

5-2023

## ASSESSING RURAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Ava M. Hagwood

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ASSESSING RURAL NORTHERN CALIFORNIA FOSTER PARENT  
RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

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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  
Ava M. Hagwood

May 2023

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This research proposal aims to better understand the effectiveness of current recruitment of Resource Family Approved (RFA) foster parents in a rural Northern California region. Approximately half of the foster youth at the selected research site were placed out of county due to a lack of available in-county privatized foster homes or RFA foster homes. By assessing the effectiveness of current recruitment rates, researchers identified effective future recruitment efforts. This understanding can lead to an increase in local foster homes and aid increased Family Reunification efforts.

**Methods:** The study partnered with a rural Northern California Resource Family Approval (RFA) program and utilized a positivist approach. The researcher assessed RFA department data and focused on licensed foster parents and former foster parents. Administrative data was collected and analyzed through thematic analysis.

**Implications:** The study's results aimed to explore effective recruitment strategies for rural RFA programs. Analysis of research results highlighted the most ineffective and potentially effective RFA foster parent recruiting strategies at the rural research site. Implications for future social work include adjusting recruitment strategies to result in additional rural foster homes.

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# CHAPTER ONE: ASSESSMENT

## Introduction

This first chapter provides an overview of the research topic and explores the effectiveness of existing foster parent recruitment techniques in rural Northern California communities. It also covers the rationale behind choosing a positivist approach, reviews supportive literature, covers the theoretical orientation, and discusses how the research will contribute to micro and macro social work. The chapter will conclude with a summary of what the chapter outlined.

## Research Question

Rural communities often lack the number of foster homes needed to house their foster children, and minimal research has assessed the effectiveness of existing recruitment strategies for recruiting foster parents in rural regions (Sedlak et al., 2010). This research focused on a rural Northern California county that does not have enough foster homes to support current numbers of foster youth. Existing recruitment techniques included informational booths/presentations at community gatherings, paper fliers, and meeting with individuals in person when they had a family member enter foster care. The first research question was: how effective are existing foster parent recruitment strategies in rural communities? For this study, foster parents were defined as

those who completed the Resource Family Approved (RFA) certification, and administrative data, primarily a department-led survey, was assessed to answer the research question.

The second research question was: what motivates individuals to pursue fostering children? A department conducted RFA foster parent survey was the primary source of information for this question. Other secondary administrative data was utilized to better understand what brought each person to pursue becoming a licensed foster parent. Due to the small nature of the organization, the Program Manager and RFA social worker both had a strong understanding of what led each foster home to become licensed.

A thematic analysis was used to assess the data. Due to the qualitative exploratory nature of this data, there was no research hypothesis.

### Paradigm and Rationale for Chosen Paradigm

This research study used the positivism paradigm approach. The positivism paradigm assumes a researcher exists outside of reality and has minimal engagement with the research site. The separation between the researcher and research site, in addition to the linear approach of the positivist paradigm, allowed the research to be proactive in reducing researcher bias; therefore, the research was more objective and had a higher overall validity (Morris, 2013). By maintaining a higher validity, the study has greater legitimacy in the realm of social work.

Positivism views reality as objective and believes reality (the physical/environmental sphere) to be governed by identifiable laws and mechanisms (Morris, 2013). A positivist researcher commits to using methodology that measures and manipulates reality, but the researchers do not directly impact reality or the administrative data under review.

In this research study, the themes impacting foster parent recruitment emerged from the qualitative data. Of the four research paradigms (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism), positivism was best suited to assess correlations between the various factors impacting foster parent recruitment. Using the positivism paradigm, researchers also used convenience sampling to gather data on a larger population. Convenience sampling was crucial in this study as a limited number of individuals completed the RFA parent survey, and thus the researcher had the most information on those specific 17 individuals.

### Literature Review

The literature review focused on the following: prevalence of the issue (foster home rates) in the target community, causes of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to become a foster parent, consequences of effective/non-effective recruitment strategies, and interventions that could lead to higher numbers of licensed foster parents.

## Prevalence of the Issue

As of May 15, 2021, the targeted community had 18 licensed foster homes, and this number remained consistent through the data collection phase in August 2022. At the time of data collection, the department had 20 active foster homes. The target research-site county had a population of approximately 18,500 people, and approximately 60-75 foster youth are currently dependents of the local Juvenile Court at any given time in the county<sup>1</sup>. Like other rural communities, this study site had high numbers of foster youth. However, it lacked the number of needed foster homes and resorted to placing foster youth in urban areas with higher availability of foster home (Sedlak et al., 2010). Of the research site juvenile dependents, approximately 15 percent were in congregate care, 15 percent were over 18 years old and lived independently, 40 percent were in family maintenance cases residing with their parents, and the remaining 40 percent were in family-like foster care settings<sup>2</sup>. Approximately 30 foster youth from the research site resided in a foster home or facility setting<sup>3</sup>.

An average of one in five Americans reside in a rural community, defined as an area with a population of fewer than 500,000 people (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018). Poverty is more intense and persistent in rural areas and places children at higher risk of adverse health, well-being, and the likelihood of entering foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Information was sourced from Plumas County Child Welfare Records.

<sup>2</sup> Information was sourced from Plumas County Child Welfare Records.

<sup>3</sup> IBID.

Poverty is not a predictor of a child entering foster care; rather, poverty positively correlates with higher rates of children in foster care (Wulczyn et al., 2013). More than 26 percent of children in rural areas live in poverty compared to 21.5 percent of urban children (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2018).

One contributing causal factor of rural poverty and increased foster care rates remains a lack of access to services and supports such as housing, transportation, or financial assistance (Freisthler, 2011). The lack of support services puts families who need assistance in danger of not providing for their families. These families struggle to obtain basic needs such as housing, food, medical appointments, or get to work/appointments. This inability to provide for their families and increased stress often results in abuse/neglect of children and places children at a higher risk of entering foster care (Freisthler, 2011).

As of 2019, California had approximately 9,061,651 children; of those, approximately 60,000 were in the California foster care system (California Department of Social Services Programs, 2021; the University of California at Berkeley Child Welfare Indicators Project, 2020). Sedlak et al. (2010) found that children in rural areas endure abuse at almost two times higher rates than those in urban areas. Overall rates of abuse were 1.7 times higher in rural areas than urban counties; sexual abuse occurred at 2.0 the rate of urban counties, emotional abuse occurred 2.6 times more than urban counties, and serious harm (by Harm Standard maltreatment) was 2.2 times the incident rate in rural counties compared to urban counterparts (Sedlak et al., 2010).

## Barriers to Recruiting and Retaining Foster Parents

The lack of resources also impacts those who want to become or choose to be foster parents. Rural foster parents do not have access to the same resources and support as their urban counterparts, such as Far Northern Regional Centers, nonprofit organizations, or behavior specialists. This lack of access to resources contributes to the obstacles individuals face when deciding whether to become foster parents.

Potential foster parents often do not become foster parents because they lack/cannot find services available to help foster youth, lack of agency support, limited caseworker support, and the adverse effects of abuse allegations. Individuals are often fearful of allegations being made against them or their family members by foster children or biological parents which could impact their family's reputation or stability. A lack of data surrounding the causes of foster parents not obtaining licensure for their homes directly hinders the ability to improve retention rates.

The paramount need for a successful foster parent is support. The support could come from other family members, school, daycare, or other sources; however, the most important factor is support from the RFA Unit or foster agency. Support from the agency includes emotional support, communication, respect, trust, and the foster parents being considered part of the child's care/support team (MacGregor et al., 2006). Licensed Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) homes need access to outside resources such as Far Northern Regional Centers, behaviorists, nonprofit organizations, and other facilities to

care for their high-needs foster children. These specialty resources are often unavailable in rural areas and can be a barrier to having foster homes of all levels, especially ISFC homes.

Buehler, Cox, and Cuddeback (2003) documented foster parents' need for support and proper training. Specifically, foster parents benefit from trainings that teach age-appropriate parenting, tolerance, relationship-building skills among co-parenting foster parents, and organization/routines in the foster home that allow flexibility with the child(ren)'s needs. The study emphasized the need for foster parents to be thoroughly trained and well-versed in these areas of family functioning throughout the application process and continued training throughout a foster child's placement.

### Motivation

Research has consistently found intrinsic motivation is the foundation for individuals becoming foster parents. Intrinsic motivation comes from many areas of life, including individuals wanting to give back to their community, out of love for children, a desire to increase family size, adoption, seeking companionship, filling an "empty nest," and/or religious reasons (Daniel, 2011; Baum et al., 2001; MacGregor et al., 2006; Maslow, 1943). Some individuals who had previous experience in foster care sought out the foster parent role as adults because they related to the children and had first-hand experience understanding their needs (MacGregor et al., 2006). Homes with high levels of altruism and religious motivations also correlated with higher rates of foster home certifications (Moroney, 2014).

The one external motivation for becoming a foster parent is the financial compensation for taking a foster child into a home. Monetary compensation intends to match a child's needs; however, compensation increases as a child's needs increase. In California, foster parents receive financial compensation from \$1,000 to \$2,600 (Department of Social Services, Foster Care Rate Setting, 2021). A foster home with a foster youth that does not have special needs will receive approximately \$1,000 per month to go towards the child's needs. This amount is often not enough independently to motivate adults to become foster parents as many foster parents need to provide the youth with new clothes, food, daycare, tutoring, extracurriculars, and other out-of-pocket expenses. Daniel (2011) found that families with more financial resources were more likely to continue fostering than families with less financial support.

### Consequences

The consequences of ineffective recruitment strategies include lacking enough local foster parents and placing children in foster homes far from their hometowns. Having children placed far from their original homes hinders reunification efforts and can lead to children remaining in foster care for longer periods of time (The Benefits of Family Time, 2020). This is primarily due to the increased difficulty in arranging and scheduling visitation between the children and their parents. Children also experience a departure from their school of origin, disruption of service providers, and adjusting to a foreign environment. This can negatively impact the child's education, mental health, and general well-being (Berger et al., 2009). Experts argue that each time a child is moved to a



new school, they lose approximately four to six months of academic progress because of the disruption (Emerson & Lovitt, 2003).

### Interventions

Current recruitment tactics at the research site included handing out fliers around the community and occasionally participating in informational booths. The majority of licensed foster parents at the research site became foster parents by knowing a child personally who needed a foster home. To understand future effective recruitment strategies, this research required a better understanding of how effective existing recruitment strategies were and how to target specific populations of potential foster parents.

Data on the demographics of licensed foster care providers is minimal; however, a study by Doris Capello (2006) documented New Jersey had 868 Hispanic children in foster care in 2003, but only 185 foster homes were categorized as Hispanic. This minimal representation of minority foster parents can be seen throughout the United States, especially in predominately Caucasian rural communities.

Different foster parent demographics need to have recruiting strategies tailored to their culture, language, and social policies. Doris Capello (2006) studied the importance of considering those three factors when recruiting Hispanic foster parents. As of 2018, the Hispanic population represented the largest minority in California, making up 39 percent of the residents (Public Policy Institute of California, 2020). Of the 437,283 children across the United States in foster care on September 30, 2018, 21 percent were Hispanic (Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2020). The Capello 2006 study found that Hispanic foster parents are often extended family members or part of a community church; therefore, effective recruitment of Hispanic foster parents incorporates a family or church component. Hispanic families often view any child in their home as a family member, which contributes to permanency for foster children in their care. Doris Capello's (2006) study demonstrates the importance of considering diverse demographics and cultural norms when recruiting foster parents and expands on how that consideration can lead to more diversified foster parents in a region.

### Conclusion

Rural communities have unique struggles in recruiting foster parents. Scant research has addressed effective foster parent recruitment strategies. However, researchers have assessed foster parents' needs and motivations, and their findings can be applied when designing future recruitment strategies. Understanding foster parents' needs and motivations can tailor recruitment strategies to each family or region. By tailoring recruitment efforts to encompass individuals' motivations and needs, researchers can be more effective with their recruitment approaches. Due to the higher need for foster parents in rural regions and fewer support services available to foster parents in rural areas, recruiters will need to be attuned to individuals' motivations and needs to recruit and retain foster parents effectively.

## Theoretical Orientation

This research study focused on assessing the effectiveness of existing recruitment methods when attempting to certify new foster parents in a rural Northern California county. An appropriate theoretical framework for this research was Maslow's Motivation Theory. The Motivation Theory proposes that individuals are driven by internal and external influences to complete a goal or outcome (Maslow, 1943). Intrinsic motivation is driven by internal rewards, such as a sense of pride. In contrast, external motivation results from reasons outside an individual used to complete a goal or outcome, such as getting paid for completing a job. Motivation Theory explores what prompts individuals to work toward a goal or outcome; it is often used to better understand an individual's level of productivity and job satisfaction. This theory suggests that the research needs to evaluate intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in each foster parent recruitment approach.

MacGregor et al. (2006) argues intrinsic motivation is more important for foster parents than extrinsic motivation. The higher the intrinsic motivation, the higher the "job" satisfaction of being a foster parent. This theory helped form a framework for this research topic by identifying recruitment tactics that target intrinsic motivation. By understanding the role intrinsic motivation plays when recruiting foster parents, we can anticipate recruitment strategies focusing on approaching people in altruism-evoking environments - such as church settings or charity/volunteer organizations - would lead to higher recruitment rates.

Potential Contribution of the Study to Micro and Macro Social Work Practice

This study contributed to the individual (micro) and system (macro) levels of child welfare and social work. By identifying the most effective recruitment strategies, the county can invest resources toward specific strategies, leading to an increased number of foster homes in the future. A county's commitment to increasing its number of foster homes will benefit foster children through foster children having increased access to in-person visitation, remain in their school of origin, have a continuum of care with service providers, and be in a familiar environment with access to their natural support system. This individual (micro) level benefit can aid in Family Reunification efforts. Individuals in a Family Reunification case are working with the department to reunify with their child(ren) placed in an out of care foster home. Improved Family Reunification efforts can improve the foster youth's overall health, mental health, and academic success.

Through a better understanding of how to effectively recruit foster parents, the department (macro-level) can be better equipped to target specific populations of individuals to pursue foster parent licensure. By having a better understanding of how to increase the number of local foster parents, the community will have an opportunity to promote a sense of unity, empathy, and develop a better understanding of the struggles foster youth in the community endure. Community members will have the chance to give back to foster youth while also acting as a support for the child's family if the child returns to their biological family home and if the biological family continues contact with the foster family. This additional support for the members in a Family Reunification

case could aid in permanency upon the foster child returning home to their birth parents.

An increased number of foster homes would also result in additional homes available for respite when needed. Respite foster homes are short-term placements designed to provide the full-time foster parents with a temporary break from caring for their foster children. An increase in respite foster homes available would reduce foster parents' burn-out rates and increase foster youth's permanency in their foster homes (Jenaro, Flores, & Arias, 2007).

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research topic - understanding the effectiveness of current foster parent recruitment strategies in rural Northern California regions. This section also reviewed rationale behind choosing a positivist paradigm and reviewed relevant literature. In the literature review, multiple factors were evaluated in relation to the research topic, including the prevalence of the issue, barriers to recruiting, motivation for becoming a foster parent, consequences of not having enough foster homes, and possible interventions to target potential foster parents. The theoretical orientation selected was Maslow's Motivation Theory which explored how intrinsic motivation, compared to extrinsic motivation, influences individuals to pursue becoming a licensed foster home. Finally, the chapter discussed the impacts the study would have on macro and micro levels of social work.

## CHAPTER TWO: ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

This chapter will focus on the engagement phase of the study. This section discusses the selected study site, services the site provides, demographic information on the region, and the gatekeepers (the Program Manager and RFA social worker). Different engagement strategies for the gatekeepers at the research site are assessed. The chapter then focuses on ways the researcher will self-prepare and overcome issues and concerns, including diversity, ethical, and political issues. The last section covers the role of technology in the engagement of the gatekeeper, university, and data assessment. The section will then conclude with a summary of what the chapter discussed.

### Study Site

The selected study location was a rural community in Northern California. The rural county has 19,915 people as of July 1, 2021 (United States Census, 2021). As of July 1, 2021, the community was 82.1 percent Caucasian, 10.3% Hispanic, 3.2 percent American Indian, 1.2 percent African American, and 3.2 percent were categorized as another ethnicity. (United States Census, 2021). For comparison, as of October 2022, the foster children in out-of-home placement by the research site had the following ethnicities: 15 percent (n=4) African American,

7 percent (n=2) Native American, 11 percent (n=3) Latino, 66 percent (n=18) Caucasian.

The research site is an aging community, with over 30 percent of residents listed as 65 years old or older (United States Census, 2021). In 2003, 13.5 percent of residents lived in poverty, and 17.2 percent of children in the research site county lived in poverty; an estimated 19.8 percent of adults were categorized as food insecure (California Food Policy Advocates, 2003). As of July 2021, the research site had 63 children in the Child Welfare System (CWS) (Webster et al., 2021).

The focus agency was a rural Northern California Resource Family Approved (RFA) program. The RFA program began on January 1, 2017, and was administered through the California Department of Social Services as an alternative to private foster home agencies (Elmendorf et al., 2021). This allowed local counties to manage their own foster homes instead of contracting with external agencies (Elmendorf et al., 2021). As of May 15, 2021, the rural research-site RFA program had 30 registered RFA foster homes, only 18 of which were active. During data collection in August 2022, the number had increased to 20 active RFA homes. The agency offers two half-day trainings for individuals seeking to become registered foster or adoptive parents. These two trainings result in foster parents receiving the required 12 hours of training before becoming licensed. Additional online foster parent trainings are provided as needed to deliver specific education to foster parents who have children in their home with specific needs. Due to the remote location and small size of the RFA

program in the research site community, limited services are offered to their RFA foster parents compared to their neighboring RFA urban counterparts. All RFA employees working at the research site are required to have a master's degree. The RFA employees conduct foster and adoptive home studies and other RFA-related case management. Social workers provide the RFA home study reports to the local county juvenile court and other courts upon formal request.

#### Engagement Strategies for Gatekeepers at Research Site

The researcher engaged the Program Manager and RFA social worker (the gatekeepers at the RFA program) by meeting with them to assess the study site's needs and interest in participating in the proposed research study. This meeting also allowed the researcher to answer any clarifying questions the gatekeeper had and stressed the potential long-term benefits of the research. The researcher worked with the RFA Unit to discuss the role of the RFA staff throughout the research process and gained permission to access the unit's records. The researcher discussed ways to maintain the anonymity of the clients and employees involved in the research. Follow-up meetings were arranged with the researcher and the gatekeeper as needed or requested for continued clarification. The research was not conducted prior to obtaining the approval of the University and gatekeeper.

The researcher contacted the gatekeeper via in-person communication, email, and telephonic correspondence to engage the research site. Through the RFA Unit's participation in this research study, they not only benefited short-term



with an anticipated increased number of RFA foster homes, but they also benefited long-term with the knowledge of more effective and efficient recruitment strategies. Upon the conclusion of this research, the researcher prepared a presentation for the department on the study's findings.

### Self-Preparation

To prepare for data collection in a positivist study, the researcher developed and completed the research question, paradigm, and literature review before the research began. The preparation and assessment steps were completed separately due to the research occurring in a positivist study format; the steps were completed sequentially (Morris, 2014). The researcher needed access to technology to conduct data analysis of existing recruitment strategy effectiveness.

The researcher needed to be sensitive to the existing diversity of RFA recruitment strategies, as not all current recruitment strategies fit into a specified category. The researcher prepared for data collection of existing recruitment data by communicating with the RFA social worker and Program Manager. The information provided to the researcher by the RFA social worker did not include identifying information, so the current RFA foster parents retained their confidentiality. Data was collected outside of the research site on the effectiveness of new recruitment tactics by providing a thorough literature review of similar research.

## Diversity Issues

As mentioned above, the rural research-site county was 82.1% Caucasian, 10.3% Hispanic, 3.2% American Indian, 1.2% African American, and 3.2% were categorized as another ethnicity. (United States Census, 2021). Compared to the average in California, the research site population is older and has a higher rate of poverty (Data USA, 2021; Bohn et al., 2020). The limited diversity factors diminished this study's replicability; however, the study remains generalizable to other rural communities in California.

## Ethical Issues

This research study underwent an assessment by the Institutional Review Board to address potential ethical concerns. The RFA social worker provided the researcher with information on the number of RFA foster parents, and all names of the current RFA foster parents remained anonymous. No identifying information was used when referring to a specific foster parent to protect each individual.

## Political Issues

The primary political issue was potentially portraying the research site negatively when assessing the recruitment strategies already in place by the RFA unit. Due to the possibility of the researcher finding the recruitment tactics ineffective in recruiting foster parents, the department could be viewed adversely. This potential negative portal did not surprise the department as they considered

their current recruitment strategies to lack efficacy. The research site welcomed the researcher to work with them to address the ineffectiveness of their current recruitment strategies. Not only did the partnering RFA Unit receive confirmation that their existing recruitment strategies were ineffective, but other similar agencies could be criticized as well if they practice comparably inadequate recruitment strategies. The researcher worked with the RFA Unit to discuss how to frame the existing ineffective recruitment strategies.

Another political concern was that all employees in the RFA program in the county hold their Master's in Social Work while the researcher was in the process of completing such a degree, which had the potential to result in agency concerns. However, the researcher had prior experience working in social work and held two related bachelor's degrees. The researcher anticipates completing a Master's in Social Work throughout the research process; therefore, this concern was addressed and mitigated.

### The Role of Technology

Technology was a crucial component of this research study because it allowed the researcher to assess the effectiveness of existing RFA foster parent recruitment rates and various factors, including demographics, recruitment strategies, and external factors that could impact the recruitment strategies. In-person correspondence, emails, phone calls, and texting were used to communicate with the research site gatekeeper as well as University professors

and staff assisting with the research. Technology was used to approve proposals, consent forms, and data analysis.

### Summary

This engagement chapter identified the study site as the RFA Unit in a rural Northern California county. The services the study site provides, clients the agency serves, and the gatekeeper at the agency were discussed. Engaging the study site gatekeeper in the initial development of the research was accomplished by meeting with them and maintaining frequent contact with the study site to answer any clarifying questions. The researcher prepared to conduct the research through sequential steps of preparation and assessment. This included thematical data assessment and a review of existing literature.

The study site's region lacked ethno-racial diversity, and therefore the researcher focused on inclusive recruitment strategies to reduce discrimination against marginalized groups. To ensure the study met the ethical standards of the field, the research proposal was assessed by an Institutional Review Board, and client/employee anonymity was maintained upon publication. The political concerns discussed included exposing negative components of the research site's existing recruitment approaches and the agency permitting someone without a Master's degree to work within a unit requiring individuals to have their Master's degree. Finally, the study utilized technology to approve proposals, consent forms, data analysis, and correspondence.

## CHAPTER THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

### Introduction

This chapter examines the implementation of this positivist study. It covers how the focal foster homes were selected and how administrative data was collected. Details on recording and analyzing the data are evaluated. Finally, the chapter discusses how the study will be terminated and the plan for disseminating the study findings to the research site before concluding with a chapter summary.

### Study Participants

This research did not directly involve study participants as it analyzed existing data. Data included information on Resource Family Approved (RFA) certified foster parents and individuals who were previously RFA certified. Any information regarding existing foster parents remained confidential, and no identifying information was used. No identifying information will be present if a foster parent is referred to in the published research. Couples who pursued becoming licensed foster parents were grouped and counted as one foster home in the data.

## Selection of Participants

This study included data from all individuals who completed the foster parent licensing process and became licensed RFA homes and individuals who were previously certified. The 17 focal foster homes were comprised of individuals who completed the department-conducted RFA survey in August 2022. Of the individuals who completed the survey, 12 were active foster homes, and five were inactive.

## Data Gathering

Data collection occurred through collecting administrative data from the selected Rural Northern California RFA Unit on their recruitment efforts, including recruitment approaches such as advertisements, flyers, news articles, word-of-mouth, and events. Data was collected over August 2022 on both active and inactive foster parents. The specific foster parents analyzed were chosen from among individuals who completed the RFA survey conducted in August 2022. The researcher kept a confidential log of the provided administrative data and a codebook to track relevant themes related to the following: recruitment of foster parents, motivation, challenges with existing strategies, benefits of rural fostering programs, and future recruitment.

## Phases of Data Collection

Data collection included collecting information by reviewing charts, the web-based Child Welfare website for RFA parents (Binti), a department-

conducted RFA parent survey, and speaking with the Program Manager and RFA social worker. The researcher coded for relevant themes related to this research. All administrative data was locked in the RFA social worker's office or accessed through the password-protected Binti computer system. Specific names and case histories were not included in the published research, and the information was collected and assessed on a case-by-case basis.

### Data Recording

The website Binti is utilized to process RFA applications and store information specific to each RFA family. The administrative data extracted from CWS/CMS, Binti, the survey, and conversations with the Program Manager and RFA social worker were compiled into a Microsoft Word file.

### Data Analysis

Administrative data was collected, coded, and analyzed through thematic analysis. Data was based on licensed foster parents and individuals who were previously licensed foster homes. The researcher reviewed the secondary administrative data, obtained a broad view of the themes through using a codebook, and connected the findings to the content and thematic analysis. This research study explored the effectiveness of recruitment techniques through qualitative data.

## Termination and Follow Up

Positivist research does not result in an ongoing relationship between the researcher and participants or the research site following the completion of the research study. The researcher provided the research site with information on how to access the published research paper if they wish to do so in the future, and it will be available for the research site to contact if needed.

## Summary

This study utilized convenience sampling. Qualitative data was gathered through one phase of analyzing secondary administrative data. The data gathered were stored securely throughout the research process, and the researcher analyzed the data through thematic analysis. The study site was informed of the findings through communication with the researcher and through accessing the published research. Following research publication, the researcher will minimally continue contact with the research site as needed.



## CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION

### Introduction

This section covers the demographics and emerging themes discovered in the analyzed department data. The identified themes relating to foster parent recruitment are discussed as well as motivation, challenges with existing recruiting, benefits of rural foster programs, and future steps for recruitment. A thematic analysis of how the information applies to social work on a micro and macro level is performed.

### Presentation of Findings

#### Demographics

This study assessed data from a department-led survey of Resource Family Approval (RFA) homes in addition to Binti data and information provided by Deputy Director/Program Manager Debbie Wingate. At the time of the department-led survey in August 2022, there were 20 active foster homes total, and 12 responded to the survey. Five non-active foster parents provided feedback to the survey as well. A total of 17 individuals participated in the survey, and their responses were analyzed. Survey participants provided demographic information on their age, gender, location, ethnicity, and length of their foster parent certification. They also provided detailed information relating to the recruitment and retention of RFA foster parents.

Of the 17 respondents, 94 percent (n=16) were female, and 6 percent (n=1) were male. The lack of male representation in the respondent sample has the potential to skew the data; however, most of the respondents are the primary care providers of the homes and have more insight to their needs and their family's needs. The respondents were allowed to mark more than one ethnicity, and the percentages were as follows: 82.4 percent (n=14) Caucasian, 17.6 percent (n=3) Hispanic, 11.8 percent (n=2) Native American, and 5.9 percent (n=1) Pacific Islander. However, as noted in Chapter Two, the foster children's ethnicities in the county were as follow: 15 percent (n=4) African American, 7 percent (n=2) Native American, 11 percent (n=3) Latino, and 66 percent (n=18) Caucasian. The RFA foster parents' ethnicities were not representative of the children in out-of-home care. Please see Appendix B for a complete list of questions asked to the RFA foster parents.

The RFA foster parents documented the communities in which they lived, and 70.6 percent (n=12) lived in the rural research site county. In contrast, 29.4 percent (n=5) lived outside of the research site county in neighboring rural communities.

## Results

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: recruitment of foster parents, motivation, challenges with existing recruitment, and the benefits of rural fostering programs. The section will conclude by exploring future recruitment.

## Recruitment of Foster Parents

The findings from department data analysis illustrated each foster parent had their unique reason for becoming a foster parent, yet they intersected across a shared theme. Everyone became a foster parent because of a personal connection to the foster care system. The 12 responses from active foster parent surveys and the eight active foster homes that did not complete the survey all shared the same motivation of personal connection. This motivation was also true for the five non-active foster parent survey respondents.

Survey participants' personal connections included personal experience as a foster child, being raised in a home with foster children, or knowing someone entering the foster care system. Of the personal connections, it was most common for a person to become a foster parent to care for a relative or someone they knew, then remain licensed for other children. One survey respondent noted, "I became a foster parent because a little boy who was enrolled in my childcare stole my heart. He had moved four placements in five months, and I knew his current home was giving a 14-day notice for him. I called immediately to find out what to do so he could come live with us." Because of her personal connection to the child she mentioned, this respondent continued as an RFA foster parent for three years.

Some foster parents' connection to the foster care system came from personally experiencing foster care as a child and motivated them to give back to foster children as adults. A foster parent survey respondent stated, "I wanted to create a stable and thriving home for those who need care. As someone who

[was in the foster care system myself], I can relate to many. It was always a goal in my life to foster.” This particular foster parent had positive and negative foster home experiences as a child and strived to provide a positive experience for local foster children as an RFA foster parent. She is a foster parent in the same community in which she was a foster youth.

The department survey responses indicated that individuals remained foster parents for non-related foster children due to an increased awareness of the community’s need for foster parents. One foster family stated, “Since our nephews were returned to their mother, we have kept our certification open in case they needed a place again. Since then, we have fostered two non-family children.” This foster family decided to keep their certification open to non-relative children because their experience raised awareness of the community’s need for foster parents and increased their confidence in their ability to foster.

### Motivation

The data was consistent with the literature review and supported individuals’ primary motivation of pursuing foster parent certification as intrinsic motivation. The RFA survey asked foster parents on a scale of one to ten (one being the least and ten being the most) how much of their motivation to become licensed foster parents was intrinsic. Seventy-one percent (n=12) of respondents put themselves as a ten, while the remaining 29 percent (n=5) of respondents marked between nine and seven. No participants reported less than a seven. This finding aligns with MacGregor et al. (2006), who established intrinsic motivation as more important for foster parents than extrinsic motivation. The

findings from the survey reiterate the importance of stressing internal motivation during recruitment opportunities. It also supports Maslow's (1943) theory that individuals are driven by intrinsic motivation as they feel a sense of pride and internal reward.

However, when reviewing department data from Binti, it was apparent that intrinsic motivation was limited to helping family members. Most foster parents discontinued their certification once the child they became a foster parent for was no longer in the system. The Program Manager stated, "the vast majority of RFA parents that have closed their certification have closed because the child they became certified for went home to their parents."

A similar question was asked to assess foster parents' extrinsic motivation to foster (e.g., financial), and 83 percent (n= 14) of respondents marked there was no extrinsic motivation. The other 17 percent (n = 3) responded that they were minimally motivated, and the highest individual marked themselves as a three on the one to ten scale (one being minimal and ten being maximal). This also aligns with MacGregor et al. (2006) findings of intrinsic motivation being more important than extrinsic motivation for foster parents.

### Challenges with Existing Recruitment

The department identified multiple recruitment challenges internally, while foster parents identified addition, external obstacles. Internally, the department struggled to participate in resource foster parent recruitment efforts, and the RFA Unit was consistently understaffed. In the past two years, the department's primary attempt at recruitment was the distribution of a paper flier with limited information.

Research has found that generalized foster parent recruitment, such as through fliers or billboards, is often ineffective. In contrast, targeted recruitment is more effective and efficient in meeting the organization's recruitment needs (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2018). Although the department dispersed its recruitment flier throughout the community, the Program Manager deemed it an unsuccessful strategy. Since the onset of COVID-19, the department has attended few in-person events and struggled to maintain a positive presence in the community. Staff members do not attend events unless required, and the department is reluctant to pay staff to attend events outside of business hours. Many foster parent survey responses noted the lack of department engagement in community events and no online presence.

A foster parent noted, "I think recruitment starts within the department and how they play a role in including current foster parents." The department needs to build a positive reputation with its existing foster families, and one primary contribution to this reputation is the department's communication with - and inclusion of - foster parents. This is especially important during times of decision-making. For instance, involvement in case plan development or court preparations can empower foster families to advocate for their foster children and form long-lasting relationships with the department. When foster parents feel heard and valued, they are more likely to encourage peers to become foster parents. This relationship with foster parents also increases the department's credibility within the community. Stine et al. (1995) found that individuals have increased trust and intrinsic motivation in entities when they feel heard and

respected. Through the department demonstrating their respect for existing foster parents and individuals in the community, they will directly increase the trust and intrinsic motivation of those they are interacting with, which helps not only with recruiting foster parents but also retention of existing foster parents.

A primary external challenge the department faces is the negative reputation of the Child Welfare System in modern-day society. Due to the media, personal experience, or the historical trauma social services has contributed to over the years, there is a predominantly negative perspective of the foster care system, and individuals in the community/society often refer to it as a “broken system.” While the negative reputation of foster care being a “broken system” is a macro-level issue, this stigma could be counteracted on a micro-level with the department becoming more involved with and educating the research site community. As mentioned above, the department does not prioritize community engagement. Steps for improvement will be discussed further in the Future Recruitment section.

One obstacle to recruitment that impacts nearly every recruitment strategy is the lack of financial resources. Due to California discontinuing Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Support (FPRRS) funding in 2020, the department could not purchase recruiting material such as posters, give-away branded items, or invest in advertising opportunities. As of May 2022, the State plans to reinstate these funds and has agreed to invest one hundred million dollars on-going into the FPRRS fund (California Welfare Directors Association, 2022).

The lack of a culturally and ethnically diverse population in the community leads to the obstacle of recruiting diverse homes for foster children. The United States Census (2021) found the community was predominantly Caucasian (82.1 percent), while the minority ethnicities in the community were made up of 10.3% Hispanic, 3.2 percent American Indian, 1.2 percent African American, and 3.2 percent were categorized as another ethnicity. Many ethnic minority foster children at the research site lack representation in the study site's RFA program. For example, despite the department having 15 percent (n=4) African American children in foster care, they have no African American foster homes. Considering that only 1.2 percent of the community is African American, the organization will need to make concerted efforts to recruit homes that represent the population of their foster children (United States Census, 2021). The RFA Unit must recruit culturally and ethnically representative homes for their foster children to have the opportunity to be raised in ethnically and culturally representative homes. This is especially important when taking in foster children whose native language is not English. Doris Capello's (2006) study explores and emphasizes the importance of tailoring foster parent recruit efforts to include diverse demographics and increase diversified foster homes in a region. Capello (2006) found increased diversity of foster homes leads to high rates of permanency for diverse populations of foster children.

#### Benefits of Rural Fostering Programs

There are multiple unique benefits rural foster parent programs experience that the department could leverage to build a positive reputation for the RFA



program and bolster recruitment efforts. Due to the department's small size, the entire child welfare and RFA staff meet weekly to discuss their cases. In these meetings, staff members discuss foster home availability, which children need new placement, and the details of client strengths and challenges. These meetings also aid interagency efficiency because staff members remain informed about other cases and can assist foster parents and foster children on another social worker's caseload as needed. This integrated communication between staff members provides department-wide support to existing foster parents.

The department serves a small-town community, which allows positive and personal relationships to be cultivated between staff and foster parents. These relationships drive social workers to work to find ideal placements, guardianships, and adoptions for foster youth. Foster parents often feel the department is transparent and sets them up for success when they have consistently successful placements. One foster parent who adopted three children from the department said, "[RFA] tries to place kiddos with the best-matched foster placement versus just placing them with the next available family." Because she has had success with her placements, this particular foster parent has been a strong advocate of the department and utilized her positive experience with fostering and adopting to recruit her friends to become foster parents. An established rapport with foster parents allows the department to retain existing foster parents.

A unique feature of rural social work remains the vast integration and knowledge of the local needs social workers have within the community. A

shared background and established relationships between foster parents and staff allow the department to provide relevant and targeted training to foster parents. A specific example would be a social worker identifying a region at higher risk for Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and the department responding by providing additional CSEC training to foster parents located in the vulnerable area. It was noted by the Program Manager/Deputy Director, "each community has unique needs; we must be aware of their needs so we can best address them." Communication between staff and foster parents is vital when meeting foster parent needs and building a positive reputation within the community. The benefit of communication extends beyond meeting the needs of existing foster parents to helping recruitment efforts. By having a strong understanding of the surrounding communities, the department remains aware of what community events have high attendance rates so social workers can be more efficient with their recruitment efforts at events in each community.

#### Moving Forward with Future Recruitment

The agency continues to develop a targeted recruitment plan that makes the need for foster parents more personalized and tangible to individuals in the community. Since it is most common for individuals to become foster parents when they have a personal connection to children in the foster care system, there needs to be a connection between individuals in the community and foster youth. Diffusion of responsibility occurs when the foster care system is "just another organization" to potential foster parents. Survey data shows that humanizing foster youth and developing personal connections to the foster care system

results in individuals feeling a greater responsibility to help foster children in their community.

A key element of developing a targeted recruitment plan is identifying the specific area of need and the population most likely to help. In this case, the greatest need is foster homes for older children. Target populations for recruitment include parents of teenagers, school staff, and service organizations. Another target population is churchgoers, as many churches encourage altruism and service to others. Identifying target communities would allow for a tailored recruitment plan for each community.

A final component of future recruitment efforts is working to improve the agency's reputation within the community. Expanding the department's presence at community events and communicating the services offered to clients can be used to build trust and rapport within the community. Building a greater presence and recognition within the community creates relationships with potential foster parents. Shifting society's perspective of "Child Protective Services" is vital in recruiting foster parents because people are more likely to work with organizations they trust and have an established relationship (Stine et al., 1995). Trust in a partnered organization allows prospective foster parents to act on their intrinsic motivations, which MacGregor et al. (2006) found to be the primary motivating factor for foster parents.

## CHAPTER FIVE: TERMINATION AND FOLLOW UP

### Introduction

This section offers a discussion based on the findings from analyzing department data, especially the data collected from the Resource Family Approval (RFA) survey. It also discusses the termination of data collection from the department and the dissemination plan for the study findings.

### Discussion

Recruiting individuals to give their time, home, and love to strangers is complicated and impacted by various factors. This complexity increases in rural areas, such as the rural Northern California research site, partly because the foster care rates are higher with fewer resources available (Sedlak et al., 2010; Freisthler, 2011). Increasing the number of licensed foster homes in rural areas is especially important, considering the higher rates of children in foster care in rural communities (Sedlak et al., 2010).

Recent conversations with the Program Manager for the Child Welfare Unit regarding intensified foster parent recruitment efforts resulted in the decision to develop a targeted recruitment plan. The targeted recruitment plan will incorporate findings from this research and the recent RFA survey results. The Program Manager plans to prioritize tailored in-person recruitment approaches in the recruitment plan. Recruitment will be diversified based on the location of the

recruitment opportunity and focus on intrinsic motivators for the potential RFA foster parents (Capello, 2006; Maslow, 1943). These approaches already proved successful when the study site's RFA Unit recruited a new foster family while attending a local farmer's market event in late September 2022. The recruited family had a personal connection to the foster care system, which was a prominent part of the conversation leading the family to pursue certification. This experience aligns with the conclusions drawn in this research study.

The analysis of department data resulted in several themes related to recruiting RFA foster parents in the rural county. Personalized recruitment approaches resulted in greater motivation for individuals to pursue becoming licensed as a foster home. The results were consistent with MacGregor et al. (2006), who identified intrinsic motivation as more important for foster parents than extrinsic motivation. This finding supports recruitment approaches that highlight intrinsic motivation and personal connections to the foster care system.

### Termination of Study

In his Motivation Theory, Maslow (1943) argued that individuals are driven by internal and external influences to complete a goal or outcome. The researcher analyzed contributing factors, including strengths, areas of improvement, and resources, to identify existing motivational factors leading individuals to pursue becoming a licensed Resource Approved Family (RFA) home. This in-depth analysis of motivation was beneficial for the study site as it helped identify the motivation for becoming a foster parent, the challenges of

recruiting in rural areas, and recommendations for future recruitment. The study's recommendations and findings were considered when the department began developing its targeted recruitment plan. The plan for disseminating the findings was made, and the study was terminated.

#### Communication of Findings to Study Site

The researcher communicated the study findings orally with the Director and Program Manager of the study site agency. Once the graduate studies department at California State University, San Bernardino, approves the report, a written copy of the study findings will be provided to the Director and Program Manager of the study site.

#### Dissemination Plan

Dissemination of the study findings will be as follows: a copy of the report will be provided to the director of the department, a copy of the study will be provided to the Program Manager of the Child Welfare Unit, and a copy of the study will be provided to the Chair of the County Board of Supervisors.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMATION EXTRACTED FROM ADMINSTRATIVE DATA

- RFA parents' Ages
- RFA parents' Ethnicities
- RFA parents' locations
- Duration of RFA parents' licensure
- August 2022 department survey
- Department Binti statistics
- Program Manager's opinion of existing RFA recruitment strategies



APPENDIX B

RESEARCH SITE AUGUST 2022 RFA PARENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Your email.
2. Your name.
3. Community in which you reside.
4. Your ethnicity.
5. Are you an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) home?
6. If you are not currently an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) home, are you registered with a tribe and interested in becoming an ICWA home?
7. How long have you been a foster parent?
8. Have you ever fostered children not related to you?
9. Are you an active RFA foster home or currently waiting for placement of a foster child?
10. Why did you become an RFA foster parent?
11. If you became an RFA foster parent for a family member, have you (previously or presently) considered fostering for non-family members? If so, why?
12. What do you feel the biggest motivation/draw was for YOU becoming an RFA foster parent?
13. How much motivation was intrinsic (i.e., religious reasons, wanting to help your community/family, etc.)? (1-10 scale response)
14. How much motivation was extrinsic (i.e., financial, etc.)? (1-10 scale response)
15. Why did you choose to pursue being licensed through Plumas County RFA versus a privatized foster care organization such as Children's First Foster Agency, Environmental Alternatives (EA), etc.?
16. How do you think the Department could improve their foster parent recruitment approaches?
17. Would you be more likely to recruit other foster parents if you received a recruitment stipend?
18. Would you be interested in going with an RFA Social Worker to speak at events to recruit foster parents (i.e., fairs, churches, services organizations, etc.)?
19. What additional RFA training are you interested in taking?
20. Would you be interested in becoming an Intensive Services Foster Care home? (Intensive services foster care is a level of care. Foster youth who are considered ISFC have a higher level of need and therefore need to be placed with resource parents who have been trained specifically to meet those needs.)
21. Would you be interested in an RFA mentorship program?

22. If you answered yes to the previous question, would you be interested in being a mentor or having a mentor?
23. Would you be interested in an RFA Support Group? (Please note, if we have enough positive feedback, we will explore what time and location worked best for everyone.)
24. If you marked yes to the previous question, who would you prefer to lead the support group? (The Department or RFA Parents)
25. If you marked yes to being interested in participating in a support group, are there any specific topics you would like to have covered?
26. Are you interested in providing respite for other RFA foster parents?
27. Are you aware that foster children need a well-child medical checkup and dental appointment within 30 days of placement and annually thereafter?
28. Are you interested in participating in RFA appreciation events?
29. If you marked yes, please select the events you would be interested in attending: (pool day, movie event, crafting event, bowling, BBQ, overnight family summer camp, other)
30. What do you think the Department does best to support you?
31. How can the Department better support you?
32. Has a Plumas County Social Worker come to your home once per month while you have had a foster child in your home?
33. If no, how often did a Plumas County Social Worker come to your home per month while you had a foster child in your home?
34. Any additional comments or concerns you would like to add?

Developed by Ava M. Hagwood

APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD EXEMPTION LETTER



**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination  
Status: Determined Exempt  
IRB-FY2022-251

Brooklyn Sapozhnikov Ava Hagwood  
CSBS - Social Work, Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.  
California State University, San Bernardino  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Brooklyn Sapozhnikov Ava Hagwood:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Rural Northern California Foster Parent Recruitment Strategies" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**

- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillesp@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillesp@csusb.edu). Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2022-251 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Nicole Dabbs*

Nicole Dabbs, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

ND/MG

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