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Perceptions of childcare workers about components of effective care in group homes

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PERCEPTIONS OF CHILDCARE WORKERS ABOUT COMPONENTS 
OF EFFECTIVE CARE IN GROUP HOMES 

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

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

by 
Vanessa Evette Moreno 
Tyler Scott St. Clair 
June 2004
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of care provided to children in group homes in San Bernardino County. In an effort to better understand the effectiveness of care, childcare workers will be interviewed on their perceptions of the components of effective care for children in group homes. Learning about these childcare workers will expand understanding of how to best care for the needs of children in group homes.
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DEDICATION

To the children who have resided in group homes and the childcare workers who are dedicated to them. To group homes whose doors are opened wide in support of healthy growing children.

For my loving wife, Johana, who has supported me in my ventures. She is my guide and true love. For my family who is my foundation. May I always make you proud of me.

For my son Joseph, who has been with me all through the years of my college education. With your presence, I would have not made it this far. We made it together and now you have a path to follow. For my family members who offered their time and support while I pursued my goal to become a social worker. For a special man, Bruce, who came into my life during my college years and guiding me through many obstacles. You have always been by my side and now we can focus on our future.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Group homes are defined as any facility of any capacity that provides 24-hour care and supervision to children in a structured environment, with such services provided at least in part by staff employed by the licensee (CCR, 1998). These facilities are designed for children who have to be removed from their own homes because they hold the potential for having a strong therapeutic effect on disturbed children. Children rely on the consistent care in the controlled environment of a group home and childcare workers who are tolerant and supportive. Group homes are increasingly becoming important components of the system of care for emotional deficits of maltreated children and adolescents.

Managers and line staff are usually the direct childcare workers for children in group homes. Their basic responsibilities are to provide the care and safety needed by the children in their charge. Since Frye House in 1978, many group homes and childcare workers have been able to fulfill that role of providing care and safety for children. Gordan interviewed children that had been
resident of Frye. According to his research and those interviews, after those children left Frye House, they were able to stay clean from illegal drugs, work regularly, and keep from being hospitalized. According to James Gordan, some of the previous residents even continued in their studies to become professionals in various fields (Gordan, 1978). The same results have continued to happen with current established group homes.

Unfortunately, other group homes have tainted their reputation, by not fulfilling their responsibilities of providing care and safety to the children in their charge. There is some evidence that childcare workers have neglected, stolen from, raped or molested, beaten, malnourished, or otherwise abused the children in their care (Whitakker, 2000).

Even with all the preventions taken to screen out the childcare workers that might be a threat to these children, abusive instances still occur. An example of this is a group home in Southern California that was recently shut down due to allegations of rape and molestation (Gold, 2001). Group home agencies and the state both screen childcare workers, assessing their past history and temperament to see if they are fit to work at a group home. Perceptions of childcare workers may help us
understand some of the components of effective care in group homes.

Recently, the mental health professions have started looking into the treatment and structure given to children by childcare workers in group homes (Iglehart, 1993). This emerging trend prompted this study. Childcare workers have perspectives on care in group homes that are important because they are the individuals directly providing the physical and mental needs for the children in group homes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effectiveness of care provided to children in group homes. Childcare workers within a group home have unique perspectives about effective care for the children residing in group homes. By doing this study, child welfare can learn more about the concepts childcare workers have in the field. This is important to study because the effectiveness of care given to children in group homes has lasting long-term effects. Group home care attempts to alleviate serious individual problems of abused children including, poor socializing skills, delayed psychosocial development, low self-esteem, low aspirations, and continued institutionalization.
Childcare workers, with the required education are defined by the group home managers as those staff members "giving treatment." Typically, these treatment staff members hold positions variously described as "counselor," "caseworker," "therapist," "social worker," and "group supervisor."

Research has shown that group homes are superior to institutions such as orphanages and mental hospitals, that were previously used to meet the needs of this population because they are smaller, more homelike, more therapeutic, more supportive, and less anonymous and barren (Bush, 1980). Without childcare workers in group homes, children are not able to obtain treatment interventions and effective care.

Although the treatment is mandated in group homes, it has been argued that the type of treatment is not specified. Research has shown that the group home community care system does not distinguish the goals of different group homes (Cohen, 1986). Childcare workers are challenged with different populations and their own beliefs about effective care in group homes. Comparing the standardized care prescribed for group homes, explained in Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations, and the care actually provided by caregivers can assess whatever
current codes are accurate (California Code of Regulations, 1998).

Findings from this study will be derived from structured interviews with childcare workers from three different group homes. Interviews will explore the perceptions of childcare workers about the components of effective care provided to children in group homes.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study will examine childcare workers' perceptions of the components of effective care provided to children in group homes. The care provided by childcare workers is the intervention/implementations stage of the generalist model. The generalist model, adopted by the Council on Social Work Education embodies the common knowledge base of social work practice.

It is important to research this topic for a number of reasons. One is because, according to National Association of Social Work (NASW), "the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic human needs, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable, oppressed, and poor people" (NASW, 1996). Foster children living in group homes are one of the groups of people being referred to. Learning
about these childcare workers will expand understanding of how to best care for the needs of children in group homes.

By researching this topic, childcare services can continue to reach for the highest standards in achieving proper welfare for children. This idea is in accordance to the NASW Code of Ethics, which states, “Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise” (NASW, 1996). Social workers are continually looking to increase the fund of knowledge and skills that will continue to develop and enhance the profession.

This is similar to another value of social work that refers to the need for social work practitioners to strive to make social institutions more humane and responsive to human needs (Hepworth, Larsen, & Rooney, 2002). While group homes for children seem to be a necessary component of the foster care system, it is still important to understand further the types of care these children need.

The need for research in this area comes from these core values and ethics of the social work profession. The goal for group homes is that children who reside in them become habituated enough to function in a foster family setting. This study will expand knowledge of group homes and the staff who support them. This study examines the
perceptions of childcare workers about components of effective care provided to children in group homes.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Before group homes were developed, there were institutions that provided food and shelter for potential delinquents. The social work profession transformed these from placements of last resort to therapeutic alternatives and called them group homes. Group homes have proven to be more effective in caring for children than the previous institutions (Kolar, 1983). However, they have not shown to be as effective when compared with children who live with a family. This chapter discusses the development of group homes, their purpose and guiding theories, their policies and procedures, and why it is necessary to continue researching group homes and their effectiveness of care for the children in their charge.

Historical Perspective

Over the last hundred years, child welfare institutions have served a variety of purposes and have been thought of in a variety of ways (Bush, 1980). Orphanages and other like institutions have been around since the early 1700's (Whittaker, 1971a). These institutions were originally just buildings built to
provide food and shelter for orphans. However, they became institutions for children who were labeled potential delinquents.

Over time, institutions became sources of psychological care for children who were considered disturbed. These changes occurred over successive transformations in political and social thinking. One of these changes occurred in 1909, when President Theodore Roosevelt headed the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children. This conference made institutional care an option of last resort. Foster families were considered first for child placement. However, those children that were too difficult for foster families were placed in institutions (Jones, 1989). This is still the general principle for how dependent children of the state are placed in care today.

After the 1909 White House Conference, there was a National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1911. This conference decided to use Binet intelligence tests to provide better-classified institutions for delinquents. However, placing children in institutions based on their mental rating created concern from others. Those concerned felt the fundamental focus of treatment should be on the child's emotional disturbances. By 1920, these concerns
were recognized with the forming of the child guidance model, which consisted of treatment by psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. This model became the new paradigm for institutional treatment (Whittaker, 1971b). By 1929, influence from the child guidance model had led to various residential cottages, which took the place of older barrack style institutions, to see the need to educate cottage staff about the treatment of children (Whittaker, 1971b). This was the beginning of the idea of training workers who work with troubled children and properly care for them.

Another shift to therapeutic placements began in the 1960s and 1970s when group homes brought a different image to institutions for children. During the 1960s many alternative institutions for problem children consisted of 24-hour behavior modification centers (Bush, 1980). In the 1970’s, Frye House was designed to provide long-term residential care for young people who were unable to live with their parents despite individual and family counseling (Gordon, 1978). Frye House was an integration of a communal philosophy of staff and a version of a group home. The founders were nonprofessionals who shared therapeutic ideals of childcare by identifying with children despite their behavior.
State governments had an impact on dependent and neglected orphans by declaring orphans as the major residents in child welfare institutions. This gave these children freedom, structure, meaningful relationships and respect, and adequate living services (Bush, 1980). Group homes offer a setting where children are cared for on a 24-hour basis by childcare workers who reside elsewhere. Cohen (1986) indicated group home placement was intended to be a time-limited situation for children needing experiences in a structured setting before they can adjust successfully to a more family-like environment. "It is generally agreed that the kind of structure and supervision found in residential group homes are indicative of problems that cannot be effectively addressed in a foster family home" (Iglehart, 1993).

To guide group homes, Title XXII of the California Administrative Code states that the goal of treatment must be to provide experience in a structured setting that will facilitate the child's return home or release to a more normal living situation (Cohen, 1986). Structural factors affecting quality of care and issues such as administrative structure and organization requirements are regulated. Title XXII contains guidelines for the structure, operation, and regulation of group homes that
provide board and care for populations in temporary need, permanent homes for chronic patients, and alternatives to psychiatric hospitalization and/or incarceration (Cohen, 1986).

A group home today, is a residential facility designed as a mixture of some of the qualities of children's institutions and foster homes for troubled youth. Scholars and professionals in the child welfare community have noted that group homes are used as one of several placement alternatives for adolescents who are otherwise difficult to place (Berrick, Barth, Needell, & Jonson-Reid, 1997).

Group homes have the ability to focus activities on helping to change the conduct of behaviorally disordered youth. There is a distinction between a group home's "social aid" function (helping residents maintain a level of social behavior and dignity as a person) and group home's "clinical aid" function [ameliorating illness] (Cohen, 1986). A treatment program in group home focuses on individual residential needs, therapeutic interventions, rehabilitation, and developmental growth. Berrick, Barth, Needell, and Jonson-Reid (1997) pointed out that group homes offer continuity of safe care until
young adulthood, a phenomenon that is not always witnessed in foster care.

This reduces the chance that children will have frequent placements in overburdened foster care.

Childcare workers are to provide general supervision of children according to policies and procedures in a group home. Childcare workers are to maintain basic disciplinary and behavioral control of children (Cohen, 1986). Stimulating the children's interest in recreational activities creates therapeutic interventions for the children in the group home. They are to encourage proper daily personal hygiene tasks, assess child's clothing needs, and assist in bedtime procedures. They also participate in group sessions employing the treatment model of the group home and work with supervisors in implementing treatment programs for specific children.

Policies and Procedures for Group Homes

The following material draws heavily from California Code of Regulations, (CCR, 1998). Numerous policies and procedures have been instilled to help properly run group homes. The policies that are most directly related to childcare workers are separated into the following categories: reporting requirements, personnel
requirements, personnel duties, staff/child ratios, night supervision, personal rights, discipline policies and procedures, complaint procedures, personal services, and planned activities.

Reporting requirements are the policies and procedures for childcare workers to follow if a child has an emergency, has been removed from the facility, or was placed in a restraint. It requires a thorough description be written within 10 working days of the event and that all relative representatives for the child to be notified.

Personnel requirements are policies that the licensee of the group home must employ to ensure the management of the facility. One of these policies is to hire at least one facility manager that will be present at the facility at all times while children are in attendance. The facility manager is required to have at least one-year full-time experience working at a group home facility and 15 college semester units in behavioral science.

Personnel duties are the duties of childcare workers. These duties include the supervision, protection, and care of children in their charge. Childcare workers are to assist children when they are having a problem, administer discipline and set limits for behavior, and note children's progress. In addition to these, they are also
to perform office work, cooking, housecleaning, laundering, and maintenance of the facility and grounds.

Staff/child ratios are to be met differently under the following circumstances. While providing direct care and supervision to children, there is to be a staff person for every four children. During night supervision, the staff/child ratio should be a minimum of 1 staff per 30 children with another staff person who is on call and able to arrive at the facility site within 30 minutes.

Personal rights are to be ensured to each child residing at a group home facility. These rights include being able to visit the facility with his/her parents prior to being admitted, to be able to file a complaint with the facility, to have the facility inform his/her authorized representative of his/her progress, to have communications to the facility from his/her relatives or representatives, and to have visitors visit during waking hours. Their rights also include being able to wear their own clothes, possess their own toiletry items, possess and use their own cash, and possess their own personal items unless prohibited as part of discipline. They also have the right to their own storage space and access to telephones.
Discipline policies and procedures are to be written and copied for staff, children, and representatives. No discipline is to violate a child’s rights. Forms of discipline that are considered acceptable are time-outs (i.e., exclusion in an unlocked living, sleeping, or play area), fines, prohibiting attendance in a planned activity, prohibiting use of entertainment devices, or performance of additional duties related to training needs in the child’s needs and service plan (e.g., writing sentences).

Written complaint procedures are to be developed so that children and their representatives are permitted to file complaints, without fear of retaliation. These procedures are to be posted so that they are accessible to children and their representatives.

Personal services are to be given to children of the facility. These services include laundering services and cash allowances to be paid out to all children at least once a month.

Group homes are also to have a written plan for both indoor and outdoor activities that is provided to the children of that facility. The types of activities listed can include activities that require group interaction, physical activities, leisure time, educational activities,
and activities that meet the training, money management, and personal care and grooming needs identified in the children’s needs service plan, under the provision of CCR Title 22. Each child is also permitted to attend/participate in worship services and activities of the child’s choice, community events (e.g., dances, tours, concerts), and the YMCA, YWCA, and Boy and Girl Scouts. All children within the facility are to be given the opportunity to participate in the activities developed by that facility.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The theory guiding conceptualization of this study is the behavior modification approach. The behavior modification approach focuses on explicit daily living behavior that is observable and accessible to intervention (Cohen, 1986). Explicit daily living behavior consists of interactions with the social environment. Childcare workers use this behavior modification as a treatment to provide special learning experiences that decrease deviant or adverse daily living behavior interactions and increase adaptive behavior interactions.

One method of behavior modification used to enhance their daily living behavior is token economy. Token
economy is a point system built around chores where children receive praise, approval, and feedback. Every event of the day is designed to strengthen the children by means of token economies (Bush, 1980). It is a system where desired behaviors are encouraged by earning points and gaining privileges for successfully completing the desired behaviors.

The behavior modification approach used in group homes has a self-actualizing tendency to focus on the children’s problems to facilitate a full development of potential. Childcare workers create an atmosphere where the children are able to resolve their own problems in a therapeutic relationship (Bush, 1980). Atmosphere is created through attitudes, norms, and beliefs.

This is important because studies concerned with the prediction of behavior from attitudinal and normative variables have used the related frameworks of the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior to support the idea that, attitudes, norms, and beliefs are determinants of behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). While both theories share the components of intention, this study will use a qualitative framework incorporating the idea that attitudes, norms, and beliefs are significant factors in understanding current and
future behavior of childcare workers. Support for intention, attitude, norms, and beliefs as determinants of behavior have been summarized in a meta-analysis and in a review of the literature (Armitage & Conner, 2000; Sutton, 1998).

Childcare workers involved in this study use the behavior modification approach and provide a supportive experience in a structured setting that will facilitate the child's return home, or release to a more normal living situation. Childcare workers aim to provide a neutral atmosphere for children whose emotional lives are in turmoil and focus on daily living behavior. It is important to understand how these workers attitudes, norms, and beliefs are translated into the interventions they use with their charges.

Effectiveness of Group Homes for Children

There are two main ways that studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of care given to children residing in group homes. One of these is by using a standardized instrument to measure effectiveness (Altshuler & Poertner, 2002). Studies using a standardized instrument on the effectiveness of care in group homes for children seem to be scarce. This may be the result of
difficulties in developing a standardized instrument that is both valid and reliable that can compare a child’s well being before and after they have entered a group home.

The Child Health and Illness Profile-Adolescent Edition (CHIP-AE) is a new standardized instrument that may prove useful in helping to determine effectiveness of care for children in group homes. It is specifically designed to measure the health and well-being of children living in group homes. One study that administered the CHIP-AE to 63 adolescents living in group homes found that the instrument has potential for being reliable and valid (Altshuler & Poertner, 2002). The CHIP-AE was used to measure the health and well-being of the youth to whom it was administered. Its results suggested high levels of satisfaction with physical health and problem solving; average levels for mental health; and adequate levels of academic achievement. However, because the sample size was too small, the findings could not be generalized to all children in group homes. Also, the study stipulated that because the test relies heavily on the youth to provide the information, one must question the accuracy and honesty of the reporters (Altshuler & Poertner, 2002).

The second way that studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of care given to children
residing in group homes is through comparative analysis. This is done by comparing two or more subject groups and analyzing for differences and similarities.

One study that used comparative analysis measured the effectiveness of two types of child-caring facilities: mediatory institutions and group homes. The study compared nine different group homes and five institutions in Louisiana and used goal attainment as the measure of effectiveness. It found that group homes show significant progress in effectiveness compared to institutions (Kolar, 1983). This supports group homes being an effective institution for providing care to children.

However, another study by Christensen, Fan, Grotevant, Miller, and van Dulmen (2000) that also used comparative analysis with differing subjects found results to the contrary. It compared adopted and nonadopted adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 years old. This study specified that adolescents living in group homes were one of the larger groups at high risk in all the psychological and behavioral factors and problems examined. These included physical health, fighting, lying, school achievement, substance use, and psychological well-being. Their findings showed that more adopted
adolescents have problems of various kinds than their nonadopted peers.

Other studies continue to show mixed results on the effectiveness of care in group homes for children. Gary and Karen who studied residential treatment programs that serve troubled youth who tend to first fail in other treatment programs found mixed results in the effectiveness of group homes. According to Gary and Karen, a review of available studies of the effectiveness of residential treatment delivered in group home settings and residential treatment centers concludes that, "despite methodological shortcomings and variability in programming, residential services do improve functioning for some, but not all youth." Karen and Gary also found that the positive outcomes of treatment are not easily maintained and may dissipate after time. They concluded that successful post-treatment may also depend on post-treatment environmental factors like relative support and residential stability (Gary & Karen, 2002). The mixed results show that there should be continued research in this area. This study was prompted because there is a need for continued research in this area.
Summary

The kind of structure and supervision found in residential group homes were developed to treat the problems that cannot be effectively addressed in foster family homes. It is childcare workers that provide the general supervision for these children. Because of this, they are the critical component in the effectiveness of treatment and care these children receive.

Research is continuing to look for efficient ways of measuring effectiveness of care for children in group homes. Currently, results have shown that group homes are more effective in providing care for children than are institutions. However, studies also show that children from group homes are at high risk psychological and behavioral factors and problems. This suggests that more research should be conducted so that proper policies and procedures can be put in place that will provide better care and lower risk for psychological and behavioral factors and problems for children in group homes.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This research is a qualitative study using face-to-face interviews. The study is designed to be explorative and descriptive. Participants were asked about the key components of effective care, the challenges in delivering effective care, and what other professionals think are key components and challenges in delivering effective care. The outcomes of this study will identify themes and patterns that are generated from the data.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of childcare workers about components of effective care provided to children in group homes in San Bernardino County. Childcare workers' perceptions were recorded and analyzed using taped recordings.

This study was qualitative in nature. It was qualitative so respondents could freely offer their views, understandings, and perceptions of the effectiveness of care provided in group homes than might otherwise be missed by a restrictive standardized instrument.
A limitation with using face-to-face interviews is that participants may choose to answer questions in a socially desirable way. It was attempted to control this bias by having the interviewer, at the beginning of the interview, stress the importance of giving honest responses to the questions posed.

Sampling

The population of interest for this study was childcare workers from group homes for children in San Bernardino County. A sample was drawn from three group homes that have been selected by availability sampling. Participants within the group homes were also selected by availability. The total number of participants in this study was be eight (N = 12).

In order to qualify to be part of the sampling each participant had at least 3 months experience at the group home where they are currently employed at the time of the interview. In addition, participants in the sample must have had all the training required from Title XXII from CCR so that they have been exposed to the policies and procedures required from group homes for children.

Participants included nine female childcare workers and three male childcare workers of various ethnicities.
They ranged in age between 18 years old and 55 years old. They also ranged in length of employment within the group home from 3 months to 15 years.

Data Collection and Instruments

The primary data collection consisted of face-to-face interviews with childcare workers from four different group homes in the County of San Bernardino. The interview schedule was administered by the researchers and consists of sixteen open-ended questions. The questions asked are designed to determine the perceptions of childcare workers on the effectiveness of care in group homes (Refer to Appendix A). These questions are divided into four main categories. Category 1 is the group home experience for the childcare workers. Category 2 is the care provided in the group home. Category 3 is the policies and procedures in the group home. Category 4 is the interventions used in group homes.

Procedures

An informed consent describing the research, rights as a research participant, and confidentiality, was be approved by Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. After approval, phone calls were made to group homes explaining the research and
interest in interviewing the childcare workers. Group homes were given information on the purpose of this study and were asked for permission to interview their childcare workers. Administrators of group homes were asked for a list of childcare workers meeting the requirements to be in the sample. Childcare workers were then contacted, via face-to-face or telephone, using that list. After contacting the possible participants, the researcher gave information on the purpose of this study and informed them that they would receive a $10 gift certificate. A set appointment time was then scheduled to meet with each childcare worker at the location convenient for them.

At the beginning of the scheduled appointment, the approved informed consent was given to the participants. After reading and marking the consent form, the interview took place. After the interview, the participants were handed the gift certificate and debriefing that further explained the purpose of the study and provided contact information if there were additional questions.

Protection of Human Subjects

A written consent form was given to each participant on the day of the interview. The researchers utilized a numeric coding system that was known only to the
researchers. Names of the childcare workers were not placed on the interview schedule. All completed interview schedules were kept in a locked drawer in a researcher’s office. The researchers were the only persons who had access to this information.

Once the data from the interview schedules was analyzed, the interview schedules and tapes were destroyed. A debriefing statement was given to each participant to further explain the purpose of the study and included the telephone numbers of the researchers and supervising staff of the study if there were additional questions.

Data Analysis

The model utilized in the analysis of the data was a descriptive content analysis. The descriptive analysis included univariate and bivariate statistics such as frequency distribution. The categories were set up to identify themes and patterns that were generated from the data. The researchers then gathered the frequencies from the interview data and reported the findings.

Summary

The perceptions of childcare workers about components of effective care provided to children in group homes was
analyzed and categorized into identifiable themes and patterns. Participants in this study were protected at all times based on the methods and procedures used by this study. It was hoped that this study will enable professionals vested in children living at group homes to increase the quality of effective care.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This study included of twelve childcare workers from three different group homes in San Bernardino County. It covers the responses of childcare workers on their perceptions of components of effective care in group homes.

Presentation of the Findings

The childcare workers ranged in age from 18 to 55 years old. Three participants had three months to one year of experience, two participants had one to three years of experience, three participants had three to five years of experience, and four participants had five plus years of experience. Three participants had high school, five participants had some college education, two participants had graduated from college, and two participants had some graduate school. The ethnic make up was 33% White/Caucasian, 50% Black/African American, 8% Asian/Pacific Islander and 8% Hispanic/Latino. For further demographic information refer to Table 1 (see Appendix D).

Each question in the taped interviews was used to gather statements that were then summarized as to
responses that pertained to the question. The responses to the questions were used to form themes that pertained to the effectiveness of care in group homes as perceived by childcare workers that were interviewed. A total of four main themes were developed from their responses. These themes were: a) interventions that are or could be effective in group homes, b) interventions that are not effective in group homes, c) childcare workers views and reasons about their colleagues and themselves with working in a group home, and d) childcare workers views on the overall effectiveness of group homes. The following is a list of the questions with sample responses used to either establish main themes or to aid in the identification of important factors.

Question 1 "Why do you think you chose to work in a group home?" This question dealt with the reason childcare workers chose to work at a group home, which could effect their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs on the effectiveness of care provided in group homes. Seven participants reported that they chose to work in a group home to have a positive influence on children's lives. For example, one participant stated, "I love children and wanted them to know there was someone out there that loves them." Another participant stated, "I started working with
adults, and then found out about group homes and decided I wanted to help children." Five of the participants reported their reason for choosing to work at a group home was for their own self-interest. For example, one participant stated "I’m almost done with my Master’s Degree in criminal justice and needed to get my foot in the door." Another participant stated, "I needed a job." The answers from the participants to this question helped establish the theme "childcare workers views and reasons about their colleagues and themselves with working in a group home."

Question 2 “Is a group home the only place you have been exposed to trouble children? Explain.” This question dealt with their experience and interest in working with high-risk children. Eleven of the participants reported having prior work experience. For example, one participant stated, “Yes, I had been a foster parent for five years.” Another participant stated, “I have worked in youth groups, private high schools, soup kitchens, and been to Mexico.” Only one participant reported not having prior work experience, but having only been exposed to troubled children within their own family. The answers from the participants to this question helped establish the theme
“childcare workers views and reasons about their colleagues and themselves with working in a group home.”

Question 3 “What do you think children in group homes need most?” This question dealt with perceptions on the needs of children in group homes. Seven participants reported that nurturing aspects were needed for children in the group home setting. For example, one participant stated, “Children need someone to listen to them with understanding and compassion.” Another participant stated, “Children need affection, someone to talk to, listen to them, attention.” Five of the participants reported children needing aspects of security. For example, one participant stated, “Children need safety.” Another respondent stated, “Children need consistency and structure.” The answers from the participants in this question helped establish the theme “interventions that are or could be effective in group homes.”

Question 4 “What do you think children in group homes need least.” This question also dealt with perceptions on the needs of children in group homes. Ten participants reported that what children in group homes do not need is negative staff involvement. For example, one participant stated, “Negativity, vibes about what you do or say from staff.” Another participant stated, “Children don’t need
discipline. Yelling of staff." Two participants reported "not sure" responses to the question. The answers from the participants in this question helped establish the theme "interventions that are not effective in group homes."

Question 5 "What would you like to see more of in group homes?" This question also dealt with perceptions on the needs of children in group homes. There were several varying responses to this question. One participant reported a "not sure" response to the question. Eleven participants reported they would like to see more positive interventions in the group home. An example of this is two participants who specifically stated, "Parental involvement." Another participant stated they would like to see, "more one-on-one with kids, and personal attention." The answers from these participants to this question helped establish the theme "interventions that are or could be effective in group homes." One participant included in his statement that, "appreciation for childcare workers," would also be something good to see more of in group homes. The answer from this participant to this question helped establish the theme childcare workers views on the overall effectiveness of group homes.

Question 6 "What do you like most about the care provided in group homes?" This question dealt with
perceptions of the effectiveness of care provided in group homes. All twelve participants reported that they liked most the homey and supportive environment provided for the children most about the care provided for the children in group homes. For example, one participant stated, "know that staff will be there for the residents to help them get out on their own and out of the system." Another participant stated, "Security. Likes to know that kids feel safe and out of harms reach." Yet another participant stated, "Meals, because a lot of kids don't receive them," referring to when they are not in the group home. The answers from the participants in this question helped establish the theme "interventions that are or could be effective in group homes."

Question 7 “What do you like least about the care provided in group homes?” This question dealt with perceptions of the effectiveness of group home care. Two participants reported "not sure" answers. Five participants that reported what they liked least about the care in group homes dealt with the idea that it was not similar to home environment. For example, one participant stated, "The fact that it is a group home and not a home." Another participant stated, "The lack of homeliness." These answers from the participants to this question
helped establish the theme "childcare workers views on the overall effectiveness of group homes." Five other participants that reported on what they liked least about the care in group homes dealt with childcare workers' interest in and treatment of children in group homes. For example, one participant stated, "Staff are there for the money and not for the kids. It affects the kids." Another participant stated, "staff who try to put their own beliefs onto the kids." These answers from the participants to this question helped establish the theme "childcare workers views of and reasons about their colleagues and themselves with working in a group home."

Question 8 "If you could change anything about the care provided in group homes, what would it be?" This question dealt with perceptions of the effectiveness of group home care. Four participants reported "not sure" responses to the question. Another participant stated, "Nothing. I like the way things are run." Yet another participant gave an answer that did not pertain to the question. However, three participants mentioned various interventions they would like changed or to see more often in group homes. For example, one participant stated, "Emancipation should be part of the program longer; keep it till they are eighteen years old, or set them up with a
house to provide them stability. Some are not ready to be emancipated and when they leave some end up right where they begin." Another participant stated, "More individual counseling because kids get lost without this and end up in the system." Three participants stated that they would like to see more "consistency" in group homes. The answers from the participants to this question helped establish the theme "interventions that are or could be effective in group homes."

Question 9 "Do you think residents receive adequate meals and hygiene care? Explain." This question dealt with the perceived level of care as stipulated under Title 22 California Code of Regulations (CCR, 1998). All twelve participants reported thinking that the children in group homes received adequate meals. Eight participants also reported being that children in group homes do receive adequate hygiene care. However, four of the participants reported being unsure whether children in group homes received adequate hygiene care. For example, one participant stated "Don’t know if residents take baths unless you’re in there with them." Another participant stated, "Don’t know about hygiene. Group homes should have hygiene classes and they don’t. Timed showers are not good." This question was used to establish the theme
"childcare workers' views on the overall effectiveness of
group homes."

Question 10 "What do you think is a sufficient amount
of recreation time for residents each day." This question
dealt with the activity schedule believed appropriate as
stipulated under Title 22 California Code of Regulations
(CCR, 1998). All twelve participants gave responses that
fell in the range acceptable under Title 22. For example,
eight of the participants stated, "two to three hours of
recreation time." This question was used to establish the
theme "childcare workers' views on the overall
effectiveness of group homes."

Question 11 "What do you like most about the policies
and procedures in group homes?" This question dealt with
the requirements of Title 22 California Code of
Regulations, as well as the rules and regulations within
each individual group home (CCR, 1998). One participant
reported not liking the policies and procedures within the
group home because the, "bottom line is money." Two
participants reported "not sure" responses to the
question. Nine participants reported what they liked most
about the policies and procedures were the structure,
accountability, and consistency they provide. For example,
one participant stated, "The fact that it is really
structured and the residents know what to expect daily.” Another participant stated, “the structure and that everyone sticks to it.” This question was used to establish the theme “childcare workers’ views on the overall effectiveness of group homes.”

Question 12 “What do you like least about the policies and procedures in group homes?” This question dealt with the requirements of Title 22 California Code of Regulations, as well as the rules and regulations within each individual the group home (CCR, 1998). Five participants reported “not sure” responses to the question. Three participants reported not liking the rigidity of rules in the group home. For example, one participant stated, “Too many rules. Staff don’t follow them.” Another participant stated, “Doesn’t allow the residents to act like normal kids.” Four other participants reported on their views of administration’s effectiveness in the group home. For example, one participant stated, “administration does not have enough understanding for staff.” Another participant stated, “the money is so important to them,” referring to administration within the group home as “them.” This question was used to establish the theme “childcare
workers' views on the overall effectiveness of group homes."

Question 13 "What types of interventions do you find most useful?" This question dealt with what interventions childcare workers believe are the most useful in a group home with children. One participant gave a response that did not pertain to the question. However, eleven participants reported that varying types of attention are most useful when intervening with children at group homes. For example, one participant stated, "Talking to child, constantly repeating yourself." Another participant stated, "Listening and allowing kids to reflect." Yet another participant stated, "Ignore behavior, but don't feed into behavior. It will escalate them." This question was used to establish the theme "interventions that are or could be effective in group homes."

Question 14 "What types of interventions do you find least useful?" This question dealt with what interventions childcare workers believe are least useful in group homes with children. Seven participants reported that interventions that are the least useful in group homes for children involve yelling, demanding, and demeaning confrontations with the children. For example, one participant stated, "Staff getting angry with the children
and start yelling at them, and don’t speak to them like a human being.” Another participant stated, “When childcare workers are demanding and overpowering and not allowing any time for discussion.” Four participants reported physical interventions as being the least useful intervention when working with children in group homes. For example, one participant stated, “Hands on, right away, instead of trying to calm the child down.” One participant reported that “trying to bribe a kid” is the least useful intervention when working with children in group homes. This question was used to establish the theme “interventions that are not effective in group homes.”

Question 15 “Are there other interventions you would like to see used? If yes, explain.” This question dealt with what interventions childcare workers believed would be useful in addition to the interventions already in use. Two participants reported that there were no other interventions they would like to see used. Four participants reported on various kinds of attention as an intervention they would like to see used more. For example, one participant stated, “So many kids. Staff should take time out to take time to listen to kids point of view.” Another participant stated, “More verbal and take time with kids.” Four other participants reported on
needing more stable and consistent activities as interventions they would like to see used more in group homes. For example, one participant stated, "More activities to keep them from bickering at each other all the time." Another participant stated, "being stable." Two participants talked about training as an intervention that they would like to see used. For example, one participant stated, "Trained to use more effective holds for bigger kids." Another participant stated, "Trained in behavior modification." This question was used to establish the theme "interventions that are or could be effective in group homes."

Question 16 "Do you think the care provided in group homes is effective? If yes, what is effective about it? If no, what is not effective about it?" This question dealt directly with perceptions of childcare workers of the effectiveness of group homes for children. Six participants believed that group homes were effective in providing care. For example, one participant stated, "Yes. Provides structure and built in discipline. It helps them to be social and deal with their anger." Another participant stated, "Yes. The kids have graduated and gone home." One participant reported that they did not believe group homes were effective because, "It is like holding
tank with a rigid schedule. Kids are like being in a boot camp. There are consequences that are not appropriate. Needs to be about the kids, not about the money." Five participants reported mixed answers to the question. For example, one participant stated, "Sometimes, depends on the child and where they are placed. It may not be the right place for them." Another participant stated, "Hard to say. Yes because it provides an outlook, gets children into school, and helps them to socialize. No because children come in with sexual behaviors and interact with predators and end up turning." In this case, the participant was saying that children who come into a group with sexual behaviors might come out sexual predators because of interactions with other predators in the group home. Yet another participant stated, "Depends on the child and what level of care they need." This question was used to establish the theme "childcare workers views on the overall effectiveness of group homes."

Summary

Responses were obtained from twelve face-to-face interviews. Tape recordings and notes were taken and later analyzed for differences and similarities in responses. The responses of the individuals in this study showed some
common themes that are factors in the effectiveness of group homes with children. Perceptions of childcare workers were studied in an effort to understand how attitudes, norms, and beliefs of childcare workers influence the effectiveness of group homes for children.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

After analyzing the responses of individuals involved in this study, four major themes became apparent. The first two themes are about childcare workers' perceptions of interventions that are, or could be, or are not effective in group homes. The third theme is how childcare workers view themselves and their colleagues' performance in the group home. The last theme is about childcare workers' views on the overall effectiveness of group homes. The basic idea behind those four themes deal with the idea that group homes do not resemble an ideal living environment that could replace the family system.

Discussion

Through all the interviews, the overarching theme that the participants talked about, dealt with providing more of a family setting for the group home. During the interviews, interventions that childcare workers believed are or could be effective in group homes involved children learning more basic living skills, receiving more love and attention, and living in more of a consistent and secure environment. For example, one participant explained that
group homes should prepare children better for emancipation, the time when they come of age and begin living independently. This example is about group homes doing more in teaching basic living skills to the children in their care so that when they are emancipated they will be able to function normally in society. The interviewees also explained that children in group homes need more love and attention, as well as consistency and security. One participant stated, "Children need affection, someone to talk to, listen to them, and attention." Another participant simply stated that children needed "consistency and security." All of these ideals revolve around providing more of a family setting for group homes.

During the interviews, interventions that childcare workers believed are not effective in group homes involved inappropriate reactions from childcare workers towards children’s behaviors in group homes. Examples that were stated during the interviews include staff yelling at children, using physical interventions at inappropriate times, not allowing children self-determination, and using bribery to reduce unwanted behaviors from children. The fact that these interventions were discussed implies that they are also interventions that are being used in group homes. If that is the case, these negative interventions
would be contrary to providing an ideal living environment that could replace the family system.

The participants in the interviews discussed how they viewed themselves and their colleagues' performance in the group home. The majority of childcare workers interviewed reported that the reason for choosing to work at a group home was because they love children and want to help those who need it. For example, one participant stated, "I love kids. They need structure, living skills, and to know that there is someone out there that loves them." Another participant simply stated that, "to help children," was their reason for working at a group home. Wanting to help and give love to children in group homes are aspects of nurturing. This is a key component of societies' view of an ideal family setting, which could be one way in which childcare workers are actively trying to bring the family setting into group homes.

A few participants in the interviews explained that their reasoning for choosing to work at a group home was for self-interest. Two participants reported that by working at a group home they would be able to obtain a position that corresponded with their academic degrees and could potentially be what allows them to get their "foot in the door" for more high paying occupations. However,
three other participants reported choosing to work at a group home simply to attain a job. Choosing to work at a group home solely for self-interest may stunt the childcare workers' ability to apply patience, understanding, and caring to children in group homes. This could be one reason why inappropriate interventions are seen in group homes and why childcare workers have mixed feelings about how much of an ideal living environment children in group homes are raised in. However, it seems unlikely that people would choose to work in a group home without some semblance of compassion for children in need. The difficulties within group homes are likely more complex than what a childcare worker's reasoning is for working at a group home.

The last theme is about childcare workers' views of the overall effectiveness of group homes. Childcare workers had varying beliefs about the effectiveness of care provided in group homes. Based on the interviews, group homes are most effective in providing care to children when they simulate a family setting, by providing attention, proper hygiene care, recreation time, and making policies and procedures that provide structure consistency and accountability. In addition, it is important that administration and policy makers enforce
the evolving standards that are described in the
California Code of Regulations Title 22, with the focus
being on the care of children.

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors. One factor
that limited this study was finding group homes that would
allow this study to be done in their facilities. This
limited the study from obtaining more diversity among the
participants. Another factor that limited this study was
that it did not involve direct observations of the
practice of childcare workers in group homes. This
prevented the study from being able to substantiate the
testimonies of the participants in this study. The final
factor that limited this study was that it did not compare
the responses in the interviews with the demographic
information obtained. This could have potentially provided
a better understanding of the care provided in group
homes.

Recommendations for Social Work
Practice, Policy and Research

Social workers need to continue researching group
homes and their usefulness in the child welfare system to
get a better understanding of how children are affected by
being raised in group homes. They need to develop better programs that take into account that many children from group homes are not prepared to enter society when it is time to emancipate. Many of the factors that contribute to people being able to enter society independently are skills that were learned while living in a family system. Group homes have not yet perfected an ideal living environment that could replace the family system.

Based on the interviews in this study, factors to consider when running a group home include hiring employees that are prepared to work with high risk children, training employees to interact and apply interventions that are appropriate for specific behavior, enforcing the policies and procedures prescribed under Title 22 the California Code of Regulations, and also creating policies and procedures that would make group homes better equipped to deal with high risk children.

Conclusions

The participants of this study made it very clear they believed providing a living environment that simulated the family system would be best in making group homes for children more effective in providing care. While other factors were also present, participants in this
study repeatedly described interventions that are used in the ideal family setting. Those interventions involved teaching basic living skills along with providing love, attention, structure, and consistency. Participants also described adverse interventions that would not be used in the family system, but appeared to be part of the group home system, wittingly or unwittingly. The importance of ensuring that interventions are positive factors in children's live in group homes is paramount. For group homes to remain part of the child welfare system, they will need to create circumstances that ensure the interventions that are provided are effective within the group home. The most important conclusion from this study is to realize that children in group homes are people too, and should be provided with at least a similar courteousness while residing in a group home that they would receive within an ideal family system.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE
Interview Schedule

1. Why do you think you chose to work in a group home?
2. Is a group home the only place you have been exposed to troubled children? Explain.
3. What do you think children in group homes need most?
4. What do you think children in group homes need least?
5. What would you like to see more of in group homes?
6. What do you like most about the care provided in group homes?
7. What do you like least about the care provided in group homes?
8. If you could change anything about the care provided in group homes, what would it be?
9. Do you think residents receive adequate meals and hygiene care? Explain.
10. What do you think is a sufficient amount of recreation time for residents each day?
11. What do you like most about the policies and procedures in group homes?
12. What do you like least about the policies and procedures in group homes?
13. What types of interventions do you find most useful?
14. What types of interventions do you find least useful?
15. Are there other interventions you would like to see used? If yes, explain.
16. Do you think the care provided in group homes is effective? If yes, what is effective about it? If no, what is not effective about it?
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent

You are asked to participate in a study conducted by Vanessa Moreno and Tyler St. Clair who are students in the Master of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB).

The research project concerns the perceptions of childcare workers about providing effective care to residents in a group home.

The interviews will last approximately 30-40 minutes. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped.

There are no expected risks to you from participating in the interview. There will be no cost to you other than your time.

Please be assured that any information that you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researchers. No participant will be identified in the report. Neither your name nor any other identifying information gathered during the interview will be available to the group home staff and others. After the research is completed, the information and the tapes will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you wish to withdraw from this study or to leave, you may do so at any time and need to give no explanation.

The Department of Social Work Sub-Committee California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board, has approved this study. If you agree to participate, please mark below.

By the mark below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand the nature of the study. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Mark ______ Date ______________

I give permission for my interview to be taped.

Yes ___ No ___
APPENDIX C

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT
Debriefing Statement

You have just participated in a study that solicited information on the perceptions among childcare workers pertaining to effective care to children in group homes. Vanessa Moreno and Tyler St. Clair, who are Social Worker Interns at California State University San Bernardino, conducted this study. Any concerns about this study may be addressed to Rosemary McCaslin, Project Advisor (909/880-5007).

It is our hope that by doing this study, we will gain a better understanding of the childcare worker roles. The information supplied by you is crucial in providing insight that may affect care given to children in group homes. In return for your participation you may request a copy of the study results from Vanessa Moreno or Tyler St. Clair after June 2004 at your agency.
APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHICS
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Dr. Rose McCaslin  
Department of Social Work  

California State University, San Bernardino  
University Parkway  
San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397  

To Dr. McCaslin  

This letter serves as notification to the Department of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino, that Vanessa Moreno and Tyler St. Clair have obtained consent from the to conduct the research project entitled "Perceptions of Childcare Workers about Components of Effective Care in Group Homes."

If you have questions regarding this letter of consent, you may contact

__________________________________________  at  __________________________________________

Name/ Title  Phone Number

Sincerely,

__________________________________________  ____________________________

Signature  Date

__________________________________________  ____________________________

Name (printed)  Title/Position
REFERENCES


ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:
   Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair

2. Data Entry and Analysis:
   Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:
   a. Introduction and Literature
      Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair
   b. Methods
      Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair
   c. Results
      Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair
   d. Discussion
      Team Effort: Vanessa Moreno & Tyler St. Clair