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## EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES IN FOSTER CARE FROM THE FOSTER PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES IN FOSTER CARE FROM THE FOSTER  
PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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

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

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by  
Christina M. Landeros  
Cherish Watson-Nunez

May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of foster parent perceptions of the services their foster youth were receiving. This study aimed to gather information based on how effective foster parents felt these services were in the hopes that this information can lead to better service provisions. This study conducted a secondary analysis of qualitative interviews of fifteen foster parents with foster children enrolled in Hesperia Unified School District.

Qualitative data analysis revealed themes and subthemes in positive and negative experiences associated County versus school service referrals, as well as social worker communication with foster families. The study found that participants related effectiveness of services with social worker availability, communication, timeliness, and assistance with tasks. This study recommends County social workers are provided further training through their employer to develop more effective communication and follow-up skills. The study also recommends research be conducted with additional school districts within San Bernardino to gather a larger sample size of San Bernardino County foster parents.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### Problem Formulation

In any given year, approximately one million children come to the attention of the child welfare system in the United States (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2019). Many of these children have experienced complex trauma, which can disrupt various aspects of the child's development. In addition, many children in the foster care system have behavioral issues and require services to help them change that behavior. If these services are ineffective, the child may behave in ways that make it difficult for the child to support placement in a single foster home, leading the child to be placed in multiple homes.

Whether biological or foster, parents who care for these children hold a significant role in their involvement with these services. Social workers in Public Child Welfare agencies and workers in foster care agencies should be concerned about the issue of parents' experiences in the foster care system because it is the parents who ultimately carry the responsibility of children's permanency. Service effectiveness is essential because a child's permanent placement often depends on the positive outcomes of the family's services.

Foster parents themselves must also take part in training services to prepare for the needs of foster youth. Even after completing the extensive background and training requirements, there continues to be frequent turnover among foster parents. A substantial portion of foster parents kept their homes

open for placement, on average, for eleven months (Hanlon et al., 2021). If foster parents feel inadequately prepared to address the behaviors of children placed in their home, it may result in hesitations to continue fostering. A lack of faith in foster parent preparedness training can affect foster parent recruitment and retention rates.

Service effectiveness for biological parents is also crucial because the public child welfare system requires parents to complete services before reunifying with their child or children. If services are ineffective for parents, they may fall back into the old habits that brought them to the attention of the public child welfare system in the first place. This recidivism of family involvement in the public child welfare system has led to trauma and familial destruction for both the children and parents involved in the system.

Suppose the reason for recidivism is insufficient service or ineffectiveness. In that case, the public child welfare and foster care systems may be doing more harm than good to the families involved in the system. We plan to learn more about what is working well for families in the child welfare system and what clients feel they need to succeed as foster parents to address these concerns.

### Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

It is essential to understand how foster parents perceive the services they receive from the public child welfare and foster care systems because a better way to measure service effectiveness is by collecting information directly from the people who utilize the services. Many of the services these families receive

are evidence-based practice. For example, in mental health services, the popular approaches such as talk therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy have been shown effective. However, actual delivery of such interventions could vary due to each person administering and receiving such treatments differently, and there is not a “one size fits all” type of therapy available.

### Purpose of the Study

This study will address foster parents' perspectives of the effectiveness of services offered and obtained through the public child welfare and foster care systems. To address such topics, this study will conduct a secondary analysis of foster parent interviews. The interviews were conducted by a group of Master of Social Work (MSW) interns at California State University San Bernardino as part of their internship curriculum with the Hesperia Unified School District. The purpose of the interviews was for the interns to gain first-hand insight into the foster system as it is experienced by the parents involved in the system.

The only way agency workers can know that the services they are providing or asking clients to complete are effective is by taking the time to communicate with the client. By conducting this secondary analysis on foster parent interviews, we are collecting information that will allow us to gauge how effective services have been for these clients so far. In addition, the information gathered in this study will enable social work agencies to understand how their clients perceive the services they are utilizing. With this understanding, social workers will be able to better advocate for their clients if it is found that certain

services are ineffective. In addition, once it is understood that some services are not working for some clients, then the social worker will be able to supply different services that may be more effective.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

To better understand this complex topic of perspectives of services, this section has been broken into subsections of mental health, behavioral & medical health, parent training, and general needs and services.

#### Mental Health

Mental health is a common theme and service offered to children in the child welfare system. However, for the many children in foster care receiving mental health services, their foster parents are assigned the task of scheduling appointments, communicating with social workers and service providers, and providing other mental health support to the children in their care.

A 2012 study examined urban foster parent perspectives on services received by foster parents and youth, including mental health. The researchers held four focus groups with thirty-eight participants from a child welfare agency. The researchers used a mix of convenience, random, and non-random sampling for the groups. The results from the study found that foster parents did not have faith in the effectiveness of mental health services that their foster children received. (Spielfogel et al., 2012).

Larsen et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study that examined experiences and perceived outcomes with mental health services from the perspective of foster parents. The high rates of mental health service utilization in

the child welfare system allowed gathering user experiences to measure and improve the quality of care provided to clients. Data was collected as part of a more extensive study over six months. Foster parents of youth aged 11-18, who had been living together for at least six months due to a mandated placement, were eligible for the study. The study focused on families in five Norwegian counties covered by The Office for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, and eligibility was assessed from regional records and Child Welfare Services (CWS) in the region. Using these criteria, foster parents of 736 youth were eligible for the study and were mailed informational letters describing the survey and instructions to participate. In addition, questionnaires could be completed online or in a telephone interview. Foster mothers and foster fathers were asked to respond individually, and in total, one or both caregivers to 330 youths filled out the survey.

As part of the study, the authors considered the frequency of service use, service experiences, perceived outcomes, type of service provider utilized for services, and mental health symptoms and impairments affecting youth in their daily life. Overall, foster parents received and reported positive service experiences, with the majority describing clinicians with communication as "easy to understand" (891). However, a considerable number of participants gave a low to medium satisfaction level to the following components of the service contact: information received about the child's condition, cooperation with other services, and organization of the work.

Approximately half of the foster parents felt that services contributed to improved conditions for the youth and better functioning when compared to before receiving services. No overall differences were noted in the quality of care received from child welfare services versus specialized mental health providers. However, foster parents of older children were found to have fewer positive experiences with services overall. Additionally, the study found that foster parents had lower rates of positive outcomes with children who had been living with them for extended periods.

The authors admitted that the descriptive responses received in the study relating to service provider types were "complex to categorize" due to the question structure of the survey instrument, resulting in results that should be "interpreted with caution" (892). The article has evidence of a ceiling effect in the results. Although a sizable portion of single elements of the survey was rated highly, only a small percent gave the highest score of overall service experience. This can be evidence that participants were unable to thoroughly express their satisfaction rates with the scaling categories provided in the study. This information can show that increased scaling categories to rate satisfaction may be needed for researchers to gain more reliable data.

### Behavioral & Medical Health

A 2015 article utilized a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design as a follow-up to a larger study on foster parent satisfaction, which showed concerns about behavioral health services. Authors Hayes, Geiger, and Lietz

(2015) conducted added research through closed and open-ended survey questions. Additionally, the researchers included satisfaction with medical, dental, and vision needs. Using a convenience sampling method, participants in the study were invited via email and were eligible only if they had also participated in the initial survey. Out of the 649 families that had participated in the initial study, 442 completed the follow-up survey. More than half of the responders were fostering children ages five and younger. There were no significant differences in demographics relating to race/ethnicity/type of household, income, or time fostering compared to the initial survey.

Over 75% of foster parents reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the medical, dental, and vision care that their foster children had received, and 92% expressed overall satisfaction. Feedback relating to challenges encountered with these services resulted in the following themes: authorizations, dental, and vision care, prescriptions, and general medical services. In obvious contrast to medical needs, less than 25% of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the services received for their children's behavioral health needs, and overall, 43% expressed overall satisfaction. Themes in rates of dissatisfaction with behavioral needs were found to be related to delays in accessing services, the need for individualized services, systemic barriers, and issues with communication. In the feedback for medical and behavioral care, a common theme from foster parents was "the need to be

heard, consulted, and included in the assessment and treatment of the child in their care" (504).

Similarly, Spielfogal et al. (2012) found that foster parents expressed dissatisfaction with staff communication, including a lack of information relating to the child's history that would help the parent address behavioral concerns. Thus, addressing the barriers in behavioral health services and increasing the inclusion of foster parents in foster youth services can support a collaborative effort to obtain favorable outcomes for children in the child welfare system.

### Parent Training

In child welfare, foster families are heavily relied upon to provide a safe space for children to live. Foster parents take on a heavy responsibility to care for children that have been placed in the child welfare system. To better support children, parents must understand their background to support their development. Foster parents are the primary connection foster children have to get their education, medical, and psychological needs met.

To improve a foster parent's ability to care for children, most must undergo foster parent training as a legal requirement to become a licensed home. Foster parent training is meant to prepare parents with skills to understand potential emotional and behavioral issues better. The hope is that the training will give parents the skills to manage the problems and increase the number of positive relationships between foster parents and children.

Spielfogel and colleagues (2012) found that parents wanted training but simultaneously lacked confidence that techniques learned in training would be effective for the needs of the children in their home. Kaasboll and colleagues (2019) examines existing literature on foster parent training to better understand the strengths and limitations of training from the perspective of foster parents. The researchers did a systematic review of peer-reviewed articles that examined "foster parent's needs, satisfaction and perceptions of foster parent training." To be eligible for inclusion, studies had to describe the needs, satisfaction, satisfaction, and perception of foster parent training. Studies that focused on all types of foster parent training programs were eligible. Studies focusing only on adoption or biological parent training were excluded. Out of 4063 articles, thirteen studies were found to meet the criteria for the review.

Kaasboll et al. found that the satisfaction with foster parent training was relatively high in most studies. A theme that the researchers noticed was the need for specific training for special needs children. The need for increased training relating to mental health, trauma, diversity, and culture was expressed. The flexibility and format of foster parent training were found to be essential to foster parents. Many parents indicated an interest in alternative training methods, such as virtual options that could be completed from home.

Parents also expressed the need for more practice in real-life scenarios and a general manual they could reference regarding whom to contact for support with various aspects of foster care. Overall, the research on foster parent

training is limited. The available research usually includes foster parent opinions about training as secondary outcomes. The available information reflects a need for new educational modules and new platforms for training.

### General Needs and Services

Many individuals within the child welfare system depend on services to address the complex needs for their overall well-being. To name a few, essential services for families in foster care can include mental health, education, parent training/preparation, childcare, and behavioral aid. Not only do the children in foster care need services, but many times, the foster parents do too. The lack of supportive services for families can result in a high turnover of foster parents. This contributes to a lack of or disruptions in placement for children, which can contribute to disturbances in a child's school settings, attachment issues, and health problems.

A study by Barnett and colleagues (2018) was conducted to understand better the needs of foster and adoptive parents and the children they care for and the ability for the services to meet their needs. The researchers utilized a mixed-methods study, using focus groups and a survey, to obtain the information from the perspectives of foster and adoptive parents – who will now be interchangeable with "parents." The researchers narrowed down participants for the focus groups through support groups for parents.

The focus groups were held over four months and included a total of twenty-seven parents. Incentives were not offered. Approximately seventy

percent of the participants were female, with an average of two children in the home. The average time that parents had been licensed was 6.3 years. In the focus groups, the researchers talked with parents about the services available to identify what helped and hindered effective systems and services. Surveys were sent to all foster and adoptive parents within the previous ten years that the child welfare agency had physical or email addresses on file. Five hundred twelve surveys were received out of 1206 mailed. 74% of survey participants were female. The survey focused on parent perspectives about child welfare and mental health services available for children, their satisfaction with service professional's interactions, the usefulness of training and resources, most significant needs, and challenges, and overall experience as a foster parent.

When the results from the focus groups were analyzed, it was found that participants identified their challenges with services at a rate of nearly three times more often than positive experiences. In addition, focus groups and surveys revealed five primary themes: poor communication and collaboration between child welfare staff and families, as well as between service organizations, lack of respect between child welfare agencies and the courts, lack of preparation for fostering or adopting, lack of mental health providers that understand the needs of foster families, and a lack of resources and support available to families after children are placed in the home or adopted.

The survey data supported many of the same issues discussed in the focus groups, but survey responses provided more positive responses. For

example, some positive themes were that parents were pleased with some child welfare staff's knowledge base in a particular area, helpfulness in the process, and provided support as parents navigated through fostering and adoption. In addition, the benefit of parent support groups to meet emotional needs as parents was also a positive theme.

### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theoretical perspectives that will be used for this research project are conflict theory and systems theory. Conflict theory originated from the work of Karl Marx. The theory views society as a power struggle between different social groups. As cited in Zastrow et al. (2019), this theory assumes that the limited supply of valued resources, such as power and wealth, creates conflict between people attempting to attain the items. Conflict can present itself in various forms, including disagreements and violence. Conflict is unavoidable; however, it can be beneficial to social change. By applying conflict theory to our research, we can see how unequal power disparities can impact those utilizing services within the child welfare system. Becoming aware of and understanding power differences can help social workers address inequalities and reduce conflict for the benefit of service recipients.

Ludwig von Bertalanffy first introduced general systems theory for social work. His framework analyzed whole systems and led to new standard terms. Basic systems theory components include system, boundaries, subsystem, homeostasis, input, output, feedback, differentiation, entropy, negative entropy,

and equifinality (Zastrow et al., 2019). Urie Bronfenbrenner later adapted systems theory. Bronfenbrenner looked at system interactions within an ecological environment. Bronfenbrenner's adaptation outlined five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Theories & Practice Models Used in Social Work, n.d.).

Anderson et al. (1999) defined a system as an "organized whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over some period of time." System boundaries differentiate it from other systems. Systems can vary in size and are present at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Sometimes systems can develop subsystems, which is a secondary system within a system. Systems theory helps us understand how an individual system is intertwined with one or many other systems. The functioning of individual systems and how individual systems interact with one another affect the homeostasis, or balance, and overall well-being of individuals and families.

Input is the information that flows into a system from other systems, and output is the information that flows out of a system. Feedback is the information a system receives from other sources about its performance, and it can be positive or negative. Entropy is the natural tendency for a system to break down. Negative entropy refers to the growth of a system to prevent entropy. Equifinality refers to the belief that there are many ways to achieve the same goal.

Differentiation refers to the tendency of a system to become more complex over time.

Applying systems theory to situations allows multiple areas to be analyzed and can give a better understanding of the overall functioning of a system to decide best where interventions should be made. Family systems must work with multiple systems to ensure that children receive proper and sufficient services to address their needs. The services that an individual receives from other systems will affect the family system and homeostasis. Our research will analyze the perceptions about the quality of interactions between family systems and service systems. These interactions play a role in the functioning of the family and can show where improvements can be made to increase functioning.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study will examine various service types received by foster youth and the services' perceived effectiveness according to the foster parents responsible for the children. The information gathered for this study came from telephone interview transcripts provided by Hesperia Unified School District. The qualitative methods used in this study will best facilitate the examination of perceived service effectiveness. The interviews were conducted to understand how service provisions for foster youth in the district's schools could be improved upon.

#### Study Design

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of an array of services provided to children in foster care from the perspective of their foster parents. The study will examine qualitative data retrieved from foster parents by MSW Interns at Hesperia Unified School District to identify areas for quality improvement in services to children in foster care. This study is a secondary data analysis that will examine the interview transcripts collected by the MSW interns. One of the authors of this study was previously one of the MSW interns conducting interviews. However, since the internship has ended, neither of the authors will be contacting participants.

The telephone interviews were authorized by the student services social worker for Hesperia Unified School District. The foster parents and student information was provided to the interns by the said social worker, the interns' supervisor. The MSW interns were required to record their interviews with the foster parents on a google work document. After the internship was terminated, all interns sent their interview documents to the social worker supervisor. The authors of this study then reached out to the social worker supervisor to request permission to access the interview transcripts. The social worker supervisor cleared each document to ensure none contained identifiable information and were assigned appropriate pseudonyms before emailing the documents to the authors of this study.

### Sampling

Participants considered for this study were both male and female foster parents. All participants were at least eighteen years old. Approximately forty-five parents who Hesperia Unified School District had tagged as foster parents were contacted and informed of the opportunity to participate in an interview regarding satisfaction with their foster children's services. Parents were stated they were biological parents, not foster parents, during the interview were not determined not eligible to participate in this study. Parents who declined to speak with the researchers were not included in the final sample size participant count. Fifteen foster parents were determined to be eligible for participation in the study. All fifteen agreed to participate in the interviews. All participants were current or

former foster parents of children who attended school in Hesperia Unified School District at any point during the 2019/2020 school year. All foster children received mental health or behavioral services through Children & Family Services or an associated referred agency as a component of their case plan. Information about the type of services received was collected by the information disclosed in the interviews and will be necessary to analyze the data correctly. Participants that volunteered for this study included their current and former experiences with service utilization.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

Secondary data analysis will be conducted to determine foster parents' perception of the effectiveness of foster youth services. The interviews were completed and transcribed by MSW interns working with Hesperia Unified Schools District's Student Services department. The transcripts were recorded in real-time on Microsoft word documents. First, participants were asked open-ended questions that covered: what services the foster children used while in the foster parents' care, how the service effectiveness impacted the foster family, and how the services could have been more effective.

More specific questions were asked based on the participants' willingness to divulge further information. Further questioning pertained to what agency the services were provided by, what agency provided the referral for services, how the county and foster agency social workers were supporting the family with their needs, and if the foster parents were interested in the MSW intern conducting the

interview reaching out to the school district or county CFS agency to further support the family with getting their needs met.

### Procedures

The authors of this study will obtain permission from the Hesperia Unified School district to access the transcriptions of telephone interviews of foster parents. The transcripts will be obtained through emailed Microsoft word document attachments. The school district will vet the transcripts before they are sent to the authors to ensure no identifiable information is included in the transcripts. The incentive utilized to gain participants for the interviews was the disclosure that the foster parents' opinions could help service providers make changes to their service delivery that may lead to a positive increase in effectiveness.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The human subjects will be protected by anonymity and the nature of the secondary analysis. The transcripts being analyzed will not contain any identifying information, but demographic information will be included. Each transcript will come to the authors of this study with pseudonyms to allow the authors to maintain clarity while reviewing the transcripts. All of the transcripts have been recorded, so the authors of this study will not contact any participants.

The interviews were conducted voluntarily, with full disclosure by the MSW interns that the information was being collected to give the foster parents a voice

in the perceived effectiveness of services being provided to the youth in the foster system. Interview transcripts will be stored as private downloads on the authors' personal computers. The computers will be password protected, so only the authors will log into the computers. The interview transcripts will also be stored in a password-protected document file to add extra security.

### Data Analysis

All data gathered from the interview transcripts will be analyzed with thematic analysis. Information will be divided into categories based on the service type it refers to, such as service referrals, behavioral health services, and mental health services. Vague statements from the participants, such as, "it was good/all right/fine," will not be included in the data analysis if the interviewer did not conduct follow-up questions to get a clear understanding of what the participant was expressing.

All statements will be sorted into categories into service types based on the services the statements refer to. There will be 'positive' and 'negative' sections in each service type category, where statements will be assigned according to the perceived effectiveness disclosed. Each positive/negative section will contain subsections on the reason given for each option. For example, subsections may consist of 'service provider,' 'location,' 'facility staff,' 'county worker's impact of services.'

Interrater reliability was utilized in this study to ensure the data was analyzed relatively and decrease researcher bias. Each researcher involved in

this study analyzed and coded interview responses independently to identify themes, subthemes, and concepts. Each assessment was then brought together to compare how each researcher coded the information. Information coded the same between researchers remained coded as is, and information coded differently was reassessed and further analyzed to detect relationships and determine more concrete results the researchers agreed upon.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results from a secondary analysis of personal interviews conducted with study participants. Demographic data is presented with participant experience in the following categories: services, social worker experience, child(ren)'s experience, foster parents fostering experience, and advice for social workers. Direct quotes were used to support the themes identified in the participant's perception of services as foster parents.

#### Demographics

Of the twenty interviews available, fifteen were relevant and able to be used for the study. The foster parents consisted of fifteen females (100%). Of the participants, five participants were Caucasian (33.3%), six were Hispanic (40%), three were African-American (20%), and one identified as Asian (6.6%). The foster parents have actively had foster care placements within the last year and have received some form of child welfare service component for the children placed in their homes. Nine participants identified themselves as unrelated to the child(ren) in care (60%) and six participants identified themselves as relatives to the child(ren) in their care (40%). One participant identified themselves as fostering through a foster family agency. See Table I for breakdown of participants by characteristics.

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Participants by Characteristics.

<b>Participant Demographics</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
<b>Caucasian</b>	5 (33.3%)
<b>Hispanic</b>	6 (40%)
<b>African-American</b>	3 (20%)
<b>Asian</b>	1 (6.6%)
<b>Female</b>	15 (100%)
<b>Relative Caregivers</b>	6 (40%)
<b>Total N</b>	15 (100%)

## Presentation of Findings

### Services Received by Foster Parents

Service utilization among foster parents was split among county services and non-county-services. County services were composed of therapy services, and social worker support. Six participants reported receiving therapy services for the foster children in their care. Fifteen participants received social worker support services.

Non-county services were composed of Individualized Education Plans (IEP), school communication regarding grades, behavioral concerns, and learning disabilities, and foster resources to supplement foster child support. Three participants reported receiving IEP services, three participants reported

receiving student services, and one reported utilizing foster support resources through a local hospital.

### Perceived Effectiveness of County Services by Foster Parents

Fourteen participants shared their experiences relating to their perception of the effectiveness of services. Responses were mixed between positive and negative experiences. Eleven of the participants discussed their perception of experiences working with social workers. Five participants noted the experience as being positive, two reported negative experiences, and four reported mixed feelings about the experience. Participant four reported that the social worker was “supportive and helpful”, and participant six reported her social workers are “very attentive and supportive of the family’s needs.”

Participant seven reported negative social worker experience, reporting “the social workers demanded too much from someone trying to maintain a job as well as adhere to all the court dates and paperwork.” Participant eight stated “the biggest challenge was the social worker.” She continued to say her social worker was “difficult, rude, and felt they were above me.” The participant explained that she felt afraid to stand up to social workers out of fear the foster children may be removed from her care.

The four participants that expressed mixed feelings described inconsistencies in social worker service. Participant four shared that she has had “attentive and supportive” social workers, but the current worker is “hard to contact.” Participant twelve stated she has had “fantastic workers”, as well as

workers that are “night and day.” She described fantastic workers as following through on tasks, being timely with addressing foster children’s needs, and establishing positive relationships with the foster children. She reported dissatisfaction with social workers who were difficult to get a hold of, lacked follow-up for needs, and did not have a good relationship with the foster children. Foster parent number fourteen expressed similar concerns, reporting she has had social workers that are “willing to get in deep and do whatever they can to help the kids and their foster families.” She described working with social workers that “do the minimum” and do not tend to the family’s needs. Participant fifteen reported that despite having “several” caseworkers, she has only been satisfied with the services received from her current social worker.

Some foster parents attributed their perception of effectiveness of services to their foster children’s experiences. Participant eleven expressed that “the court system moves children around too much. That is why these children are so messed up.” Participant fourteen reported that her foster child had been in “nine or ten different placements”, and that their time in foster care was “scary.”

When participants were asked what their view was of services they were receiving, participant responses were mixed. One participant expressed satisfaction with services. Two participants indicated dissatisfaction with their services. Dissatisfaction from services was related to COVID-19, and lack of support with tasks. Participant four shared the belief that, “Having wraparound and counseling services online is inappropriate for the children’s age”, explaining

that “he is unable to focus” and “too young to benefit from this mode of service.” The participants who did not report satisfaction with services felt they had little support and lacked guidance with their concerns. Participant two reported, “I need someone who can help me understand the process, and help me with information to best help my grandson.”

Four participants indicated that they had not been offered services at all and were unaware of service options. Four participants identified that they have had to utilize services through outside sources, including their school district or workplace, rather than the department. Participant fourteen reported that she is utilizing foster resources through the school district to obtain support for her foster child. Participant fifteen reported, “The only reason the children are receiving services now is because I am a nurse at a local hospital. I have had to work to obtain resources for my grandkids. None of the social workers have ever offered any resources for the kids, myself, or my husband.”

### Suggestions for the Improvement of Services

Three of the participants provided thoughts on how service effectiveness could be improved. Participant twelve stressed the importance of follow-up and communication. She stated, “follow through with the things you say you will do, and follow-up with families even if it is just to let families know something did not work out the way it was planned to.” She also expressed the importance of trauma-informed responses to children that have been removed from their homes, and the need for relationship-building between social workers and foster

children. She stated, “Workers who do not follow up and follow through cause further trauma and trust issues for foster children, because the children learn that the people who are supposed to be there for them are not doing their job.” Foster parent fourteen addressed engagement techniques, advising that “social workers need to be aware of how they are questioning children”, explaining that children feel they are “doing something wrong.” She also indicated that social workers need to be more proactive with children’s records, explaining that her foster child was affected due to social workers “not doing their job.” Foster parent fifteen noted that their service effectiveness could be improved if social workers “stayed in contact with the foster parents and utilized their communication skills.” She also expressed the need for social workers to be supportive and helpful in the process, and consistent in their support.

**Table 2.** Themes of Foster Parent Perspectives.

Domain	Subtheme	Example Quote
Services Received by Foster Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...behavior issues and is receiving therapy...”</li> <li>• “...ADHD and a learning disability, and the student is in therapy...”</li> <li>• “...Child is in several types of therapy to help him with those diagnosis, as well as trauma he experienced while in foster care...”</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...attend several therapy sessions a week...”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...receives a lot of support and communication from Child’s teacher and principle</li> <li>• “...utilizing the foster/homeless resources through the school district</li> <li>• “...Child’s teachers are involved in Child’s care, an IEP is being developed, and her teacher has contacted the social worker for the family</li> <li>• “...One of the child’s teachers came in for a home visit, and recommended the child get an IEP because she does not retain her education.</li> </ul>
Perceived Effectiveness of County Services by Foster Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive Experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• second social worker, however, was very helpful and supportive and made reunifying much easier than the previous worker.</li> <li>• has had workers that are willing to “get in deep” and do whatever they can to help the children and their foster families</li> <li>• all of her social workers and her FFA workers have always</li> </ul>

		<p>been very attentive to and support of the family and their needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agency and social workers she has interacted with are always supportive and takes good care of the family.</li> <li>• One worker was “fantastic; always followed through on what she promised, was on top of getting the children the referrals they needed and had a good relationship with the children.”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative Experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social worker was working against her and making it as difficult as possible for mom to reunify</li> <li>• social worker “did not follow the rules and guidelines she was supposed to...”</li> <li>• had workers who do “the minimum”</li> <li>• The FFA worker and the county social worker did not have the records</li> <li>• other people “weren’t doing their job.”</li> <li>• social worker has been hard to contact</li> <li>• sw would take note of something, but the referrals never came</li> </ul>

		in, was hard to get a hold of, did not follow up with information requested, and did not have a good relationship with the children.”
Suggestions for the Improvement of Services	Communication/follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• workers who follow up and follow through build better relationships with children</li> <li>• the children learn they can trust the worker and the worker is looking out for them</li> <li>• Workers who do not follow up cause further trauma and trust issues for foster children</li> <li>• children learn that the people who are supposed to be there for them and look out for them are not doing their job.</li> </ul>

### Summary

This chapter presented the findings of a secondary data analysis to address foster parent perspectives on the effectiveness of services. Findings show the differences between services obtained from county and non-county referrals. Results were organized into three categories to further explore experiences. The categories were: services offered to foster parents, foster parent perceptions on the effectiveness of received services, and perceptions on

how service effectiveness could be improved. In relation to perceptions of the effectiveness of services, responses were closely linked to the foster parent and social worker relationship involving social worker availability, communication, timeliness, and assistance with tasks. To increase service effectiveness, participants suggested increasing communication and follow-up with families, and improving engagement with foster children.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion section for this study. This chapter will review the limitations of the study and recommendations for the authors about how this study could impact social work practice, policy, and research. The conclusion section will cover the overall experience of this study and what the researcher could have done differently.

#### Discussion

A theme of satisfaction identified in this study pertains to the county social workers who were easier to contact. Two participants (13.3%) identified that they had been fostering children through San Bernardino County CFS for several years. Those participants were able to share their experiences of working with many social workers over the years. Participants who had multiple years of fostering experience identified that social workers who were easy to contact were beneficial to the foster family and children in care, because the social workers were responsive to the family and children's needs. Social workers who answered their phones and emails regularly, were able to help foster families obtain the services the children required much easier and quicker than social workers who were harder to contact. These findings are consistent with past literature. As noted in Spiefogel et al. (2012), "Similar to previous findings, foster

parents in this study wanted to feel supported and have positive working relationships with agency staff.”

This study found that a common theme of dissatisfaction identified by participants was the variation in county social workers’ communication. Of the fifteen participants in the study, seven participants (46.6%) identified that their social workers were difficult to contact, making it difficult for participants to access the resources and services they needed. Due to this difficulty, several participants identified that they preferred to obtain services offered through the community because those services were more easily accessible. These findings are similar to what Barnett et al. (2017) found in their study. The authors noted, “Moreover, parents have identified poor collaboration and integration of services, poor availability of child welfare workers, and feelings of being devalued by the child welfare court systems.”

Another common theme identified in this study was the support to foster family offered by Hesperia Unified School District. Participants identified that the school district offered a wide variety of resources to foster families, to help these families obtain services they needed. Although the school district itself did not provide services to foster families, the district did provide families with a resource guide that provided information for services offered by community providers. Hanlon et al. (2021) reported, “Although it may seem obvious that foster parent satisfaction is connected to foster parent retention, it is not clear from the literature that child welfare agencies seek to increase or promote satisfaction.”

The findings in this study regarding foster parent's preference to seek out services through the school district, rather than through the child welfare agency, is evidence of this.

### Limitations

Several limitations were identified during this study. This first limitation is sample size. The authors of this study were provided forty-five participants Hesperia School District had identified as associated with foster children from the school district. As the authors sorted through the transcripts, it was discovered that not all forty-five identified families were actually foster families. Some of the families identified as foster were actually biological families or adoptive parents. Parents who identified as adoptive parents declined to participate in the study, as they believed their experience did not qualify as "fostering children."

Another limitation discovered was the inability to follow-up with participants to get clarification on their statements. Some participants gave vague statements that could have been interpreted differently between researchers. For such statements, the author of this study coded the statements individually, and then came together to reconcile the different interpretations. Statements that were too vague for the authors to interpret were not included in the final data collection.

A third limitation identified in the study was that all participants were female. It should be noted that males may have a different interpretation of the serviced provided through the various outlets foster parents obtain services

through. by including the male perspective, the data could change to reflect a different level of satisfaction with services.

Obtaining data from only one school district was also a limitation to this study. Data from multiple school districts in San Bernardino County would provide a more inclusive view of foster parents' satisfaction rates of service effectiveness.

#### Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research Practice

Using the data gathered from the participants in this study, the researchers believe client engagement, follow-up, and communication should a higher priority to county social workers. The researchers understand that county social workers have very high caseloads and a multitude of families they are working with at the same time, but based on this study it appears to be imperative that social workers keep in mind that their communication skills are also observed by their clients as a service the social worker is providing.

By being hard to contact, social workers are limiting their level of benefit to their clients. When social workers cannot be contacted appropriately by their clients, their clients suffer from not receiving the services or resources they need. Participants in this study identified that when the foster parents cannot contact their social worker, the child/ren in foster care is unable to receive the services they require, leading to a detriment to the child/ren waiting for their social worker to coordinate their services.

## Policy

Due to the apparent lack of communication between the social workers and foster parents identified by this study, it is strongly recommended that San Bernardino County provide further training to their social workers, to help the social workers develop more effective communication and follow-up skills. Client engagement and communication is already a mandatory requirement for San Bernardino County CFS, however, there appears to be issues remaining where the requirement meets social work practice. Further training for social workers may help them increase their understanding of the importance of communicating with their clients.

## Research

The researchers recommended a research study be conducted with a multitude of school districts in San Bernardino County to gather a larger sample size of San Bernardino County foster parents. In addition, the researchers believe research investigating San Bernardino County social workers as participants to gather their perception and experience working with foster families. This would help to identify why some social workers are harder to contact than others, can what changes need to be made in order to make all social workers more easily accessible to their clients.

## Conclusions

This chapter presented the discussion of the significant findings found in the data analysis process of the study, and how these themes apply to the foster

parents' perspective of service effectiveness. Also, this chapter outlined the limitations of the study and made recommendations for social work practice, policy, and future research with foster parents and their perspective of service effectiveness.

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

Two researchers were responsible for completing this study. Responsibilities were divided in the following manner:

1. Data Collection:

By: Cherish Watson-Nunez

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

By: Christina M. Landeros and Cherish Watson-Nunez

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

a. Introduction and Literature:

By: Christina M. Landeros and Cherish Watson-Nunez

b. Methods:

By: Christina M. Landeros and Cherish Watson-Nunez

c. Results:

By: Christina M. Landeros and Cherish Watson-Nunez

d. Discussion:

By: Christina M. Landeros and Cherish Watson-Nunez