Foster parent retention: A study of the Orange County Social Services Foster Care Program

Mary Silvestrini
Erika Rosa Volz

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FOSTER PARENT RETENTION: A STUDY OF THE ORANGE COUNTY
SOCIAL SERVICES FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Mary Silvestrini
Erika Rosa Volz
June 1995
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June 6, 1995

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Abstract

From 1982 to 1991, there was a 64% increase in the number of children in the foster care system nationally because of an increase in child abuse, neglect, and abandonment. Although there was an increase in the number of children needing foster care, there was a decrease in the number of foster homes in the United States. This study measured the level of satisfaction of foster parents with the Orange County Foster Care Program. The findings of this study showed significant results at the .05 probability level or better relating to foster parent satisfaction in the following areas: Communication between social workers and foster parents, financial reimbursement, and the way licensing complaints were handled. The researchers recommend team training between social workers and foster parents, increased financial reimbursement, and the provision of non-agency personnel to investigate licensing complaints as specific ways to improve foster parent satisfaction, and consequently, increasing the retention of foster parents.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Introduction

Problem Statement

From 1982 to 1991 the estimated number of foster children in the United States grew from 262,000 to 429,000, a 64 percent increase (Barth, Courtney, Berrick, Albert, 1994). In California, the number of foster children grew from 26,000 in 1980 to 51,000 in 1987, a 96 percent increase (Anderson, 1988). Anderson (1988) also reports that the dropout rate for foster parents is 50 percent or more, based on the Community Care Licensing Department for the state of California. Nationwide, Evans (1993) reports that there was an overall decrease in the number of available licensed foster homes, with 86 percent of the states reporting decreases from 10 percent to 20 percent. Researchers recognize that contributing causes for the increase in children needing foster care is due to an increase in child abuse, neglect, and abandonment (Evans, 1993; DiNitto, 1991). This increase in abuse makes it even more important to retain the existing foster parents in the foster care system. In addition, Barth et al. (1994) found that an increasing number of children are currently entering the foster care system with more severe medical, emotional, and behavioral problems than in the past. Anderson (1988) theorizes that as the number of foster children grows,
quality foster homes will become overcrowded and the foster care agencies may be forced to lower their standards for foster homes. Although this problem is salient to the concern of social service agencies across the country, a literature search conducted by the researchers of this study failed to find significant empirical research as to how to retain existing foster parents in the foster care system.

Foster care in America has its origins in the early colonial indenture system. Abandoned and destitute children were bound out to families who could care for them and teach them a trade (Laird & Hartman, 1985). The welfare of the child during this period was based on the belief that families and Christian charities were responsible for impoverished children.

During the second half of the nineteenth century "child saving" was the impetus of the Child Welfare movement. Social scientists emphasized the importance of environment over heredity in shaping a child's character; therefore, "good Christian families" were the ideal refuge for rescued children (Laird & Hartman, 1985).

During the turn of the century, Charles Birtwell began asking "what does the child need?" rather than "where shall we put the child?" As director of the Boston Children's Aid Society, Charles Birtwell helped move foster family care into the modern era. Foster family care was viewed as temporary and as a treatment-oriented service to families.
and children (Laird & Hartman, 1985).

In 1959 Maas and Engler's study dispelled the belief that foster care was temporary. They found that more than half of the foster children would likely remain in foster care until their maturity. The study also showed that only a fraction would return to their families, and a few would be adopted (Laird & Hartman, 1985). As the situation continued throughout the sixties and seventies, public awareness of the problem increased. A new direction toward permanency planning developed in which foster care was viewed as a decision-making system rather than a treatment service to families and children (Hartman & Laird, 1985). In 1980, legislation for permanency planning was passed.

The 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA), known also as the permanency planning law, was intended to maintain abused and neglected children safely with their biological families, whenever possible (Barth et al., 1994). The AACWA was enacted in response to children being lost in long-term foster care. In some cases, children were poorly cared for and shuffled between numerous placements (Jansson, 1993).

As an attempt to preserve biological families, the Act advocates the use of home-based placements and provides them with prevention services. The Act requires agencies to construct effective planning for the future of foster children, it monitors the child's progression through
mandated reporting methods, and it places a time limit on the length of non-permanent substitute care placements. These requirements guard against losing children in the foster care system. Finally, the Act protects parents whose children are in non-permanent substitute care placements by locating the children in close proximity to their parents and by allowing the parents to participate in treatment planning (Barth et al., 1994).

Since foster care recruitment remains low today and the number and severity of incidents of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment increases, it is important to insure that the existing foster parents remain in the system (Evans, 1993; DiNitto, 1991). Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore possible means by which to retain existing licensed foster parents by questioning their satisfaction regarding various aspects of the foster care system. The relevance of this study for social work practice is to explore ways of retaining existing foster families in the child welfare system by allowing the foster parents to express their satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with their specific children's services agency.

Literature Review

Research in foster care has primarily been conducted on foster families that have exited the foster care program. A literature search by the researchers of this project showed
that only a few studies have examined ways in which to retain existing foster parents (Anderson, 1988; Barth et al., 1994; & Cautley and Aldridge, 1975). The importance of studying retention is to gain insight into reasons why foster parents remain in a demanding foster care system.

Reasons for foster parents leaving the foster care system may be influenced by the changing characteristics of children entering the child welfare system as well as changes in the type of families who are adopting. Barth et al. (1994) report that an increasing number of children entering the system present with serious medical, emotional, and behavioral problems. In 1985 the State Department of Social Services (SDSS) in California evaluated a random sample of children receiving placement prevention services and found that approximately 40 percent of the families had health problems and 55 percent had substance abuse problems (SDSS, 1986). Another study performed in 1989 using the same methodology as the former, found that 51 percent of families had health problems and that 88 percent had substance abuse problems; an increase of 11 percent and 33 percent respectively in just four years (Barth et al., 1994).

The increase of substance abuse in families has resulted in an increase in drug-exposed infants entering the foster care system. A study of ten hospitals by the General Accounting Office (1989) found that of the 4,000 drug-
exposed infants born in 1989, approximately 1,200 were placed in foster care at birth. This trend indicates a need for specialized foster care families since many regular foster family homes may not be equipped to handle these children.

The AACWA of 1980 had an interesting impact on the child welfare system. While on the one hand it made removing children from their biological families more difficult, it made adopting a foster child, by the foster parents, more feasible. According to Barth et al. (1994), statistics in 1980 showed that 40 percent of all adoptions of children in California involved in child welfare services were made by foster parents. In 1991, foster parents accounted for 92 percent of all adoptions involving children in the child welfare system (Barth et al., 1994). Barth et al. (1994) also recognize that adoptive parents are more likely to be relatives of the adopted child. However, one consequence of adopting a foster child is that the foster parent ceases to foster, thus reducing the pool of available foster parents.

Other studies on foster parents who have ceased being caregivers found numerous reasons for their leaving the system. Barth et al. (1994) found that within a one year period only one-third of foster parents had received training of any kind. Furthermore, 91% of kinship providers had received no training within the one year period. Both
groups of foster parents suggested a need for more training, especially in caring for drug exposed infants (Barth et al., 1994). Boyd and Remy (1979) believe there is a positive correlation between training and placement stability. Their contention is that better training of foster parents would reduce the incidence of failed placements, increase the chances of successful placement outcomes, and raise the probability of retention (Boyd & Remy, 1979). In addition, other literature supports training as a form of improving communication and support between the foster care agency and the foster parents (Bastian & Odams, 1983; Boyd & Remy, 1978; Pasztor, 1985 & Titterington, 1990).

Furthermore, studies have consistently found that the role of the foster parent is often vague and ambiguous in that the foster parent is often treated as half colleague and half client (Jones, 1975; Titterington, 1990). In a San Diego County survey, foster parents reported that it would be beneficial for social worker training to emphasize the role of the foster parent (Evans, 1993).

Barth et al. (1994) found that in the area of foster care involving specialized foster parents, higher reimbursement contributed to their decision to be foster parents. It was also found that this was an important factor in the recruitment of specialized foster parents. Higher reimbursement becomes a viable option in retaining foster parents when the alternative to foster care is group
homes. Barth et al (1994) report that, of the $800 million allocated for out-of-home care in California in Fiscal Year (FY) 1991-1992 serving more than 80,000 children, 63 percent ($504 million) was spent on group care, which only serviced 14 percent (11,200) of the children receiving out-of-home care. This indicates that group care for young children is more than 10 times the cost of standard foster care. A 1990 report by the Senate Office of Research in California recommends ways to improve the foster care system. They recommend a new category, "Professional Foster Parent," which would have the following characteristics: "Provision of specialized care for high-risk infants and young children, particularly those likely to remain in long-term foster placement; provision of care to children who otherwise would be placed in group homes; provision for placement of two or possibly three children in a home; requirements that foster parents possess appropriate education, especially in child development or nursing; payments of $2,000 or more per month per child."

A 1988 California study performed in ten Bay Area counties found consistent complaints among foster parents who left the system. Reasons for parents ceasing to foster in order of frequency were as follows: "Foster Care System Problems" (35%) which included, frustration from the legal process, court systems, and permanent placement plans of foster children, and foster parents' perception of being
"blacklisted" when children were no longer placed with them; "Duties and Demands of Foster Parenting" (26%) which included, high demands on time, strain on biological family, stress from birth parents' visits; and "Financial Considerations/Burdens" (15%) which included, insufficient pay and respite care (Anderson, 1988). Less frequently reported reasons for leaving foster parenting (10%) included, adopting the foster child, change of residence or marital status, and birth of their own child (Anderson, 1988).

Although these studies indicate that foster parents have a variety of grievances with the foster care system, there remains a significant number of foster parents within the system. Barth et al. (1994) have found that general satisfaction with the foster care system exists within the group of specialized foster care (SFC) parents, those who specialize in the care of children with special needs, such as, developmental disabilities and drug exposed infants. Key findings regarding SFC parents were that they received more training, regular social worker support, higher pay, and access to additional community services. It is important, therefore, to look at the factors that keep foster parents in the system, not only to measure satisfaction, but also to improve the relationship between the agency and the foster parents.
Problem Focus

This research project takes a positivist orientation to explore the topic of retention of current foster parents. This study is specific to foster parents in the Orange County Children's Services Agency. The purpose of this study is to identify areas that foster parents find important and satisfying within the foster care system. In conducting this study, it is the expectation of these researchers that this study will become the basis for the development of a comprehensive approach for retaining foster parents.

Positivist research usually addresses causality. Because this is an exploratory study, causal relationships were not drawn. However, the researchers examined the premise that the higher the level of satisfaction with the following independent variables: "Placement vacancies," "licensing issues," "placement problems," "training," "foster parent resources," and "foster parent recognition," the more likely foster parents will remain in the foster care system.

Two major social work roles were evaluated in this study. First, the role of administrator/policy maker involved a needs evaluation of the existing foster parent training program for social workers and foster parents in the Orange County Children's Services Agency. The
researchers anticipate that changes in agency policy will result in better training for social workers and foster parents. This will positively affect direct practice, the second major social worker role.

The areas explored in this study pertain to foster care systems problems. These areas include, improved communication between the agency and the foster parents, a well defined role for the foster parent, and sufficient respite care. In order to address these problems and needs, this study measures the satisfaction levels of current foster parents by questioning their reasons for remaining in the system. The results of this research will be submitted to the Orange County Children's' Services administrators who will then assign a task force to assess the current foster care program based on the outcome of this study. The expectation is that the task force will recommend a revision to the present foster care program which will improve training for both foster parents and social workers. If improvements are implemented, the existing problems and needs of foster parents should be alleviated and foster parent retention should increase.

Method

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this research project was to examine the
reasons why foster parents remain in the foster care system. This was accomplished by studying foster parent's satisfaction levels with the foster care system. The study specifically targeted the Orange County Foster Care Program. The researchers' intention was to use the results of this study as a vehicle, not just for future studies, but also to start the process of reconstructing the foster care program in Orange County Social Services Agency.

This positivist study had an exploratory design since the question of why foster parents remain in the foster care system had not been adequately addressed in the literature. Research had focused primarily on why foster parents have left the system. Since exploratory research is the first step toward causal research, this study was the starting point in an effort to gather and expand on this limited body of knowledge.

**Sampling**

A random sample of current licensed foster parents providing long-term foster care for Orange County Social Services Agency were asked to participate in this study. As of February 1995, the total number of licensed foster parents providing long-term foster care was 398. Foster homes offering long-term foster care, provide foster children a family-like setting while their biological parents undergo Court ordered treatment or serve as a
permanent placement if biological parental rights are terminated.

From the 398 foster homes administering long-term foster care, the researchers randomly selected 210 homes. The addresses of the 398 foster homes were gathered by using a list of foster home address labels generated by Orange County Social Services Agency and categorized by zip codes. Each address label had a 57% chance of being selected. A large sample was chosen in order to secure a large survey return, since the normal return rate for first mailings is 25%. Randomized selection was accomplished by the researchers selecting every other name on the sheets of address labels until 210 labels were compiled. Of the 210 surveys mailed out, 55 were returned to the researchers within the 10 day period given to foster parents in which to respond. Two of the surveys were returned from the postmaster stamped "address unknown" and one was returned with a letter stating that the survey did not apply. This left a total of 52 foster parents (25%) responding to the surveys.

Data Collection

Data from the foster parents was collected by means of a self-administered survey (See Appendix A). The surveys were mailed to 210 Orange County foster parents and included both qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey
adopted eight applicable questions from existing surveys conducted on foster parents who have left the system. By using questions already tested, validity for those questions has been established. New questions were also created specifically to address the question: What keeps foster parents in the system? Closed-ended questions utilized the Likert scale and rank order for measurements. Demographic questions measuring such variables as age, sex, and number of years as a foster parent were also included. Demographic data provided a sample of the profile of foster parents within the Orange County Social Services Agency. Open-ended questions were used and the results evaluated using open-coding techniques as established in Strauss and Corbin (1990). The current study utilized open-ended questions to allow for subjective responses. This allowed foster parents to respond freely to such questions as: "What, if anything, can be done to encourage you to continue to be a foster parent?" Responses were classified in categories according to common themes. The unit of analysis was the person answering the questionnaire.

The researchers in this study created a new survey which utilized questions from The Foster Home Retention Survey conducted by Sharon Anderson (1988) and from The National Foster Parent Survey carried out by James Bell Associates, Inc. (1991). It also included 51 original questions specifically created to determine factors
associated with current foster parent satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. This new instrument was created because surveys in the past have focused on the negative reasons of why foster parents have left the system. The majority of foster parents left the foster care system due to problems with the agency. This indicated that there was something inherently faulty with the system and that, if those conditions were corrected, more foster parents would remain in the system. But since the current foster parents had been exposed to the same system and continued to remain, this study sought to identify those aspects which contribute to retention of foster parents, a rather different concern.

In order to ensure the face validity of this instrument the researchers pre-tested the instrument. By gathering feedback from two California State University of San Bernardino professors, six Orange County Social Services Agency administrators, the Orange County Foster Parent Advisory Board, and two non-foster parents, these researchers were able to address and correct for vague and ambiguous questions. A strength in the validity of this instrument was in using a standardized survey for all the participants. Another advantage was that the population of current foster parents had not been recently surveyed, thus reducing potential for bias due to repetitive questioning.

A disadvantage to the mail survey was that it had a low return rate which could influence the generalizability of
the results. Research indicates that most surveys generate a 25% return rate on the first mailing, a finding that held true in this particular study. Another limitation, intrinsic to all surveys, was that questions had to be general enough to be appropriate to all respondents. As a result, pertinent information such as specific reasons why a foster parent was satisfied or dissatisfied with the foster care system could be missed (Babbie, 1992). Although this was a concern, the current study reduced the likelihood of missing pertinent information by incorporating qualitative questions that allowed for subjective responses. In this way, foster parents could supplement general answers with specifics on how the foster care system individually affects them and what recommendations they have for it.

Procedure

The self-administered surveys were mailed to 210 Orange County foster parents along with a letter of consent (See Appendix B), a debriefing statement (See Appendix C), and a self-addressed postage paid return envelope. The letter of consent explained the intent of the study and ensured the respondents who all information was kept confidential. Respondents were informed that the letters of consent and their signatures were separated from the surveys by the researchers and that their consent would not link them to the surveys in any way. Respondents had approximately 10
days in which to complete and return the survey. One month prior to sending the survey, the Foster Care Liaison Officer announced in the Foster Parent Newsmemo that the surveys were forthcoming. To further ensure confidentiality to the respondents, return envelopes were addressed to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino where the researchers collected and evaluated the data.

Protection of Human Subjects

In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the foster parents in this study, several steps were taken. First, a letter of consent was attached to every survey sent explaining the purpose of the study and detailing how the participants' rights would upheld. The foster parents were instructed to sign the consent form, take a copy if they wished, and return it with the completed survey. The foster parents were assured that their signatures on the "Consent Forms" were only part of a protocol for the California State University San Bernardino research committee and were not used to identify the respondent or released to the Social Services Agency. Foster parents were informed that letters of consent would be detached immediately following arrival and placed in a separate file titled consent forms.

Completed surveys were mailed to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino,
analyzed by the researchers, and only the results were given to the Social Services Agency. Foster parents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could cease to answer questions at any time. A telephone number was included in the debriefing statement, which respondents were instructed to retain, in the event that foster parents had questions regarding the survey or the purpose of the study.

Results

To analyze the "Foster Parent Retention Survey," quantitative and qualitative procedures were utilized. Both procedures were necessary to analyze this survey since foster parents responded to both quantitative and open-ended questions. The survey contained demographic and contingency questions (See Appendix A). The contingency question contained three to six parts, each focusing on a particular independent variable, such as "Foster Parent Recognition." The questions elicited rank order responses, which were in turn, followed by open-ended questions to evoke more detail. How the foster parent responded to the initial question for each variable, dictated what part of the question he or she would answer next.

Demographic data were analyzed using univariate statistics to find the measure of central tendency for such nominal, ordinal, and ratio level variables as, level of income and number of foster children in a household. Contingency questions were
analyzed using univariate statistics as well as open-coding methods found in Corbin and Strauss (1990).

The following independent variables were examined in the contingency questions: "Placement vacancies", "licensing issues," "placement problems," "foster parent training," "foster parent resources," and "foster parent recognition." Because this is an exploratory study, causal relationships were not drawn. However, the researchers examined the hypotheses that the higher the level of satisfaction with the aforementioned independent variables, the more likely foster parents would remain in the foster care system. In order to analyze whether a significant relationship existed between the independent and dependent variables, the dependent variable, level of satisfaction, was cross-tabulated with the independent variables using Chi-Square to measure significance. The dependent variable was measured using a four point Likert scale, with one being positive and four being negative.

Demographic Data

Of 210 questionnaires mailed to foster parents in Orange County, 52 (25%) were returned. Demographic data can be found in Table 1. Forty percent of the respondents had been licensed foster parents for five years or less. Seventy-one percent of the respondents had two foster parents living in the home. The average number of children foster homes were licensed to care for at one time was 2.3
Table 1. Description of Demographic Data for Long-Term Foster Parents in the Orange County Foster Care Program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Description</th>
<th>Number Responding to Question n=</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licensed 5 years or less</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two foster parents in home</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children home is licensed for</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual number of children fostered per home</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range of children most commonly fostered</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>0 to 10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range foster parents prefer to foster</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0 to 6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found behavioral problems particularly stressful in foster children</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.0*</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children placed similar to type requested within last 5 years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1.0*</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster parents who are 40 years of age or older</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.0*</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total combined annual income of $30,000 or more</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4.0*</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied or somewhat satisfied with financial reimbursement</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.0*</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect to continue fostering within next 5yrs</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemplating stopping to foster within next 2 years</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.0*</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* indicates a median score
and the average number of children currently being fostered per home was 2.4. The ages of children currently fostered ranged from birth to 10 years, however, the age of children foster parents preferred to foster, ranged from birth to 6 years.

Thirty-five percent of the respondents indicated behavioral problems as a characteristic of foster children that they found particularly stressful. Seventy-one percent of foster parents indicated that within the last five years, children placed with them have been similar to the type of child they requested. Eighty percent of the respondents were 40 years of age or older. Seventy-three percent of the respondents had a total combined annual income of $30,000 or above.

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that
they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the financial reimbursement (See Figure 1). Of the 36 respondents who answered the question, "How many more years do you expect to foster?," thirty-eight percent indicated that they expected to continue fostering more than five years. Twenty-five percent of all respondents are contemplating stopping to foster within the next two years.

Level of foster parent satisfaction was cross-tabulated, using Chi-Square at the .05 or better level of significance, with demographic data (See Table 2). The following significant relationships were found at the .05 level or better between: Foster parent satisfaction with financial reimbursement and whether the foster parent was contemplating stopping to foster (See Table 2), foster parent satisfaction with placement vacancies and whether the foster parent was contemplating stopping to foster (See Table 2), and foster parent satisfaction with placement problems and whether foster parent was contemplating withdrawal from the system (See Table 2). It is also important to note that a significant Chi-Square was found between the expected years of fostering and total family income level (See Table 2).
Table 2. Results of Chi Square Cross-Tabulations at p < .20.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-Tabulation (dependent variable by independent variable)</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Degrees Of Freedom</th>
<th>Pearson's Chi-Square Probability Level (p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial reimbursement satisfaction by will stop fostering in two years</td>
<td>8.29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected years to foster by total income category</td>
<td>11.27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by will stop fostering in two years</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by feel home is intentionally overlooked</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by do not know why vacancy exists</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to how licensing complaint was handled by years licensed</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to how licensing complaint was handled by how licensing complaint was handled</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement problems by will stop fostering in two years</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.02*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement problems by age category</td>
<td>16.38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction of placement problems by Contacted social worker's supervisor</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement problems by disagreed with permanent placement of child</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following sections further address the research question, "what keeps foster parents in the foster care system," by evaluating the relationship between the independent variables in the contingency questions, with level of foster parent satisfaction. Furthermore, the sections address the qualitative data.

Placement Vacancies

The questions regarding "Placement Openings" targeted any foster parents who had an unfilled vacancy for three or more months. If a foster parent responded "yes," the researchers attempted to elicit information as to what the foster parent believed was the reason for this vacancy.

There were no significant results between the independent variables in "placement vacancies" and level of foster parent satisfaction (See Table 2). Figure 2 displays the percentage of foster parents who responded to various reasons for why their vacancy remained unfilled. "Vacancy
Figure 2. **Reason Foster Parents Believe Vacancy Remained Unfilled**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Vacancy</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy is on hold</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentionally overlooked</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/P rejected placement</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred not available</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Vacancy is on hold" refers to foster homes that have either a voluntary or involuntary hold placed which prohibits them from accepting foster children. "Intentionally overlooked" refers to the foster parent's perception that the agency is intentionally overlooking their vacancy. Foster parents indicating "Do not know" are unaware of why their vacancy is not filled. "Foster parent (F/P) rejected placement" refers to foster parents who have chosen not to accept a particular foster child. "Preferred not available" refers to the foster parents who request a specific type of child and will not accept any other type. The median for the level of foster parent satisfaction in "placement vacancies" was 2.0 which indicated some satisfaction with the reason the vacancy had remained unfilled (See Figure 3).

Qualitative data were placed in the following
categories using Corbin and Strauss' (1990) method of open-

coding: Of the 40% of respondents who answered "what they liked most about the way placement vacancies were handled," the most frequently cited response was "satisfied with social worker's efforts." Of the 33% of respondents who answered "what they liked least about the way placement vacancies were handled, the most frequently cited response was "too long to place a child" (See Appendix E).
Licensing Issues

The questions regarding "Licensing Issues" dealt with whether a foster parent had a licensing or child abuse complaint lodged against them and, if so, if it were handled fairly, sensitively, unfairly, or insensitively. A significant relationship was found between level of foster parent satisfaction and "how the licensing complaint was handled," (See Table 2). The median for "how the complaint was handled" was 2.0 which indicated some satisfaction with how the complaint was handled (See Figure 4). The median for level of satisfaction in licensing issues was 1.0 which indicated a high level of satisfaction (See Figure 5).
Figure 5. Foster Parent Satisfaction with how Licensing Complaint was Handled

Of the 29% of respondents who answered the open-ended question, "how could the foster home investigation process be improved," the most frequently cited response was "more protection against false allegations." Of the 18% of respondents who answered "what they liked least about the way licensing complaints were handled, the most frequently cited response was "lack of Agency communication with foster parents" (See Appendix E).

Placement Problems

Questions dealing with "Placement Problems" related to complaints foster parents lodged against the Social Services Agency for such things as disagreement with a foster child's
permanent placement plan or a foster parent being made to feel that a placement failure was their fault.

A significant relationship was found between level of foster parent satisfaction and "questions to social workers inadequately answered" (See Table 2). The median for level of satisfaction in placement problems was 2.0 which indicated some level of satisfaction with how placement problems were handled (See Figure 6). Figure 7 reports the percentage of respondents who have experienced any of the following placement problems: "Made to feel that placement failure was my fault," "Disagreement with foster child's permanent placement plan," "Excessive demands on my time," "Difficulties dealing with foster child's biological parents," "Questions to social worker inadequately
answered," and "Slow or no response by social worker to my phone calls." Figure 8 reports the percentage of foster parents who responded to the question regarding their various attempts to resolve the placement problem.

Of the 46% of respondents who answered the open-ended question, "what they liked most about the way problems with placements were handled," the most frequently cited response was "supportive social workers." Of the 37% of respondents who answered "what they liked least about the way placement problems were handled," the most frequently cited response
Figure 8. Foster Parents' Attempts to Resolve the Placement Problem

was "social workers/Agency not responsive to foster parents' concerns" (See Appendix E).
Training for Foster Parents

The questions regarding "Foster Parent Training" elicited information about foster parent satisfaction with current training and whether foster parents believed additional training would increase communication between them and their social worker. The median for level of foster parent satisfaction with training was 2.0 which indicated some satisfaction with training (See Figure 9).

Figure 9. Foster Parent Satisfaction with Training

Of interest, was the 71% of respondents who felt that joint training of social workers and foster parents would improve communication between them.

Of the 64% of respondents who answered the open-ended question, "what they liked most about training," the most frequently cited response was "informative." Of the 50% of
respondents who answered "what they liked least about training," the most frequently cited response was "repetitive" (See Appendix E).

**Foster Parent Resources**

The questions regarding "Foster Parent Resources" evoked information about what resources foster parents used,

**Figure 10. Foster Parent Satisfaction with Resources**

![Foster Parent Satisfaction with Resources](image)

their level of satisfaction with them, and what could be done to improve the resources. Figure 10 reports the median level of foster parent satisfaction for the foster parent
resources.

Of the 42% of respondents who answered the open-ended question, "list resources needed but not currently available," the most frequently cited response was "list of doctors, dentists, and counselors who accept Medi-Cal." Of the 58% of respondents who answered "what they liked most about foster parent resources," the most frequently cited response was "foster parent support groups" (See Appendix E).

**Foster Parent Recognition**

The questions regarding "Foster Parent Recognition"

Figure 11. Recognition Foster Parents Find Rewarding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition Events</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Thank You&quot; by staff</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation in Newsmemo</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Gold Awards</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster Home Assessments</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Thanksfest</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Recognition Event</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

evoked responses relating to attempts by Social Services to recognize foster parents. Figure 11 reports the percentage
of foster parent responses to the type of recognition that they found especially rewarding. The median for level of foster parent satisfaction regarding "foster parent recognition" was 2.0 which indicated some satisfaction to the recognition foster parents received (See Figure 12).

Figure 12. Foster Parent Satisfaction Regarding Recognition

![Bar chart showing foster parent satisfaction levels and percentages]

Discussion

Previous research indicates a relationship between foster care system problems and a foster care agency's ability to recruit and retain foster parents (Anderson, 1988; Jones, 1975; & Titterington, 1990). Foster care system problems include: Insufficient reimbursement, high demands on time, stress from birth parents' visits, foster
parents' perception of being "blacklisted" when children were no longer placed with them, and a vague and ambiguous foster parent role. The current results seem to support these findings.

Current Results and Previous Research

A significant relationship was found between foster parent satisfaction with financial reimbursement and whether foster parents were contemplating stopping to foster. Barth et al. found similar results in the area of foster care involving specialized foster parents. Their results showed that higher reimbursement contributed to their decision to be foster parents. It was also found that this was an important factor in the recruitment of specialized foster parents. Higher reimbursement became a viable option in retaining foster parents when the alternative to foster care was group homes. Barth et al. (1994) states that in California, group care for young children is approximately 10 times the cost of standard foster care and three times the cost of specialized foster care. Therefore, even if reimbursement for standard foster care were doubled, the cost for group homes would still be five times the cost of foster care. This issue justifies further study by policymakers and researchers.

Orange County Social Services Agency was interested in knowing whether foster parents were satisfied with the way
placement vacancies were handled. They were concerned that foster parents felt they were being intentionally overlooked for placement, thus, leading them to exit the foster care system. The current study did, in fact, find a significant relationship between foster parent satisfaction with placement vacancy and whether foster parents were contemplating stopping to foster. Although previous literature has not addressed placement vacancies, in particular, the Anderson study (1988) found that foster parents' perception of being "blacklisted" was a contributing factor to their ceasing to foster.

A significant relationship was found between satisfaction with the way placement problems were handled, and whether the foster parents were contemplating stopping to foster within the next two years. These results replicated Anderson's findings (1988) in which she studied factors contributing to foster parents leaving the foster care system. Anderson (1988) reported the most frequently cited responses for leaving the foster care system, in order of significance, as: "Disagreement with child's permanent plan," "questions to social worker inadequately answered," and "slow response to my phone calls to social worker." The researchers in this study found similar results, however, the order of most frequently cited responses for placement problems were: Slow or no response by social worker to phone calls, questions to social worker inadequately
answered, and difficulties dealing with foster child's behavior and worker not able to help. It appears from Anderson's study and the replication of her findings, that the relationship between the social worker and the foster parent is essential to foster parent satisfaction and, ultimately, to retention.

Current Findings That Lead to Speculation

A significant relationship was found between satisfaction with the way licensing complaints were handled and whether the complaints were handled fairly, sensitively, unfairly, or insensitively. Although past studies have not addressed the issue of licensing complaints, Orange County was interested in knowing whether the way licensing complaints were handled had an impact on foster parents exiting the system. While these findings do not directly answer the question, they suggest that a relationship between the handling of licensing complaints and the foster parent's perception of how complaints were handled, heeds further consideration.

Qualitative data in this study offers subjective information which, otherwise, may have been lost in quantifiable answers. The results of the qualitative data in this study indicate important trends which are supported in the literature. The researchers found a notable trend in foster child characteristics which foster parents found
particularly stressful. High risk medical/drug exposed infants and behavioral problems were among the most frequently cited characteristics which foster parents found stressful. Barth et al. (1994) found that reasons for foster parents leaving the foster care system may be influenced by the changing characteristics of children entering the child welfare system. He states that there has been a dramatic increase in the percentage of families with substance abuse problems and other health problems. This results in an increase of children entering the foster care system with serious medical, emotional, and behavioral problems. Interestingly, the findings in this study support Barth's assumption.

Another trend found in the qualitative data of this study, and supported in current literature, involved social worker and foster parent communication. For example, in all sections of this study communication between the foster parent and the social worker was either the leading cause of satisfaction or the leading deterrent of satisfaction. Literature on foster care emphasizes that communication is integral to a good working relationship between foster parents and social workers (Daniels & Brown, 1973; Jones, 1975; Pedosuk & Ratcliffe, 1979; Titterington, 1990).

Qualitative data in this study also show an increase in satisfaction when foster parents feel they are taken seriously and treated as part of a team (See Appendix E).
Rindfleisch (1993) found similar results in his study of family foster home retention in which foster parents wanted to be taken seriously, listened to carefully, and respected. The contention is that foster parents come into the system with a strong belief about themselves and that saving and nurturing children is what they do best. Further, communication between social workers and foster parents can help clarify the foster parent role which is often times ambiguous and vague (Jones, 1975; Titterington, 1990). Qualitative data in this study show that foster parents are unclear of their role due to social workers treating them as part client and part colleague (See Appendix E). Many researchers suggest collaborative training as a means of increasing communication between foster parents and social workers. Interestingly, three-fourths of the respondents of the current study felt that joint training of social workers and foster parents would improve communication between them.

**Explanation of Unanticipated Results**

A significant relationship was found between the number of years the foster parent expected to continue fostering and the total annual income category. The results of this study showed that 73% of the respondents had a total combined annual income of $30,000 or above. From these results it appears that the respondents are at a high median income level. This might imply that, because the median
income is higher than average, reimbursement for foster care would not be the primary reason for foster parents remaining in the foster care system. However, because this study took place in Orange County, California, the median income level is higher than the national average due to the elevated cost of living. Therefore, financial reimbursement does, in fact, impact the retention of foster parents in Orange County.

Orange County experienced a financial crisis shortly before the surveys were sent to foster parents, thus possibly affecting the results of this study. The financial crisis had the potential of negatively affecting Orange County foster parents. Foster parents feared that the State of California Department of Social Services would take over the foster care program. There was also the concern that Orange County Social Services Agency would not be able to reimburse the foster parents and that many social workers would be laid-off, leaving foster parents in a state of dismay. These concerns may have affected the responses. For example, foster parents already leery of the Orange County situation, may have abstained from responding to the survey for fear of "rocking the boat." At the same time, foster parents responses may have been exaggerated due to the added frustration of an uncertain situation.
Limitations and Strengths

This study had weaknesses which must be considered. First, this study was conducted by researchers outside of Orange County Social Services Agency. The cover letter was printed on California State University of San Bernardino letterhead, which may have caused some foster parents to be less enthusiastic about participating in this study. Some foster parents may have believed that since the study was not conducted by the Agency itself, this was not a serious study for the Agency and that changes would not be implemented.

Second, although a 25% return rate for the first mailing in most questionnaire studies is good, limited time and resources did not allow these researchers to carry out follow-up mailings. Therefore, the results do not include the perceptions or experiences of the remaining 75% who did not respond. Foster parents who did respond may have felt that their answers to the surveys would lead to change. Those who did not respond may have felt that their answers would not be taken seriously and, therefore, did not want to take the time. Another limitation that may have affected the results of this study, was the large number of foster parents who left questions unanswered. It is possible that foster parents were apprehensive to answer questions which they perceived to have potential ramifications by the
agency. It is difficult for persons, such as the foster parents in this study, to answer candidly in a survey about the agency which provides their livelihood. Although the researchers can only speculate why some foster parents responded and others did not, careful consideration should be given to the generalizability of these results.

Third, Likert scale questions have a disadvantage. It is difficult to quantify experiences into a mutually exclusive category. This is apparent by the number of respondents who did not answer Likert scale questions. The researchers attempted to address this intrinsic difficulty by incorporating many open-ended questions that would allow foster parents to express their experiences and their viewpoints. Open-ended questions tend to be time consuming, which may account for the number of respondents who did not answer these questions.

The results of this study also showed several strengths. First, comments by foster parents indicated that they favored researchers not being connected with the Social Services Agency (See Appendix E). This, along with guaranteed anonymity, most likely contributed to foster parents answering openly. Second, open-ended questions and additional comments provided the researchers with valuable information. Foster parent responses, were in general, candid, insightful, and gave a clear view of the frustration, as well as, the fulfillment that foster parents
Third, several of the findings in past literature on foster parent satisfaction, were replicated in this study. For example, social worker and foster parent communication, training, and financial reimbursement, were all found to be contributing factors to foster parent satisfaction. Fourth, although the researchers cannot measure the exact benefits, the announcement of the forthcoming survey in the Orange County Foster Care Newsmemo and the self-addressed postage paid return envelopes, appear to have been helpful. In addition, the researchers elicited a prompt response by specifying in the cover letter that surveys be returned within a 10 day period. This discouraged foster parents from procrastinating.

Implications for Orange County Foster Care Program

The discussion and its implications for change in the Orange County Foster Program, should be limited to the context of the sample size. That is, out of the 398 current long-term foster parents, 210 were sampled with 52 foster parents (25%) responding to the survey. Fifty-two respondents, or 13% of the total population of Orange County long-term foster parents, can be considered a statistically significant sample. Given the constraints of sample size, the researchers discovered valuable findings for the Orange County Foster Care Program.
The Orange County foster parents appear to be very satisfied with resources available to them. Foster parents who responded were very satisfied with the majority of Orange County resources (See Figure 10). Current training offered by Orange County was also rated favorably by foster parents (See Figure 9). Foster parents indicated that they gained from interaction with more experienced foster parents and that information provided in training was valuable. Orange County foster parents stressed the importance of existing support networks among foster parents. This is an area of importance for the retention of foster parents which can also serve as a resource in recruitment by the Orange County Foster Care Program.

Although Orange County showed favorable results in certain areas, several concerns emerged. The relationship between social workers and foster parents appeared to be the greatest area of concern. Many foster parents stated that their questions were ignored or inadequately answered by social workers. In addition, foster parents indicated that their belief of what was best for the foster child was often disregarded by the social worker. This apparent lack of communication translates into what many researchers attribute to be the cause of role ambiguity among foster parents. Furthermore, lack of communication also plays a role in foster parent recognition. In this study, foster parents indicated that the type of recognition they would
prefer is an acknowledgment by social workers for a job well done.

Another area of concern in this study is the 25% of respondent foster parents who are contemplating leaving the foster care system within the next two years. Many of those contemplating leaving, stated that insufficient financial reimbursement, foster care system problems, and lack of placements were reasons for their leaving. Although insufficient financial reimbursement is an area that the Orange County Foster Care Program cannot improve at this time, foster care system problems and lack of placements are two areas needing further investigation by the Orange County Foster Care Program. It is important to note that 20% of those foster parents contemplating leaving, were doing so for personal reasons rather than problems within the agency.

A final significant area of concern for the Orange County Foster Care Program is the manner in which foster home investigations are handled. Foster parents frequently complained about being treated like a criminal, being accused of wrongdoing from the start of the investigation, and having no neutral source with whom to confer. The Orange County Foster Care Program may need to contract with an outside agency to investigate and mediate licensing complaints.
Recommendations for Social Work Practice

Based on the findings of this study and literature on foster care, suggestions for social work practice in the Orange County Foster Care Program will be made. When considering these recommendations, one must take into account Orange County's limitations of budget cuts, increased workloads, and increasingly severe problems of children and families.

These researchers recommend a team approach to fostering that would increase communication and clarify role ambiguity between social workers and foster parents. According to Laird and Hartman (1985), a team approach to fostering involves the social worker "monitoring the placement, clarifying role expectations, and facilitating the foster family's use of more natural support networks." This would require adequate preplacement foster parent training and sufficient information sharing. One way of accomplishing this goal is by agencies considering a team approach to training. This would require regular team meetings involving agency staff and experienced foster parents. These skilled foster parents would be used to recruit and retain other foster parents, plan for foster children's needs, and design future training (Rindfleisch, 1993). Foster parents surveyed in this study believed that a team approach to training would increase communication.
between foster parents and social workers. Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that they would attend a training designed for agency staff and foster parents. This large positive response shows the motivation by foster parents to improve communication.

The researchers further recommend improvements in the area of financial reimbursement. These recommendations would consequently save the Orange County Foster Care Program money by averting the use of more costly alternatives such as group homes. A 1990 report by the Senate Office of Research in California recommends ways to improve the foster care system. They recommend a new category of "professional foster parent" which would have the following characteristics:

- Requirements that foster parents possess appropriate education, especially in child development or nursing
- Payments of $2,000 or more per month per child
- Provision of specialized care for high-risk infants and young children, particularly those likely to remain in long-term foster placement
- Provision of care to children who otherwise would be placed in group homes
- Provision for placement of two or possibly three children in a home

Another reason to increase financial reimbursement and
invest time and training in foster parents, is the current issue of welfare reform at the national level. The conservative political climate in the United States calls for the return of orphanages. The amount of reimbursement that foster parents receive for each foster child is approximately $4,800 per year. The cost to the United States government for each child in an orphanage would be $59,500 per year, twelve times more than foster care (Newsweek, 1994). Therefore, the logical answer is to retain the current foster parents, raise their financial reimbursement, and improve the foster parent and social worker relationship through training. The alternatives to not investing in foster parents are the high costs of group homes and orphanages.

Conclusions

Although the recommendations of these researchers may not be feasible by county foster care programs at this time, the long-term benefits should be considered as a justification for the short-term costs. The recommendations presented by the researchers require further investigation as to whether retention rates would increase as a result of their implementation. The researchers suggest follow-up studies by the Orange County Foster Care Program in order to focus on the specific areas requiring improvement. As a result of focusing on certain areas, such as team training,
increased financial reimbursement, and providing non-agency personnel to investigate licensing complaints, sound hypotheses can be formed and future studies can follow.
Appendix A:

Survey
Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey

Your answers to the following questions will provide us with important information regarding foster parents in Orange County.

1. Please indicate your type of foster licensing: (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)
   - EPOCH
   - High Risk Medical Care
   - Emergency Shelter Home
   - Specific Children
   - Long-term Foster Care
   - Other(SPECIFY)

2. How long have you been a licensed foster parent? _______ years _______ months

3. How many children is your home licensed to accept at one time? _______ number of children

4. How many foster children are currently in your home? _______ number of children

5. Please indicate the age range of children that you prefer to foster parent:
   ____________ to ____________ years

6. Please indicate the age range of children you are currently foster parenting:
   ____________ to ____________ years

7. Are there any foster child characteristics that you find particularly stressful?

8. Within the last five (5) years, have the children placed with you been similar to or different from the type of child you requested from the agency?
   - have been similar
   - have been different

9. Please indicate the number of foster parents living in this home: ____________

10. Within the last five years, what is the average number of foster children you have cared for at any one time? ____________

11. What is your age category? (CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX.)
   - 20-29
   - 50-59
   - 30-39
   - 60 or older
   - 40-49

12. Excluding foster care payments, what is the total combined annual income of all members of your family? (CHECK ONE.)
   - $10,000 - 19,999
   - $20,000 - 29,999
   - $30,000 - 39,999
   - $40,000 - 49,999
   - $50,000 - 74,999
   - $75,000 or more
12a. How satisfied are you with the financial reimbursement you receive for being a foster parent? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. For how many more years do you expect to be a foster parent? _____ years

13a. Are you contemplating stopping accepting foster children in the next two years? (PLEASE CHECK ONE)

□ Yes □ No

13b. If yes, what is the main reason you are contemplating stopping accepting foster children?


13c. What, if anything, can be done to encourage you or make it easier for you to continue to be a foster parent?


Placement Vacancies

14. Do you currently have a vacancy in your home that has been unfilled for at least three (3) months? (Only answer this question if your home is not on hold.)

□ Yes □ No

14a. If yes, what do you believe is the reason that the vacancy has remained unfilled?

□ The type of child you prefer has not been available.

□ You have been contacted regarding possible placements but you have rejected them for various reasons.

□ You do not know why the vacancy has not been filled.

□ You feel that your home is intentionally being overlooked. (If so, briefly state why you believe this)


□ Your vacancy is on voluntary or involuntary hold.

□ Other (PLEASE SPECIFY.)
14b. What actions have you taken to have the vacancy filled?

____________________________________________________________________________

14c. What was the response? (PLEASE EXPLAIN BRIEFLY.)

____________________________________________________________________________

14d. How satisfied were you with this response? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied 1</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied 2</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied 3</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

14e. What do you like most about the way placement vacancies are handled?

____________________________________________________________________________

14f. What do you like least about the way placement vacancies are handled?

____________________________________________________________________________

Licensing Issues

15. As a foster parent, have you ever had a licensing or child abuse complaint made against you?

□ Yes □ No

15a. How was it handled? (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

□ Fairly □ Sensitively □ Unfairly □ Insensitively

15b. How satisfied were you with the way it was handled? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied 1</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied 2</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied 3</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

15c. In your opinion, how could the foster home investigation process be improved?

____________________________________________________________________________
15d. What do you like most about the way licensing complaints are handled?


15e. What do you like least about the way licensing complaints are handled?


Placement Problems

16. Have you experienced any of the following?

☐ Slow or no response by social worker to my phone calls

☐ Questions to social worker inadequately answered

☐ Difficulties dealing with foster child(ren)'s behavior and worker could not help

☐ Difficulties dealing with foster child(ren)'s biological parents

☐ Excessive demands on my time (visitation, transportation, social worker visits, etc.)

☐ Disagreement with foster child(ren)'s permanent placement plan

☐ Made to feel that a placement failure was my fault

☐ Other, (PLEASE SPECIFY.)

16a. If you have experienced any of the above, what attempts did you make to resolve the problem (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

☐ Did nothing (PLEASE SKIP TO QUESTION 16f.)

☐ Spoke to child's social worker about the problem.

☐ Called ARK

☐ Contacted the Foster Care Liaison Officer (Lynda Scott)

☐ Contacted the social work supervisor

☐ Contacted the Program Manager

☐ Contacted the Director of Children's Services

☐ Asked for a grievance hearing

☐ Other, (PLEASE SPECIFY.)
16b. What was the outcome? (PLEASE EXPLAIN BRIEFLY.)


16c. How satisfied were you with the outcome? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16d. What do you like most about the way problems with placements are handled?


16e. What do you like least about the way problems with placements are handled?


16f. If you did nothing, what prevented you from seeking help?

- [ ] Did not feel the problem warranted taking action
- [ ] Did not know I could go over the supervisor's head
- [ ] Was afraid there would be retaliation against me if I complained (i.e. no future placements)
- [ ] Did not want to alienate the Senior Social Worker
- [ ] Did not know I could contact others besides the Senior Social Worker (i.e. Supervisor, Foster Care Liaison Officer, Program Manager, Director of Children's Services)
- [ ] Other, (PLEASE SPECIFY.)


Training

17. Do you attend any Foster Parent Training Classes? (CHECK ONE)

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
17a. If you have not attended, why did you not attend? (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

☐ No free time.
☐ No childcare.
☐ Already have sufficient training.
☐ Other, (PLEASE SPECIFY.) ________________________________

17b. If you have attended, how satisfied are you with the training? (PLEASE CIRCLE ONE.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat satisfied</th>
<th>Somewhat dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

17c. What do you like most about the training?

________________________________________________________________________

17d. What do you like least about the training?

________________________________________________________________________

18. Do you feel that joint training of social workers and foster parents would improve communication between them?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

19. Would you attend such a training designed for agency staff and foster parents?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

19a. If yes, what is a convenient time for you to attend training classes? (PLEASE LIST DAYS AND TIMES.)

_________________________ Days ___________________________ Times
20. Which of the following resources have you used? (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY AND INDICATE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WHERE 1 = VERY SATISFIED, 2 = SOMEWHAT SATISFIED, 3 = SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED, 4 = VERY DISSATISFIED.)

- Foster Care Liaison Officer (Lynda Scott) 1 2 3 4
- Orangewood Foundation Respite Care Program 1 2 3 4
- ARK 1 2 3 4
- VNA Respite Care 1 2 3 4
- Foster parent support group(s) 1 2 3 4
- Mileage and child care reimbursement for attending training 1 2 3 4
- Foster Parent Store 1 2 3 4
- Operation Santa Claus 1 2 3 4
- Foster parent local, state, and/or national organizations 1 2 3 4
- Children’s Services Public Health Nurses (Nancy Ota/Gloria Zamarripa) 1 2 3 4
- Foster Care Advisory Board 1 2 3 4
- Other, (PLEASE SPECIFY.) ________________________________

20a. Please list resources that you and/or your foster child need, but are not currently available.

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

20b. What foster parent resources do you like or find the most useful?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Foster Parent Recognition

21. Of the following attempts by Social Services to recognize foster parents' efforts, which do you feel are especially rewarding?

☐ Annual Board of Supervisor's Recognition Event

☐ Annual Thanksfest

☐ Foster Home Assessments by workers

☐ Annual Gold Awards

☐ Mention of appreciative comments by workers in the Foster Care Newsmemo

☐ A "thank you" for a job well done by the staff

21a. Regarding recognition from Social Services, I am overall:

Very satisfied 1
Somewhat satisfied 2
Somewhat dissatisfied 3
Very dissatisfied 4

21b. What other types of recognition do you suggest?

__________________________________________________________________________

General

22. Would you be willing to participate in a task force, or committee, to work on foster care/Social Services Agency issues?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

22a. If yes, what times would be convenient for you? (PLEASE LIST DAYS AND TIMES.)

__________________ Days  ___________________ Times

23. Please list any general comments or suggestions you have about improving the foster parent program.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU
Appendix B:
Letter of Consent
February 9, 1995

Dear Foster Parent(s):

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. As you know, the number of children in need of foster homes in Orange County continues to rise and you as foster parents continue to face new challenges in providing care for such children. Therefore, in order to find out about your satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the Orange County foster care system, we need your help.

Enclosed is a questionnaire which asks about your experiences as a foster parent. This study is being conducted by Erika Giacomazzi and Mary Silvestrini, graduate social work students at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) under the supervision of Dr. Morley Glicken. This questionnaire has been reviewed and approved by Orange County Social Services Agency, CSUSB, and the Foster Care Advisory Board. Your name and address will not be released to the Orange County Social Services Agency or CSUSB as a result of your participation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you see an item which makes you feel uncomfortable, you need not answer it. You may stop participating at any time. As part of the procedure for university based research projects, CSUSB requires that all survey participants give their informed consent to participate in this study. By providing your signature at the bottom of this form, you are giving your informed consent to have your responses used as part of the study which will examine foster parent satisfaction. Your signature on this consent form will not be used to identify you. Upon arrival of the completed survey, the consent form will be detached and surveys will be analyzed anonymously.

We want to thank you for your help. The information you supply is crucial to providing us with an overview of the problems, as well as the positive aspects, experienced by Orange County Social Services Agency foster parents. As students in the field of social work, your responses will allow us to make recommendations for improvements to the Orange County Social Services Agency, based on your needs. Results of this survey will be presented in the Foster Care News memo sometime in May.

Please complete and return the attached questionnaire, and this letter with your signature, by February 24, 1995 in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope.

Thank you for your response and for your service to children.

Mary Silvestrini/Erika Giacomazzi
Master of Social Work Students

Foster Parent Signature
Appendix C:

Debriefing Statement
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT.

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your responses will help us to determine the issues dealing with foster parent satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and retention. As a result of your responses, recommendations will be made to the Orange County Social Services Agency.

If you feel that you are having problems with the Department or you need further explanation of this study, please call your Foster Care Liaison Officer, who is there to support you.

Lynda Scott (714) 704-8255

For questions regarding this study, you may also contact Mary Silvestrini and Erika Giacomazzi's research advisor, Dr. Morley Glicken.

Dr. Morley Glicken
Department of Social Work
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(909) 880-5557

Thanks again.

Mary Silvestrini   Erika Giacomazzi   Dr. Morley Glicken
M.S.W. Student    M.S.W. Student    Research Advisor
CSUSB            CSUSB              CSUSB

Please keep this page for future reference.
Do not mail with questionnaire.
Appendix D:

Additional Cross-tabulations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cross-Tabulation (Dependent Variable by Independent Variable)</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Pearson's Chi-Square Significance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to how licensing complaint was handled by will stop fostering in two years</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to training by stop fostering in two years</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reimbursement satisfaction by expected years to foster</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with placement problems by spoke with social worker about problem</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with placement problems by excessive demand on time</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by voluntary or involuntary hold</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with placement problems by years licensed</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to training by years licensed</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to recognition by years licensed</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reimbursement satisfaction by children placed similar to requested</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to how licensing complaint was handled by children placed similar to requested</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement problems by children placed similar to requested</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Tabulation</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Degrees of Freedom</td>
<td>Pearson's Chi-Square Significance Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to training by children placed similar to requested</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to recognition by children placed similar to requested</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by type of child not available</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to placement vacancies by contacted but you rejected placement</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel home being intentionally overlooked by current number of foster children</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reimbursement satisfaction by years licensed</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reimbursement satisfaction by age category</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to how licensing complaint was handled by age category</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to training by age category</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction to recognition by age category</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E:

List of Qualitative Data
### Responses to Open-Ended Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foster Child Characteristics that Foster Parents Find Particularly Stressful</th>
<th>Frequency of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Teenager&quot;</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;High risk medical/drug exposed babies&quot;</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral problems</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Jealousy, truancy, anger, fighting, screaming&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past abuse issues</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Molestation issues&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Reason Foster Parent is Contemplating Ceasing to Foster</th>
<th>13/52 25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal and life changes</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Moving out of state&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster care system problems</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;The inconsistency of the agency policy, treatment of foster parents, unclear rules, and the inability of the agency to help us obtain services for these children.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial considerations</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;We work, child care is $575 a month. We get $345.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Can be Done to Encourage You to Continue to be a Foster Parent</th>
<th>26/52 50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Stop making us run all over to accommodate social workers and parents&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respite</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Better respite programs we need at no cost to foster parents&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequency of Response

Financial reimbursement
For example, "Raise the rate of reimbursement, since I work full time I have to pay for child care and that takes more than what we are reimbursed so it ends up costing us money rather than breaking even"

Foster care system problems
For example, "More cooperation from social workers and place children in my home"

What Foster Parents Like Most About the Way Placement Vacancies are Handled

Social worker's efforts
For example, "We have a very good relationship with the placement worker and she is honest and forthcoming with what is going on"

Prompt response to vacancy
For example, "Usually filled within a week or two."

Pre-placement visits
For example, "Being able to have pre-placement visits to make sure the placement is suitable for all"

What Foster Parents Like Least About the Way Placement Vacancies are Handled

Lack of pertinent information about foster children
For example, "A lot of social workers aren't honest about the kids' problems"

Preferential treatment to certain foster parents
For example, "If social worker knows and likes you, you will
FrequencY of Response

get child first"

Pre-placement visits
For example, "Trial weekends are very hard on children"

Too long to place child
For example, "It takes too long to get another child. About 5 to 6 months of waiting for another foster child"

Foster parent's placement requests overlooked
For example, "Nobody in placement seems to read our initial list of requirement. If we have indicated we don't want sexually molested kids, why are we constantly offered them?"

What Foster Parents Like Most
About the Way Licensing Complaints are Handled

Confidentiality
For example, "They didn't tell everyone (such as the mother, friends, and neighbors) about the incident"

Opportunity to correct problem
For example, "They give you time to fix things"

Quick response
For example, "They act on the complaint at once and are thorough in their investigation. They listen to your side and are fair"

What Foster Parents Like Least
About the Way Licensing Complaints are Handled

Too soon labeled as guilty
For example, "I believe foster
parents should be considered innocent until proven guilty"

Unscheduled visits
For example, "I didn't like the surprise visit. I don't see why it couldn't be a set-up visit"

Lack of agency communication with foster parent
For example, "Little communication unless we initiated it"

What Foster Parents Like Most About the Way Problems With Placements areHandled

Supportive social workers
For example, "Social workers try hard to work problems out"

Teamwork
For example, "When the social worker and I work together for resolution of a problem"

Agency procedures
For example, "The fact you get to see and know about the child before deciding if you want them"

What Foster Parents Like Least About the Way Problems With Placements areHandled

Social worker not responsive to foster parent
For example, "When the social worker will not accept any input and feels her or his way is the only solution"

Foster child's best interest not always priority with agency
For example, "Social services does
not put the child's best interest as a priority. They are more concerned with their own agenda"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What Foster Parents Like Most About Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;Interesting topics, guest speakers, CPR, and First Aid Training&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;The opportunity to continue to learn and to interact with other foster parents&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas on problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For example, &quot;The chance to talk about concerns and ideas on how to handle them&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **What Foster Parents Like Least About Training** |
| Training not specific to certain foster children | 3.8% |
| For example, "Too often training not pertinent to our cases" |
| Repetitive | 17.3% |
| For example, "Too long and some repeat information" |
| Too far away and time consuming | 13.5% |
| For example, "Usually location is inconvenient to us South County foster parents" |
| Problems with way training is conducted | 11.5% |
| For example, "Social workers are not mandated to attend the same training so that we are on the same level. They do not offer the same training more than once" |
Resources That Foster Parents Need, but Are not Currently Available

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Frequency of Response} \\
\text{Respite} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 13.5\% \\
\text{For example, "Weekend child care at low or discount rate with medical and drug exposed children trained caregivers"} \\
\text{List of doctors/dentist/counselors who accept Medi-Cal} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 19.2\% \\
\text{For example, "List of good doctors and dentists that accept Medi-Cal"} \\
\text{Support offered to foster parents} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 7.7\% \\
\text{For example, "A mental health professional who can help foster parents deal with losing and separating from a child they cared for and loved. Especially the first placement"} \\
\text{More resources for foster children} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 1.9\% \\
\text{For example, "Would be nice to have musical instruments available to the kids. Discounts for Karate, waterpolo, etc. for foster kids"}
\end{array}
\]

Recognition suggested by foster parents

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Frequency of Response} \\
\text{More monetary recognition} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 3.8\% \\
\text{For example, "Monetary-especially for long-term foster parents"} \\
\text{Treated more as a team member} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 9.6\% \\
\text{For example, "Being treated like a professional and a member of the team"} \\
\text{Letters of "Thank you" and support} \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad 5.8\% \\
\text{For example, "Thank you letters to foster parents and support letters"}
\end{array}
\]
References


