for children licensed by the state after approval, i.e., meeting the standards established for such licensing. Provisions for states to take care of needy children were established via this law, including funding, development of a plan for each child, and a period of review for the foster family home.

In 1974, another milestone was reached in foster care with the passage of the Child Abuse and Treatment Prevention Act (P.L. 93-247). This law required that professionals report suspected incidents of child maltreatment to child protective service agencies (Allen & Bissell, 2004). Clearly, this law was designed to protect children from abuse in their homes by putting pressure on teachers, doctors, lawyers, police, and other professionals to report abuse. No longer could professionals choose, without consequences, not to get involved when they suspected abuse or neglect of a child. Before its passage, it was certainly unethical for professionals to fail to report suspected abuse, but after the law was enacted, it became a violation of the law to do so.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the practice of placing far too many Native American children in foster care and their subsequent adoption by white couples served

as the impetus for passage of the 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608). The purpose of this law was to create safe guards to prevent the unnecessary removal of Native American children from their families.

In 1980, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act became law (P.L. 96-272). The passage of this act solidified foster care as a federal program as it continued funding the foster care program (Everett, 1997). This act also served as a major victory for biological parents with children placed in foster care, as a major emphasis of this legislation was that child welfare agencies must make a good faith effort, by law, to keep families together. This law also provided safeguards against placing children in environments for which they were not suited. In the past, authorities placed children in hospitals and orphanages without sufficient cause to do so. Thus, this law established that children, whenever possible, must be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

In 1997, another major overhaul in foster care policy occurred with the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89). Perhaps the most contentious part of ASFA concerns shortening permanency timelines, offering families less time to make and sustain the changes the courts asked of them before termination of parental rights (TPR) would ensue and the child would be eligible for adoption. This point will be discussed further in the “Policies Driving Practice” section.

Lastly, federal funds for adoption were streamlined to pay or offer tax incentives to families who adopt children from foster care. Officials removed fiscal disincentives for state agencies to move forward through the adoption process more efficiently. This too can be seen as a move away from family preservation and towards TPR, as tax breaks

and other incentives are offered to “entice” families to adopt. In addition, this was the first time the federal government gave the directive that states must track certain measures to increase accountability, such as entries and exits into care, length of time in care, and other outcome measures. Thus, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting system (AFCARS) was created (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2003). Reporting to AFCARS is mandatory; the results are not only available to policy makers, but also to the public, who can access these statistics via the World Wide Web. Noteworthy as well, this act also eliminated long-term foster care as a viable placement and *formally* recognized kinship care as a permanency option for children. In a policy context, this act overhauled foster care (Allen & Bissell, 2004).

In the early 1990s, a policy issue brought to the forefront of foster care was the issue of discrimination with regard to foster care services and placements. As a result, in 1994, the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was passed (P.L. 103-382). This law prohibited agencies that receive federal funding from discriminating, through either denying a person the chance to adopt a child or denying a person the chance to become a foster parent based on their race, color, or national origin. This act omits gays and lesbians, and as a result, state officials can create policies to exclude them as foster or adoptive parents. In addition, local agency officials can set formal policies or informal practices to the same result. Florida expressly forbids adoption or fostering by gays or lesbians, while other states or agencies may have informal practices intended to exclude them.

In 1996, the Interethnic Adoption Provisions (P.L. 104-188) extended MEPA so that individuals could sue states or agencies if they believed they were victims of discrimination. Thus far, MEPA has not resulted in the loss of funding for any state agency.

In the process of developing what is today's foster care, children who need substitute care have gone from being the property of adults without *any* basic human rights to having at least some protections under the law. Today, the focus is on best practice for the affected child. Though one can argue that foster care has a long way to go in order to satisfy fully the needs of children, historically the system has improved.

Important Foster Care Milestones in Alabama

The R.C. lawsuit was filed in the United States District Court against the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) in 1988 on behalf of a child who was then in the custody of DHR (P.L. 88-H-1170-N). Only his initials, *R.C.*, identified the child, who had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. According to those filing the suit, DHR did not maintain systems to provide for and adequately address the needs of emotionally disturbed or behaviorally disordered foster children when placed in the foster care system. In this instance, without an investigation, authorities committed a child to a psychiatric hospital because he was upset. Later, his lawyers argued that authorities could not show cause for such an extreme placement. In fact, they argued, his removal from his family in the first place was without cause.

The case, by agreement of the involved parties, resulted in a consent decree, signed and approved by the federal judge in 1991 (Bazelon Center for Mental Health

Law, 1998; *R.C. versus Andy Hornsby Consent Decree*). The settlement required that DHR create and maintain a suitable system of care for the child welfare program. This decree emphasized the prevention of placement, early intervention, family reunification, delivery of services in home-based and community-based settings, and child and parent involvement in the planning and delivery of services. Its implementation required improvements in the areas of service development, training, quality assurance, and rights protection (Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, 1998; *R.C. versus Andy Hornsby Consent Decree*). Now-retired United States District Judge Truman Hobbs entered an order approving the Consent Decree on December 11, 1991. In 1999, Judge DeMent entered an order extending the time for compliance with the Consent Decree until October 2002. State officials moved to have the decree lifted in December of 2004. A debate ensued in popular media outlets. However, the decree was extended.

In 2005, Voices for Alabama's Children, a member of Voices for America's Children (VOICES), began collaborating with the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA) in an effort to urge legislators to give foster parents more decision-making power over children in their care ("Child advocates making a difference," 2004). VOICES and AFAPA made the case that foster parents are not included in important decisions regarding children in their care. This had long frustrated foster parents. VOICES and AFAPA officials proposed a Foster Parent Bill of Rights be put into place.

The impetus for this proposed legislation derived from foster care providers' dissatisfaction resulting from their inability to attend court hearings where their foster children's cases were decided without their input. They also expressed dissatisfaction at not being able to speak directly to professionals both inside and outside of the child

welfare system. Articles and letters again appeared in newspapers around the state. One letter written noted that the DHR in Alabama must aggressively recruit new families to keep up with demand, “[y]et, the way state government has treated foster parents is shameful” (“Righting a wrong: State foster parents close to getting rights ensured,” 2004, 1). Foster parents are obviously central to the foster care system. The hope was that passing the Foster Parent Bill of Rights would aid in the retention of foster parents in Alabama. In conclusion, the writer suggested treating foster parents as equal partners in the state’s efforts to care for abused and neglected children. As a result of letters like these and other methods of advocacy, the groups met and constructed a list of rights, modeling their work on similar legislation in Tennessee. Thus, after much advocacy, the Foster Parent Bill of Rights was signed on April 20, 2004 (P.L. 62783-8; to view this act in its entirety, see Appendix A). The purpose of this legislation was to ensure better treatment of foster parents by DHR and to extend their rights as primary caregivers of children in the custody of the state.

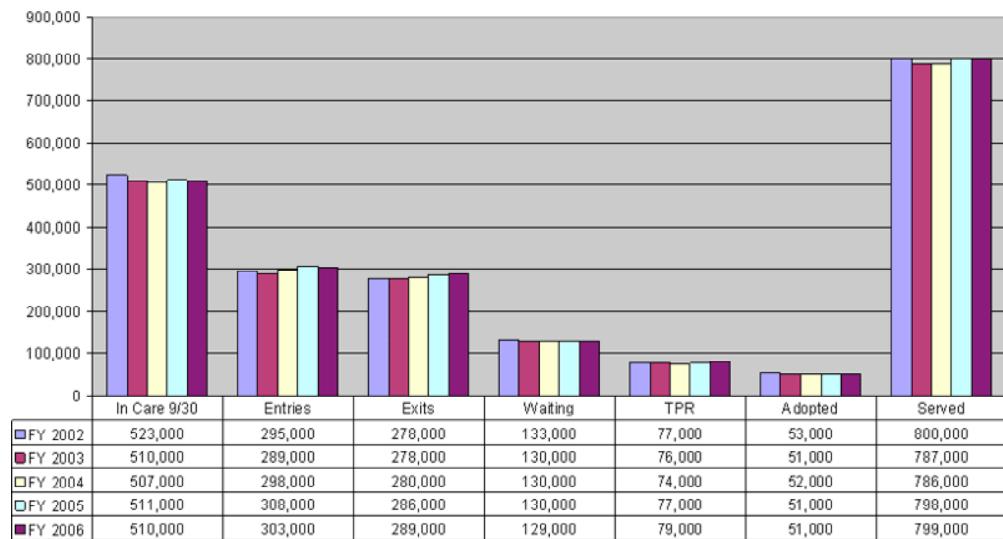
In 2007, the R.C. Consent Decree was lifted. In a Memorandum Opinion and Order written by Judge Ira DeMent (*R.C. versus Page Walley Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 2007). Judge DeMent wrote that an independent court review revealed that there was “evidentiary support for the finding that Defendant has satisfied both prongs of the Consent Decree’s termination clause” (p. 31).

Foster Care Today

Today, foster care is designed to give children substitute care in a family setting whenever their own families are unable or unwilling to provide this care (Crosson-Tower,

2003). Foster care provides: 1) emergency care for children on a temporary basis; 2) temporary help for a parent who needs it due to stress; 3) the necessary time, within reason, for a parent to solve problems due to lack of housing, addiction, mental illness, poverty, etc.; 4) protection for children in instances of abuse, neglect, or, in some cases, extreme instability; 5) care for children until an institutional placement becomes available; and 6) care until the child can be placed in a permanent situation, such as adoption, or the child becomes an adult (Crosson-Tower, 2003). Foster care can be voluntary via a written request from the primary caregiver. In such an instance, termination of the agreement can occur via the request of either the parent or the agency. In most instances, abuse or neglect compels authorities to remove children from their families. In such instances, children should be placed in foster care only when there is clear evidence that their parents cannot care for them properly (Martin, 2000).

Figure 1 indicates that although there has been a slight decline in the total number of children in care from 1998 to 2004, the number of children in foster care has steadily remained at over half a million (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006b). Figure 1 also demonstrates that the number of children served each year is, astonishingly, nearly 800,000. This category represents an estimated count of all children who were in the public foster care system during 2005. In other words, the number includes both the children who were already in care on the first day of the fiscal year (October 1) and the children who entered foster care during the year.



Source: AFCARS data, U.S. Children's Bureau, Administration of Children Youth and Families

Figure 1. Trends in adoption and foster care.

The average stay in foster care is 30 months (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006a). Sixty percent of children remain in the system for at least one year, some up to five or more years. In 2005, 53% of children in foster care were males.

Racial disparity continues to be an issue of concern within the child welfare system (Chiball et al., 2003). Table 1 indicates the race of children in foster care. Note that African American children make up 38% of the children in foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006b). However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2005), African Americans in total represent only 12.1% of the U.S. population. Studies have demonstrated that race is *not* a factor in incidences of abuse and neglect. However, African American and Latino families are more likely to be reported for child abuse and neglect, to have children

removed from their homes, and to have their children in care for longer periods of time than are white families in similar circumstances (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Table 1

Race and Ethnicity of Children in Foster Care, 2006

AI/AN Non-Hispanic	2%	10,168
Asian Non-Hispanic	1%	2,978
Black Non-Hispanic	38%	162,722
Hawaiian/PI Non-Hispanic	0%	1,104
Hispanic	17%	96,967
White Non-Hispanic	37%	205,662
Unknown/Unable to Determine	3%	11,286
Two or More Races Non-Hispanic	2%	19,12

NOTE: Using U.S. Bureau of the Census standards, children of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Beginning in FY 2000, children could receive more than one race designation

Source: AFCARS Report , US Department of Health and Human Services

Types of Placement

When children must enter foster care, the first placement alternative is kinship care. Kinship care refers to a relative, close family friend, or tribal member caring for the children (Geen, 2004). The prevailing belief is that kinship care minimizes trauma to the children since the children do not transition to living with complete strangers and are subsequently able to maintain contact with family members. However, according to Geen, no rigorous research can be found to demonstrate that children placed in kinship care have better outcomes than those placed in non-kin homes. Kinship care providers typically are older, African American, have lower incomes, are in poorer health, and have less education than traditional foster parents. Kinship foster care providers are supervised less, ask for fewer services, and subsequently are offered fewer services; thus,

the end result could be that they are not offered the support they need to nurture and protect the children in their homes (Geen, 2004). Data shown in Figure 2 reveals that kinship care has grown over the past two decades; kinship care now represents 24% of all placement types in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006a). This percentage is likely to be low, as many children reside in informal kinship care arrangements, and informal care data is not currently gathered by AFCARS.

Pre-Adoptive Home	3%	17,351
Foster Family Home (Relative)	24%	124,571
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	46%	236,911
Group Home	7%	33,433
Institution	10%	53,042
Supervised Independent Living	1%	5,872
Runaway	2%	12,213
Trial Home Visit	6%	26,606

Source: AFCARS Report, US Department of Health and Human Services

Figure 2. Placement settings in 2006.

Sometimes children go into foster care without forewarning; in these instances, placement is often a temporary crisis home, also known as a shelter home. A crisis home is an alternative when there is a need for an emergency placement and is available to accept children 24 hours day, seven days a week. This placement is designed to be short term (Martin, 2000).

When no relatives are available or willing to take in children ordered into foster care, the next step is to work towards placing them in non-kin foster homes, also referred to as traditional foster homes. For many years non-kin placements were assumed to be

the best place for the child, because it was believed that parents who had children placed in foster care were from dysfunctional families who could not provide a stable nurturing home for the child (Martin, 2000). Now, non-kin placement is the second placement option considered. Roughly 50% of all foster homes are non-kin foster homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006b).

Specialized treatment homes, also referred to therapeutic foster homes, serve as a method of caring for children who have special needs. Before obtaining licensure as a therapeutic foster parent, the potential caregiver must receive more extensive training than traditional caregivers and be able to commit to providing more time and energy to the children whom they will care for. In return, they are offered a higher payment for this specialized care (Martin, 2000). Generally, only a certain number of “slots” are available per county, and the number of placements available may not represent the actual number of children in need of this type of care. Therapeutic placement can occur due to placement instability (i.e., several placements in a short time), emotional or behavioral concerns, or to address the needs of medically fragile children.

Some foster children reside in group home care. Group homes are not a preferred method of care for children in foster care, as they are not considered family settings. Nonetheless, some children are difficult to place in family settings and must be placed in group homes. About 9% of foster children reside in this sort of setting (Martin, 2000).

Placing children in an institutional setting can occur in cases when children have severe mental health problems. This restrictive placement, though not ideal, makes up

about 10% of foster child placements (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2006b).

Policies Driving Practice

Two major factors have driven recent foster care policy. The first is an increase in the number of children entering foster care. In fact, from 1983 to 2005 there was a 96% increase in the number of children in foster care (George, Wulczyn, & Harden, 1997). As a result, policy-makers shifted more emphasis towards offering relatives the chance to foster children. Secondly, negative media reports after tragic outcomes for children (such as child death following reunification or while in foster care) has brought about “reactive” policymaking (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004).

To alleviate the stress placed on the foster care system, in 1993 the Family Preservation and Support Services program brought about a stronger focus on preventing the necessity for foster care (P.L. 103-66). This act focused more emphasis on helping parents whose children were at risk for removal. The next year, Congress funded family preservation services. On the surface, it seemed as if the emphasis on keeping children with their family had increased. However, funding for this initiative has been low from the outset. In fact, many social workers maintain that not nearly enough money is available to aid families who are at risk of having their children placed in foster care (Martin, 2000). Also, the foster care population had risen from 262,000 children in care at the end of 1982 to 400,000 in 1990 (Spar, 1997). Measures to keep children out of foster care followed the influx of children into care and the declining number of available homes. ASFA (P.L. 105-89), passed in 1997, was designed to alleviate the problem of children lingering too long in foster care. As such, the law expedites timelines for

establishing permanency. This policy was developed to transition children out of care quickly and in essence reversed much of what the Family Preservation Act writers sought to accomplish. There were three major assumptions behind this legislation. First, there were too many children in foster care, over half a million as of 2003 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2003). Second, the longer a child stayed in care, the less his or her chances of being adopted. Third, children considered “at risk” needed to be safe from abuses they might suffer at the hands of their parents (Espejo, 2005; Nguyen, 2004; Roberts, 2005). In fact, the passage of this act was in response to a few horrific incidents of child abuse sensationalized in the media.

The passage of ASFA signified a shift away from family preservation. Biological parents’ rights, many argue, took a step backwards as parents were given far less time to meet the requirements set forth in order to take back custody of their children (*Adoption and Safe Families Act*, 1997). This practical dilemma still exists, often termed “reunification versus permanency.” It is debatable how much help (or more importantly how much time) biological families should have to recover custody when their children are placed in the child welfare system. Although ASFA established some guidelines for moving children into more permanent settings more quickly, the question as to what constitutes “best practice” remains. The subject often finds its way into popular media outlets after the death of a child; an article from the Associated Press (Sowell, 2004) demonstrates this. In this article, the life story of “Angelo” is recounted. Angelo had to go to the hospital 12 days after his birth with broken bones and eventually died. His two-year-old sister was in a similar situation, being raised by the same parent, and she became the focus of a child custody case. The author wrote of his outrage that a judge gave the

mother six months to put her life back together. He emphasized that, in his view, the laws and practices of judges and social welfare agency workers put children back in dangerous situations. He argued that judges and social workers falsely believe social services can “turn parents into better people” and prevent abuse via family reunification services.

Situations resulting in the death of a child put new life into the debate over permanency vs. reunification. In a similar case, the Washington D.C. Department of Human Services came under great scrutiny after finding four young children dead, killed by their mother, Benita Jacks. In this case, the Department of Human Services was accused of failing to act to place these children in care when it was obvious they were at risk. After a lot of media attention, the Mayor of D.C. announced that at least six employees were terminated (Foxnews.com, 2008; Klein, Alexander, & Montes, 2008). These popular news articles illustrate how laypersons develop attitudes and beliefs about foster care as a system, including those parents who have children placed in this system and those individuals who might serve as potential foster parents themselves.

Critics of ASFA argued that the law tears down families by taking away families' rights and that poor families pay a disproportionate price as neglect due to poverty is far more common than physical abuse (Espejo, 2005; Nguyen, 2004; Roberts, 2005). Wexler (2002) believes that this legislation amounts to “take the child and run” (p. 130). He compared this law to the Orphan Train movement, arguing that many of the issues now leading to the permanent removal of children could be fixed with a little time and adequately funded and developed preservation services. He believes that thousands of children could avoid foster care placement as a result. He offered an example of a

grandmother raising her grandchild who lost custody because of a leaky roof. Her skills as a primary caregiver were not in question; however, she could not afford to have the roof repaired on a fixed income. State officials put the child in state custody; she later died at the hands of her foster parent. While this was an extreme case, it emphasized the point that had officials helped the grandmother with the neglect issues, i.e., helped her fix the roof, there would have been no need for foster care placement. This would have been more cost-effective and would have saved the child from family displacement.

If the purpose of the law was to stop children from lingering in foster care, perhaps it has had an effect. Children no longer stay as long in foster care. However, over a half of a million children are still in foster care each year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, 2003). While the debate over what is best, permanency or preservation, plagues practice today, social workers and judges must make these difficult decisions daily.

Foster Children

When a child enters foster care, it is important to note that he or she enters multiple systems that should link and work together for the child and family (Liederman, 1997). These can include child welfare agencies, courts, and public and private service providers (i.e., public assistance, mental health care providers, medical providers, and so on) (Bass et al., 2004). After placing children in foster care, social workers develop a permanency plan based on an in-depth assessment of the child's needs and the needs of the birth parents. Court officials and DHR staff review and monitor the plan. For most

children, reunification with their birth parents is the goal of the permanency plan. In fact, families are reunited in 57% of cases (Bass et al., 2004).

Reasons Children Enter Care

Each year nearly 300,000 children are removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect and placed into foster care (Bass et al., 2004). Families who are in need of child welfare services seem to be more “damaged” than in the past, that is, they have more serious needs (Martin, 2000). Parents can have a certain set of characteristics that leads to possible placement of their children in foster care, and these characteristics can be divided into two categories, socially acceptable and socially unacceptable reasons for child welfare involvement (Martin, 2000). Socially acceptable reasons can be mental illness, other illness, or poverty. Drug addiction is an example of a socially unacceptable reason for child welfare involvement. Socially unacceptable parenting more often leads to removal of children. In addition, parents who had children placed in care due to a socially unacceptable reason are less likely to receive the services they need to maintain custody of their children (Martin, 2000). Most children who are placed in foster care are placed because of maltreatment. The four categories that make up child maltreatment are physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse (often called psychological abuse) (Crosson-Tower, 2003).

Poverty is the largest risk factor for entry into foster care (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004; Espejo, 2005). Poor children suffer almost twice as much as non-poor children from developmental delays and mental illnesses and almost three times as much from chronic illnesses. These children are also five times more likely to die from a

physical illness than a middle-class child. Those who are poor, of course, will have fewer resources, such as adequate housing and health care. These children more often suffer from poor nutrition and are at a higher risk for suffering physical and sexual abuse (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). Evidence shows that many children enter foster care due to parental substance abuse; however, exactly how many is difficult to determine (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Foster Care Drift

Since Mass and Engler (1959) published their book in the late 1950s, foster care “drift” has been a concern for both policy makers and practitioners (Barber & Delfabbro, 2003). Foster care drift refers to children experiencing lengthy stays in foster care, away from their biological parents, with no clear goals to find permanency. When foster care drift occurs, children and parents are prevented from making lasting emotional bonds, and the children are at risk of multiple placements (Lee & Lynch, 1998). The Adoption and Safe Families Act (P.L. 105-89) focused on the length of children’s stay in foster care. A primary focus of this act was to expedite timelines for permanency, the underlying assumption being that a lack of stability while in foster care can further harm children (Lee & Lynch, 1998).

Outcomes for Children Exiting Care

In the mid 1980s, a stronger emphasis was placed on children aging out of foster care, since it was discovered that they faced some common obstacles to becoming “successful” members of society. Barriers included a lack of job skills, no access to

insurance, and a higher proportion of drug and alcohol addiction, imprisonment, homelessness, and early pregnancy (Allen & Bissell, 2004). Consequently, the Independent Living Initiative was passed in 1986 (P.L. 99-272). This statute required agencies to assist children who were leaving foster care due to their age by providing what is now termed “exit services.” These include educational or vocational support and training for independent living. In 1999, the law expanded to include payments for room and board for children ages 18 to 21 that left care.

Foster Parents

Motivations for Fostering

Fostering in the United States is a volunteer effort. There is no pay, no benefits, the children are in the custody of the state, and state officials reunite them with their parents, place them with relatives, or place them in an adoptive home at any time. Most people who decide to foster do so because they want to help children have a safe home (Isomaki, 2002; Roger et al., 2006). Some people foster because of an inability to conceive biological children or because they miss their grown biological children. Some parents want a playmate for a child they have, while others may know a child placed in foster care and want to help that particular child. Altruism and philanthropy are the primary motivators behind a person’s initial decision to foster; “[i]t is strongly evident that most foster parents have been motivated by: empathy, love, generosity, a willingness to help, and even a kind of home-bound mission for volunteering” (Isomaki, 2002, p. 629). Of course, before one considers fostering children, one must first see that there is a need for foster parents. Cox, Buehler, and Orme (2002) used data from the National

Survey of Current and Former Foster Parents to examine how potential foster parents first found out about the need for foster parents. Findings indicated that about 36% first heard about fostering through other foster parents, 28% through mass media, 9% through civic organizations, 4% through churches, and 24% through other sources.

Recruitment

Foster parent recruitment has become more difficult as fewer families are willing to become foster parents. As a result, the supply of foster families has not kept up with the demand (Everett, 1997). Part of the reason for the decline in foster parents is that, except in cases of extreme poverty, board payments are not a net gain for parents (Barth, 2001). In fact, in a society in which spending power continues to decline and more and more families need a two-parent income in order to meet their needs, low board payments have become even more of a barrier to recruitment than in the past (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). While child welfare agencies expect that both parents may work, many foster parents cannot effectively work full time and foster children, as fostering itself can be the equivalent of a full-time job. Consider that in 2003 in the urban south, the actual cost of raising a child (ages 0-2) per month was \$714, while the board payment averaged only \$350 per month ("The cost of raising a child compared to foster care maintenance payments," 2003). Potential foster parents must be willing to financially subsidize the costs incurred on behalf of their foster children, given that the cost of raising a child exceeds that of the payments provided by the government.

Today children are entering care with higher levels of social, emotional, behavioral, and physical difficulties than in the past (Martin, 2000). Meanwhile, there

are more women working outside of the home, housing costs have risen, and foster parenting suffers from a poor public image, all of which serve as recruitment barriers (Barth, 2001; Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004; Dozier & Lindhiem, 2006; Martin, 2000). Additionally, there are no social security benefits and no retirement plan in place for foster parents (Barth, 2001; Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004; Dozier & Lindhiem, 2006).

Foster Parent Retention

Retention of qualified foster parents could decrease the need for constant recruitment while also offering children placement stability and experienced foster parents. Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004) noted that the foster care system faces serious future challenges. One major challenge is that while there has been a rise in the number of children entering the foster care system, the number of available foster homes continues to decline. Barriers to retention, similar to those cited for recruitment, include women entering the workforce in greater numbers, the high cost of housing, and the existing negative image of foster parenting (Martin, 2000). One study conducted as part of a recruitment effort uncovered evidence that, of 1,000 persons who initially showed up at a recruitment day for new foster parents, less than half began the licensing process, and of those, only 170 applicants completed the process and became licensed. Shortly thereafter, 77 families had quit. Thus, only 90 households were still involved with fostering out of the 1,000 who were initially interested (U.S. GAO, 2004).

Variables That Affect Retention

The reasons foster parents stop fostering fall into two broad categories: 1) quitting for “natural” reasons and 2) quitting because of a lack of satisfaction in the role, or “unnatural” reasons (Fees et al., 1998). Natural reasons can involve age, poor health, adoption, marriage, divorce, giving birth to biological children, and relocating to a new geographical area. Generally, little can be done to preempt quitting in these cases. The remainder of this section will focus on quitting due to a lack of satisfaction with the role of foster parent.

Barth (2001) asserted that to improve foster care, and thus improve retention, foster care should go far beyond the current standards of practice and not be “just a vessel in which children float until a decision is made whether they will go home or to another kind of permanent placement” (p. 17). He asked, presumably tongue-in-cheek, if when parents cannot provide the minimal sufficient level of care whether foster care places children in situations that provide “the minimal sufficient level of care plus a smoke detector” (p. 17).

As already pointed out, traditional foster care board payments are not a net financial gain for foster parents, except in the case of extreme poverty, and Alabama’s board payments are among the lowest in the nation (Barth, 2001; "Child advocates making a difference," 2004). Reimbursements for travel and day care (when provided) are low and are often without built-in cost-of-living adjustments. Additional expenses for clothing, transportation, food, toys, and school supplies are oftentimes not repaid via reimbursements; thus, foster parents must commit to financially supporting their foster child, essentially losing money each month. It costs more than double the board payment

to raise a child in Alabama ("The cost of raising a child compared to foster care maintenance payments," 2003); thus, foster parents, in addition to their emotional investments in fostering, are also asked to financially subsidize the child welfare system. Barth (2001) advocated housing allowances, tax credits, and no-interest automobile loans to help foster parents overcome some of the financial obstacles.

An interesting model that showcases the impacts of foster parent remuneration is the Jane Adams Hull House Neighbor-to-Neighbor Program (Jane Adams Hull House Association, 1994). This program works with children and families in select Chicago communities. These program developers recognized the essential role of foster parents in supporting the family connections of the children that they foster; as such, they professionalized this role, making the foster caregivers full salaried employees of Hull House. In this program, 57 professional Foster Caregivers (as they are termed in this program) care for sibling groups of 4 or more. The base salary is \$16,000 annually, plus benefits (in addition to board payment of \$600 per month per child).

This program was designed to address the very concerns that foster parents have that lead them to leave fostering: professionalizing their role, providing training, and providing support within the continuum of services. The Foster Caregivers provide loving, quality care overall. The motivation for the vast majority of Foster Caregivers is the notion of providing an opportunity for siblings to stay together once they come into care and working with the family/parents to help them reunite, if possible. The commitment level is demonstrated when Foster Caregivers provide permanency through adoption or subsidized guardianship. If, for example, they adopt, the Foster Caregiver can no

longer be employed with Hull House. Approximately 95% of the sibling groups who have been adopted have been adopted together by the Professional Foster Caregiver, and most often that means the Foster Caregiver will lose their salary and benefits (Jackson-Cobb, 2008).

Jackson-Cobb (2008) also expressed that the salary and benefits the Foster Caregivers receive allows them the time and flexibility to participate on a high level in all aspects of a family's case (i.e., court, administrative case reviews, school meetings, therapy, visits, etc.) without having to miss work; if they were employed elsewhere, this could be a problem.

This unique program boasts an 84% foster parent retention rate (generally averaging 95%, but due to permanency and retirement, the rate has gone down a bit). Additionally, this program offers the children placement stability. In fact, for 76% it is the *first and only* placement. Lastly, there is only a 2% "step up" to a higher level of care, i.e., a more restrictive placement setting, since the inception of this program in 1994.

Lack of agency support services to help foster parents with issues such as grief when children leave foster homes, difficult behaviors of children, respite care, transportation to medical appointments, day care services, or counseling also affects the retention of foster parents (Cox et al., 2002; Fees et al., 1998; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002). Conversely, satisfaction tends to be higher when foster parents feel competent to handle their foster children, have no regrets about time investments, face less agency red tape when requesting services, and are provided needed information about foster children

from social workers and agencies (Cox et al., 2002; Denby, Rindfleisch, & Bean, 1999; Fees et al., 1998; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002).

Hudson and Lavasseur (2002) identified low satisfaction among foster parents when they perceived disrespect from caseworkers, felt communication between the foster parent and the caseworker was poor, and felt that they had no voice in the court system or with the agency. Foster parents believe that they are not adequately involved in the planning for the children's future even though they are with the children every day. Complicating the situation is the high staff turnover rate in child welfare, often attributed to exceedingly high caseloads, low pay, poor working conditions, poor public image of child welfare caseworkers, and lack of training (only one-third of child welfare workers are trained social workers) (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). Despite these problems with the system, foster parents still need caseworkers to validate their importance by telling them they are valued, respected, and otherwise recognized for what they do (Denby et al., 1999). Hudson and Lavasseur noted a foster parent who was upset by her caseworker calling her a "babysitter" and a more general sentiment of feeling undervalued. Also identified by Hudson and Lavasseur was the failure of the social worker to respond to what the parent perceived as a crisis. Respondents reported in many cases that case workers responded slowly, whether to a crisis or simply returning a phone call.

Study Variables

The choice of study variables was guided by a critical assessment of issues based on the existing literature, a pilot study, and the researcher's personal experience as a

foster parent. Accordingly, it was proposed that perceptions about the following factors will affect retention: availability of services to support foster care provision, respect and recognition given by caseworkers, financial assistance and work benefits, and crisis response of caseworkers.

To better explain the variables that were tested in this study, conceptual definitions of each variable are presented; these definitions are specific to the case of foster parenting (Patten, 2000). For example, the conceptual definition of services is narrow in focus and defines services strictly as they relate to foster parenting.

Perceived Availability of Support Foster Care Services

In the context of social exchange theory, foster care services are conceptually rewards or costs. Thus, DHR offering a needed service to a foster parent is a “reward”; however, not offering a requested service or delay of service delivery is theoretically a “cost.” Within the context of SE, services are rewarding only if the foster parent truly perceives the need. This issue constitutes a possible limitation in applying social exchange theory to foster parenting. Relevant survey questions contained “not applicable” as a response choice in order to best address this.

In this study, “services” is conceptually defined as the system of operation by which DHR provides foster parents with something concrete that the foster parent needs to effectively foster children; this includes the time it takes to receive a requested service and if lag times are perceived as unreasonable. These services can include specially requested services or expected services. In other words, an example of an expected service is monthly contact by the social worker. An example of a requested service is

respite care. Under the rubric of services, money and work benefits are separate variables of interest discussed later.

At some point, any number of services can become critical to the success or failure of a foster child placement. In a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (2002), the authors made it clear that foster parents need more help in obtaining services. In other studies, findings indicated that foster parents identified respite care, transportation, day care, and child and family counseling as needed services (Cox et al., 2003; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002).

An example of how services can make a difference might be a new and overwhelmed foster parent requesting respite services. On the one hand, without respite services, these new foster parents may believe they are unable to handle being a foster parent and may feel as if they are “on their own” when fostering is supposed to be a team effort. On the other hand, new foster parents who are feeling overwhelmed but ask for and receive respite services not only get a needed break, but also can feel more secure in knowing that fostering is a team effort.

The perception that needed services are always available without unreasonable wait times may affect not only the quality of foster parenting, but also how the foster parents view the caseworker and the agency as being able to help meet the needs of the child. If a foster parent believes that the services needed are available when requested, this can be rewarding, from a social exchange theory point of view. However, for a foster parent who needs a service for a foster child but the service is not implemented or the delivery of the service is delayed, this becomes a cost, because the foster parent becomes frustrated or worried about the child in their care. The foster parent must then

try to obtain the service somewhere else or do without it, which can potentially worsen the situation.

Perceived Respect and Recognition Given by Caseworkers

In this study, respect occurs when an agency worker(s) shows consideration to foster parents or holds them in high esteem. Recognition occurs when an agency worker(s) shows appreciation or gives credit to a foster parent for an achievement. Whether or not foster parents perceive that they have earned the respect of their caseworker and believe that the people within the agency recognize their efforts constitutes either a reward or a cost. In several qualitative interviews conducted with current and former foster parents, a lack of respect and recognition was the most prominent reason cited for quitting as a foster parent (Samya, 2004). Hudson and Levasseur (2002) asked foster parents about the types of support they needed and found that the primary need was respect and recognition. They did not ask any questions about respect, yet respect consistently came up as a concern from the foster parents, which strengthens their findings.

In other studies, satisfaction with fostering was higher (more rewarding) when agency staff showed approval towards foster parents they perceived were doing a good job. Satisfaction was lower (more costly) when there was poor communication between the caseworker and foster parent (e.g., not returning calls) or when foster parents perceived that the social worker did not reach out to them (Denby et al., 1999; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rindfleisch et al., 1998; Roger et al., 2006). In addition, Martin (2000) made

the case that providing recognition and treating foster parents as valuable members of the team is essential.

Perceived Financial Assistance and Work Benefits

In this study, financial assistance and work benefits are cash and non-cash payments made to a foster parent by DHR. Some examples can include board payments, extra money for clothes, family health insurance, liability insurance (against abuse allegations), retirement benefits, or tax breaks. In Alabama, neither a salary nor work benefits currently exist for foster parents, except that they can claim a foster child who has resided in their house for six out of twelve months of the year as a dependent. This is not a special tax break because any person with a minor child living in their home can make this same claim.

Foster parents do receive some monetary support from DHR in the form of a monthly room and board payment. Whether perception of the adequacy of this payment results in the foster parents feeling that the money is a reward is debatable. This stipend is not intended to be a salary but rather to cover the cost of room and board, daily supervision, and provide a personal allowance ("The cost of raising a child compared to foster care maintenance payments," 2003); however, these monthly stipends are currently too low (Martin, 2000). For example, in Alabama, estimations of the actual cost of rearing a child far exceed the amount of money paid to foster parents. The actual costs outweigh the board payments by as much as \$413 per month for children ages 15 to 17 ("The cost of raising a child compared to foster care maintenance payments," 2003).

According to a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, foster parents often incur many extra expenses not covered by DHR, such as clothing, sports, and recreation fees (Office of Inspector General, 2002). In this study, program managers did not see extra expenses incurred by foster parents as a concern, but foster parents overwhelmingly did.

The results of other studies concluded that foster parents identified liability insurance, extra money to help cover dental expenses, school supplies, and child and family counseling as important (Cox et al., 2003; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; Martin, 2000). It is clear that foster parents are not only twenty-four-hour parents to children in need, but in fact they are actually subsidizing the child welfare system by paying so much money out of pocket (Martin, 2000).

Chamberlain, Moreland, and Reid (1992) tested whether or not additional money and services would aid in retention. They offered one group of their participants an extra \$70.00 per month, a foster parent facilitator, and extra “support” phone calls each week from staff; another group received the extra services but no stipend; and a control group received standard services. Results indicated that 25% of those who did not receive the extra benefits dropped out compared to only a 9% dropout rate among those receiving more money and services. The dropout rate was lowest among those who received the stipend, the extra support call, and the foster parent facilitator.

Kirton (2001) found that money was not a factor when deciding to become a foster parent, but foster parents said they were naïve with respect to the difficulty of the job. Many did not know how much money they would receive until their first payment. He found that those with substantial fostering experience said that they would welcome

improved payments as recognition of the challenges they faced, because they viewed foster parenting as a professional service. Some of the foster parents interviewed in this study feared that increasing payments would make foster care “too impersonal.” In other words, they feared that more money would make the role more akin to a job rather than promoting the idea of providing a family setting. Kirton found that all participants unanimously believed that current payments did not reflect their skills.

Barth (2001) made the case that foster parenting does not constitute a net gain, except in the case of extreme poverty. He suggested that foster parents needed social security benefits, insurance, a retirement plan, tax credits, and no-interest automobile loans to help offset some of the costs of fostering.

Perceived Crisis Response of Caseworkers

In this study, crisis response occurs when a foster parent believes a situation has reached a critical phase and wants the caseworker to respond. Of course, crisis response is difficult to study because perceptions can vary. For example, a child who has attempted suicide is obviously in crisis. But what about a child who refuses to do homework, gets upset, and threatens to run away? This might be more of a gray area and foster parents vary as to whether they actually regard a situation like this as a crisis.

Inadequate response to a crisis was a major theme discussed in a qualitative pilot study with foster parents (Samya, 2004). Foster parents reported that when a caseworker quickly aided them during a crisis, their level of satisfaction was much higher than when a caseworker was slow or non-responsive during a crisis. This was the major reason for early termination of foster parenting (Samya, 2004).

Hudson and Levasseur (2002) found in their study that crisis assistance, as defined by the foster parent, is critical to meeting foster parents' needs. The respondents in their study reported that caseworkers were slow to respond to a crisis, even with respect to returning a phone call, thus leaving them feeling angry and frustrated. In similar studies, social services support, satisfaction, and responsiveness of the caseworker were important (Denby et al., 1999; Fees et al., 1998; Rhodes et al., 2001).

Gaps in the Current Research

In the current body of research, theory informed only a handful of foster parent retention studies (Denby et al., 1999; Orme et al., 2003; Orme et al., 2004; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rindfleisch et al., 1998; Roger et al., 2006). It could not be determined whether this was because of a lack of theoretical focus or because authors simply did not discuss their theoretical focus. Explicit theoretical focus is important because it provides a roadmap for future researchers. This study contributes to the literature because it provides a theoretical foundation. In addition, few studies included foster fathers in their sample, whereas this study included foster fathers. In some studies, the authors questioned whether the room and board payments were adequate to provide for the needs of foster children (Barth, 2001; Martin, 2000; Rindfleisch et al., 1998). Other researchers asked broader questions about the importance of offering tax breaks, health insurance, and retirement benefits (Barth, 2001; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002). This research focused on offering benefits to foster parents and how they perceived this offer.

Thus far, no studies have explored the idea of professionalizing foster care in depth, nor have researchers explored what, if any, impact this might have on the quality

of services foster parents deliver to children or the implications for retention of foster parents. In fact, whether or not foster care is volunteer work or professional work is a point that seems to come up in the “Implications for Practice” sections of journal articles (Barth, 2001; Rindfleisch et al., 1998) but has not really been a focal point of research in the United States. Kirton (2001) explored the idea of professionalizing foster care in England through interviews with foster parents, but he could not develop a consensus as to whether or not foster parents believed professionalizing foster care would be a positive step. Whether or not foster parents in Alabama believed fostering should be more of a professional rather than a volunteer service was one focal point in this dissertation.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Research question. What factors, i.e., rewards and costs, have the most influence on foster parents’ decisions to continue or quit fostering?

Hypothesis 1. If foster parents rate the availability and quality of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will have quit fostering.

Hypothesis 2. If foster parents rate the quality and availability of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will rate themselves as having a lower commitment to continue fostering.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This section summarizes the study's methodology, beginning with the research objectives and then proceeding to a discussion regarding variables believed to affect retention and including the operational definitions of each. Following this, the section focuses on study procedures, sampling, the developed data collection strategy, the research instrument, and techniques for analyses.

Research Objectives

This dissertation employed a primarily quantitative methodology but was supplemented by qualitative data where appropriate. The research, framed and informed by social exchange theory, intended to uncover the factors leading to continuance and discontinuance of foster parenting and to discover effective strategies for increasing retention and satisfaction. Specifically, the project examined the following aspects of foster parenting: (a) what foster parents believe to be the most rewarding aspects of fostering; (b) what foster parents believe to be the most costly; and (c) who quits, continues, or considers quitting based on how they rate costs and benefits. Additionally, this study focused on how perceived resources or lack thereof affected the decision to foster children.

Participants

The target population for this study consisted of two distinct categories of foster parents. The first was currently approved non-kinship foster parents in the state of Alabama who have fostered for at least six months. The comparison group was formerly approved, non-kinship foster parents in the state of Alabama who had relinquished their license within the last three years and had previously fostered for at least six months.

Current Non-kinship Care Foster Parent Sampling Strategy

In the state of Alabama, there are an estimated 1,870 traditional foster homes (Alabama DHR, 2005). This figure reflects the number of approved foster parent *homes*. However, many of those foster parent homes consist of two foster parents, that is, a foster mother and a foster father. When considering the sampling strategy and estimating the total number of available homes, it was noted that some foster parents have not fostered for at least six months. Those participants were subsequently excluded as study participants. Given the above parameters, it was estimated that there were 2,800 to 3,000 non-kin foster parents in Alabama who met the criteria to participate in this study during the time the sample was drawn.

To determine an appropriate sample size, power analysis was carried out based on the guidelines set forth by Cohen (1988). For sampling current foster parents, a power analysis for obtaining a power of .80 based on a multiple regression model with four predictor variables (services, respect and recognition, financial assistance and work benefits, and crisis response) and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.5$), with an alpha level of .05, indicated that the sample size must be at a minimum of 100. With an expected return

rate of 30-50%, it was decided that a minimum of 250 current non-kin foster parent households should receive a survey in the mail. (Two per household were sent.)

For this study, a representative sample was collected; once lists from the twelve counties that participated were sent, the sample was divided into three stratum based on census data, i.e., small, mid-size, and large. For current foster parents from the small counties, all participants were selected, from the mid-size counties, every third person was selected, and for the large counties, every fifth person was selected. For the mid-size and large counties, the first participant was selected by asking someone to choose a number within the range of participants.

For the former foster parents, a similar method was utilized; however, due to the low number of potential participants and the high number of “undeliverable addresses,” all potential participants were sent a survey.

An anticipated sampling concern with sending a survey to individual households was that there was no way to know ahead of time if one or two foster parents were going to reside there. In addition, the researcher wanted to be sure that if surveys came back from two-parent households, then both parents had completed it. To plan for this, only one stamped return envelope was provided with enough room to easily mail back both surveys. Cost effectiveness was a primary motivation for sampling both persons per household. However, since enough participants returned a survey from a separate household, the researcher analyzed only one per household, using probability sampling to select the participant. (This discussion will be expanded in the section discussing results.)

Former Non-kinship Care Foster Parent Sampling Strategy

Between October 2005 and August 2006, 818 regular foster homes voluntarily closed (W. Norris, Personal Communication, October 1, 2006). Again, this calculation is based on the number of foster *homes* closed, not the number of foster parents. Thus, it was estimated that between October 2005 and August 2006, between 1,200 and 1,400 foster parents quit. Based on this figure, it was estimated that in the past three years (the sampling time period), approximately 4,000 foster parent homes closed. Out of the 818 regular foster homes, 269 were classified as *both* regular foster homes and therapeutic foster homes; in other words, the foster parents had dual approval. This is significant, since a person approved to foster children in need of therapeutic care may not have fostered as a regular foster parent; however, typically they will have fostered both children receiving therapeutic services and children who receive general services. To handle this, there is an item on the survey that asks what type of fostering the foster parents have provided, therapeutic care and standard care both being alternatives. Those who fostered exclusively as therapeutic foster parents were eliminated in all statistical analyses, since this group of foster parents receives more money, more services, and more training, thus creating a distinctly different experience as a foster parent.

For sampling former foster parents, a power analysis for obtaining a power of .80 based on a logistic regression model with four predictor variables (services, respect and recognition, financial assistance and work benefits, and crisis response) and a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.5$), with an alpha level of .05, indicated that the sample size must be at a minimum of 100 participants (Cohen, 1988). However, in this model, the dependent variable consisted of two distinct groups to be compared, those who have quit fostering

and those who are still fostering. This meant that the sample was split between these two groups; thus, a sampling of at least 50 former non-kin foster parents was required. With an expected return rate of 30-50%, a minimum of 150 survey packets were mailed to former non-kin foster parents' households (two per household were sent). For the same reasons previously mentioned, random sampling techniques were attempted to collect data from former foster parents.

In an effort to increase participation, subjects in both groups had an opportunity to participate in a lottery-type drawing in which one person won a \$100 gift certificate to Target. A stamped postcard to enter the drawing was included in the survey packet, and those who chose to enter the drawing returned the postcard. Although intended as an incentive to promote participation, the researcher had no way of knowing if those who entered the drawing participated in the survey or not, thus maintaining participant anonymity.

In the event that too few surveys were returned to yield statistically meaningful results using this sampling strategy, the researcher had permission to attend local foster parent meetings and ask foster parents to fill out surveys. However, this was not necessary, as enough participants were reached via the aforementioned strategy.

Research Instruments

Two similar survey instruments were developed and used in this study: one was drafted for current foster parents and another for former foster parents. Both instruments measured the same constructs and contained similar items. Two survey instruments from which a number of questions were adapted for use in this study were from the National

Survey of Current and Former Foster Parents (Westat, 1993) and the Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory (Stockdale, Crase, Lekies, Yates, & Gillis-Arnold, 1997).

Discussion of the National Survey of Current and Former Foster Parent and Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory Surveys

When developing the instruments for this study, portions of the National Survey of Current and Former Foster Parents (NSC&FFP) (Westat, 1993) and the Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory (SWFPI) (Stockdale et al., 1997) were adapted with permission from each author. In addition, questions were developed specifically for this project, since the selected instruments (or other instruments reviewed) did not address all of the study variables.

The use of the NSC&FFP was intended to gain a better understanding of the issues that affect the recruitment and retention of foster parents (Westat, 1993). More specifically, the goal was to: 1) compare the characteristics of those who recently became foster parents to more experienced foster parents; 2) identify differences between current and former foster parents in terms of the types of children cared for and the perception of their experiences with the child welfare system; 3) compare the experiences of foster parents who, at the time of data collection, had children placed in their homes to those who recently had children leave; and 4) identify agency recruiting, licensing, training, placement, and monitoring practices (Westat, 1993). The NSC&FFP contained two separate survey instruments—one for current foster parents and one for former foster parents. No information regarding the validity or reliability of the instruments was found.

A majority of the demographic questions included in both the FFPSS and CFPSS were from the NSC&FFP, and those questions are unchanged. However, most of the survey questions taken from the NSC&FFP were not used in their original format. The wording of the questions remained largely unchanged, but instead of forcing a dichotomous, yes/no response, Likert-scaled response possibilities were added to the questionnaires. The formatting of the answers then corresponded to the response scale from the Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory, the second survey instrument from which questions were gathered.

The Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory is one of three scales developed by Stockdale et al. (1997). These inventories were part of a program evaluation regarding the effectiveness of foster parent training. The Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory consists of statements evaluating how satisfied foster parents are with many aspects of fostering. Responses are based on a 5-point Likert scale. The original inventory consisted of 25 items; however, after evaluation of reliability and validity, Stockdale et al. dropped three items. The researcher dropped four questions, thus resulting in the use of 18 items from this scale. Stockdale et al. employed factor analysis to determine the internal validity of the scale using a rotated factor matrix. They uncovered three factors. The first was termed “role demands satisfaction” and had a reliability of .71 ($N = 48$). The second factor was termed “social service support satisfaction” and had a reliability of .80. The third factor was termed “personal needs satisfaction” and had a reliability of .82. The Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory, as a whole, yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .84.

Two surveys were developed for this study, the Current Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey (CFPSS) and the Former Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey (FFPSS) (See Appendices B and C). The CFPSS combines 34 items adapted from the NSC&FFP, 12 items from the SWFPI, and 41 items developed by the researcher. The survey for former foster parents combined 34 items adapted from the NSC&FFP, 12 items from the SWFPI, and 39 items developed by the researcher. These questions represent the four key factors hypothesized to affect decisions regarding continuance of foster parenting: quality and availability of services, crisis response, money and work benefits, and respect and recognition. The criterion variables are: 1) the status of the foster parent (current or former) and, for those who are currently foster parents, 2) likelihood of continuing to be a foster parent.

Procedures

This research utilized a survey design, due to its cost effectiveness, anonymity, and efficiency. Surveys also proved less likely to invite interviewer bias, particularly in the mail survey design employed by this study. Finally, surveys are easy for other researchers to replicate, provide an excellent way to assess attitudes, offer a flexible method of obtaining answers, and can be used to measure variables as simple as a person's age or as complex as attitudes and beliefs (Alreck & Settle, 1995; Nardi, 2003). Survey research allows the researcher to cover one small aspect of the respondents' situation or to explore the same issue in more detail by including additional questions. In essence, survey design allows the volume of data and complexity of the survey to be left up to the researcher (Alreck & Settle, 1995).

Variables of Interest

After critical examination of the issues that affect the retention of foster parents, reflection on the researcher's own experiences as a former foster parent, and interviews with current and former foster parents (Samya, 2004), it was proposed that the following variables affect retention: 1) perceived availability and quality of foster care services; 2) perceived respect and recognition given by caseworkers; 3) perceived financial assistance and work benefits; and 4) perceived crisis response of caseworkers.

In the context of SE, it is important to note that not all of these variables necessarily carry a reward dimension in every case. For example, crisis response can be a cost; not getting extra money for clothing can be a cost; and not receiving tutoring for a child who needs it can be a cost. Yet, if a foster parent never needs or asks for any of these services, this could serve as a limitation in the application of this theory. In an attempt to counter this effect, "does not apply" was added as an option on all but one subscale, the money and work benefits subscale, since the relevant questions were hypothetical or about payments that all foster parents receive.

While all retention issues are important, it was hypothesized in this study that the factors discussed above would be *most* predictive of fostering status and commitment to fostering. In the social exchange context, foster parents who perceived greater rewards and lower costs would be more likely to continue in their foster role.

Operational Definitions

Conceptual definitions of variables have been offered, but such definitions, while necessary, are not sufficient for research purposes. Patton (2000) noted that conceptual

definitions “do not indicate the precise concrete or physical steps we will take in order to see the variable” (p.17). Operational definitions define the boundaries of the variables.

An operational definition is a description of a variable in terms of the specific process or set of validation tests used to determine its presence and quantity. Properties described in this manner must be publicly accessible so that persons other than the definer can independently measure or test for all of them ("Operational definitions," 2006, p. 1). According to Patten (2000), the researcher must strive for an operational definition that allows for replication by another researcher.

Operational definition of availability and quality of services as a variable in this study. Fourteen items within the questionnaires formed the Availability and Quality of Services subscale. These items were:

- Your working relationship with social service agencies (social workers, the DHR, etc.),
- Your working relationship with other agencies related to the foster child (schools, counselors, etc.),
- The amount of information given by your caseworker(s) about the children placed in your home,
- The availability of respite care when needed,
- The availability of social workers when needed,
- The availability of additional foster parent training,
- Assistance from social workers,
- Your understanding of the legal system,

- The availability of liability protection,
- The ways in which your foster placements have ended,
- The availability of services in general,
- The availability of day care,
- Transportation for medical services or other appointments, and
- The time lapse between asking for a service and receiving it.

Operational definition of respect and recognition for foster parents as a proposed variable in this study. The following four items within the questionnaires formed the Respect and Recognition subscale. These items were:

- The amount of time spent discussing your foster child(ren) with your caseworker,
- The value the caseworker places on your opinion regarding your foster children,
- The length of time for the caseworker to return phone calls, and
- Your overall experience with your caseworker(s).

Operational definition of financial assistance and work benefits for foster parents as a variable in this study. Eighteen items within the questionnaires formed the Financial Assistance and Work Benefits subscale. These items were:

- Foster Parents should be considered as professionals,
- Foster parents should receive retirement benefits,

- The State should contribute to a social security fund so that foster parents could have those benefits when they retire,
- Foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment,
- Foster parenting requires specialized skills,
- Foster parents *are* paid enough for the work they do,
- If foster parents were paid a salary, fostering would become too impersonal,
- Foster parents deserve more money,
- Foster parents should receive low-interest loans to help with buying cars for transportation and for the home maintenance needed to maintain their license,
- If foster parents were paid a salary, more people would want to be foster parents,
- The amount of money paid to foster parents is more than enough to cover my expenses,
- Foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars for transportation and upkeep on their home needed to maintain their license,
- Foster parents lose money fostering and end up using their own money to pay for fostering,
- The amount of money foster parents are given through the monthly board payments accurately reflects the effort of the job they do,
- Foster parents and their families should be eligible for health insurance benefits, and
- If foster parents were paid a salary, then fewer people would quit fostering.

Operational definition of crisis response as a proposed variable in this study.

Four items within the questionnaire formed the Crisis Response subscale. These items were:

- The crisis response of your caseworker(s),
- The time it takes for your caseworker to respond to a crisis situation with your foster family,
- The way your caseworker handles a crisis, and
- The responsiveness of your caseworker when you have a situation that requires immediate help.

Pilot Testing the Surveys

Before mailing the surveys to foster parents and former foster parents, limited pilot testing provided feedback as to the quality and readability of the survey.¹ The investigator followed the established criteria set forth by Fink and Kosecoff (1998) and Nardi (1995):

- Does the survey provide the information needed?
- Are any words or questions ambiguous or repetitive?
- Are the procedures in the survey uniform?
- Could others use the instrument to collect information in the same way?
- How reliable and consistent is the information collected from the instrument?
- How long does it take to complete the surveys?
- Are the instructions effective?

¹ Pilot testing did not begin until after approval from the University of Alabama's Institutional Review Board was in place.

- Do the questions flow well?
- Is the formatting of the items acceptable?

The survey's Flesch-Kincaid grade level was 6.6 ("Word for Mac," 2008).

Initially, the surveys were administered to a small group of people (N = 5).

During this first phase, no foster parents took the survey. Instead, people who had a background in social work or research methods and "ordinary citizens" with a high school education filled them out. The purpose was to catch typos and grammatical errors and to review for the ease of the instructions, formatting, flow, and readability of the questions. Reviewers wrote any comments they had in the margins as they answered each question. Upon completion, the researcher discussed each survey with the participant and sought their overall impressions of the strengths and weaknesses of the instruments.

Once the surveys had been refined, four former and current foster parents were asked to fill out surveys. Those who participated in pilot testing were excluded from participation in future data collection and were asked not to discuss the research project with others. These reviewers were also asked to make comments in the margins. After they completed the survey, the researcher discussed question clarity, survey length, time involvement, ease of instructions, and formatting with participants (results were not scored). Overall, impressions were favorable, and the survey took twenty to forty minutes to complete.

Data Collection

Before data collection, approval from the University of Alabama Institutional Review Board was granted (see Appendix D for a copy of the IRB proposal). The investigator also sought approval to access the study population from the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Mrs. Mandy Andrews of DHR, who reviews applications for research and serves as the University of Alabama School of Social Work's liaison regarding IV-E funds, served as a liaison between the researcher and state and county level DHR agencies (Andrews, 2006). As per her request, once a formal research proposal was in place, it was submitted for her review. After her review, staff attorneys and other personnel reviewed the proposal, after which approval was granted.

During the proposal phase of this project, after consulting with DHR representatives, it was agreed that a master list of current and former foster parents throughout the state would be made available to the researcher, who would then use probability sampling methods to select participants. However, the researcher was later informed that no such list of former foster parents existed; information on former foster parents is kept at county offices. Additionally, DHR was unable to provide a statewide listing of current foster parents. As an alternative, Mrs. Andrews facilitated access to selected county agencies. She made a list of county agencies based on the size of the county and the location of the county, consideration of both being to obtain diversity of study participants. Thus, counties with small, mid-size, and large populations were chosen. In the case of excessively rural counties, consideration was given as to whether the number of approved foster parents in the county would be useful to the study. The list compiled was submitted to the Deputy Commissioner for Field Administration. He

approved contacting the suggested agencies, and from that contact each director could then decide whether or not to participate.

The researcher drafted a document explaining the study that Mrs. Andrews included in her email requests to county directors. Email messages were forwarded to the researcher if a county director agreed to participate, after which the researcher initiated phone contact. The researcher did not directly participate in selecting counties, other than to request counties with varying demographics that were geographically dispersed throughout the state. Representatives from each of the 12 counties sent the researcher a list of current foster parents. With regard to former foster parents, one largely rural county did not have any former foster parents from the past three years who were eligible to participate in the study, and one county did not respond to requests to send names and addresses of *former* foster parents. It should be emphasized that although counties were cooperative, a number of agency employees indicated that data retrievals were difficult for foster parents who had stopped fostering. Most expressed that the available list of foster parents who voluntarily closed their homes would not be representative of the actual number of people who quit in the last three years. Employees stressed that those records would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain and would hold up the project for a prolonged period. In these instances, employees were asked to send a “convenience” sample based on names they could remember or easily access.

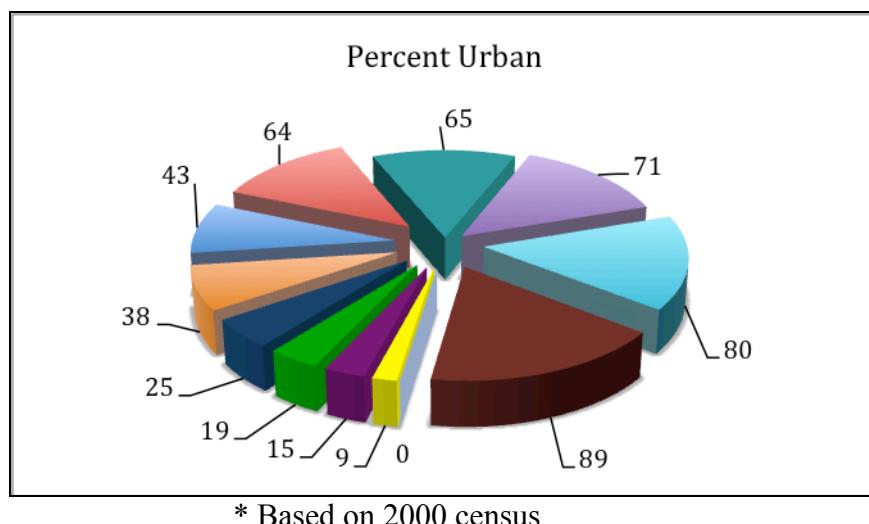
Twelve counties sent lists of current foster parents; based on census data, these lists were stratified by population base. From the small counties, all participants were selected, from the mid-size counties, every third person was selected, and for the large counties, every fifth person was selected. For the mid-size and large counties, the first

participant was selected by asking someone to choose a number within the range of participants.

For the former foster parents, a similar method was utilized; however, due to the low number of potential participants and the high number of “undeliverable addresses,” all potential participants were sent a survey.

Although the researcher is aware of which counties are included in the study, these counties will not be named in this dissertation; instead, Figure 3 demonstrates the population make-up of the counties involved in this study (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000). The number of current non-kin foster parents in each county ranged from 3 to 241. As aforementioned, the number of former non-kin foster parents in each county who relinquished their license was hard to ascertain, as records are not well kept once a foster parent decides to stop fostering. For this group, the lists of names from the counties included anywhere from 0 to 56 eligible participants.

Figure 3. Counties by urban makeup.



With the cooperation of selected County DHR agencies, surveys were mailed to current foster parents in twelve counties and to former foster parents in ten counties. The packets included a letter inviting both the foster mother and foster father to participate in the study, a letter of consent, and the survey. Since household composition could not be determined in advance (i.e., whether or not two parents resided at the particular address), two surveys were included in every packet. Also included was a postcard offering the option to enter a lottery drawing for a gift card and one stamped return envelop. Only one stamped return envelope was offered to determine which surveys were from the same home, as no identifying information was collected. One week after the initial survey packet was mailed out to participants, a reminder postcard was mailed (see Appendix D) to all participants in an effort to increase the return rate.

Data collection was completed anonymously. Documents containing identifying information, such as master lists of potential participants from each county that participated, were held in a secure location. This list was destroyed after the reminder postcards were mailed. The returned surveys contained no identifying information, not even the county in which the participant resided. Participants were given instructions to return postcards separately from the survey instrument, and after a winner was drawn, all postcards were shredded. Though the researcher could not be sure that those who returned postcards participated in the study, having the postcards returned separately ensured the anonymity of participants. Data collection occurred over a two-month period, until a sufficient number of surveys were returned. The power analysis used to determine the requisite sample size was discussed in the previous chapter.

Initially, 165 former foster parent survey packets were mailed (note: two surveys per packet). When a packet was returned because of an “undeliverable address,” another packet was sent to a new participant, using the probability sampling method described earlier. Eventually, the researcher exhausted all former foster parent addresses; thus, survey packets were mailed to a total of 189 former foster parents. Fifty-eight surveys were returned from 53 households. Two households were immediately excluded because only the demographic questions were answered. The response rate was 28%.

For non-kin current foster parents, 320 survey packets were mailed initially. As above, in the event of an undeliverable address, packets were replaced and new subjects were added. Once the minimum of 100 survey packets was returned, sampling stopped. In total, 16 additional survey packets were mailed to this group. One hundred and thirty-three surveys were returned from 101 households. The response rate was 32%. Data collection stopped March 28, 2008, and the lottery drawing for the Target Gift Card was held under the supervision of Dr. Debra Nelson-Gardell.

For all analyses, *one* participant from each household was selected. This decision was based on the likelihood that responses from within the same household might be too similar and the fact that enough surveys were returned from different households to proceed in this manner. The method for choosing which participant would be included when two surveys were returned was a coin toss for each household.

Data Analysis

Computing the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of Internal Consistency

Computing Cronbach's Alpha on each subscale took place before hypothesis testing in order to yield some idea of the reliability of the survey instruments. The computation determines how well sets of variables measure a single uni-dimensional latent construct (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Cronbach's Alpha is defined as "the mean correlation across the items, adjusted upward by the Spearman-Brown prediction formula by k ...the higher the proportion of variance due to individuals, the higher the Cronbach's Alpha" ("Cronbach's alpha," 2006, p. 2). The minimum acceptable value is .70 ("Cronbach's alpha," 2006). A result of .70 or higher would indicate that the scales are acceptably reliable, or rather that the items within the scales are measuring something somewhat consistently. Of course, reliability does not assure construct validity, or in the case of this research, whether subscales were actually measuring items contributing to foster parent retention.

Once surveys were returned and data entry was completed, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were determined for each subscale within the questionnaires. Tests were run on each of the following subscales (Tables 2-5); results are discussed at a later juncture.

Table 2

Subscale: Availability and Quality of Services

1. Your working relationship with social service agencies (social workers, DHR, etc.)
2. Your working relationship with other agencies related to the foster child (schools, counselors, etc.)
3. The amount of information given by your caseworker(s) about the children placed in your home
4. The availability of respite care when needed
5. The availability of social workers when needed
6. The availability of additional foster parent training
7. Assistance from social workers
8. Your understanding of the legal system
9. The availability of obtaining liability protection
10. The ways in which your foster placements have ended
11. The availability of services in general
12. The availability of day care
13. Transportation for medical services or other appointments
14. Time between asking for a service and receiving it

Table 3

Subscale: Financial Assistance and Work Benefits

1. Foster Parents should be considered as professionals
2. Foster parents should receive retirement benefits
3. The State should contribute to a social security fund so that foster parent's could have those benefits when they retire
4. Paying into social security should be a part of fostering so that foster parents could have these benefits when they retire
5. Foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment
6. Foster parents *are* paid enough for the work they do
7. If foster parents were paid a salary, fostering would become too impersonal
8. Foster parents deserve more money
9. Foster parents should receive low-interest loans to help with buying cars for transportation and home maintenance needed to maintain their license
10. If foster parents were paid a salary more people would want to be foster parents
11. The amount of money paid to foster parents is more than enough to cover my expenses
12. Foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars for transportation and upkeep on their home needed to maintain their license
13. Foster parents lose money fostering and end up using their own money to pay for fostering
14. The amount of money foster parents are given through the monthly board payment accurately reflects the effort of the job they do.
15. Foster parents and their families should be eligible for health insurance benefits
16. If foster parents were paid a salary fewer people would quit fostering

Table 4

Subscale: Respect and Recognition

1. The amount of time spent discussing your foster child(ren) with your caseworker
2. The value the caseworker places on your opinion regarding your foster children
3. Length of time for caseworker to return phone calls
4. Your overall experience with your caseworker(s)

Table 5

Subscale: Crisis Response

1. Crisis response of your caseworker(s)
2. The time it takes for your caseworker to respond to a crisis situation with your foster family
3. The way your caseworker handles a crisis
4. The responsiveness of your caseworker when you have a situation that requires immediate help

Scoring the Surveys

Aside from the demographic questions and a handful of open-ended questions, the two surveys contained sets of questions with 5-point Likert-type scale responses (see Appendix F for an overview of how specific questions relate to the variables of interest). Likert-type scale design allows researchers to quantify attitudes by combining responses to the individual items measuring a construct (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). Commonly, summing subscales is the mathematical way to obtain scores from Likert-type scales. It was anticipated that in some instances foster parents would be asked questions about services they have never utilized. In this case, they were instructed to mark “does not apply,” which had a zero value. Data with a zero value would present a problem if summing scores. Assigning a zero value to this question and then summing this subscale would dramatically decrease the respondent’s score and erroneously lead to the interpretation that the respondent was not happy with services when, in fact, that respondent had “no opinion.” Thus, summing the score would not reflect that respondent’s true attitude. To counter this potential bias and allow for a more accurate interpretation of attitudes in anticipation of zero value data, mean scores were obtained using only those items with a value greater than zero instead of summing scores. By

averaging the scores and omitting zeros, zero value data did not negatively skew the scores.

Descriptive Statistics

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Inc., 2007) was used for data analysis. Frequencies were tallied and the data were checked for errors, then descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the demographic data of the sample. Descriptive analysis of the demographic variables preceded any other analysis in order to gain a better understanding of the sample population. Frequencies were tallied for all demographic and potential control variables (questions 1-14). These included years of service as a foster parent, type of foster home, number of current foster children living in the home, number of biological children in the home, years fostering, type and number of children fostered, total number of children fostered, marital status, income, employment status, education, race, age, gender, and religious affiliation of the respondents. Measures of central tendencies are also reported, where appropriate, to describe some of the demographic data. Measures of central tendencies were also run to check for skewness and kurtosis of the independent variables, since the analysis techniques assume a normal distribution of the data. From the demographic variables, the following were hypothesized to be intervening variables in the regression equations: income, experience, age, and race. The choice to use these demographic variables as covariates was based on a similar use of these variables in other studies (Denby et al., 1999; Orme et al., 2003; Puddy & Jackson, 2003; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003). Income is an important dimension since a person with more financial resources is likely to rate

board payments, paid day care, money for gas, and so forth as less important than someone whose income is such that they are struggling each month to pay their bills. Race sometimes impacts studies since people from varying racial backgrounds/cultures can also have varying expectations, values, and cultural experiences. Experience as a foster parent was used as a covariate since the longer one has fostered, the more adept one is likely to be in accessing resources and tolerating negative behaviors children can exert. Age is also important, as younger foster parents who have children of their own in the home, or perhaps work outside of the home, might have different needs and expectations than a retired couple, for example.

Logistic Regression

Hypothesis 1: If foster parents rate the availability and quality of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will have quit fostering. To evaluate Hypothesis 1, logistic regression techniques were employed.

Rationale. Logistic regression tests for significant relationships between the criterion variable, quit or still fostering, and the predictor variables. This method was appropriate since the criterion variable was dichotomous, i.e., respondents are grouped according to their status as current or former foster parents, and the predictor variables were interval level or continuous. Since scores were combined within each subscale and mean responses were calculated, the subscales represent continuous variables.

Logistic regression tested for the differences between those who had quit fostering and those who are still fostering. The research hypothesis was that those who quit fostering are different from those who continued fostering. The prediction was that those who quit fostering experienced fewer rewards and more costs than those who have continued. The equation for logistic regression is $\log(p/1-p) = b_0 + b_1 * x_1 + b_2 * x_2 + b_3 * x_3 + b_4 * x_4 + b_5 * x_5 + b_6 * x_6 + b_7 * x_7 + b_8 * x_8$. Thus, the equation for this analysis is:

$$\log(p/1-p) = b_0 + b_1 * x_1 \text{ (services)} + b_2 * x_2 \text{ (financial assistance/work benefits)} + b_3 * x_3 \text{ (respect/recognition)} + b_4 * x_4 \text{ (crisis response)} + b_5 * x_5 \text{ (income)} + b_6 * x_6 \text{ (experience)} + b_7 * x_7 \text{ (education)} + b_8 * x_8 \text{ (race)}, \text{ whereas } p = \text{fostering status}, \text{ which was calculated using 1 for yes and 0 for no.}$$

Multiple Regression

Hypothesis 2: If foster parents rate the quality and availability of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will rate themselves as having a lower commitment to continue fostering.

To answer Hypothesis 2, multiple regression was employed.² Multiple regression tests for a significant relationship between the criterion variable, commitment to continue fostering, and the predictor variables.

Rationale. Multiple regression was chosen for this analysis because both the criterion variable and the predictor variables were measured at the interval level. This technique is used to predict outcomes, just as in logistic regression. Furthermore,

² Multiple regression was proposed. This method was attempted but then replaced by simple regression. Please see the discussion in Chapter IV.

multiple regression tests for differences among the participants who are actively fostering children but have different attitudes towards continuing to foster in the future (in this test, former foster parents are not included). As Figure 4 indicates, foster parents' responses were analyzed in terms of their reported level of commitment to continue as a foster parent (based on a five-point response).

Figure 4. Dependent variable for multiple regression analyses.

Thinking ahead over the next three years, do you intend to continue as a foster parent?

Not likely.....	1
Somewhat likely.....	2
Neutral.....	3
Likely.....	4
Extremely likely.....	5

The prediction was that those experiencing fewer rewards and more costs will have a lower commitment to continue fostering. Multiple regression employs the following equation: $y = a + b_1 x_1 + b_2 x_2 + b_3 x_3 + b_4 x_4 + b_5 x_5 + \text{covariates}$. Thus, the equation for this analysis is y_1 (likely to continue, 5 pt. response) = $a + b_1 x_1$ (services) + $b_2 x_2$ (financial assistance/work benefits) + $b_3 x_3$ (respect/recognition) + $b_4 x_4$ (crisis response) + income + experience + age.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Description of the Sample

The analysis for this study was completed in five phases. In Phase One, sample demographic information was analyzed using frequency distributions and percentages for all nominal level data. Frequencies, mean scores, standard deviations, and percentages, as well as the range, were calculated for all scale level data. In Phase Two, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each subscale within the survey. In the third phase, descriptive statistics were calculated for the Availability and Quality of Services subscale, the Financial Assistance and Work Benefits subscale, the Respect and Recognition subscale, and the Crisis Response subscale. In Phase Four, logistic regression was computed to address Hypothesis 1. Finally, in the fifth phase, multiple regression, followed by simple regression, was calculated to address Hypothesis 2.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 provides demographic information and the foster care characteristics of foster parents in this study. Fifty-three former foster parents and 101 current foster parents comprised the study sample. The mean age of foster parents was 47.07, with a range of 28 to 84 ($N = 153$). A majority of the sample was married, 66%, and 17% was

divorced. Five percent reported that their spouse was deceased, and 14% was never married. The majority of participants was female, 80%.

A small majority of the foster parents was White (55.9%), with 44% reporting ethnicity as African American. None of the selected participants identified themselves as being of Native American or Hispanic descent. The mean years of education was 13.93, with the range from 10 to 22 (N = 147). The most commonly reported household income range was \$15,000 to \$39,000 per year (30.5%); 23% reported an income of \$40,000 to \$59,999; 19% reported making between \$60,000 and \$79,999; 13% reported earning more than \$80,000, while less than 2% reported an annual income under \$7,000.

Over 70% of respondents were employed full time; 6% was employed part time; 9% was homemakers; 11% was retired; and less than 2% reported being unemployed and seeking employment. Participants were asked to describe the religion with which they identified. During data entry, categories were created based on responses. The most commonly reported religious affiliation was the Baptist Church at 50%; the Methodist Church was cited 18% of the time, Non-Denominational Christian churches were reported 14% of the time, while the last 31% was scattered among 13 various other predominately Christian institutions.

Current foster parents were asked how many foster children were living in their home at the time of project participation. The mean number of foster children in the home was 2.2, ranging from 0 to 7 total (N = 101). All participants were asked how many biologically related children were raised in their home simultaneous to fostering. The mean number was 1.2, with a range of 0 to 7 (N = 153). Additionally, current foster

parents averaged 5.66 years of foster parenting experience, with a mode of 1 year and a range of 1 to 34 years (N = 154).

Respondents were asked to describe what type of fostering they had done in the past. Restrictions could apply; for example, some foster parents might be approved to foster a relative, while others could be approved to conduct multiple types of fostering, such as non-kin and therapeutic fostering, conjointly. A foster parent, therefore, could check more than one category. However, not all respondents seemed to understand this question, and many simply named non-kin and put a question mark for other types. Thus, findings for this category should be viewed with caution. All but nine of the respondents chose non-related (N = 154). Emergency care was selected 46 times, therapeutic care was selected 10 times, relative care was chosen 14 times, group home was selected one time (respondent noted it was in years past), and other was selected two times (in both cases, "other" was described as providing foster care for medically fragile children).

All respondents were asked to give an estimate of the total number of children they fostered under the various types of foster care, i.e., How many children did you foster who were related to you, etc. Of the 154 homes surveyed, foster parents reported that during their tenure as foster parents, they estimated fostering a .14 mean of children who were related to them; .56 who were known to the foster parent before placement but were not related; and 15.37 who were *not known or related* to the foster parent before placement. The mean score for the total number of children fostered over the career of the foster parent was 15.93, with a range from 0 to 300 (N = 154). The mean value was higher than expected for both the total number of non-related children fostered and the total number of children fostered. Further investigation revealed that six participants

fostered more than one hundred children, which inflated the mean. This being the case, the researcher also examined the median, which was 6, and the mode, which was 2. These two measures of central tendency more accurately reflect the data set as a whole ($N = 148$).

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Variable	Demographic Characteristics		
	Mean	N	%
Foster Parent Category			
Former Foster Parent		53	34.4
Current Foster Parent		101	65.6
Age	47.07		
Family Composition			
Married or Living as Married		98	63.6
Divorced		26	16.9
Widow/Widower		8	5.2
Never Married		22	14.3
Gender			
Female		123	79.9
Male		31	20.1
Race			
African American		67	44.1
Caucasian		85	55.9
Years of Education	13.93	147	
Income			
Less than \$7,000 per year		3	1.9
\$7,000 to \$14,999		14	9.1
\$15,000 to \$39,999		47	30.5
\$40,000 to \$59,999		36	23.4
\$60,000 to \$79,999		29	18.8
More than \$80,000		20	13.0
Employment			
Full time		111	72.1

Part time	9	5.8
Unemployed but looking	2	1.3
Homemaker	14	9.1
Disabled or retired	17	11.0
Religious Affiliation		
Pentecostal	7	4.5
Baptist	76	49.4
Catholic	8	5.2
Methodist	13	18.4
Assembly of God	5	3.2
Non Denominational	22	14.3
Jehovah Witness	1	0.6
Church of Christ	2	1.3
Liberty Fellowship	2	1.3
Church of God	6	3.9
Presbyterian	2	1.3
Nazarene	2	1.3
Holiness	2	1.3
Masonic Jew	1	0.6
Buddhist	1	0.6
Mormon	1	0.6
Number of foster children in the home (current only)	2.21	101
Number of bio related children in the home	1.2	153
Years of experience fostering	5.66	
Approved to foster as*		
Non-relative foster parent, yes or no	145	
Emergency care, yes or no	46	
Therapeutic care, yes or no	10	
Relative foster home, yes or no	14	
Group home, yes or no	1	
Other (Medically Fragile)	2	
Categories Fostered		
Total fostered who were related to you	.14	153
Total fostered who were known to you before but not related	.56	153
Total fostered who were not known or related	15.37	153
Total number of children fostered	15.93	154

*Foster parents can be approved to foster in multiple categories

Descriptive analyses were run on those who had stopped fostering to ascertain some of the potential reasons for stopping fostering. Questions in this section of the survey had Likert-type responses ranging from not at all a reason to very much a reason. This test revealed that, of the options given, the top three reasons people selected stopping were adopting a child, 33% (N = 53), poor communication with foster care worker, 18% (N = 53), and agency is insensitive to my needs/lack of support from agency, 13% (N = 53) (see Table 7). For all other categories, responses indicating the item as being a reason the foster parent stopped were low, with figures ranging from 2 to 9%.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of Reasons to Quit Fostering

Question	n	%	M	SD
Age-was be too old to care for children			1.13	.57
Not at all a reason	49	93		
2	0	0		
3	2	4		
4	1	1		
Very much a reason	0	0		
Divorced, marital problems			1.13	.69
Not at all a reason	50	94		
2	0	0		
3	0	0		
4	1	2		
Very much a reason	1	2		
Health problems			1.10	.57
Not at all a reason	50	94		
2	1	2		
3	0	0		

		0	0		
Very much a reason		1	2		
Moved/relocated				1.17	.73
Not at all a reason	49	92			
2	0	0			
3	1	2			
4	1	2			
Very much a reason	1	2			
Conflict between foster child and my own or adopted				1.31	.97
Not at all a reason	46	87			
2	2	4			
3	2	4			
4	2	4			
Very much a reason	2	4			
Expected to have my own child or more of my Own children				1.31	.96
Not at all a reason	48	90			
2	0	0			
3	0	0			
4	0	0			
Very much a reason	4	8			
Expected to adopt a child				2.43	1.9
Not at all a reason	32	60			
2	0	0			
3	0	0			
4	1	1.9			
Very much a reason	17	32			
Needed to return to work or work full-time				1.38	1
Not at all a reason	44	83			
2	2	4			
3	2	4			
4	2	4			
Very much a reason	2	4			
Amount of monthly board payment				1.54	1.1
Not at all a reason	39	74			
2	3	6			
3	7	13			
4	1	2			
Very much a reason	2	4			
Could not get the type of child requested				1.4	1
Not at all a reason	43	81			
2	3	6			

3		2	4	
4		2	4	
Very much a reason		2	4	
Poor communication with foster care worker				1.83 1.5
Not at all a reason	39	73		
2	3	5		
3	3	5		
4	0	0		
Very much a reason	7	13		
Agency was insensitive to my needs/lack of support from the agency				1.6 1.2
Not at all a reason	41	77		
2	2	4		
3	2	4		
4	4	8		
Very much a reason	3	6		
Did not have a say in child's future				1.5 1.2
Not at all a reason	40	76		
2	4	8		
3	0	0		
4	6	11		
Very much a reason	2	4		
Lack of respite services				1.2 .57
Not at all a reason	48	91		
2	1	2		
3	2	4		
4	1	2		
Very much a reason	0	0		
Problems with children(s) parents				1.3 .68
Not at all a reason	44	83		
2	5	9.4		
3	1	2		
4	2	4		
Very much a reason	0	0		
Child's behavior/discipline problem				1.7 1.3
Not at all a reason	44	83		
2	5	9		
3	1	2		
4	2	4		
Very much a reason	0	0		
Health, or personal care needs of children was too difficult to manage				1.1 .41
Not at all a reason	49	93		

2	1	2		
3	2	4		
4	0	0		
Very much a reason	0	0		
Had difficulty seeing child(ren) leave			1.5	1.2
Not at all a reason	39	74		
2	5	9		
3	2	4		
4	1	2		
Very much a reason	4	8		

Scale Descriptive Statistics

Scale reliability, descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of central tendency were computed for the subscales in order to capture how participants rated items on each of the four subscales: Availability and Quality of Services, Crisis Response, Money and Work Benefits, and Respect and Recognition.

Scale Reliability

Cronbach's alpha statistics were calculated to ascertain the internal reliability of the four subscales, Availability and Quality of Services, Financial Assistance and Work Benefits, Respect and Recognition, and Crisis Response. An acceptable score for reliability is .70 or higher.

The Availability and Quality of Services subscale was $\alpha = .813$ ($M = 43.11$, $SD = 10.162$) (see Table 8). The Money and Work Benefits subscale had three items that were negatively worded. Before reliability statistics were computed, these three variables were reverse-coded using the transform technique in SPSS, Inc. (2007). This subscale had a reliability of $\alpha = .801$ ($M = 59.50$, $SD = 8.232$). The Respect and Recognition Subscale

had the highest reliability at $\alpha = .904$ ($M = 12.88$, $SD = 4.389$). The Crisis Response subscale also yielded an acceptable result at $\alpha = .871$ ($M = 12.88$, $SD = 4.83$). All of the Cronbach's alpha scores were higher than the expected minimum of .70 without removing any questions.

Table 8

Cronbach's Alpha

Subscales	α	M	SD
Availability and Quality of Services	.813	43.11	10.162
Money and Work Benefits	.801	59.50	8.232
Respect and Recognition	.904	12.88	4.389
Crisis Response of Your Caseworker	.871	12.22	4.803

Descriptive statistics offer both a context for and a perspective on the distribution of responses, as well as foster parents' levels of satisfaction for the different dimensions of care. For this section, the focus is on percentage comparisons.

Descriptive Statistics of Availability and Quality of Services Subscale

The Availability and Quality of Services subscale was intended to capture which services were provided to foster families, whether those services are offered in a reasonable time frame once requested, and if foster parents are satisfied with the services. Many services are provided without request, such as board payments, home visits, and so

forth. Services such as tutoring, counseling, etc., are generally requested on a case-by-case basis. The Availability and Quality of Services subscale offers an understanding of what services foster parent rate highly (expressed in terms of level of satisfaction).

Forty-four percent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction over the time between asking for and receiving a service, and 38% expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of information given by their caseworker (see Table 9).

The “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” occurred most often with regard to availability of liability protection (33%), time between asking for and receiving a service (28%), and transportation to medical/other appointments (26%). Less consensus is found with regard to availability of liability protection/insurance,³ as 26% were dissatisfied and 32% were satisfied; thus, this question yielded a fairly even split among participants.

The highest degree of satisfaction was with other agencies related to the care of the foster children, as 72% were satisfied and only 8% were dissatisfied. This is to be expected, as the relationship with DHR is primary when fostering, whereas relationships with other agencies tend to be secondary. Following closely behind this category in levels of satisfaction was availability of additional training (68%), availability of day care (68%), and respite care (62%). A small majority also indicated satisfaction with their relationship with social service agencies (55%) and the ways in which foster placements ended (53%).

³ As far as the researcher could discern, liability protection is neither discussed nor offered in this state. Thus, participants may not have fully understood the question.

Table 9

Frequencies for Availability and Quality of Services

Question	n	%	M	SD
Relationship with social service agencies			3.33	1.24
Does Not Apply	0			
Very Dissatisfied	16	10.4		
Dissatisfied	27	17.5		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	25	16.2		
Satisfied	60	39.0		
Very Satisfied	25	16.2		
Relationship with Other Authorities Related to the foster child			3.78	1.05
Does Not Apply	2	1.3		
Very Dissatisfied	5	3.2		
Dissatisfied	9	5.8		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	27	17		
Satisfied	76	5		
Very Satisfied	34	49.4		
Amount of Information Given By Caseworker			3.03	1.33
Does Not Apply	3	1.9		
Very Dissatisfied	17	11.0		
Dissatisfied	41	26.6		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	26	16.9		
Satisfied	45	29.2		
Very Satisfied	22	14.3		
Availability of Respite Care			2.59	1.61
Does Not Apply	27	17.5		
Very Dissatisfied	16	10.4		
Dissatisfied	17	11.0		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	43	27.9		
Satisfied	35	22.7		
Very Satisfied	16	10.4		
Availability of Social Workers			3.19	1.24
Does Not Apply	3	1.9		
Very Dissatisfied	11	7.1		
Dissatisfied	33	21.4		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	35	22.7		
Satisfied	50	32.5		
Very Satisfied	22	14.3		

Availability of Additional Training		3.80	.91
Does Not Apply	0		
Very Dissatisfied	1	.6	
Dissatisfied	14	9.1	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	34	22.1	
Satisfied	71	46.1	
Very Satisfied	34	22.1	
Assistance from Social Workers		3.27	1.14
Does Not Apply	0		
Very Dissatisfied	11	7.1	
Dissatisfied	32	20.8	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	33	21.4	
Satisfied	58	37.7	
Very Satisfied	19	12.3	
Understanding of the Legal System			
Does Not Apply			
Very Dissatisfied			
Dissatisfied			
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied			
Satisfied			
Very Satisfied			
Availability of Liability Protections/Insurance		2.27	1.60
Does Not Apply	37	24.0	
Very Dissatisfied	17	11.0	
Dissatisfied	13	18.4	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	50	32.5	
Satisfied	29	18.8	
Very Satisfied	8	5.2	
Ways in Which your Foster Placements Ended		3.35	1.26
Does Not Apply	4	2.6	
Very Dissatisfied	8	5.2	
Dissatisfied	27	17.5	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	32	20.8	
Satisfied	54	35.1	
Very Satisfied	27	17.5	
Availability of Service's in General		3.17	1.99
Does Not Apply	4	2.6	
Very Dissatisfied	9	5.8	
Dissatisfied	34	22.1	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	31	20.1	
Satisfied	62	40.3	
Very Satisfied	14	9.1	

Availability of Day Care		3.07	1.77
Does Not Apply	29	18.8	
Very Dissatisfied	4	2.6	
Dissatisfied	14	9.1	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	22	14.3	
Satisfied	50	32.5	
Very Satisfied	35	22.7	
Transportation for Medical/Other Appointments		2.36	1.69
Does Not Apply	39	25.3	
Very Dissatisfied	12	7.8	
Dissatisfied	16	10.4	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	40	26.0	
Satisfied	35	22.7	
Very Satisfied	40	7.8	
Time Between asking for and Receiving Services		2.74	1.22
Does Not Apply	1	0.6	
Very Dissatisfied	25	16.2	
Dissatisfied	43	27.9	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	43	27.9	
Satisfied	28	18.2	
Very Satisfied	14	9.1	
Total Score		3.07*	.73

* Mean score calculated for total subscale

Descriptive Statistics of Crisis Response Subscale

Foster parents were asked to rate the crisis response of their social worker (see Table 10). The purpose of these questions was to gain information about how foster parents perceived the responsiveness of the caseworker when they believed they needed immediate help. In Samya's (2004) qualitative interviews, participants expressed that situations would often arise which they perceived required immediate attention, yet the request was either ignored or the social worker would respond days or weeks later. The respondents were not clear as to whether their social worker believed the situation was

truly a crisis and chose not to respond or their social worker was too busy to respond to them. In this pilot study ($N = 8$), in all but one case respondent indicated that at times they indeed had social workers that were very responsive to their needs. However, over time and with staff turnover, they would encounter non-responsiveness, and their satisfaction with fostering would decrease. In fact, this was cited as the central reason four of them quit. Therefore, based on the initial study's results, measuring crisis response was considered an important independent variable in the fostering equation.

Regarding crisis response, the item “the way your caseworker handles a crisis” elicited the most dissatisfied responses from participants (35%). For this subscale, three out of the four items elicited a 25% or higher response for the neutral category. The “crisis response of your caseworker” (52%) and “time it takes for your social worker to respond to a crisis situation” (50%) items received the most satisfied responses. “Responsiveness of social worker when you have a situation requiring immediate attention” followed closely behind (48%).

Table 10

Frequencies for Crisis Response

Question	n	%	M	SD
Crisis Response of Your Caseworker			3.11	1.41
Does Not Apply	8	5.2		
Very Dissatisfied	14	9.1		
Dissatisfied	30	19.5		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	27	17.5		
Satisfied	51	33.1		
Very Satisfied	24	15.6		

Time it Takes for your Caseworker to Respond to a Crisis Situation with Your Foster Children		2.95	1.55
Does Not Apply	13	8.4	
Very Dissatisfied	13	8.4	
Dissatisfied	27	17.5	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	39	25.3	
Satisfied	40	26.0	
Very Satisfied	40	26.0	
The Way Your Caseworker Handles a Crisis			
Does Not Apply	12	7.8	
Very Dissatisfied	18	11.7	
Dissatisfied	21	13.6	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	44	28.6	
Satisfied	39	25.3	
Very Satisfied	23	14.9	
Responsiveness of Your Caseworker when You Have a Situation Requiring immediate Help		3.19	1.33
Does Not Apply	5	3.2	
Very Dissatisfied	18	11.7	
Dissatisfied	17	11.0	
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	40	26.0	
Satisfied	51	33.1	
Very Satisfied	23	14.9	
Total Score		3.07*	.73

* Mean score calculated for total subscale

Descriptive Statistics of Money and Work Benefits Subscale

The purpose of this scale was to gain insight into the role that money and benefits may have in the decision to continue fostering children. It is widely known that the board payment given to foster parents falls short of the money it costs to rear a child. Additionally, whereas an adoptive parent receives tax incentives, foster parents receive none, nor do they receive any other type of benefits, such as insurance or retirement benefits. Lastly, this set of questions explores how foster parents define their role, as

employees or volunteers, and to what extent they believe they have a skill set, such as what one would find in a typical job.

The Money and Work Benefits subscale (see Table 11) revealed the highest disagreement with the statement “the amount of money paid is more than enough to cover expenses” (79%). A companion question, “foster parents deserve more money” elicited 78% agreement.

The highest percentage of respondents selected neutral, i.e., neither agree nor disagree, for the questions, “foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment” (38%), “if foster parents were paid a salary fewer people would quit fostering” (36%), and “foster parents should receive retirement benefits” (34%).

The highest agreement occurred with “foster parenting requires specialized skills” (70%), “foster parents lose money fostering and end up using their own money to pay for fostering” (70%), and “foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars and home maintenance to help maintain their license” (68%).

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Money and Work Benefits

Question	n	%	M	SD
Foster Parents Should be Considered Professionals			3.77	.99
Strongly Disagree	2	1.3		
Disagree	9	5.8		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	48	31.2		
Agree	54	35.1		
Strongly Agree	40	26.0		

Foster Parents Should Receive Retirement Benefits		3.32	1.11
Strongly Disagree	7	4.5	
Disagree	29	18.8	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	52	33.8	
Agree	39	25.3	
Strongly Agree	27	17.5	
The State Should Contribute to a Social Security Fund for Foster Parents for Retirement		3.39	1.17
Strongly Disagree	9	5.8	
Disagree	27	17.5	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	45	29.2	
Agree	41	26.6	
Strongly Agree	32	20.8	
Foster Parents Should Receive a Salary Rather Than a Board Payment		3.18	1.18
Strongly Disagree	11	7.1	
Disagree	33	21.4	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	58	37.7	
Agree	22	14.3	
Strongly Agree	30	19.5	
Foster Parenting Requires Specialized Skills		1.84	.92
Strongly Disagree	2	1.3	
Disagree	7	4.5	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21	13.6	
Agree	59	33.8	
Strongly Agree	65	42.2	
Foster Parents Deserve More Money		4.16	.99
Strongly Disagree	4	2.6	
Disagree	6	3.9	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23	14.9	
Agree	52	33.8	
Strongly Agree	68	44.2	
Foster Parents Should Receive Low-interest Loan to Help with Buying Cars, and Home Maintenance to help Maintain their License		3.61	1.11
Strongly Disagree	16	10.4	
Disagree	36	23.4	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	42	27.3	
Agree	37	24.0	
Strongly Agree	21	13.6	

If Foster Parents were Paid a Salary, More People Would Want to Become Foster Parents	3.53	1.03
Strongly Disagree	7	4.5
Disagree	14	9.1
Neither Agree nor Disagree	49	31.8
Agree	57	37.0
Strongly Agree	26	16.9
The Amount of Money Paid is More than Enough to Cover Expenses	1.88	.83
Strongly Disagree	57	37.0
Disagree	64	41.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27	17.5
Agree	6	3.9
Strongly Agree	0	
Foster Parents Should Receive Tax Breaks to Help With Buying Cars, and Home Maintenance to help Maintain their License	3.82	1.9
Strongly Disagree	3	1.9
Disagree	13	8.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	35	22.7
Agree	60	39.0
Strongly Agree	43	27.9
Foster Parents Lose Money Fostering, and End up Using Their Own Money to Pay For Fostering	4.18	.90
Strongly Disagree	3	1.9
Disagree	3	1.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	24	15.6
Agree	58	37.7
Strongly Agree	66	42.9
Foster Parents and Their Families Should be Eligible for Health Insurance Benefits	3.58	1.08
Strongly Disagree	5	3.2
Disagree	19	12.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	47	30.5
Agree	47	30.5
Strongly Agree	36	23.4
If Foster Parents were Paid a Salary, Fewer People Would Quit Fostering	3.31	1.08
Strongly Disagree	11	7.1
Disagree	21	13.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	55	35.7
Agree	44	28.6
Strongly Agree	23	14.9

The Amount of Money of Board Payments Accurately Reflects the Effort of the Job Foster Parents Do		3.31	1.08
Strongly Disagree	52	33.8	
Disagree	76	49.9	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	22	14.3	
Agree	3	1.9	
Strongly Agree	1	.6	
Total Score		3.24*	.40

* Mean score calculated for total subscale

Descriptive Statistics of Respect and Recognition Subscale

The purpose of the Respect and Recognition subscale was to explore whether or not foster parents believed their caseworker valued them as a member of a larger team. In studies conducted by Samya (2004) and Hudson and Lavasseur (2002), as well as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2004), results indicated that foster parents did not believe they were being valued as members of a care team.

For the Respect and Recognition subscale (see Table 12), the highest dissatisfaction occurred with the item “length of time for caseworker to return calls” (32%), followed by “caseworker valued your opinion regarding your foster children” (29%) and “amount of time spent discussing your foster children with your caseworker” (26%). Neutral responses ranged between 16% for “length of time for caseworker to return calls” and 22% for “amount of time spent discussing your foster children with your caseworker.”

Satisfaction responses are evenly divided for overall experience with your caseworker, with frequencies ranging from 53% for “overall experience with your

caseworker” to 50% for “caseworker values your opinion with regard to your foster children.”

Table 12

Frequencies for Respect and Recognition

Question	n	%	M	SD
Amount of Time Spent Discussing Your Foster Children with Your Caseworker			3.30	1.17
Does Not Apply	0			
Very Dissatisfied	14	9.1		
Dissatisfied	26	16.9		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	34	22.1		
Satisfied	60	39.0		
Very Satisfied	20	13.0		
Caseworker Valued Your Opinion regarding Your Foster Children			3.17	1.25
Does Not Apply	1	.6		
Very Dissatisfied	19	12.3		
Dissatisfied	27	17.5		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	29	18.8		
Satisfied	60	39.0		
Very Satisfied	17	11.0		
Length of Time for Caseworker to Return Calls			3.11	1.30
Does Not Apply	0			
Very Dissatisfied	28	18.2		
Dissatisfied	22	14.3		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	25	16.2		
Satisfied	63	40.9		
Very Satisfied	16	10.4		
Overall Experience With your Caseworker			3.32	1.27
Does Not Apply	1	.6		
Very Dissatisfied	18	11.7		
Dissatisfied	20	13.0		
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	32	20.8		
Satisfied	57	37.0		
Very Satisfied	26	16.9		
Total Score			3.22*	1.09

* Mean score calculated for total subscale

Multivariate Comparison between Current and Former Foster Parents

Although there are various methods of multivariate analysis, logistic regression was chosen to address Hypothesis 1. This method allows the researcher to estimate the probability that several independent variables can predict change in a nominal (dichotomous) dependent variable (Cherry, 2000), as is the case here where two groups are being compared, those who are still fostering and those who have already stopped fostering. Thus, logistic regression was used to predict who is still fostering and who has quit fostering based on mean scores on the four subscales (Availability and Quality of Services, Crisis Response, Money and Work Benefits, and Respect and Recognition), as well as income, years of education, age, and race—which were hypothesized to be intervening variables.

Hypothesis 1: If foster parents rate the availability and quality of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will have quit fostering.

Initially, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted on each independent variable in order to ascertain their relationship to the dependent variable. Table 13 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of each subscale by category, i.e., those who are still fostering (Yes) and those who have stopped fostering (No).

An independent sample *t*-test was performed comparing the mean Availability and Quality of Services score for the condition of still fostering ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .76$) and for the condition of stopped fostering ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .68$). The alpha level was set at .05. This test was not significant, $t(152) = .34$, $p = .73$.

For Respect and Recognition for the condition of still fostering, scores were M = 3.18, SD = 1.0, and for the condition of stopped fostering, M = 3.04, SD = 1.12. The alpha level was set .05. This test was not significant, $t(152) = -.59$ p = .59.

Comparing the mean score for Money and Work Benefits for the condition of still fostering (M = 3.35, SD = .44) and for the condition of stopped fostering (M = 3.19, SD = .29) was significant, $t(152) = 2.68$ p < .05

An independent samples *t*-test was performed comparing the mean score for crisis response of your caseworker for the condition of still fostering (M = 3.11, SD = 1.12) and for the condition of stopped fostering (M = 2.98, SD = 1.12). The alpha level was set at .05. This test was not significant, $t(152) = .70$ p = .49.

Independent sample *t*-tests were run with the four covariates variables. An independent sample *t*-test was performed comparing the mean of years of experience as a foster parent with the condition of still fostering (M = 6.52, SD = 7.19) and for the condition of stopped fostering (M = 4.08, SD = .3.68); this test was statistically significant, $t(149) = 2.76$ p = .006. Analysis of income for the condition of still fostering generated a result of M = 4.00, SD = 3.71; for the condition of stopped fostering, M = 3.71, SD = 1.29. The expected alpha level was .05. This test was not significant, $t(147) = 1.35$ p = .18. Comparing the mean age of the foster parent for the condition of still fostering yielded a result of M = 46.44, SD = 10.83, and for the condition of stopped fostering, M = 48.29, SD = 11.31. The expected alpha level was .05. This test was not statistically significant, $t(-.988)$ p = .325. Comparing race of the foster parents and the condition of still fostering yielded a result of M = .58, SD = .50, and for the condition of

stopped fostering, $M = .53$, $SD = .50$. The expected alpha level was .05; this test was not statistically significant, $t(150) = .59$, $p = .36$.

Table 13

Independent Sample t-test

Variable	M	SD	t	p
Availability and Quality of Services				
Yes	3.08	.76	.34	.73
No	3.04	.29		
Respect and recognition				
Yes	3.18	1.08	-.59	.59
No	3.29	1.12		
Money and Work Benefits				
Yes	3.35	.44	2.68	.008
No	3.19			
Crisis Response of Your Caseworker				
Yes	3.11	1.12	.70	.49
No	2.29			
Years of Experience Fostering				
Yes	6.52	7.19	2.76	.006
No	4.08	3.68		
Income of Foster Family				
Yes	4.00	1.25	1.35	.18
No	3.71	1.29		
Age of Foster Parent				
Yes	46.44	10.83	-.99	.33
No	48.29	11.31		
Race of Foster Parent				
Yes	.58	.50	.59	.36
No	.53	.50		

N = 101 for yes

N = 53 for No

The goal of logistic regression is to correctly predict a category outcome for each case using the most prudent model. Logistic regression techniques estimate the probability of an event occurring using the log of the odds of a time-fixed outcome event to see how it is related to a linear equation (Norusis, 1998). Thus, a dichotomous dependent variable is coded as a dummy variable and the probability of the event occurring is calculated based on the cutoff of 0.5, the midpoint between 0 and 1.

An stepwise logistic regression was utilized to attempt identification of significant predictors of the criterion variable, fostering: yes or no. Stepwise method signifies that variables have been placed in the model in steps, or blocks.

In the first block of the model, only the primary variables of interest were included. Logistic regression results indicated that none of the variables in this model could successfully predict who had stopped fostering and who was still fostering (-2 Log Likelihood = 174.50; $\chi^2 = 5.30$; $p = .26$). This model was able to classify 62% of cases correctly. Though this model successfully predicted who is still fostering 93% of the time, it only successfully predicted those who quit 8% of the time.

The Wald chi-square in logistic regression tests the null hypothesis that the constant is equal to zero (Bruin, 2006). Table 14 reports the results of the Wald statistic. In Block One, none of the predictor variables is significant at the $p < .05$ level. For the Availability and Quality of Services variable, results were Wald = .46, $p = .50$; for the Respect and Recognition variable, Wald = 1.50, $p = .22$; for Money and Work Benefits variable, Wald = 2.69, $p = .46$; and for the Crisis Response variable, Wald = .46, $p = .83$.

Table 14

Regression Coefficients of Block One

	B	SE	Wald	DF	p	Exp(B)
Quality of Services	-2.88	.43	.46	1	.50	.75
Respect and Recognition	.37	.31	1.50	1	.22	1.45
Money and Work Benefits	-.77	.47	2.69	1	.10	.46
Crisis Response	-1.85	1.77	.55	1	.46	.83

In the second block of the model, the four primary variables of interest were included, along with the hypothesized intervening variables, i.e., experience as a foster parent, income, race, education, and years experience as a foster parent. As was the case in the first block, none of the primary variables of interest in the model could successfully predict who had stopped fostering and who was still fostering. The intervening variable, years of experience fostering, was significant; none of the other variables was (-2 Log Likelihood = 161; $\chi^2 = 18.67$; $p = .097$). This model was able to classify 67% of cases correctly. Those who were still fostering were correctly predicted 85% of time, while the model predicted those who already stopped fostering accurately 36% of the time. Thus, on balance, this model would seem to be a better fit. However, this model performed better because of the inclusion of more variables, thus increasing the degrees of freedom.

Table 15 reports the results of the Wald statistic. In Block Two, years of experience fostering was a significant indicator of whether or not a person was still fostering (Wald = 3.87 $p = .05$). The Exp(B) statistic indicates how much a given variable improves the odds of an event occurring; thus, as the years of experience

variable decreases by one, a foster parent is .91 times more likely to discontinue fostering ($\text{Exp}(B) = .912$).

For the Availability and Quality of Services variable, results were Wald = .408, p = .52; for the Respect and Recognition variable, Wald = 1.55, p = .21; for the Money and Work Benefits variable, Wald = 2.03, p = .48; for the Crisis Response variable, Wald = .534, p = .47; for the income variable, Wald = .21, p = .29; for the race of the foster parent variable, Wald = .1.79, p = .18; for the education level of the foster parent variable, Wald = .008, p = .93, and for the variable years of experience as a foster parent, Wald = 3.87, p = .05.

Table 15

Regression Coefficients for Block Two

	B	SE	Wald	DF	p	Exp(B)
Quality of Services	-29	.46	.41	1	.52	.75
Respect and Recognition	.40	.32	1.55	1	.21	1.50
Money and Work Benefits	-.74	.52	2.03	1	.15	.48
Crisis Response	-.20	.27	.53	1	.47	.82
Years of experience fostering	-.09	.05	3.87	1	.05	.91
Income			6.21	5	.29	
Education	.009	.09	.008	1	.93	1
Race	-.56	.42	1.79	1	.18	.57

* Income is categorical

To attempt to uncover why Hypothesis 1 was not supported, *post hoc* analyses were run to test whether the sample of foster parents was over-represented with foster parents who fostered solely to adopt. This analysis was carried by hand; the researcher looked over every participant's survey to check for any mention of fostering solely to adopt. These analyses revealed that 27 foster parents fostered to adopt, and 24 fostered for various other reasons, primarily as a means to "give back" in their community. Since the objective of this study was to uncover factors that lead to quitting and develop retention strategies to help DHR maintain foster parents, further analyses were run excluding those foster parents who fostered solely to adopt. A mean comparison of the two groups was run. Thus, in this analysis, which included the participants who fostered for reasons other than adoption and those who had stopped fostering were compared based on mean scores from the four primary variables of interest, for each test the alpha level was set at .05.

An independent sample *t*-test was performed (see Table 16) comparing the mean score for Availability and Quality of Services for the condition of still fostering ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .76$) and for the circumstance of stopped fostering ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .71$). The test was not statistically significant, $t(124) = -.435$, $p = .48$.

Comparing the mean score for Respect and Recognition and the condition of still fostering ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.08$) and the situation of stopped fostering ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .98$), the test was not statistically significant ($t(124) = -2.09$, $p = .23$).

Comparing the results of the mean score for Money and Work Benefits and the condition of still fostering ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .44$) and the condition of stopped fostering ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .37$), the test was not statistically significant ($t(124) = 1.86$, $p = .17$).

Comparing the mean score for Crisis Response and the condition of still fostering ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.12$), and for the circumstance of stopped fostering ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.30$), this test was not statistically significant ($t(124) = -1.17$, $p = .32$).

Table 16

Variable	M	SD	t	p
Availability and Quality of Services				
Yes	3.08	.76	-.44	.48
No	3.15	.71		
Respect and Recognition				
Yes	3.18	1.08	-2.09	.23
No	3.68	.98		
Money and Work Benefits				
Yes	3.35	.44	1.86	.17
No	3.17	.37		
Crisis Response of Your Caseworker				
Yes	3.12	1.12	-1.17	.32
No	3.42	1.30		

Multivariate Analysis of Intent to Continue Fostering

Hypothesis 2: If foster parents rate the quality and availability of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as low, then they will rate themselves as having a lower commitment to continue fostering..

This hypothesis explores intent to continue fostering, so subsequent analyses include only participants who reported that they were currently fostering children.

Multiple regression was chosen to answer Hypothesis 2. Multiple regression allows the researcher to predict outcomes based on regressing independent variables (in this case availability and quality of foster parent services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response) against a dependant variable (in this case, continued commitment to foster).

Before analyzing the overall model, the researcher examined the results of the Pearson's r to study the relationships among the independent variables (see Table 17). One of the assumptions of multiple regression is that independent variables are just that, independent of one another. Pearson's r allows the researcher to examine these relationships. Ideally, should one variable be correlated with another ($r > .7$, a standard cutoff in statistics) (Garson, 1998), the researcher would consider removing one of them from the model or find a way to combine the two into one variable.

The correlation matrix revealed that Availability and Quality of Services, Respect and Recognition, and Crisis Response were all highly correlated with one another. For Availability and Quality of Services and Respect and Recognition, $r = .82$, $p < .001$; for Crisis Response and Availability and Quality of Services, $r = .80$, $p < .001$; and for Crisis Response and Respect and Recognition, $r = .84$, $p < .001$.

Table 17

Summary Multicollinearity between Independent Variables

	Crisis Response	Respect and Recognition
Quality of services	.80*	.82*
Respect and Recognition	.84*	-

* significant at p < .001

All three variables show promise as significant predictors of intent to continue fostering unilaterally; however, the high degree of multicollinearity presents a problem when attempting a stepwise regression. The three variables are “fighting” to be in the model, not based on their value, but due to their significant relationship to one another (see Table 18). Thus, these variables are essentially forcing one another out of the model, despite their potential significance as predictors. Once two of them are out, the third becomes significant. Since this was the case, it was decided that neither stepwise regression nor forced entry regression was appropriate to use for this data set. Stepwise regression was attempted, and, although the above-mentioned variables were unilaterally significant, the high correlations forced a situation where the model was removing variables based on collinearity, not significance to the overall model. Thus, after careful review, it was decided that simple linear regression should be used to correct for the violation in the assumption of multicollinearity below 0.7 (Leeper, 2008). Since Money and Work Benefits and the intervening variables showed no promise in the initial multiple regression analysis, simple regression was performed for the independent variables Availability and Quality of Services, Crisis Response, and Respect and Recognition. These results will follow.

Table 18

Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

	Intent to Continue	Services	Respect and Recognition	Money Benefits	Work Response	Crisis Response	Education	Age	Years Fostering
<u>Income</u>									
Intent to continue	1.00								
Services	.29**	1.00							
Respect/Recognition	.32**	.82*	1.00						
Money/Benefits	.08	.08	.30	1.00					
Crisis Response	.32*	.80*	.84*	.20	1.00				
Education	-.09	.06	.07	-.21	-.07	1.00			
Age	.04	.10	.16*	.50	.19*	-.26*	1.00		
Years Fostering	-.14	.09*	.11	.10	.12	-.18*	.51*	1.00	
Income	-.006	.08	.05	-.22	-.02	.29*	-.18*	-.12	1.00

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (1-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at .001 level (1-tailed)

As Table 19 demonstrates, simple linear regression analysis revealed that Availability and Quality of Services was a significant predictor of commitment to continue fostering children ($\beta = .29$, $p = .003$), accounting for 8% of the variance in intention to continue. Respect and Recognition explained approximately 10% of the variance ($\beta = .32$, $p = .001$). Lastly, Crisis Response ($\beta = .32$, $p = .001$) explained 10% of the variance of commitment to continue fostering.

Table 19

Simple Regression on Intent to Continue Fostering

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Quality of Services	.58	.19	.29	3.05	.003
Respect and Recognition	.44	.13	.32	3.31	.001
Crisis Response	.43	.13	.32	3.41	.001

Open-ended Responses

The primary purpose of the open-ended questions was to search for gaps in the existing survey so that issues important to foster and former foster parents that were not otherwise addressed in the survey could be brought to light. A secondary purpose was to obtain more detailed information in order to refine this survey for future use. The amount of open-ended data received exceeded expectations. In keeping with the original purpose

of these data, a basic thematic analysis, i.e., creating categories, was conducted. The focus was on reporting what the foster parents said in a meaningful way for readers.

Some of the open-ended questions were designed to elicit a particular response, such as what is least/most rewarding about fostering children. Some questions were much broader, such as additional comments following questions about services.

Once surveys were returned, the responses to open-ended questions were typed verbatim (with the exception of obvious misspelling and misinterpretation of words) into a Word document in table format under the original question heading ("Word for Mac," 2008). Once the data were prepped and edited, the researcher read and then re-read the responses to get a sense of the data. Next, an Excel file was created. Each sheet within the file consisted of headings reflecting the question that the respondent answered. During this phase of the data entry, time categories were developed under each question heading based on the type of response ("Excel for Mac," 2008).

Current and former foster parents responses were kept separate at all times. Former foster parents' data were analyzed first. The following is an example of how the coding scheme was carried out. If a foster parent expressed, "I spent a great deal of money while fostering and wish that DHR had helped me so I would not have been losing money each month," a code named, "Make sure foster parents are not having to spend their own money" would be developed. Any time this theme was reintroduced within the data set, it would be added to a running tally. Results are presented in Appendix G.

After initially coding all data for former foster parents, in the interest of uniformity, the researcher carried over the codes for analyzing the current foster parent data set. However, as additional themes emerged, they were added to current foster

parents' data. Additionally, some of the former foster parents' codes were not found within the current foster parent data. In this case, the code was removed from the current foster parent analysis.

In the next step of this analysis, the themes were categorized according to the broader areas of fostering they represented. In other words, themes were grouped according to titles, such as "positive statements about fostering" and "voicing concerns about the agency." The codes developed in the previous step were reported under these larger categories. Table 20 demonstrates one thematic example from each open-ended question.

Table 20

Examples of Open-ended Response Themes

Question	Category	Example of Theme
Additional Comments About Fostering	Positive Statements made about Fostering	Love for the children made it all worthwhile/I enjoyed fostering
What was most rewarding about fostering	Helping Children	Making a difference in a child's life, seeing them happy
Why you became a foster parent	Personal Motivations	To help abused or neglected have a safe stable home
Other reasons you stopped fostering	Agency/System/Supervisor	Tired of hassles/agency/fighting the system
One thing that might keep you from stopping fostering	Social Worker	If the social worker had a better attitude, was responsive
If you were in charge, what first change would you make	Acknowledge Foster Parents Skill Set, Let Them Help with Decisions	Give us a say, reunification/kinship care is not always best
What is least rewarding about fostering	Systemic Problems	Kids returning home before the parents are ready
What kinds of improvements in agency support/services are most needed	Improve social work turnover, increase their pay/reduce caseloads	Improve social work turnover, increase their pay/reduce caseloads

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

General Overview

The aim of this research was to use SE as a framework to uncover factors leading to the decision to stop fostering children. Previous research in this area focused primarily on motivation to become a foster parent and recruitment issues. Very little recent research has considered why foster parents quit, despite the continuing decline in people willing to foster (Everett, 1997).

Demographics

Most respondents were married females. More participants were White than Black, but considering the demographics of the state, both groups were well represented. The average years of education, nearly 14, was higher than expected. Very few respondents reported less than a high school diploma; in fact, most reported some college.

Most respondents (72%) were employed. In fact, since most of the sample was female (80%), this was surprising. The researcher wondered if perhaps the question was not read carefully and respondents marked employed if their husband worked. The mean years of experience fostering was six. Foster parents reported fostering a median of 6 children throughout their tenure as foster parents. In summary, the demographic

information revealed a diverse sample of participants on every dimension except gender, which is not unusual in research with foster parents.

For the group who stopped, when asked why they quit fostering, the most reported reason was adoption. Unfortunately, it was not the intention of this researcher to have a sample in which participants only became foster parents because they intended to adopt. Adoption is considered a “natural” reason to stop, and not a reason that an agency can develop a retention strategy to avoid. Additionally, fostering to adopt can be a different experience than fostering simply for the service of doing so. This was the primary reason for inclusion of the an additional *t*-test comparing those who were still fostering to those who had quit and did not rate adoption as a reason. However, these results were not significant.

Subscales

It is difficult to discern what an agency director or deputy director, or for that matter a foster parent, would quantify as “enough” satisfaction to say that a particular service delivery is consistently being delivered in an acceptable manner. The question becomes whether 50% of people being satisfied with a service is enough satisfaction. Of course, the same question can be posed in terms of dissatisfaction: what percentage is high enough to conclude service delivery is too inconsistent?

Foster parents expressed satisfaction with service delivery and the quality of those services. However, they were not satisfied with the time it takes to receive services or the amount of information given to them by their caseworker about their foster children. In the qualitative pilot study interviews conducted by the researcher (Samya, 2004), foster

parents cited this as a major issue in their decision to stop fostering. One mother reported, “I had a young boy who was not doing well in school, we requested a tutor and it was six months before we got one, well, he had already failed by then.” Similar results were found in a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (2002). In this report, foster parents expressed a desire to more easily obtain a greater range of services for the children in their care. As a result, a recommendation was made that states find ways to help foster parents obtain services and identify challenges to obtaining services; in return, it was believed that retention would increase.

For the Money and Work Benefits subscale, percentages are much clearer, as there tended to be greater consensus among the respondents, whether in a “positive” or “negative” direction. That is, there was a larger gap between agreement and disagreement. Interestingly enough, for questions asking about the “status” of foster parenting and whether or not they should be considered professionals, there is a high degree of agreement that they should. The same held true for any questions about the amount of money paid and the work that is expected of them. There was certainly agreement that foster parents are not receiving enough money to cover expenses and are subsidizing the child welfare system with both time and money. These findings are congruent with Rhodes et al. (2001), Barth (2001), Timmer et al. (2004), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (2002), and Chamberlain et al. (1992). However, foster parents did not support the idea of retirement or health insurance benefits. Nor did they expect more people to continue fostering or begin fostering if more money was offered. A majority of foster parents supported tax

breaks to assist them with accessing materials needed to maintain their home in accordance with state codes for fostering, as well as the purchase of vehicles to transport children in their care.

This Money and Work Benefits subscale elicited quite a bit of narrative response, i.e., foster parents spontaneously wrote comments beside questions, and those who wrote comments overwhelmingly expressed that people fostering for the money should lose their license to foster. Of course, this type of statement assumes that a foster parent who seeks more payment is a “bad” foster parent. The general census was that if more money was offered, then people would only foster for money, but that they themselves only fostered for the love of children. However, the respondents reported believing they deserved more money. In terms of future retention of foster parents, it is hard to say if offering more money would aid in retention efforts. It is important to make it clear that increasing retention should not occur at the expense of the foster child living in a good and loving home, which is what many respondents seemed to believed would occur. To this point, when asked if fostering would be too impersonal with the addition of higher monetary incentives, percentages were fairly evenly split. Generally, foster parents did not think so, but they welcomed the idea of tax breaks and other incentives. With that said, the fact that they believe they are underpaid begs the questions as to whether offering more money might indeed increase satisfaction.

It is puzzling that most participants (over 75%) desired and felt they deserved greater monetary support (or at least that DHR should pay enough so fostering is not a money-losing venture and so foster parents can continue to give good care even in tough economic times). Yet, there are such strong feelings *against* the idea. In no other

volunteer service or work environment that this researcher can think of is offering money viewed negatively. In fact, respondents indicated that increasing financial incentives would *lower* quality, not raise it. It is striking that social work, the profession primarily responsible for the service delivery of child welfare, was once a volunteer service, and its practitioners have struggled since its inception to receive adequate remuneration. It is interesting that similar value conflicts exists in foster parenting. Generally, offering more money creates a larger applicant pool and, in turn, more room to “weed out” those who are not suited to perform to the standard. Barth (2001) made the case that standards for foster parents are too low; thus, the quality of care delivered to children sometimes suffers. Should the Red Cross decide to start paying volunteers, it is doubtful anyone would see this as a “red flag,” an initiative that would lead to a decline in the quality of service delivery. When considering this issue in the context of SE (a perspective having its roots in economics), money becomes a difficult exchange to measure in this case. One of the assumptions of exchange is that money will lead to a perception of a more balanced exchange in relationships. In this case, however, the foster parents seemed to have mixed feelings. In the instance of fostering children, on the surface it did not appear that money carried a heavy weight in the exchange; however, this researcher remains skeptical, as foster parents overwhelmingly expressed feeling as if they deserved more money and that their skill set was far above the money they received. More research is needed to tease out more specifically how money is weighted in the overall exchange relationship in foster parenting.

This research revealed that foster parents do not want to continue losing money because of fostering. In fact, the strongest consensus reached for all survey questions is

that foster parents are losing money and desire a larger “net gain,” even if it is in the form of tax breaks and other incentives, to help them carry out their role effectively, but not by means of a “paycheck.” Also noteworthy is the fact that some respondents who were short-term foster parents and subsequently adopted mentioned that they themselves did not deserve a salary or insurance, but that perhaps those who have committed their lives to fostering children do.

For Crisis Response, a small majority reported that they felt their caseworker recognized when they were struggling and responded appropriately. Yet, for about 30% of respondents, crisis response was perceived to be insufficient. In the open-ended comments, the theme “social workers being non-responsive in a crisis response” was common. These findings are similar to a study by Hudson and Levasseur (2002) and the past findings of this researcher (Samya, 2004). Crisis response, in both studies, was the most significant indicator of quitting. Future research is needed, however, to determine whether what a foster parent perceives to be a crisis actually qualifies as a crisis.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis in this study predicted that foster parents who rated services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and recognition, and crisis response as unsatisfactory will have quit fostering. The theoretical underpinning of this research, social exchange theory, suggests that people will remain in relationships based on a calculation (conscious or unconscious) of rewards and costs. More specifically, as related to this study, when a relationship becomes too costly, a person will end it. In this analysis, the researcher used logistic regression to attempt to uncover statistical

differences between two groups, current foster parents and former foster parents; it was hypothesized that those who quit would score lower on one or multiple subscales than those who have not.

Logistic regression modeling using the forced entry method, with the variables Availability and Quality of Services, Crisis Response, Money and Work Benefits, and Respect and Recognition as predictors and years of experience fostering, age, income, and years of education as intervening variables, could not adequately predict who would quit fostering. While years of experience fostering is significant within the model, this model yields no practical significance, as the major variables of interest are not significant. The model is not able to accurately predict who had quit fostering children based on differences in mean scores between the two groups. To attempt to control for the over-representation of participants who had fostered for the purpose of adopting and never intended to foster long term within the sample of foster parents who quit, the researcher selected out adoptive foster parents and ran independent sample *t*-tests. These mean comparisons were not statistically significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is not supported. In a similar comparison study, Rindfleisch et al. (1998) found that foster parents were more likely to quit if fostering was not a source of income, if they were able to adopt (if they wanted to), if there was less "agency red tape," if they perceived social workers offered help, and when they believed other foster parents were not supporting them. However, in this research study, no differences between the two groups were found.

There are at least two possible reasons why these results do not yield any significant findings. Of course, one conclusion to draw is that the two samples were, in

fact, *not* different in their perceptions of the availability and quality of services, money and work benefits, crisis response, or respect and recognition. Thus, by inference, social exchange theory is not useful for understanding the behavior of foster parents in this instance.

A second possible reason this hypothesis does not yield significant results is that the sample of those who stopped fostering may be biased due to sampling error, a bias that the researcher could not effectively control for in this study. The researcher intended, via probability sampling, to achieve at least a near even split between those who quit for “natural reasons” (adoption, age, etc.) and those who quit due to systemic issues. *Post hoc* analysis exploring this question proceeded as follows: the researcher examined, via comparing Likert-type responses and written responses, how much various factors influenced quitting for each group. Examination of open-ended responses revealed that the sample of foster parents who quit may have been overrepresented by foster parents who fostered primarily to *adopt* children but who never intended to foster long term. Frequencies reveal that among those who quit, 17 out of 51 stated that adoption was very much a reason. In addition, under the “additional comments” section, another 10 respondents (who did not check adoption as important) wrote that they had adopted and “filled their family.” This would bring the total to 27 out of 51. Conversely, among those who were still fostering but reported a low commitment to continuing (meaning they answered the same question about adopting), only 5 out of 57 reported adoption as a primary reason they were considering quitting. Thus, this researcher questions the dispersion of the sample on this dimension.

Foster parents who enrolled in fostering for the sole purpose of adopting and were able to do so and then stopped fostering presented a limitation in the application of social exchange theory. The person discontinuing the relationship with the agency was able to gain one of the most fundamental and rewarding of virtually all social exchanges (from a societal context), a child. In hindsight, this should have been anticipated, as the foster parent is relinquishing one relationship in favor of one that is more rewarding.

The fact remains, however, that gaining any better understanding of whether or not the sample is overrepresented with adoptive foster parents is problematic. Currently, Alabama DHR does not track precisely why homes close. The only information offered for a closed home is whether the closure was voluntary or ordered by the agency. Regardless of the reason, when a foster parent decides to stop fostering, the records only reflect the home closed due to the provider's request (Rogers, 2008). Thus, when a list of potential participants was sent, there was no way to control for this. The researcher cannot compare the demographics of this sample to the overall demographics within the study area. In short, having a sample of foster parents that is so high in people who quit for natural reasons, i.e., adoption, retirement, and moving to another location, makes it difficult to interpret the accuracy of the findings for this group. More research with a more definitive sample on this dimension is needed to adequately address the issue.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis in this study predicted that foster parents rating the availability and quality of services, financial assistance and work benefits, respect and

recognition, and crisis response as low will rate themselves as having a lower commitment to continue fostering.

For Hypothesis 2, the researcher changed the statistical method from multiple regression to simple linear regression due to the high degree of multicollinearity among three of the four independent variables. Simple regression revealed that the availability and quality of services, crisis response, and respect and recognition significantly impacted commitment to fostering while explaining individually approximately 10% of the variance. The Money and Work Benefits variable was not a significant predictor of commitment to continue, nor were any of the intervening variables.

Those who expressed a desire to stop fostering in the near future generally rated the availability and quality of services lower than those who expressed a high commitment to continue fostering. Comparable results were uncovered in similar studies (Denby et al., 1999; Rhodes et al., 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, 2002).

Questions on this subscale did not focus solely on offering needed services but emphasized as well issues such as wait time for services and information provided by caseworkers to foster parents. Thus, findings from this study point to the fact that it is not enough to have a repertoire of services available to foster parents; it is important to shorten lag times between the request for a service and its subsequent implementation.

Questions also centered on whether foster parents perceived that they were being given enough information about the children they fostered. Section 2, Decree 7, of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights mandates that foster parents in Alabama have a right to relevant information concerning the children (and biological families) who reside in their

care (Alabama Foster Parent Bill of Rights, (2004)). This study indicated that more needs to be done to inform foster parents on pertinent issues regarding the children who enter their homes and those children's families.

This study revealed that foster parents who expressed intent to quit rated respect and recognition as lower than those resolved to continue in this role. This indicates that those who are considering resigning do not believe they are valued as a team member, and this, in turn, is affecting retention. This study supported similar findings that foster parents desire the opportunity to be heard (Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2001; Roger et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, 2002).

The first act of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights asserts that foster parents have "the right to be treated with dignity respect, trust, value, and consideration as a primary provider of foster care and member of a professional team caring for children" (P.L. 62783-8, p. 1). Foster parents were mixed as to whether they believed their social workers valued them. Foster parents speculated that working in a milieu with high caseloads, inadequate pay, and workers lacking experience shapes caseworkers' attitudes. A significant number of respondents revealed in the written responses that they did not perceive the caseworkers' supervisor as helpful when they expressed concerns about their social worker or about the way in which their case was being handled. This seemed to perpetuate feelings of a lack of respect and value. Foster parents in a number of cases sought help from supervisors but did not believe their voice was heard when they had concerns. Delays in returning calls and the amount of time spent discussing the children in care were points of contention both in the surveys and in the written responses.

Crisis response is a difficult concept to measure in the context of foster parenting. Inexperienced foster parents may be more likely to perceive a situation as a “crisis event” than experienced foster parents who might see it as a fairly ordinary and expected event. This in turn could shape the response of the caseworker, who must decide on a daily basis if a situation requires his or her immediate attention. The caseworker must prioritize a request against all the other “emergencies” within their caseload. This study revealed that those who expressed a desire to discontinue rated crisis response as lower than those who intended to continue fostering. In order to improve retention, social workers must find a way to respond effectively and in a timely manner to these types of situations. Qualitative data supports the notion that although a number of foster parents were not happy with the crisis response provided them, opinion varied as to whether they perceived this to be due to a lack of concern on the part of the caseworker or due to high turnover, inexperience, and high caseloads. These findings are supported in similar research by Hudson and Levasseur (2002) and Roger et al. (2006).

Study Limitations

This study has a number of limitations, some inherent to the design and some intrinsic to the sample. Cross-sectional design does not allow the researcher to statistically link cause and effect (Alreck & Settle, 1995). Using survey methodology can only uncover relationships among variables; thus, while this study revealed directional relationships among the variables, the researcher can only *infer* why these directional relationships where uncovered. For example, this data revealed that respect and recognition are important, in the sense that as respect goes up, so does the likelihood of

continuance, for those who are still fostering. This method, even with statistically significant results, does not demonstrate that respect and recognition *caused* an increase in satisfaction—just that the two are statistically linked. A primary reason is that surveys generally measure variables at the same point in time, and respondents, if asked, are generally poor at assessing causality (Nardi, 2003). Either they do not know the cause or they will not reveal the cause. Experiments are generally better at establishing causality, because they introduce a potential cause before an effect might be observed. However, logistic regression and multiple regression are statistical tests that offered the researcher robust predictive power.

Subject biases, i.e., the influence of norms to respond in socially desirable ways, are an expected consequence of self-reporting. Thus, as with any survey, it is impossible to determine whether participants were being honest or answering based on norms or expectations. Offering participants anonymity should have countered these limitations. Also, in survey research, one cannot know if respondents understood all of the questions. Case in point, many survey respondents were “satisfied with liability protection” when it is doubtful that they have ever been offered this type of protection.

The researcher, while using some questions from other surveys, developed the four subscales introduced in this research. These subscales were not pilot tested (other than for grammar and readability), so the measures lack the rigor of repetition. In hindsight, the researcher was not satisfied with the question order on the Money and Work Benefits portion of the survey. Many respondents seemed defensive when answering questions about benefits and salary. Future implementation of this survey would include a re-ordering of these questions. The researcher believes that had the

questions been arranged so that the “nonthreatening” items (e.g., perceptions of specialness as volunteers) were posed first, the items might have been rated differently.

The fact that the sample includes only current and former foster parents in 12 counties in Alabama severely limits the generalizability of the findings. Alabama foster parents, specifically foster parents in the selected counties, may be different from foster parents in other states. Probability sampling techniques were employed to obtain a diverse sample of current foster parents. However, for former foster parents, convenience sampling was utilized in some instances. Thus, the findings still offer only tentative generalizations for foster parents from areas not included in this study as well as within Alabama. Of course, board payments, values about social welfare, and other resources vary from state to state and may result in different survey results.

Finally, all subscales include a “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” and a “neither agree nor disagree” response. For much of the survey, approximately 25% of respondents selected a neutral response. These responses are difficult to interpret in retrospect, as they may imply genuine neutrality or even an inconsistent response with regard to service delivery and other variables. While in some instances respondents gave handwritten statements beside particular questions, such as “it depends on the social worker,” the researcher cannot be sure why an ambivalent response was chosen so often. Kalton, Roberts, and Holt (1980) undertook an analysis of middle or neutral response options and found that these responses were statistically unrelated to either end of the response continuum; thus, these responses remain difficult to interpret. Complicating matters is the fact that respondents had an alternative of “does not apply” on all subscales, except the money and work benefits subscale.

Despite these limitations, this researcher believes that strengths of the study far outweigh its limitations. The findings have clear policy and practice implications for all social workers that work with foster parents and add substantially to the minimal knowledge base in the area of foster parent retention.

Implications for Social Work

This research highlights the necessity of a fundamental effort to better communication between foster parents and social workers in order to improve foster parent retention. Foster parents may label themselves as volunteers and are reluctant to accept a salary. They fear that a salary would result in individuals becoming foster parents for the money and not for the love of the children in their care, as they do. However, as part of an impetus to improve communication and increase retention, social workers must treat foster parents as skilled members of the care team, or the foster parents will not be satisfied in their role (Denby et al., 1999; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; Rhodes et al., 2001; Samya, 2004; U.S. GAO, 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, 2002).

Qualitative data in this study revealed that foster parents are often torn between their love and bond to a foster child and simply being a “temporary parent.” Written responses indicated that foster parents feel vulnerable and hurt when they perceive that they are being summarily dismissed by their caseworker. This can often happen when the child is returned to the biological family. The foster parent may have developed a strong relationship with the child and believe the return is too soon and that the biological parent have not progressed enough to successfully reunite with the child. The caseworker

can inadvertently make the foster parents feel “replaceable” or “too attached,” leading to negative feelings about both their role and their relationship to the social worker. Case in point, one respondent stated, “Foster children destroyed our house and DHR would not help pay for it, it seems they are ‘ours’ when something like that happens and ‘theirs’ when it is time to go back to bad parents who have made no progress.” Foster parents’ expectations of consideration as a team member implied that their opinion should be considered *in all aspects* of care giving. The fact that the first tenet of the Foster Parent Bill of Rights emphasizes that a foster parent is to be treated with respect and as part of the care-giving team is noteworthy.

Social work as a profession promotes the ethos of “best service” to the children and families the practitioner serves. Thus, social workers have a duty to advocate for a better system. To improve retention, social workers and policy makers must come together and work to resolve general workforce and retention issues. The respect issue, so important to foster parents, is also a matter of more general concern to the profession. The spirit and intent of the social work Code of Ethics is that social workers have a duty to “treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion...” (National Association of Social Workers, 2008, p. 21).

A second implication of the research bears on practitioners’ qualifications. Those who represent the social work profession in this milieu should be licensed; would anyone want care from a physician who never obtained or was not able to maintain a license? Would anyone send their children to a school with teachers who have no certification to teach? Yet, in an already “troubled” and “overwhelmed” system, foster children’s cases are sometimes placed in the hands of social workers who are not licensed.

Implications for Policy

Nationally

A better understanding of why foster parents quit provides an avenue for program development and training modules designed to enhance foster parent retention, regardless of geographic location. While creating services can obviously be costly, in the case of higher board payments or other monetary incentives, this study implies that adequate caseworker training in and of itself could boost foster parent retention. Bridging the gap between how foster parents *perceive* their role within the care team and how social workers treat them in that role could have a positive impact on retention. Additionally, tax breaks and other incentives, it seems, would increase satisfaction, thus likely increasing retention.

State of Alabama

The state of Alabama's foster parent record keeping was such that data collection was difficult. The state agency has no list of former foster parents. When attempting to access these data via local agencies, personnel reported challenges in finding a complete listing of people who had stopped fostering within the last three years. Due to time constraints on their part and for the investigator, only a partial listing could be compiled. This presented sampling problems. Future evaluators would face a similar problem; this suggests that DHR should work towards more meaningful record keeping for future research and evaluation.

Part of the difficulty facing the state of Alabama and many other states is the lack of empirical evidence to inform best practice. This study supported the idea that insight

into retention can be gained by studying the factors that influence quitting. This being the case, it is recommended that surveying exiting foster parents should become routine. Alabama is not alone in this regard. A report by the Office of the Inspector General (2002) identified lack of retention data as a barrier facing nearly every state. For the most part, states are left guessing as to why so many foster parents quit. Implementation of exit surveys regarding the barriers and rewards of fostering would go a long way in remedying this situation.

Though a number of study participants indicated that they were fostering to adopt and communicated that they did not deserve a salary, they also believed there is a subset of foster parents who do. Perhaps professionalizing the role of fostering generally is not appropriate. However, this research supports the notion that professionalizing the role of a subset of foster parents, i.e., those who are full-time, long-term foster care-givers, could positively affect retention. Those foster parents might view themselves as being on a more equal footing with the rest of the care team and would have sufficient monetary support to effectively carry out their long-term role. Perhaps consideration in this state should be aimed towards the implementation of a program similar to the Jane Adams Hull House Neighbor-to-Neighbor Program, since this program provides evidence of success in both retaining foster parents and providing loving homes for children.

This survey revealed the perception on the part of foster parents of a lack of professionalism on the part of *some* caseworkers in the foster care system, and an apparent lack of accountability for this behavior; this is only one study, so caution should be exerted. Just as in the case of foster parents who *may* not be suitable to care for children, yet are sometimes allowed to continue due to the lack of persons willing to take

on this role, sometimes social workers continue working with foster children despite poor work performance. Foster parents were quick to point out when their experiences resulted from ill-equipped caseworkers who seemed unqualified, unknowledgeable, and uncaring towards them and the children they fostered. They strongly believed that the DHR allowing them to remain employed constituted a significant “negative force” for fostering in this state. For example, two participants reported that a social worker directly stated that they were “just babysitters” and could be easily replaced. Two other foster parents also reported that caseworkers threatened removal of their foster children if the foster parent continued to complain about what they perceived to be relevant issues. These situations, though not the norm, go far beyond what would be considered the result of simple inexperience or a normal product of job-related stress. Obviously, these types of behavior are counterproductive to both the social work profession generally and fostering specifically. From a management perspective, the implications are for stronger policies to effectively determine who these social workers are and terminate them.

Policies to *retain* foster parents must be preceded by policies to *retain* social workers; this finding is supported by two U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports on Retaining Foster Parents (U.S. GAO, 2004; Office of Inspector General, 2002). One foster parent stated, “My child has had five social workers and is only two years old. We think this case has been through too many hands”. Currently, a job with DHR is not seen as ideal, as the pay is low and the demands are high; thus, it becomes difficult to keep higher quality social workers and to terminate ones who are of lower quality. In fact, much like the case of foster parent retention, the situation is about survival, i.e., having enough bodies to cover the shift.

Participants believed that if social workers were better paid, higher quality people would be attracted to and remain in this job. This idea has been discussed on a national level in child welfare for some time. In fact, NASW worked on a loan forgiveness plan for people in public service jobs (NASW, 2007), and Title IV-E funding is in place to provide university-agency training partnerships such that universities can offer stipends to students and other incentives to prepare students for entry in the field of child welfare (NASW, 2004). Both of these programs are intended help attract qualified job candidates. The DHR in Alabama is aware of the need to improve caseworker retention, but unfortunately, the funding support needed from lawmakers has not followed.

The issues of inadequate crisis response, lag time for services, and a lack of respect and recognition obviously can be addressed in part by management attention to these issues. However, achieving an adequate base of funding for DHR programs is also an important requisite. Offering more money and benefits leaves room to effectively remove disrespectful caseworkers, as the applicant pool would become larger and more employees would consider staying. As it is, a competent social worker is many times courted and hired by agencies offering a higher salary and less stressful employment.

This study also points out that foster parents realize it takes more money to foster children than is rendered through board payment. Foster parents in this study were overwhelmingly in agreement that they lose money fostering. While it is expected that as “volunteers” they should give time, an outflow of money equaling hundreds of dollars a month is too high a price to pay for many, no matter how high the intrinsic rewards. This is particularly true during tough economic times. Thus, it is recommended that board payments be raised to a level so that foster parents have enough monetary resources to

adequately rear children. It is further recommended that foster parents be offered special tax incentives to allow them to more easily keep their homes up to code and maintain or buy newer vehicles to transport children in their care.

Implications for Future Research

Nearly half a million children are placed in foster care with the expectation of placement stability during their tenure in the system. With fewer people willing to foster, and retention of foster parents becoming a central issue, it is surprising that foster parent retention is not more often studied. Consequently, practice in this area (as in many other areas of social services) has not been adequately informed by empirical data. Thus, this study adds to the existing knowledge base of what is known about foster parent retention. This study indicated that money and work benefits are important considerations, but the researcher could not ascertain how this variable fit within the overall decision to continue fostering. Future research will shed more light on this issue. The same can be said for crisis response and respect and recognition given by caseworkers. Studying these variables offers new insight into the rewards and costs of fostering, yet more research is needed to attain a clearer view of whether these variables affect retention, affect it only in Alabama, or are indicative of larger-scale retention issues.

Future research initiatives should focus on a policy assessment of a range of proposed and implemented foster care policies. A national state-by-state comparative policy analysis would aid in uncovering programs in other states that are effective in retaining foster parents.

Conclusion

Foster parenting is a complex phenomenon centering on the needs of vulnerable children and the adults who attempt to meet those needs. Foster parents are asked to monitor, love, and care for children twenty-four hours a day and in return sometimes have very little say in what happens to the children they have grown to love and in whom they have invested so much time, resources, and energy. They are asked to accept this uncertain situation and balance the potentially emotionally detrimental outcomes revealed by this research with the very significant intrinsic rewards they receive. While it is clear from both the scale responses and the open-ended responds that non-kin foster parents take in these children for love, and out of a sense of duty to help them, many still end up quitting out of frustration. Thus, while foster parents start fostering out of love and duty, for many, it becomes all about having the right resources and the perception that they are appreciated and seen as equals on team working to improve the lives of children.

This study supports the notion that foster parent retention can be improved via better policy and practice directed to those who are fostering children in this state. Non-kin foster parents are tasked with raising children who are not known to them and whose biological families are oftentimes angry that someone other than themselves is parenting *their* children. Yet, foster parents continue to offer this service at personal monetary cost and with the strong possibility that no matter how much love they have for a particular child, that child may leave their home at a moment's notice and return to the same people who put him or her at risk. Yet, fostering can be an immensely rewarding experience. Foster parents revealed repeatedly in their written responses that fostering is above all a labor of love:

God called me to build a home for abused, neglected, and unwanted children, so I started with foster care. Children have always had a special place in my heart and for those in my care I want them to know there is a better way to live than what they have known.

However, fewer people are now willing to foster children; thus, it is crucial to grasp what role agencies, and subsequently the people employed by these agencies, can play in increasing foster parent retention. This research effectively highlights some of the obstacles facing Alabama's DHR agencies and suggests ways to overcome these barriers to improve foster parent retention.

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APPENDIX A

FOSTER PARENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Page 0
1 SB228
2 62783-8
3 By Senator Escott
4 RFD: Children, Youth Affairs, and Human Resources
5 First Read: 05-FEB-04
SB228
Page 1
1 ENROLLED, An Act,
2 Relating to the Department of Human Resources; to establish the
3 Foster Parents' Bill of Rights Act.
4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:
5 Section 1. There is hereby established and created the "Foster
6 Parents' Bill of Rights Act."
7 Section 2. The Department of Human Resources shall ensure that
8 each foster parent shall have all of the following rights:
9 (1) The right to be treated with dignity, respect, trust, value, and
10 consideration as a primary provider of foster care and a member of the
11 professional team caring for foster children.
12 (2) The right to receive information concerning the rights
13 enumerated in this act.
14 (3) The right to a concise written explanation of their role as foster
15 parents in partnership with children and their families, the department, and
other
16 providers, the role of the department, and the rights and role of the members of
17 the birth family of a child in foster care.
18 (4) The right to training and support for the purpose of improving
19 skills in providing daily care and meeting the needs of the child in foster care.
20 (5) The right to training, consultation, and assistance in evaluating,
21 identifying, and accessing services to meet their needs related to their role as
22 foster care providers. This includes, but is not limited to, all foster care policies,
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Page 2
1 the Foster Parent Handbook, Foster Family Homes Minimum Standards, the

2 Therapeutic Foster Care Manual, and a mediation process.

3 (6) The right to provide input to the department in identifying the
4 types of resources and services that would meet the needs of children currently in
5 their care and of their families, and advocate for the same without threat of
6 reprisal.

7 (7) The right to information concerning behavioral problems,
8 health history, educational status, cultural and family background, and other
9 issues relative to the child which are known to the department at the time the
child

10 is placed in foster care prior to the child's placement with a foster parent or
11 parents. When the department knows such information after placement, the
12 department shall make that information available to the foster parent as soon as
13 practicable.

14 (8) The right to a written explanation of the plan concerning the
15 placement of a child in the foster parent's home. For emergency placements
16 where time does not allow prior preparation of the explanation, the department
17 shall provide such explanation within 72 hours. Prior to placement, the
18 department shall allow the foster parent to review a written summary of
19 information concerning the child, including, but not limited to, assessments,
20 evaluations, and case plans, and allow the foster parent to assist in determining if
21 the child would be a proper placement for the prospective foster family. For
22 emergency placements where time does not allow prior review of the
information,

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Page 3

1 the department shall provide the information within 72 hours of placement.
2 Confidential information shall be kept confidential by the foster parents, except as
3 determined through the ISP process to promote the health and welfare of the
4 child.

5 (9) The right to a staff person representing the department on call
6 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the purpose of aiding the foster parent in
7 receiving departmental assistance.

8 (10) The right to fair and equitable board payments based on a
9 system of daily board rates and other financial reimbursement as specified in a
10 plan adopted by the department after consultation with foster parents, subject to
11 the availability of funds.

12 (11) The right to accept or refuse placement within their home, or
13 to request, upon reasonable notice to the department, the removal of a child from
14 their home for good cause without threat of reprisal for acting on such good
15 cause.

16 (12) The right to information of scheduled meetings and
17 appointments concerning the foster child and permission for the foster parent to
18 actively participate in and provide input to be used by the Individualized Service
19 Plan team in the case planning and decision-making process regarding the child

in

20 foster care, including, but not limited to, individual service planning meetings,
21 foster care reviews, individual educational planning meetings, and medical
22 appointments.

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1 (13) The right to request that a person or persons serve as volunteer
2 advocate and to be present at all meetings with the department, including, but not
3 limited to, individualized service planning, administrative hearings, the
4 grievance/mediation process, the adoption process, and the allegation process
5 where the foster parent is present. All communications received by the volunteer
6 advocate shall be in strict confidence.

7 (14) The right to notice and an opportunity to be heard, including
8 timely information concerning all court hearings. This notification may include,
9 but is not limited to, notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of
10 the judge or hearing officer assigned to the case, the guardian ad litem, the
11 location of the hearing, and the court docket number. The notification shall be
12 made upon receipt of this information by the department. Although not a party to
13 the case, the foster parent may attend court hearings at the discretion of the
judge.

14 (15) The right to communication with professionals who work with
15 the foster child, including, but not limited to, therapists, physicians, and teachers
16 who work directly with the child.

17 (16) The right to communicate with the child's birth family, other
18 foster parents of the child, and prospective and finalized adoptive parents of the
19 child with Individualized Service Plan Team approval and without the threat of
20 reprisal.

21 (17) The right to necessary information on an ongoing basis which
22 is relevant to the care of the child, including timely information on changes in the
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1 case plan or termination of the placement and reasons for the changes or
2 termination of placement to the foster parent except in the instances of immediate
3 response of child protective service.

4 (18) The right to first consideration as the resource for a child in a
5 foster parent's home who becomes free for adoption or another planned
permanent

6 living arrangement.

7 (19) The right to a period of respite upon the request of a foster
8 parent. The foster parent shall provide reasonable notice of a request for respite.

9 (20) The right to information, in person and in writing, of any
10 allegations of maltreatment of children in the home of the foster parent alleged
to

11 have been perpetrated by a member of the foster parent's household, the process

12 for disposition of these allegations, and any review process for reports of
13 indicated child abuse and neglect upon receipt of the allegations. A written
14 notification of any report in which a finding is not indicated on the county level
15 shall be provided to a foster parent within five days of the findings.

16 (21) The right to copies of all information relative to their family
17 and services contained in the personal foster home record.

18 (22) The right to mediation procedures that may be developed and
19 adopted by the department and the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent
20 Association Board. The foster parent may request mediation in accordance with
21 any mediation policy adopted by the department and the Alabama Foster and
22 Adoptive Parent Association Board without threat of reprisal.

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1 (23) The right to appeal the closing of a foster family home by the
2 department in accordance with any appeal procedure adopted by the department
3 and the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association Board without threat of
4 reprisal.

5 Section 3. This act shall become effective on the first day of the
6 third month following its passage and approval by the Governor, or its otherwise
7 becoming law.

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1

2

3 _____

4 President and Presiding Officer of the Senate

5 _____

6 Speaker of the House of Representatives

7 SB228

8 Senate 17-FEB-04

9 I hereby certify that the within Act originated in and passed the Senate, as
10 amended.

11

12 McDowell Lee

13 Secretary

14

15

16 House of Representatives

17 Passed: 15-APR-04

18 APPROVED 4-20-04

19 TIME 11:05 am

20 *Bob Riley*

21 GOVERNOR

22 By: Senator Escott

Lucy Baxley

Seth Hammett

Alabama Secretary Of State

Act Num. : 2004-257

Bill Num. : S-228

Recv'd 04/20/04 01:23pmHM

APPENDIX B

CURRENT FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Part A: General questions about you and your family

1. How many years have you fostered children? _____

2. Are you approved, licensed or certified as a: (CHECK YES OR NO FOR EACH ITEM.)

	Yes	No
Foster family home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency care home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Therapeutic foster family home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relative foster home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Group home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. How many foster children are currently in your home? _____

4. How many other children do you have living in your home? _____

5. Since you first became a foster parent, how many *foster* children have you had who were:

of children

Related to you by birth or marriage..... _____

Were known to you before placement but not related..... _____

Were neither related nor known to you before placement... _____

Total _____

6. Thinking ahead, over the next three years, do you intend to continue as a foster parent?

- | | |
|--|---|
| Yes..... | 1 |
| No..... | 2 |
| I have already stopped fostering children..... | 3 |

7. What is your current marital status (CIRCLE ONE.)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Married or living as married..... | 01 |
| Divorced..... | 02 |
| Separated..... | 03 |
| Widow/Widower..... | 04 |
| Never married..... | 05 |

8. Excluding foster care payments, before taxes, what was the total combined annual income of all members of your family (those currently living in your home) last year? Include the income of family members age 14 and older. (CIRCLE ONE.)

- | | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Less than \$7,000..... | 01 |
| \$7,000-14,999..... | 02 |
| \$15,000-39,999..... | 03 |
| \$40,000-\$59,999..... | 04 |
| \$60,000-\$79,999..... | 05 |
| More than \$80,000..... | 06 |

9. What is your current employment status? (CIRCLE ONE.)

- | | |
|---|----|
| Employed full-time (30 hours or more per week)..... | 01 |
| Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)..... | 02 |
| Unemployed and looking for work..... | 03 |
| Homemaker not employed outside the home..... | 04 |
| Disabled or retired, not employed outside the home..... | 05 |
| Other (specify)_____ | 06 |

10. What is the last year of education you completed? [For example, high school graduation equals 12 years.] _____

of Years

11. What is your race? (CIRCLE ONLY ONE.)

- | | |
|--|----|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native..... | 01 |
| Black, not Hispanic origin..... | 02 |
| White, not Hispanic origin..... | 03 |
| Hispanic..... | 04 |
| Other (specify) _____ | 05 |

12. What is your age? _____

13. What is your sex? (CIRCLE ONE.)

- | | |
|-------------|----|
| Female..... | 01 |
| Male..... | 02 |

14. What is your religious affiliation? Please list a specific denomination (for example, Baptist, Methodist etc.)

Part B: Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory

Using the scale below, please respond to the following statements about foster parenting. Please answer as honestly as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your social worker or agency workers. We are interested in your level of satisfaction with foster parenting.

How satisfied are you with: CIRCLE THE NUMBER CORRESPONDING TO YOUR RESPONSE

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does Not Apply
149						

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does Not Apply
15. Your working relationship with social service agencies (social workers, DHR, etc).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
16. Your working relationship with other authorities related to the foster child (schools, counselors, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
17. Your relationship with your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
18. Balancing foster care with your family's schedule.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
19. The amount of information given by your caseworker about the children placed in your home.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
20. The availability of respite care when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
21. The availability of social workers when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
22. Relationship of your own children with your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
23. Availability of additional foster parent training.	150	1	2	3	4	N/A
24. Assistance from social workers.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
25. Your understanding of the legal system.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
26. Availability of liability protection/liability insurance.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
27. The ways in which your foster placements have ended.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
28. Opportunities to meet other foster families.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
29. Your role in helping children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
30. Your overall level of satisfaction with foster parenting	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
31. The amount of time spent discussing your foster child(ren) with your caseworker.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
32. Value caseworker places on your opinion, regarding your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
33. Crisis response of your caseworker(s).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
34. Length of time for caseworker to return phone calls.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
35. Overall experience with your caseworker(s).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does Not Apply
36. Availability of services, in general.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
37. Availability of day care.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
38. Paying for health care expenses not covered by Medicaid.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
39. Transportation for medical services or other appointments.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
40. Amount of money for recreational activities provided for the child.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
41. Time between asking for a service and receiving it.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
42. The time it takes for your caseworker to respond to a crisis situation with your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
43. The way your caseworker handles a crisis.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
44. The responsiveness of your caseworker when you have a situation that requires immediate help.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

45. Additional comments about your level of satisfaction with foster parenting:

Part C: Money and Work Benefits

Using the scale below, please respond to the following statements about foster parenting. Please answer as honestly as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential and will **not** be shared with your social worker or agency workers.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
46. Foster parents should be considered professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
47. Foster parents should receive retirement benefits.	1	2	3	4	5
48. The State should contribute to a social security fund for foster parents so that they could have those benefits when they retire.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Foster parenting requires specialized skills.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Foster parents <i>are</i> paid enough for the work they do.	1	2	3	4	5
52. If foster parents were paid a salary, fostering would become too impersonal.	1	2	3	4	5
53. Foster parents deserve more money.	1	2	3	4	5
54. Foster parents should receive low-interest loans to help with buying cars for transportation and home maintenance needed to maintain their license.	1	2	3	4	5
55. If foster parents were paid a salary more people would want to be foster parents.	1	2	3	4	5
56. The amount of money paid to foster parents is more than enough to cover their expenses	1	2	3	4	5
57. Foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars for transportation and upkeep on their home needed to maintain their license.	1	2	3	4	5
58. Foster parents lose money fostering, and end up using their own money to pay for fostering.	1	2	3	4	5
59. The amount of money given through the board payments accurately reflects the effort of the job foster parents do.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
60. Foster parents and their families should be eligible for health insurance benefits.	1	2	3	4	5
61. If foster parents were paid a salary, fewer people would quit fostering.	1	2	3	4	5

62. Please describe why you wanted to become a foster parent.

Part D: Commitment to Continuing to Foster Children

63. Thinking ahead, over the next three years, do you intend to continue as a foster parent?

- Not likely..... 1 (Continue with question 62)
- Somewhat likely..... 2 (Continue with question 62)
- Neutral..... 3 (Continue with question 62)
- Likely..... 4 (skip to question 81)
- Extremely likely..... 5 (skip to question 81)

If you answered 4 or 5 on the last question, **skip** to question 83.

Please tell us how much the following statements describe why you are considering quitting (or you plan to quit) fostering. Use the scale below

	<u>Not at all a reason</u>	2	3	4	<u>Very much a reason</u>
64. Age-will be too old to care for children.	1	2	3	4	5
65. Divorce, marital problems.	1	2	3	4	5
66. Health problems.	1	2	3	4	5
67. Moved/relocated.	1	2	3	4	5
68. Conflict between foster child and my own or adopted child.	1	2	3	4	5
69. Expect to have my own child or more of my own children.	1	2	3	4	5
70. Expect to adopt a child.	1	2	3	4	5
71. May need to return to work or work full-time.	1	2	3	4	5
72. Amount of monthly board payment.	1	2	3	4	5
73. Cannot get the type of child requested.	1	2	3	4	5
74. Poor communication with foster care worker.	1	2	3	4	5
75. Agency is insensitive to my needs/lack of support from the agency.	1	2	3	4	5
76. Do not have a say in child's future.	1	2	3	4	5
77. Lack of respite services.	1	2	3	4	5
78. Problems with children(s)' parents.	1	2	3	4	5
79. Child's behavior/discipline problems.	1	2	3	4	5
80. Health or personal care needs of children will become too difficult to manage.	1	2	3	4	5
81. Have difficulty seeing child leave.	1	2	3	4	5

82. Other reason for not continuing to be a foster parent (specify) _____

83. What **one** thing would be most important in keeping you from terminating as a foster parent?

Part F: Overall Impressions about Foster Parenting

84. What do you find **most** rewarding about being a foster parent?

85. If you were in charge of foster parenting services, what would be the first change you would make?

86. What do you find **least** rewarding about being a foster parent?

87. What kinds of improvements in agency support or services to foster parents do you feel are most needed?

APPENDIX C
FORMER FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

Part A: General questions about you and your family

1. How many years did you foster children? _____

2. Were you approved, licensed or certified as a: (CHECK YES OR NO FOR EACH ITEM.)

	Yes	No
Foster family home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emergency care home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Therapeutic foster family home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Relative foster home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Group home.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. How many foster children did you have in your home? _____

4. How many other children did you have living at home? _____

5. Since you first became a foster parent, how many **foster** children have you had who were:

of children

Related to you by birth or marriage..... _____

Were known to you before placement but not related..... _____

Were neither related nor known to you before placement... _____

Total _____

6. What was your marital status when fostering (CIRCLE ONE.)

Married or living as married..... 01

Divorced..... 02

Separated..... 03

Widow/Widower..... 04

Never married..... 05

7. At the time you stopped being a foster parent, excluding foster care payments, before taxes, what was the total combined annual income of all members of your family who were living in your home? Include the income of family members age 14 and older. (CIRCLE ONE.)

Less than \$7,000.....01
\$7,000-14,999.....02
\$15,000-39,999.....03
\$40,000-\$59,999.....04
\$60,000-\$79,999.....05
More than \$80,000.....06

8. At the time you stopped being a foster parent , what is your current employment status? (CIRCLE ONE.)

Employed full-time (30 hours or more per week).....01
Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week).....02
Unemployed and looking for work.....03
Homemaker not employed outside the home.....04
Disabled or retired, not employed outside the home.....05
Other (specify) _____ 06

9. What is the last year of education you completed? [For example, high school graduation equals 12 years.] _____

of Years

10. What is your race? (CIRCLE ONLY ONE.)

American Indian or Alaskan Native.....01
Black, not Hispanic origin.....02
White, not Hispanic origin.....03
Hispanic.....04
Other (specify) _____ 05

11. What is your age? _____

12. What is your sex? (CIRCLE ONE.)

Female..... 01
Male..... 02

13. What is your religious affiliation? Please list a specific denomination (for example, Baptist, Methodist etc.)

Part B: Satisfaction with Foster Parenting Inventory

Using the scale below, please respond to the following statements about foster parenting. Please answer as honestly as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your former social worker or agency workers. We are interested in your level of satisfaction with foster parenting.

When you were fostering, how satisfied were you with: CIRCLE THE NUMBER CORRESPONDING TO YOUR RESPONSE

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does not Apply
13. Your working relationship with social service agencies (social workers DHR, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
14. Your working relationship with other authorities related to the foster child (schools, counselors, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
15. Your relationship with your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
16. Balancing foster care with your own family's schedule.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
17. The amount of information given by your caseworker about the children placed in your home.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
18. The availability of respite care when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
19. The availability of social workers when needed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
20. Relationship of your own children with your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does not Apply
21. Availability of additional foster parent training.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
22. Assistance from social workers.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
23. Your understanding of the legal system.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
24. Availability of obtaining liability protection/liability insurance.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
25. The ways in which your foster placements have ended.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
26. Opportunities to meet other foster families.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
27. Your role in helping children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
28. Your overall level of satisfaction with foster parenting.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
29. The amount of time spent discussing your foster child(ren) with your caseworker.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
30. Value caseworker places on your opinion, regarding your foster children.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
31. Crisis response of your caseworker(s).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
32. Length of time for caseworker to return phone calls.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
33. Overall experience with your caseworker(s).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
34. Availability of services, in general.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
35. Availability of day care.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
36. Paying for health care expenses not covered by Medicaid.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
37. Transportation for medical services or other appointments.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
38. Amount of money for recreational activities provided for the child.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
39. Time between asking for a service and receiving it.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Does not Apply
40. The time it takes for your caseworker to respond to a crisis situation with your foster child(ren).	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
41. The way your caseworker handles a crisis.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
42. The responsiveness of your caseworker when you have a situation that requires immediate help.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

44. Additional comments about your level of satisfaction with foster parenting:

Part C: Money and Work Benefits

Using the scale below, please respond to the following statements about foster parenting. Please answer as honestly as you can. Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your former social worker or agency workers.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
45. Foster parents should be considered professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Foster parents should receive retirement benefits.	1	2	3	4	5
47. The State should contribute to a social security fund for foster parents so that they could have those benefits when they retire.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Foster parenting requires specialized skills.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Foster parents <i>are</i> paid enough for the work they do.	1	2	3	4	5
51. If foster parents were paid a salary, fostering would become too impersonal.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Foster parents deserve more money.	1	2	3	4	5
53. Foster parents should receive low-interest loans to help with buying cars for transportation and home maintenance needed to maintain their license.	1	2	3	4	5
54. If foster parents were paid a salary, more people would want to be foster parents.	1	2	3	4	5
55. The amount of money paid to foster parents is more than enough to cover their expenses.	1	2	3	4	5
56. Foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars for transportation and upkeep on their home needed to maintain their license.	1	2	3	4	5
57. Foster parents lose money fostering and end up using their own money to pay for fostering.	1	2	3	4	5
58. The amount of money given through the monthly board payments accurately reflects the effort of the job foster parents do.	1	2	3	4	5
59. Foster parents and their families should be eligible for health insurance benefits.	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
60. If foster parents were paid a salary fewer people would quit fostering.	1	2	3	4	5

61. Please describe why you wanted to become a foster parent.

Part E: Reasons for Stopping as a Foster Parent

Please tell us how much the following statements describe why you quit fostering. Use the scale below

	Not at all <u>a reason</u>	2	3	4	Very much <u>a reason</u>
62. Age-was be too old to care for children.	1	2	3	4	5
63. Divorced, marital problems.	1	2	3	4	5
64. Health problems.	1	2	3	4	5
65. Moved/relocated.	1	2	3	4	5
66. Conflict between foster child and my own or adopted child.	1	2	3	4	5
67. Expected to have my own child or more of my own children.	1	2	3	4	5

	<u>Not at all a reason</u>	2	3	4	Very much <u>a reason</u>
68. Expected to adopt a child.	1	2	3	4	5
69. Needed to return to work or work full-time.	1	2	3	4	5
70. Amount of monthly board payment.	1	2	3	4	5
71. Could not get the type of child requested.	1	2	3	4	5
72. Poor communication with foster care worker.	1	2	3	4	5
73. Agency was insensitive to my needs/lack of support from the agency.	1	2	3	4	5
74. Did not have a say in child's future.	1	2	3	4	5
75. Lack of respite services.	1	2	3	4	5
76. Problems with children(s) parents.	1	2	3	4	5
77. Child's behavior/discipline problems.	1	2	3	4	5
78. Health, or personal care needs of children was too difficult to manage.	1	2	3	4	5
79. Had difficulty seeing child(ren) leave.	1	2	3	4	5

80. Other reason for not continuing to be a foster parent (specify).

81. What **one** thing would have been most important in keeping you from terminating as a foster parent?

Part E: Overall Impressions about Foster Parenting

82. What did you find **most** rewarding about being a foster parent?

83. If you were in charge of foster parenting services, what would be the first change you would make?

84. What did you find **least** rewarding about being a foster parent?

85. What kinds of improvements in agency support or services to foster parents did you feel were most needed?

APPENDIX D

IRB PROPOSAL

Procedures

Title of Research Project: Retaining Foster Parents: The Rewards and Costs of Foster Parenting

PI: Misty M. Samya, PhD Student, School of Social Work, University of Alabama.

Purpose

The goal of this research is to achieve a better understanding of the complexities of being a foster parent and enable effective strategies to increase retention and satisfaction. Specifically, the objectives are to examine: (a) what foster parents believe to be the most rewarding aspects of fostering; (b) what foster parents believe to be the most costly; (c) and how foster parents weigh these costs and benefits and ultimately make a decision to continue or give up this role. The research is framed and informed by social exchange theory and will focus on how perception of costs and benefits (i.e., resources) affect the decision to foster children. Consequently, this dissertation will offer a model to predict who will quit and who will continue as a foster parent.

Design

This dissertation will employ survey design for data collection and utilize appropriate statistical techniques for analyses. Surveys packets will be mailed to foster parents. (See Appendices A and B for a draft copy of the survey instrument.)

Participants

Participants will be 100 former and 200 current foster parents who reside in Alabama and (1) have fostered at least six months and (2) if they are no longer fostering, they quit within the last three years.

Participant recruitment

Permission to recruit participants directly from the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) list of approved and formally approved foster parents is pending. I have met with Mrs. Mandy Andrews of DHR, who reviews applications for research and serves as the School of Social Works liaison. She informed me that once I have a formal dissertation proposal in place, she would review it. Subsequently, staff attorneys and other DHR personnel will review it as well. Approval will be granted or rejected pending the outcome of this process. Once approved, I will ask county directors for consent to obtain a mailing list of current and former foster parents. Participants will be recruited from the master list using random sampling techniques. In the event of a rejection from DHR, I will use the same recruitment method to try to obtain a listing of potential participants via the Alabama Foster & Adoptive Parent Association. Snowball sampling techniques are a third option. Specifically, I would ask foster parents whom I know if they would like to participate in this study, or if they know of a foster parent or former foster parent who would like to be a part of the study.

Site of research

Participants' homes will be the site of the research, as packets will be mailed to respondents' residential addresses.

Procedures

Survey packets will include a letter inviting the participants to be a part of the study, a letter of consent, two copies of the survey, two postcards offering the option to enter a lottery-type drawing for a gift card, and a pre-addressed return envelope (see appendices A-G for copies of all survey packet materials)⁴. The fact that both husbands and wives will participate necessitates multiple copies. One week after the survey packets are mailed to participants a reminder postcard will be sent out. This postcard will be sent to *all* participants, so that the PI does not know who has returned surveys and who has not, ensuring anonymity of the respondents.

Participants learn that participation is voluntary when they receive the survey packet. The preface statement also notes that the only financial incentive offered is for those who choose to do so can mail back a postcard and be entered into a lottery-type drawing for a \$100.00 gift card to Target. The rationale is to increase participation. Additionally, participants will receive an informed consent letter that further explains both the purpose of the research and why they are being asked to take part in it.

Sending postcards back with some identifying the name and address of participants presents some difficulty in ensuring respondents' anonymity. As a counter measure, participants are asked to send the postcard back separately from the survey instruments. Postcards will be shredded after the winner is drawn. No one but the PI will ever view the postcards. They will be locked in my office at Farrah Hall. There will be no way to know link the survey to the postcards since no identifying information will be on the survey instrument. No attempt will be made on my part to match the postcards to those

⁴ Note to committee reviewers, these appendices will not match the appendices in this proposal since this is to be a separate document submitted to the IRB committee it has its own set of appendices.

who did or did not participate in the survey. In addition, the postcards will not reveal any information about the study. Thus, any outsider who views the postcard in transit would have no idea that the person sending it participated in this study.

Once surveys are returned, they will be numbered for coding purposes, but this number will in no way link the person who took the survey to the master list of participants. In other words, I will not know who on my original list mailed a survey back. Surveys will be numbered in the order in which they are returned. This number will be used on all written documentation about the participant.

Participants will be asked questions designed to gain demographic information, regarding their attitudes towards foster care services, including service delivery of their caseworkers. They will also be asked what is rewarding to them about fostering and reasons why they have chosen to cease or continue fostering.

Data will be analyzed using SPSS and subsequently presented in aggregate form. Thus, no names or other identifying information will be used either in the dissertation or in any publications or presentations given in the future to disseminate findings. Once the dissertation is completed, all surveys and other identifying information will be destroyed. Results of this study will be disseminated as follows: 1) Defense of my dissertation, with an open invitation to DHR personnel, 2) An executive summary written and submitted to officials at DHR, 3) A series of presentations made to DHR upon their invitation or request, 4) Professional meetings in social work, and 5) Publication in peer reviewed journals.

If given a list of potential participants that list will be held in a locked cabinet in my office in Farrah Hall. Once the reminder postcards are mailed, this list will be shredded.

Debriefing of Participants

Participants will be informed of the potential emotional risks of participating in the study. (After review of the relevant literature, I consider these risks minimal). My phone number and email will be on the consent letter. If any participant should call indicating they are emotionally distressed or that they are otherwise concerned about the project, verbal debriefing will ensue. If a participant has any questions about their rights as a research participant, they will be asked to contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer.

Informed Consent

Participants will be provided with a written explanation of the study purposes (see Appendix E).

Risks and Benefits

Potential risks include 1. The foster parent may become upset given the personal nature of some questions, especially those regarding whether or not they plan to continue fostering.

2. The foster parent may experience emotional distress if they feel their efficacy as foster parents is being questioned. The potential direct benefits to participants include: 1.

Participants may feel empowered having helped to identify strengths and liabilities of the current program. 2. The research could have a cathartic effect on participants from their being able to air their grievances. 3. One participant will be awarded a one hundred dollar gift card.

More generally, the major benefit is in gaining insight into the rewards and costs of fostering and by identifying the stressors that lead to discontinuance of this important role. These findings will likely have direct implications for state and private agencies in charge of these services and could lead to strategies providing new ways to retain foster

parents. By offering research evidence, officials can implement specific policies that address the strengths and shortcomings of the current foster parenting system in this state. This study will help with future recruitment, training, and ongoing work with foster families. By studying specifically what is most rewarding about fostering, agencies can develop strategies to increase those rewards, thus retaining more foster parents. This would decrease the need for constant recruitment, while increasing the likelihood that foster children will be placed with experienced and highly skilled foster parents and ultimately experience placement stability. Furthermore, DHR officials could use findings from this study as a means to request funding for initiatives designed to enhance foster parents retention.

Appendix A: Current Foster Parents Survey⁵**Appendix B. Former Foster Parent Survey⁶****Appendix C: Cover letter to Current Foster Parents**

Dear Foster Parents,

I am a student at The University of Alabama working on my Ph.D. In order to finish school I must carry out a research project. I have chosen to study reasons that might influence people's decision to continue or to stop fostering children. As a former foster parent in Alabama I know how important foster parenting is and also how difficult it can be. This is such an important topic of study.

Please take the time to fill out my survey, it takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. You will be helping a student graduate, and, I hope, helping current and future foster parents. For your trouble, I am offering a chance to win a \$100.00 gift card to Target to one lucky winner to be drawn on _____. If you want to enter the drawing, please fill out the survey then return the postcard provided to you. Your time and help are so much appreciated.

Thank you,

Misty Samya, Student at the University of Alabama

Instructions:

NOTE: Two copies of the survey are provided since both foster mothers and fathers are encouraged to be a part of the study.

1. Read the consent letter (you can keep it for your records).
2. Fill out the survey.
3. Place the completed survey(s) in the postmarked envelope and mail.
4. If you wish to enter the drawing, fill out the postcard and drop it in the mail.

⁵ Omitted as it is a separate appendix in this document.

⁶ Omitted as it is a separate appendix in this document

Appendix D: Cover letter to Former Foster Parents

Dear former Foster Parents,

I am a student at The University of Alabama working on my Ph.D. In order to finish school I must carry out a research project. I have chosen to study reasons that might influence people's decision to continue or to stop fostering children. I too, am a former foster parent, so I know how important foster parenting is and how difficult it can be. Although you are no longer fostering children, information about your experiences and why you decided to stop fostering would provide me with a lot of useful information. This is such an important topic of study.

Please take the time to fill out my survey, it takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. You will be helping a student graduate, and I hope, helping current and future foster parents. For your trouble, I am offering a chance to win a \$100.00 gift card to Target to one lucky winner to be drawn on _____. If you want to enter the drawing, please fill out the survey then return the postcard provided to you. Your time and help are so much appreciated.

Misty Samya

Instructions:

NOTE: Two copies of the survey are provided as both foster mothers and fathers are encouraged to be a part of the study.

1. Read the consent letter (you can keep it for your records).
2. Fill out the survey.
3. Place the completed survey(s) in the postmarked envelope and mail.
4. If you wish to enter the drawing fill out your name and address on the postcard and drop it in the mail.

Appendix E: Sample Letter of Informed Consent

Informed Consent Letter

You and your spouse are invited to participate in a research study. The study is called Retaining Foster Parents: The Rewards and Costs of Foster Parenting. Misty Samya, who is doctoral student, is doing this study. The project is being carried out to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree at the University of Alabama, School of Social Work. My supervising professor is Dr. Debra Nelson-Gardell, Ph.D. Her contact information is work phone: 205.348.2990, email: dnelsong@sw.ua.edu.

What is this study about?

This study is being done to try and find out *what is personally rewarding and costly about fostering children*. In other words, questions ask you what you like⁷ or do not like about fostering children, and asks for your ideas on how to make fostering children better.

Why is this study important--What good will the results do?

This study is important because the results will lead to a better understanding of how foster parents can be better served by the Department of Human Resources (DHR).

Why have I been asked to take part in this study?

You are being asked to take part in this study because either you are a licensed foster parent in Alabama, or you used to be a licensed foster parent in Alabama.

How many people besides me will be in this study?

About 200 other people will be in this study.

What will I be asked to do in this study?

1. You are asked to fill out a survey and mail it back in the pre-addressed envelope provided. Questions on the survey ask you about your experiences as a foster parent. Two surveys are provided in the hopes that both foster mothers and foster fathers will complete a survey. If only one foster parent wants to fill out a survey that is fine. If you are a single foster parent, please disregard the extra copy.

2. *OPTIONAL* To offer my gratitude to those of you willing to fill out a survey I am offering a chance to win a \$100.00 gift-card to Target. One winner will be drawn. Please fill out and mail the pre-stamped postcard back to me to participate in this drawing. You are asked to return the postcard separately from the survey so that your privacy can be protected. After the drawing, the postcards will be destroyed.

How much time will I spend being in this study?

Being in this study will take about 40 minutes.

Will I be paid for being in this study?

⁷ Past tense will be added to letters going out to former foster parents.

You will not be paid for being in this study, unless your name is drawn as the winner of the \$100.00 Target gift card.

Will being in this study cost me anything?

There will be no cost to you except for your time in completing the questionnaires.

Can the researcher take me out of this study?

No, once surveys are returned I will have no way of identifying yours.

What are the benefits (good things) that may happen to me if I am in this study?

Although benefits cannot be promised in research, it is possible that you will have a better understanding of why you now foster, or in the past, fostered children. You will have an outlet to voice frustrations or concerns you may have about fostering children. Also, ways to improve the foster parenting could develop through this research, which may be a benefit if you are still fostering children.

What are the benefits to scientists or society?

This study will help social workers learn how to provide better services to *foster parents*. Society will benefit from less foster parents quitting as more foster children can stay in homes with experienced foster parents.

What are the risks (dangers or harm) to me if I am in this study?

A possible risk from your agreeing to participate is that you may become upset, since you may consider some questions about fostering children as sensitive, especially questions about stopping or continuing in the program.

The information that you share will be held in strict confidence at all times. Hundreds of surveys will be mailed out and I will have no way of knowing who completes a survey, so your responses are anonymous. When the results are written up, no specific locations, or other information that could identify you will be included.

What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?

You can choose not to participate.

What are my rights as a participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary—it is your free choice. You may choose not to take part at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time and throw out the survey. Not returning a survey will not result in any penalty or loss of any benefits you would otherwise receive.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board (IRB) is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the investigator MISTY SAMYA at 205.454.3308. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact Ms. Tanta Myles, The University of Alabama Research Compliance Officer, at (205)-348-5152.

You may keep this form for your records.

Appendix F: Postcard

BACK OF POSTCARD

If you wish to be entered to win a \$100.00 gift card to Target, please fill out and return this postcard. One winner will be drawn. Your chance of winning is estimated to be 1 out of 200. Drawing will be held __ (figure and date will be inserted).

FRONT OF POSTCARD

Your name and address

Return to:

MISTY SAMYA, PHD STUDENT
UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Box 870314
TUSCALOOSA, AL 35487-0314

Appendix G: Reminder Postcard

Misty Samya, PHD Student
University of Alabama
School of Social Work
Box 870314
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0314

On ___ date I mailed you a survey about your experiences as a foster parent, if you have completed the survey and returned it, I would like to say thank you for doing so and wish you luck in the drawing for a \$100.00 gift card. If you have not had a chance yet to fill out the survey, this is a kindly reminder to please fill it out and return it.

PS After you complete the survey, do not forget to return the postcard located in your survey packet that enters you in the drawing. **You could win a \$100.00 Gift Card!** The drawing is on _____.

Thank you for your time,
Misty Samya
Student at the University of Alabama

APPENDIX E
COPY OF EMAIL FROM THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF DHR

From: **James Slaughter <jslaughter@dhr.state.al.us>** Mailed-By: **dhr.state.al.us**
Reply-To: "jslaughter@dhr.state.al.us" <jslaughter@dhr.state.al.us>
To: "m.samya@gmail.com" <m.samya@gmail.com>
Date: **Oct 18, 2006 8:29 AM**
Subject: **My dissertation proposal on foster parent retention**
Reply | Reply to all | Forward | Print | Add sender to Contacts list | Delete this message | Report phishing | Show original | Message text garbled?

Ms Samya,

In Ms Andrews absence, I am pleased to write you in support of your research proposal. When Ms Andrews returns in a few weeks, she will work with you to secure final approval of your proposal if at all possible. I am excited about the use of your research results being of great use to DHR.

James A. Slaughter, Deputy Commissioner

APPENDIX F
RELATIONSHIP OF QUESTIONS TO EACH VARIABLE

Subscale, Availability and Quality of Services

Your working relationship with social service agencies (social workers, DHR, etc.)
Your working relationship with other agencies related to the foster child (schools, counselors, etc.)
The amount of information given by your caseworker(s) about the children placed in your home
The availability of respite care when needed
The availability of social workers when needed
Availability of additional foster parent training
Assistance from social workers
Your understanding of the legal system
Availability of obtaining liability protection
The ways in which your foster placements have ended
Availability of services, in general
Availability of day care
Transportation for medical services or other appointments

Total = 16

Subscale, Financial assistance and work benefits

Paying for health care expenses not covered by Medicaid
Amount of money for recreational activities provided for the child
Foster parents should receive retirement benefits
Paying into social security should be a part of fostering so that foster parents could have these benefits when they retire
Foster parents should receive a salary rather than a board payment
Foster parents are paid enough for the work they do
If foster parents were paid a salary, fostering would become too impersonal
Foster parents deserve more money
Foster parents should receive low-interest loans to help with buying cars for transportation and home maintenance needed to maintain their license
If foster parents were paid a salary more people would want to be foster parents
The amount of money paid to foster parents is more than enough to cover my expenses

Foster parents should receive tax breaks to help with buying cars for transportation and upkeep on their home needed to maintain their license
Foster parents lose money fostering and end up using their own money to pay for fostering
The amount of money foster parents are given through the monthly board payment accurately reflects the effort of the job they do.
Foster parents and their families should be eligible for health insurance benefits
If foster parents were paid a salary fewer people would quit fostering

Total = 16

Subscale, Respect and Recognition

The amount of time spent discussing your foster child(ren) with your caseworker
Value caseworker places on your opinion regarding your foster children
Length of time for caseworker to return phone calls
Overall experience with your caseworker(s)

Total = 4

Subscale, Crisis Response

Crisis response of your caseworker(s)
The time it takes for your caseworker to respond to a crisis situation with your foster family
The way your caseworker handles a crisis
The responsiveness of your caseworker when you have a situation that requires immediate help

Total = 4

Total = 12

Additional Questions regarding rewards

Other reason for becoming a foster parent (specify)

Please look over all of the reasons you checked on questions 59-70 and write the number of the **one** reason that was **most** important to you.

What do you find most rewarding about being a foster parent?

What do you find least rewarding about being a foster parent?

Total = 4

Wild Card Questions

Please describe why you wanted to become a foster parent

What one thing would be most important in keeping you from terminating as a foster parent?

What kinds of improvements in agency support or services to foster parents do you feel are needed

If you were in charge of foster parenting services, what would be the first change you would make?

Total = 4

APPENDIX G

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE THEMES

Table 21

Former Foster Parents: Additional Comments About Satisfaction

<u>Positive Statements made about Fostering</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Love for the children made it all worthwhile/I enjoyed fostering	3
Experience was good	3
Stopped due to having more children of our own	1
Adopted	3
Pay the social workers more so the good ones will stay	1
Social worker was good/good relationship with my social worker	<u>3</u>
Total	14
<u>Voiced Concerns about the Supervisor</u>	
Complained about bad worker to supervisor but ignored	2
Uncaring/unresponsive/unprofessional supervisor	<u>2</u>
Total	4
<u>Voiced Concerns about the Social Worker</u>	
Uncaring/unresponsive/unprofessional social worker	3
First worker good, then bad	4
Lack of help from social worker/felt like I was all by myself	2
Called a "babysitter" or "contract worker"	<u>2</u>
Total	11
<u>Voiced Concerns/Dissatisfaction with System/Agency</u>	
Pay should increase to foster parents	1
Costs of fostering	3
Children deserve more money	1
Not prepared for emergency care	1
Had problems with the agency	1
Disheartened by the system/DHR made it impossible for us	4
My opinion was not valued by anyone	1
DHR/worker not putting child first	1
DHR /worker lying, not keeping word	2
Uncaring/unresponsive/unprofessional supervisor and caseworker	1
Lack of respect from social worker/supervisor	1
DHR tried/placed children that did not fit our requested profile	<u>2</u>
Total	17
<u>Other</u>	
Children went back to biological parents	1
I moved, children were not allowed to move with us	1
Wanted to adopt but it did not work out	2
If foster parents made a salary, it would be for the money/wrong reason	<u>2</u>
Total	6

Table 22

Current Foster Parents: Additional Comments About Satisfaction

<u>Positive Statements made about Fostering</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Social worker was good/good relationship with my social worker	3
Pay the social workers more so the good ones will stay	6
Experience was good	10
Love for the children made it all worthwhile/I enjoyed fostering	16
Total	37
<u>Voiced Concerns about the Supervisor</u>	
Complained about bad worker to supervisor but ignored/covered up	3
Uncaring/unresponsive/unprofessional supervisor	2
Total	5
<u>Voiced Concerns About the Social Worker</u>	
Uncaring/unresponsive/unprofessional social worker	11
First had a good social worker, then bad ones (good ones do not stay)	10
Lack of help from social worker/felt like I was all by myself	5
Called a "babysitter" or "contract worker"	4
Social worker rewarded negative behaviors	1
If I voiced concern worker threatened to remove children	3
Social worker did not return calls	4
Inexperienced caseworker	5
Total	19
<u>Voiced Concerns Over both the Social Worker and Supervisor</u>	
Uncaring and/or unresponsive supervisor and caseworker	3
My opinion was not valued by anyone	3
Lack of respect from social worker/supervisor	8
Supervisor/worker lying, not keeping word	3
The money is not why we quit; it is the way we are treated	3
Total	20
<u>Voiced Concerns/Dissatisfaction with Systematic/Agency</u>	
Pay for Fostering should increase	4
Costs of fostering	8
DHR did not pay on time for medical/dental (collection agency calling us)	2
Children deserve more money	3
DHR did not reimburse as promised or not timely (made me feel bad asking)	4
Had to take the children to many appointments, was not told about mileage	1
Had problems with the agency	3
Disheartened by the system/DHR made it impossible for us	6
DHR/worker not putting child first (uncaring)	6
DHR did not advocate for the children, I had to	2
DHR/Courts moved children back home too soon	5

Children linger in care too long before permanency	3
Social worker turnover	7
Did not get services I needed	1
DHR does not care about black foster children/foster parents	1
Not prepared for emergency care	1
Still fostering, yet can't call children who moved to another placement	1
DHR tried/placed children that did not fit our requested profile	<u>1</u>
Total	59

Table 23

Former Foster Parents: What Was Most Rewarding About Fostering Children?

<u>Helping Children</u>	
<u>Response</u>	
Making a difference in a child's life, seeing them happy	13
Seeing positive changes in the children	4
The love we got from the children	11
Being able to love children, showing unconditional love	11
Making a child feel better when their whole world has been upset	2
Teaching the children, preparing them to be 'better' adults	5
Help children in need/offer them a safe, stable home	5
Being a positive influence	3
Help families so the children can return home	<u>4</u>
Total	58

Wanting Children

Being able to adopt	1
---------------------	---

Table 24

Current Foster Parents: What Was Most Rewarding About Fostering Children?

<u>Helping Children</u>	<u>Response</u>
Making a difference in a child's life, seeing them happy	13
Seeing positive changes in the children	4
The love we got from the children	11
Being able to love children, showing unconditional love	11
Making a child feel better when their whole world has been upset	2
Teaching the children, preparing them to be 'better' adults	5
Help children in need/offer them a safe, stable home	5
Being a positive influence	3
Help families so the children can return home	4
Total	58

<u>Wanting Children</u>	
Being able to adopt	1

Table 25

Former Foster Parents: Why You Decided to Become a Foster Parent

<u>Personal Motivations</u>	<u>Response</u>
Had a lot of love to give/love children	12
Knew a child who got placed in foster care/I/spouse was in foster care	4
To help/make difference in a child's life who is in need/help break cycle	14
To help abused or neglected have a safe stable home	8
Show children love they deserve/have not known	8
Be a positive influence for birth parents/help reunite families	5
Total	51

<u>Religious Motivation</u>	
God's plan/ministry	5
The Lord has blessed me I wanted to give back	2
Total	7

<u>Wanted Children</u>	
To adopt	5
It made me feel good to help/a rewarding profession/to give back	2
Children are grown/could not have children of my own	5
Total	12

Table 26

Current Foster Parents: Why You Decided to Become a Foster Parent

<u>Motivated to Help Others</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Had a lot of love to give/love children	22
To help/make difference in a child's life who is in need/help break cycle	32
To help abused or neglected have a safe stable home	12
Show children love they deserve/have not known	11
Be a positive influence for birth parents/help reunite families	6
Total	83
<hr/>	
<u>Religious Motivation</u>	
The Lord has blessed me, I wanted to pass these blessings	9
God's plan/ministry/the Christian thing to do	17
Total	26
<hr/>	
<u>Personal Motivations</u>	
It made me feel good to help/a rewarding profession/to give back	10
Children are grown/could not have children of my own	8
Knew a child who got placed in foster care/I/spouse was in care	14
To adopt	11
Total	43

Table 27

Former Foster Parents: Other Reasons You Stopped Fostering

<u>Foster Parent Personal Reasons</u>	<u>Response</u>
Quit for due to normal life changes (health, moved)	2
Adopted	11
Wanted to adopt, child returned to family, disrupted mine	2
Could not use corporal punishment	1
Behavior problems of children	4
Too time intensive with doctor, trips to DHR, and training etc	2
Total	22
<hr/>	
<u>Agency/System/Supervisor</u>	
Too much repetitive paperwork/training	1
Too much time until TPR	1
Not giving the birth parents a chance to give up rights, talking them out of it	1
Having to keep scheduling visits with birth families, who did not show or always were late	1
Late board payments	3
Late day care or mileage reimbursements	2
Staff turnover/Caseloads	1
Tired of hassles/agency/fighting the system	3
DHR did not advocate for the children, I had to	1
DHR did not pay on time for medical/dental (collection agency calling us)	2
Kept asking me to take teenagers when I had requested younger children	1
Wanted to adopt, but DHR kept placing short-term children	1
Complaint filed, we were not adequately trained in discipline techniques	1
Too picky about home requirements	1
Total	20
<hr/>	
<u>Other</u>	
Important surgery cancelled, due to paperwork not being filled out	1
Medically fragile child went 9 months without a wheelchair	1
DHR would not help, had to go home and feed child via feeding tube every day on lunch break	1
DHR let our license lapse	1
Total	4

Table 28

Current Foster Parents: Other Reasons You Stopped Fostering

<u>Foster Parent Personal Reasons</u>	<u>Response</u>
Adopting	4
Having more children of my own	1
Could not use corporal punishment	1
Child returned, disrupted my family	2
Total	8
<hr/>	
<u>Agency/System/Supervisor</u>	
Tired of hassles/agency/fighting the system	5
DHR intimidated us when we voiced concerns	1
Courts/DHR serve biological parents/family want to keep numbers down	5
DHR pushed to reunify not in child's best interest/parents made no progress	8
DHR not concerned with Black families, more money goes to white families	1
Staff turnover/caseloads	1
Low board payment	3
Having to do visits with birth families, who did not show or always were late	1
Too much repetitive paperwork	1
Complaint filed, we were not adequately trained in discipline techniques	1
Total	27
<hr/>	
<u>Social Worker</u>	
Social worker let Medicaid lapse/or took 6 months to 1 yr to enroll	1
Calls not returned for a week or more	1
Lack of respect from my caseworker	4
Unresponsive/uncaring/slow to act social worker	6
Total	12

Table 29

Former Foster Parents: What One Thing Might Have Kept You From Considering Quitting?

<u>Normal life changes</u>	<u>Response</u>
Adopting	6
Had to work more	2
Total	8
<hr/>	
<u>Systemic Reasons</u>	
A Better system	6
Better communications with DHR	3
Not having to fight DHR for everything the child needed	2
Support: if DHR had cared and helped me	4
If DHR put children first not biological parents/families	2
A better TPR process/give foster parents a voice in court	3
Pay/more money for the children	6
Being honest about the children in our home	1
Remove children timely, when we request	1
Better attorney/judge	2
To be able to foster a child in the age range I requested	2
Total	32
<hr/>	
<u>Social Worker</u>	
Better crisis response from my caseworker	1
A social worker who valued my opinion/If I had a voice	6
If the social worker had a better attitude, were responsive	16
A social worker that returned calls	1
Total	24

Table 30

Former Foster Parents: If You Were in Charge of Foster Parent Services, What Would Be the First Change You Would Make?

<u>Address staff issues</u>	<u>Response</u>
Work to reduce social work turnover	1
Better crisis response	2
Make social workers accountable for their actions/get rid of bad ones	6
Total	9
<hr/>	
<u>Services/Training for Foster Parents</u>	
More services (day care, respite)	3
More training	4
Train us on legal information	1
Increase the board payment/more pay	7
Pay board payments, and reimbursements on time	1
Help with visitation, do not have visits if they harm children	3
Total	19
<hr/>	
<u>Acknowledge Foster Parents Skill Set, Let Them Help with Decisions</u>	
More help with start up cost when a new child comes with nothing	1
Give the foster parents more information about children you place with them, evaluate them	1
Be there for your foster parents, back them	1
Allow foster children to stay in touch after they leave	1
Get rid of foster parents who are in it for the money	1
Total	5
<hr/>	
<u>Other Responses</u>	
Not allow social workers to give children any false hope	1
Terminate parental rights faster or go ahead and reunify	3
Nothing now	8
Improve communication between the state and the county agencies	1
Total	13

Table 31

Current Foster Parents: If You Were in Charge of Foster Parent Services, What Would Be the First Change You Would Make?

<u>Address Staff Issues</u>	<u>Response</u>
Hire more social workers	15
Work to reduce social work turnover	2
Caseworker would be more accessible to foster parents	7
Better crisis response	3
Make social workers accountable for their actions	10
Total	37
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<u>Services/Training for Foster Parents</u>	
More services (day care, respite)	8
More training	1
Train us on legal information	7
Pay board payments, and reimbursements on time	7
Increase the board payment/more pay	14
Help with visitation, do not have visits if they harm children	5
Total	42
<hr/>	
<u>Acknowledge foster parents skill set, let them help with decisions</u>	
Be there for your foster parents, back them	5
Give us a say, reunification/kinship care is not always best	13
Give us a say in adoption, children go to 'suspect' homes	4
Communicate, show appreciation, respect foster parents	19
Give the foster parents more information about children you place with them, evaluate the children	13
More help with start up cost when a new child comes with nothing	6
Recruit quality foster parents	2
Get ride of foster parents who are in it for the money	1
Total	63
<hr/>	
<u>Other Responses</u>	
Terminate parental rights faster or go ahead and reunify	7
Improve communication between the state and the county agencies and us	2
More placement stability for the children	1
Put children's safety/well-being first	9
Have non-compliant parents pay child support	1
Add a monthly newsletter from each county	1
Total	21

Table 32

Former Foster Parents: What Is Least Rewarding About Fostering Children?

<u>Systemic Problems</u>	<u>Response</u>
System is failing children	1
Kids returning home before the parents are ready	2
Fund not being used properly for the children	1
Low board payment/the pay	3
Social work turnover/caseloads	1
Lack of support/help when requested	3
Asking for services that should be in place already, made to feel bad for asking	1
Lack of communication among social workers, foster parents, birth parents	1
No legal rights, even if you care for a child for years	1
Not understanding the court process	1
Dealing with DHR/the system	5
Being lied to/used by DHR/social worker	3
Being treated like a babysitter, not being appreciated	5
Total	28
<hr/>	
<u>Least Rewarding, Personal</u>	
Stress of fostering	1
Having to hear some of the stories of what the children went through	1
What the children have to go through	1
Children I could not help	1
Dealing with birth parents/visitation problems	3
Not being able to discipline foster children as I discipline my own	1
Attitude/behavior of some of the children	4
No contact after a foster child leaves, worry for them	1
A child having to leave/saying goodbye	1
Total	14

Table 33

Current Foster Parents: What Is Least Rewarding About Fostering Children?

<u>Systemic Problems</u>	<u>Response</u>
System is failing children	5
Asking for services that should be in place already, made to feel bad for asking	2
Lack of communication between social workers, foster parents, birth parents	8
Adoptions going to 'suspect' homes to clear cases	2
No legal rights, even if you care for a child for years	3
Lack of support/help when requested	7
Funds not being used properly for the children	1
Not understanding the court process	5
Kids returning home before the parents are ready	3
Dealing with DHR/the system	14
Being lied to/used by DHR/social worker	4
Being treated like a babysitter, not being appreciated	9
Having no voice/no say	2
Social workers do not think my problems/child's problems warrant attention	10
Not having enough information about the child/caseworker withholding information	5
Low board payment/the pay	6
Lack of uniformity between counties	1
Social work turnover/high caseloads	5
Total	92
<hr/>	
<u>Least Rewarding-Personal</u>	
Stress of fostering	1
What the children have to go through	7
Children returning to a bad environment when you worked so hard	11
A child having to leave/saying goodbye	7
No contact after a foster child leaves, worry for them	3
Attitude/behavior of some of the children	6
Dealing with birth parents/visitation problems	5
Children I could not help	3
The public perception of us	2
Total	45

Table 34

Former Foster Parent: What Kind of Improvements in Agency Supportive Services Were Needed?

<u>Service Improvements</u>	<u>Response</u>
Overhaul the system	1
Offer more training	1
An evaluation unit so children can be properly placed	1
Offer better transportation services to DHR, doctor etc.	2
Give foster parents more information about the children in their homes	1
Give foster parents a say in court with judges/lawyers/social workers, we know these kids	3
Offer more counseling/make it available to foster families	4
Respite care	1
Make sure visitations are in a safe environment	1
Quicker response to foster parents' problems	3
Expand services to special needs children	1
Reduce social work turnover, increase their pay/decrease caseloads	7
Give older children a voice about where they live	1
Give children more than a Guardian Ad Litem to stand up for their rights	1
Lobby for the state to adequately fund DHR	1
More money/increase board payment to help children	5
More foster parents	1
	Total 35
<u>Improve Social Worker Service Delivery</u>	
Social worker would help foster parents, respond to their needs, not ignore them	1
Terminate unresponsive and/or disrespectful social workers	5
Allow foster parents to voice concerns without threat of removal of children	1
Make social workers prove they made home visits	2
Social worker must return calls	1
Let the foster parent know of scheduling changes	1
	Total 11
<u>Issues with Supervisors or General Comments</u>	
More cooperation/communication between the foster parent social worker agency, state	3
Work together as a team, show respect, be fair--don't favor some foster parents	19
Give foster parents more input the job the social worker and supervisors do	1
Supervisors to respond to all calls made to them by foster parents	2
Get supervisors who will help foster parents/get rid of ones who will not	3
Terminate rights timely	3
Put the children first	1
All was good	1
	Total 32
<u>Funding Issues</u>	
Pay bills to foster parents timely	4
Make sure foster parents are not having to spend their own money	2
	Total 6

Table 35

Current Foster Parents: What Kind of Improvements in Agency Supportive Services Are Needed?

<u>Service Improvements</u>	<u>Response</u>
Offer more counseling/make it available to foster families	2
Respite care	5
Quicker response to foster parents' problems	1
Expand services to special needs children	1
Give foster parents more information about the children in their homes	3
Offer better transportation services to DHR, doctor etc.	6
Reduce social work turnover, increase their pay/reduce caseloads	12
Put the children first	2
More foster parents	1
Overhaul the system	2
	Total 35
<u>Improve Social Worker Service Delivery</u>	
Terminate unresponsive and/or disrespectful social workers	1
Make social workers prove they made home visits	1
Social worker must return calls	3
Allow foster parents to voice concerns without threat of removal of children	2
Social worker would help foster parents, respond to their needs, and not ignore them	2
Hold social workers accountable	2
	Total 11
<u>Issues With Supervisors or General Comments</u>	
Get supervisors who will help foster parents/get rid of ones who will not	3
Supervisors to respond to all calls made to them by foster parents	1
All was good	1
Terminate rights timely	1
Better Communication between the foster parent social worker, agency, and state	20
Work together as a team, show respect, be fair--don't favor some foster parents	18
Make sure visitations are in a safe environment	1
	Total 45
<u>Funding Issues</u>	
Make sure foster parents are not having to spend their own money	6
Pay bills to foster parents timely	4
More money/increase board payment to help children	10
	Total 20