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Why do Foster Parents Cease to Foster?
(A study of the perceptions of foster parents.)

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It has been increasingly difficult to recruit new foster
homes and in recent years, despite National and local
advertising, the resulting approvals did not meet the
requirements of the West Sussex Social Services Department. An
important consideration was the numbers of experienced foster
parents who were ceasing to foster. It had been believed that
if only this number could be reduced then possibly the problem
of maintaining adequate levels of foster parents would be far
less crucial.

This study therefore examines the reasons why foster parents
cease to foster, in the context of the experiences in which
they had worked, whilst acting as a foster parent.

It explores in detail, several aspects of foster parenting
namely the Social characteristics of foster parents, their
training and preparation, their experience of dealing with the
foster child's own family, the support they received which
included financial matters. Lastly it considered the affects of
fostering upon their own family.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my dear wife Sue, who has
tolerated me over the last five years and supported me through
the ups and downs in the demanding role of researcher. To my
dear children, Emily and Hannah who have learnt what it is like
to have a father who is pre-occupied with his research. To my
supervisor Professor Colin Pritchard, without who's unending
enthusiasm I would have surely given up.

At Last.

It is finished.

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CONTENTS

Chapter Four.

Chapter Five.

Chapter Six.

Directory of Tables.

Chapter five.

Chapter six.

The findings. (Part two) Open-ended questions.

Chapter
One

The Changing
Nature
of Fostering

The Changing Nature of Fostering.

Fostering is a theme evident in history and literature throughout the ages. However, present day fostering has changed considerably from the fostering of yesteryear. This chapter provides a discussion of the changing nature of fostering and includes aspects of social policy. It is designed, to ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of how fostering has developed and how the role of foster parents has changed. In todays world of child care, the foster parents are considered to be an important part of the child care policy. This radical change, is reflected in changing legislation and mirrored in the 1989 Children Act.

The 1989 Children Act, said to be fully operational in October 1991 represents the culmination of a hundred years or more of policy and professional development concerning the care of children. The act brings together and consolidates the provision of the "Fostering" of children. The concept has a long history and inherent in the activity are ethical, social and psychological dilemmas. It would be true to say that central to the act is fostering as a major, if not the major pillow upon which the act rests. Society, via the agents of statutory and voluntary provision invests considerable energy and resources in the activity. This study explores one aspect of fostering. It seeks to understand why some people, after undergoing a strict approval process, then decide to cease fostering.

To place current fostering in perspective, we briefly review the changing nature of foster care. What will become apparent is the difficulties and complexities of the present, which are reflected in the experiences of former times.

An example of the fostering of children can be seen in the Princess of Egypt, Moses having been found in the bullrushes was cared for by people who apparently shared no family ties. Another example of ancient fostering was in the story of Oedepus, when a farmer took care of a crippled child. The theme is echoed by Shakespear in the Midsummer Nights Dream when we hear of the first contested custody of a child.

George (1) upon whom we draw heavily, highlighted that the care of children has been an issue since Tudor times. Heyward (2) noted that it was not formally addressed until the 17th century, when the children of the Poor Law were made apprentices. Other bodies such as Christ's Hospital placed out young children with wet nurses. D.H.S.S. (3).

Following the Victorian revision in 1834 of the Poor Law, it recognized "Boarding Out" as a means of providing a more healthy and beneficial training, than that which could be provided in either a workhouse or school. In these situations foster children were seen as being "saved" an act which they were expected to show everlasting gratitude. Foster parents were assessed with regard to their moral character, religion, their health, housing and their economic status and were judged as

"good" or "bad" dependant upon their need to gain in a financial way from this venture. The less of a need to gain financial recompense the more highly thought of were the applicants. Allowances were based upon the cost of maintaining the child within the poor law institution and this meant that the supervision of the children was minimal with the primary aim to deal with the physical needs of the child.

The early schemes of boarding out children says Rowe (4) dealt with those who had been orphaned or who had been totally deserted, older children being placed in or returned to Poor Houses, later to be apprenticed or found domestic work. Parents who for any reason were unable to care for their children were considered to be "bad" parents and consequently every attempt was made to separate the child from its family of origin thus encouraging both parties to sever all contacts from each other. Parents and relatives in these situations were generally considered to be undesirable contacts for the children.

Despite the separating of children from their birth parents it would seem, according to George (5), that the child's needs were seen as a priority. However the system of Boarding Out which existed then was seen as a form of "outdoor relief involving little if any supervision and not aiming particularly to be educational, or to provide social or emotional improvement for the child." George also highlighted an early example of progressive thinking when in 1853 the Rev Armistead in Cheshire placed children from the workhouse with foster parents who he

had selected himself and who he later supervised. At that time, he represented a growing belief which acknowledged that although the workhouse was adequate to provide for the physical needs of the child, it failed to provide an emotional stimulation and failed to offer a first hand experience of family life. As foster parents were able to provide these experiences they helped to equip the foster child for adult life, as a parent.

Later in the 19th Century, Scotland, Ireland and other european countries, extended the forms of boarding-out. They not only tried to provide a new family environment, but also a different living environment, by removing children from the inner city slums and placing them in rural settings. It was felt that the fresh clean air would benefit the children. Country folk were also seen as more trustworthy than their working class town equivalents. It was also aimed to protect them from moral contamination from their parents or relatives. Foster parents were therefore deemed "un-contaminated" by moral degradation and therefore more fitted to raise children. The formalization of controlled and supervised placements for children, unable to live with their parents, emerges.

George (6) records that the second half of the 19th Century erupted with the forming of several voluntary societies eg. Dr Barnardo's homes (now known as Dr Barnardo's) and the Waifs and Strays (now known as The Church of England Childrens Society).

After considering two reports detailing the boarding out arrangements in Scotland and in parts of England and Wales and acknowledging the pressure from a growing body of opinion in favour of boarding out, the newly formed Local Government Board issued the general order of 25th November 1870 which agreed for local children to be boarded out in other areas eg. rural. George (7). Apart from amendments to this act over the next thirty years, the 1870 legislation was the primary framework affecting children until the introduction of the 1948 children act.

Boarding out, away from natural family was viewed as preferable by most people within the statutory and voluntary bodies. It disallowed children access to their family, who were generally considered to exert undesirable influences upon them. No real evidence was produced about this, but the fact that children became dependent upon the state because of their parents misfortune or misconduct was proof enough of the parents inadequacy.

Parents and families were generally discouraged from maintaining contact with their children, the location of the children was with held and if by chance or through persistence the parent were to find the whereabouts of their child, it was often necessary to move this child, thus severing all communications. Sometimes it was even found necessary "if the child had undesirable relations troubling them, to emigrate the child to Canada." George (8).

The boarding out system was opposed in some quarters as it could have encouraged parents to be irresponsible by abandoning their children. It was also feared that the boarded out children would suffer educationally. This was particularly true in the country areas as there was no compulsory system of education and at best the children would attend small day schools which could not provide an education and training equivalent to the standard to that provided in the district and other boarding schools of the Poor Law authorities. There was a retained fear that boarding out was similar in some respects to "apprenticeship" and "child farming" and therefore boarded out children could be ill-treated and neglected. Clear thinking and a tightening of existing policy was needed in order to recruit suitable foster parents who would give priority to the needs of the children in their care.

Following the first world war, the Ministry of Pensions became responsible for large numbers of children of ex-servicemen and founded a progressive system of boarding out, which often involved the use of relatives. In 1933 the Children and Young Persons Act enabled delinquent children to be placed in the care of the Local Authority and made boarding out obligatory, subject to exceptions in certain circumstances. The number of children being boarded out increased although supervision varied and the quality of care likewise. By using

natural family to care for foster children and although not diminishing the importance of non-related carers, it did recognize the importance of keeping children in touch with their natural family.

Due to expediency, the need for parental contact was sadly ignored, when large numbers of children were evacuated during the second world war. Simeon Clarke (9) quotes from her evacuation survey of 1940:- "family life cannot be artificially created. An evacuation scheme which depends for success on the casual mixing of some children, a mother and a toddler or two with a previous homogeneous family group, is doomed to fail eventually, if not at once." She goes on to say that " well adjusted persons of unusual tolerance and insight might be able to make a good job of this predicament, but such persons are rare." Simeon Clarke was right, as the evacuation although it probably saved many lives, it created much hardship for the carers or "Hostesses" as they were known, and, in particular, the children they cared for. This gave rise to a billeting officer being appointed to supervise and to place the children. Sadly, these people seemed ill equipped to empathize with the parties concerned. Interestingly, similar problems which existed then, still exist today and a significant one being that of finance. Although the role of foster parent is beginning to change, Had we then, and do we now, have any inclination of the requirements of foster parents, who are daily confronted with management decisions regarding the care of the foster children? During the evacuation, hostesses were paid an allowance to cover

the cost of feeding the child. Other items some of which by todays standards would be considered as essential, such as clothing, treats, medicines and soap should have been provided by the appropriate parent. A failure of the parent to provide these items, potentially left the child, the parent and the hostess in conflict. The giving of presents to ones own children within the host family created difficulties also, especially when the price of such a present exceeded the amount which the hostess would, or could spend on her own children. Little importance was given to cultural matching and standards varied considerably from home to home.

The trigger which gave the impetus to the creation of the 1948 Children Act. was the reported death of Denis O'Neil whilst in a foster home. This revealed the dangers inherent in a system which failed to provide for the skilled and efficient supervision of children in public care. Subsequently two committees concerned with the care of children, Curtis in England and Clyde in Scotland, both expressed confidence in the boarding out system as potentially the best substitute for children deprived of normal home life. Hall(10). As a result of these two reports D.H.S.S. (11) confirms that the Local Authority Childrens Departments were set up in 1948 and children's Officers appointed. The staff of the childrens department including "Boarding Out officers", later to be referred to as "child care officers" and more recently termed "fostering officers" were obliged by law to board out all children in the

care of the local authority, except those whom it was considered impracticable or undesirable to place in foster homes. This obligation continued until the passing of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969. The term "Boarding Out" was commented upon by Shaw and Hipgrave (12) as it had Dickensian overtones of bed, board and nothing else, a term which is no longer legally referred to.

One of the major results of the second world war was the opening up of society so that its problems no longer remained isolated and encapsulated in quiet corners well out of the public eye. D.H.S.S. (13). Evacuation had evoked considerable sympathy for children deprived of normal family life and this sympathy was extended to many children who were found to be in residential homes and nurseries when the Childrens Department came into being in 1948. At this time there was a strong movement against institutional care. Boarding out was seen to be a way of meeting the needs of the children, but it also had the added advantage of being cheaper to implement than institutional care. With the introduction of the Welfare State and the removal of the old Poor Laws more parents were encouraged to use the Childrens Department and many asked for short term reception into care for their children. This had the affect of disassembling the family kinship network, in favour of using local authorities for support. The use of short term care and respite care was born and was used to minimize the ill affects of family crisis. As a result of this there was a rapid development in the provision of foster care, but in so doing, it

changed the role of the foster parents who previously saw themselves as "parent" of the child in care. Childrens homes were closed in the attempt to give institutionalized children an opportunity of a family life. Because of the demand upon the fostering services and a consequential shortfall in available foster homes and because of a new recognition that children should remain as part of their natural family where it represents their best interests, greater attempts were made on rehabilitation of children and the use of relatives as foster parents. Many situations were found where relatives were in a position to care for such children and in some cases were already doing so, but due to financial difficulties such arrangements were of short duration. By recognizing the relatives as foster parents and the child as Boarded Out, Local Authorities were able to give financial assistance and in addition they could help with any emotional difficulties arising in the child. This reception into care and boarding out with relatives highlighted an emerging emphasis upon the preventative role of the Childrens Department. It also helped to minimize the trauma of a child being removed from the caring environment of his own family.

The concept of boarding out grew favour with most Local Authorities. This policy was indorsed by the findings of John Bowlby (14) published in the WHO monograph "The Deprivation of

Maternal Care" in 1951. He along with other experts emphasized the importance of bonding between parent and child during the child's formative years and the damage caused by the disruption of this.

The proportion of children in care who were boarded out in 1946 was 29%. This figure steadily rose until it was 37% in 1950, Packman (15). One authority was quoted as having boarded out 73% of its children, although at the other end of the scale one children's department had only fostered 9%. Packman (16). The increase in some areas was accounted for by the number of children who were received temporarily into care during family crisis, as a result a new breed of foster parents was born. They saw their role rather differently from those that sought to provide long term substitute care. They undertook short term placements and shared the parental role with natural family. The proportion of children fostered continued to grow until the early 1960s. The peak year was 1963 when 52% nationally were placed in foster homes. Undoubtedly the care of deprived children was improving and the Boarding Out regulations of 1955 aimed to achieve at least a minimum standard of practice.

The idealism which characterized the early 1950's and 1960's was soon challenged by the growing number of failed fostering placements. Although Local Authorities were able to boast high numbers of children boarded out, the success of these placements was debateable. It was known that significant numbers of children were experiencing moves from foster homes,

sometimes more than once in the course of one year. Some of these might have been planned but many were the result of some form of disruption. These were difficult to quantify but Trasler (17) in his study of fostering in Devon 1960 estimated that in the late 1950's between a third and two fifths of long term placements failed. Parker (18) undertook a follow up study of placements in Kent five years after they had started which indicated a failure rate as high as 48%. A later study by George (19) reported that using Parkers criteria as many as 59.8% of placements disrupted or terminated in an unplanned way. Clearly fostering was advantageous for some children but the general picture was not acceptable. Fostering it was realized was not a simple process. There was also a general questioning of the need for the child to be in care and a rapid move towards work designed to prevent the reception of children into care. Where reception into care was inevitable there was a growing acknowledgement of the positive value of residential care for children. The previous need to provide an experience of realistic family life for children in care suddenly disappeared. There was a growing recognition that although fostering may have been desirable as a means to care for children, it was not without its problems. It placed stresses not only upon the foster child, but also upon the fostering family. Could the un-trained and minimally supported fosters cope with the demands of fostering? Added to this, the large institutions were being

replaced by smaller residential units, most noteable the "family group home" consisting of up to a dozen children in the care of a married couple. This form of care was seen as a more attractive alternative to long term foster care.

Following the 1969 Children and Young Person's Act the number of children supervised in their own home far out numbered those "in care". Policies of prevention and rehabilitation and a growing awareness of the limitations of fostering meant that by 1970 the numbers of children in care who were fostered had dropped. The 1969 Children and Young Persons Act increased demand for residential care leading to full and overcrowded homes. In spite of an increase in provision by the voluntary sector the ability to keep pace with demand left little choice in placements. Childrens homes gradually became a repository for societies disadvantaged children. Potter (20)

During the 1970's there were changes in child care policy and practice, particularly following the death of Maria Cowell, which brought policies of protection and rehabilitation into disrepute. Residential care later became discredited when research of approved schools, the descendant of the Victorian reformatory, demonstrated that regimes often bore little relation to boys needs. Millam et al (21).

The concept of family care was promoted by the National Foster Care Association. With its introduction in 1974 of a foster parent training course, namely "Parenting Plus", foster care, gained a greater credibility. Further attempts were also

made to prevent the reception of children into care by the introduction of "Intermediate Treatment programmes". These programmes were used as an alternative means of sentencing for the courts, but were flexible enough to be used in a voluntary capacity. This ultimately meant, that more children remained with their own families and for those who did not remain at home, their future, was destined within substitute family care. Foster care was viewed as an "Ideal", not only because it provided a positive experience of family life, but also, it represented a saving in cost for the responsible Local Authority, if compared with the cost of residential care. The concept of fostering had also changed, no longer were foster parents expected to cope with the foster child, without having experienced some form of basic training themselves.

The 1975 Children Act gave a shift in emphasis towards children being adopted. The concept of family placement was seen as preferable, but the emphasis from substitute family care changed to that of "treatment" foster care. Short term placements were offered, as a way of addressing a specific problem. These placements were task centred and time limited. Offering respite care for a family, who were experiencing a difficult situation, gained in popularity. This had the affect of alleviating stress for the child's family and limiting the possibility of the child needing long term support outside of the family home. These concepts were endorsed by the introduction of the 1989 Children Act. It emphasized the rights

and wishes of the child and viewed these as paramount. It also emphasized the importance of birth family and the need for regular family contact where an external placement was sought.

Historically, the popularity of fostering has remained relatively constant. Occasionally, it becomes less popular, dependant upon tragedies which have occurred during its implementation, growing public awareness regarding the needs of children, financial implications and legislation, which have reflected public demands and public pressure. At this present time, fostering is fashionable, provided that it allows adequate and often frequent contact with relatives of the foster child. Its continued popularity is dependant upon the variables previously mentioned. Historically also, is its comparability with residential care. In making direct comparisons, we consider children generally and therefore do not consider the specific needs of each individual child. When planning a service for children of this generation, we should be offering a choice of placements, which include residential and home based projects. This will enable local authorities to meet the needs of the child, rather than adapt the needs of the child, to fit into the services which are currently available. Changed also is the role of foster "carer", no longer "parent" to the foster child and often in the role of supporting the child and its parents, with a view to re-habilitation.

Working in partnership is a priority also for the 1989 Children Act, but partnership extends further than between local Authorities and children and parents. It also embodies the carers, without whose dedication, agencies would be unable to offer an affective fostering service. As the partnership includes the carers, then agencies have a duty to service the needs of these people and in doing so must elicit their views. Foster parents form the backbone of many Local Authorities child care strategies and in recognizing this, we must listen to what the carers say.

The following survey reflects the positive and negative experiences of the carers. People and families who have given their time, energy and enthusiasm in caring for other peoples children. Foster agencies, sit up and listen, as a failure to do so could endanger the continuance of fostering as we recognize it today.

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Chapter
Two

Literature
Review

Literature Review.

As can be seen from the introductory chapter, fostering has evolved and is now considered an important, if not a central ingredient for local authorities' planning for children in their care. If foster parents are considered to be important, then why were they allowed to cease to foster in such high numbers. In any given time, 350 families within West Sussex offered to care for foster children, yet between 1988-1989 a total of 80 families gave up this important role, WHY?

In order to answer this question and to structure the research, the recommendation of Selltiz et. al. (1) was followed to provide "Insight stimulating research", and sought the advice of experts namely foster parents and social workers, who were active in the field of fostering. They were consulted about why in their view, foster parents ceased to foster. Their answers were interesting and wide ranging and not only reflected their perceived ideas, but also drew upon their personal experiences of foster parents who had given up.

Their comments seemed to form a broad combination of factors which might lead to families ceasing to foster. The ideas volunteered by foster parents and social workers and the themes which had emerged from the literature have been systematically categorized and provided a structure against which to examine the research literature, and form a central theme throughout the entire study.

The comments made by both the foster parents and social workers are listed below, under the categorized headings to enable the reader to understand how the categories were established.

1) Social Characteristics of Foster Parents.

Although there were no specific references made to the social characteristics of former foster parents, their position in society may reflect their attitude towards fostering and therefore contribute towards the reasons why they eventually cease to foster.

2) Training/preparation

Lack of insight into child's needs-resulting in disruption.
Partners not taking on an equal share of the responsibility for caring for the foster child.
Unrealistic expectations on behalf of the Social Worker.

3) Dealings with the foster child's own family.

Moving to smaller accommodation away from natural parents.
Too old to deal with angry parents.

4) Appropriate support.

Lack of support from the Department of Social Services.
Too much support needed by the foster parents.
Exploitation by the Department of Social Services.
Quality of Social Work staff.
Pressures of work upon Social Work staff.

Made to take a child of an age group they were not
interested in.

Having to cope with emergency placements

5) Financial implications.

A need to go out to work/grew out of fostering

Change in method of Boarding Out payments.

6) Affect upon foster parents own family.

Placed stresses upon marriage.

Foster Child did not positively relate to the birth child
of the foster family.

Lack of emotional response from the Foster Child.

Adoption.

Disruptive parents of the Foster Child.

Own children "put out" by the attention given to the foster
child.

Disagreements with plans for change.

Own children were now teenagers and in competition with the
foster child.

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Four other ideas were suggested, 1) Death within the family. 2) Pregnancy. 3) Divorce within foster home. 4) Personal problems - Alcoholism. These could not be satisfactorily grouped within a chosen category and were not necessarily associated with foster parenting.

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The literature review was initially a manual process which identified any article or book, based upon empirical research written during the previous five years and related to reasons why foster parents were thought to have given up fostering. Two key Social work journals were used, namely The "British Journal of Social work" and "Adoption and Fostering". Having produced a general "trawl" of information, a method of analysis based upon the work of "Mary Hess" (2) which involved targeting single references made by a variety of different authors, which lead back to the "nodal" idea. As previously stated, the amount of information related directly to why foster parents ceased to foster was not extensive. Therefore a more comprehensive review was undertaken through the computer international inter-library loan system, which produced references predominantly from the U.S.A. Once these references had been checked and the relevant contents noted, a final hand search of the two key British social work journals was made, in order to bring the review up to date as was possible.

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Review

1) Social Characteristics of Foster Parents

Gray and Parr (3) in a Government social survey of 1957 described fostering in the late 1950's as generally a working class occupation which was confirmed by (SSRIU) (4) twenty years later, in a study of Portsmouth foster parents. But has the socioeconomic status of foster parents anything to do with success of fostering placements? Parker (5) in his study of "successful and non successful" foster placements suggested that there was. George (6) in his research, sought to explore primarily the relationship between theory and practice in foster care, but found no significant relationship between success and failure and the social class of the foster family.

Within individualized social networks there are different categories of foster parent as demonstrated by Adamson (7) in a study of 132 Foster Mothers, where three different categories emerged. These are recorded below.

1.The "related" e.g. grandmothers, aunts, siblings who were unlikely to have fostered any child who had no relationship to them.

2. The "Motherly" Those foster mothers tended to look on the child as a member of their family and to treat him much more as adopted.

3. The "model" considered to be a model of foster parenting,
being younger women in their 20's-30's usually with children of
their own. They tended to be less possessive in relation to the
foster child and more understanding of the child's needs to
maintain contact with own parents.

Napier (8) reported that 74% of the successful placements
in her study had no children of their own. Success and
non-success of placements could be a contributory factor as to
why foster parents later cease to foster. If foster parents are
deemed as successful there is a greater possibility of them
continuing to offer foster placements to other children.
Napier's study however would seem to suggest that child free
couples were most successful and this being the case there would
seem to be a similarity to that of the "motherly" trait as
suggested by Adamson. Triseliotis (9) in an original study of
40 children who had been fostered by a single foster home
described the experiences as perceived by the foster parent. He
recorded that for the long term foster parents, "they were in
their 40's and early 50's at the time of placement; having no
children of their own, or, their own children were beginning to
grow away from the family home; holding steady semi-skilled and
skilled jobs and living in council accommodation. Their
financial situation was marginally better than that of the
family of origin, its main difference being the regularity of
job and income." The study's aim had been concerned with
highlighting the foster care experiences, as seen by both the

foster parent and the foster child but in doing this it denoted
the "successful/non-successful" and his findings would seem to
conflict with previous research or perhaps reflected the
emergence of a different "type" of foster parent. The
characteristics of the foster parents, as illustrated below:-

"The most accomplished caretakers appear to be warm and
open people, with steady relationships and steady work records,
not easily threatened by references to the family of origin.
They were mostly in their late thirties and forties at
placement, often having children of their own or at least one
other foster child and both spouses were active in parenting the
children." Triseliotis observed a change of emphasis from the
mother being the main carer to sharing this responsibility with
her spouse. Fostering agencies are also considering older
people to act as foster parents who have had experience of
raising their own children and presumably have more to offer a
foster child, in the understanding of their situation and in
general parenting skills. This group would be considered as
"model" foster parents by Adamson, but would be at least 10 - 20
years older than the group he had surveyed.

Triseliotis (10) also revealed that foster parents in
the unsuccessful group were functioning under greater pressure
compared to the rest. "Relationship problems, low levels of
tolerance, accommodation and financial difficulties produced
tensions not found in the rest of the sample. In the eyes of
the former foster children, the homes lacked warmth and

consistency and the majority did not regard the foster family as their family." Not an ideal scenario for a foster child to cope with.

All families suffer from problems and part of child rearing is to teach our off spring coping mechanisms, which will better equip them for adult life. If the parents are struggling to cope with their own problems then they are less able to have time available for children in their care, especially for the foster child who is often having to cope with more problems than other children of a similar age.

Fostering agencies can add to the usual stress placed upon families, by having overly high expectations of what the carers should and can provide. This fact was observed by Bebbington and Miles (11) who report on the findings of a national srvey of foster families of children in care and voiced the opinion that "The number and type of families which foster have changed remarkably little in the last thirty years." A typical example of a foster family being a married couple, the woman aged between 31-55 years of age. She would remain at home whist her partner goes out to work. They would live in homes with three or four bedrooms and have older children.

Foster Fathers

Very little research exists regarding the importance of male foster carers within a family setting but Trasler (12) "attempted to test the possibility that the presence in the foster home of the husband of the foster mother, has an effect upon the success of the placement." In 21% of the successful placements and in 16% of those which failed there was no foster father in the home. The differences were not large enough to be statistically reliable.

A question of whether the foster father was or should be greater involved in their dealings with the Department of Social Services was raised by Mandell (13), as the majority of social work involvement with the foster home was during the day, when often the foster father was at work. The social worker therefore relied heavily upon the communication skills of the foster mother to keep her spouse fully informed of what was going on and also relied upon her communicating his views and wishes to the Social Worker. Should we expect the female member of this partnership to represent the views of her husband and more important, Was there sufficient communication between them?

Parker (14) like Trasler attributed male foster fathers with little importance, as in his research, the lack of a foster father gave no indication of success or failure in the placement. Was the male carer really necessary?

Kellmer-Pringle (15) would advocate a need for both sexes, so that the child can identify with his own or opposite sex...."better developmental progress appears to be made when praise and recognition come not only from mother, but from another preferably of the opposite sex."

Despite the recognition that male foster carers can provide a valid contribution to foster care. D.H.S.S. (16) reported that some social workers ignored the important role played by them.

Far from being ignored, Berelson and Steiner (17) professed the importance of role for the "father" because he was more likely to provide materially for the family. Bossard and Boll (18) also stressed the fact that the child's life chances would be roughly correlated with the socioeconomic status achieved by his father." But can the same be said for foster fathers?

"Foster fatherhood shares with ordinary fatherhood a long history of neglect by researchers, but a certain amount of clarity concerning it's nature is prerequisite to affective helping in foster family situations." says Davids (19) in his essay "Foster Fatherhood: The Untrapped Resource."

Being a foster father, however, does not mean the same things, as the social agency provides financially for the fostered child. The status of the foster child has no bearing on the occupation of the foster father. The status of the male

carer is compromised. He being in a similar role to that of
parent, but without the parental responsibility. Thus Davids
offers the opinion that "The position of provider for the child
does not exist, in a social and psychological sense, in the
modern fostering situation.... " He suggests that "In general
foster fathers (in a long term situation) have a better
opportunity than the caseworker to know the particular child
well enough to gauge his individual needs and perhaps to predict
his success in a future educational setting, yet agency
decisions override the foster parent's plans for the child."
When considering the relationship between the social worker and
the foster parents Davids stated "....if a foster father had
experienced raising his own children and thus was not likely to
find compensatory value in contact with the caseworker, he might
be expected to have very little interest in really interacting
with the caseworker."

Foster fathers can suffer the indignity of a lack of
recognition of their status within a fostering setting a fact
recognized by Tinney (20) in her study of 415 foster parents she
found that the role of foster parent was perceived differently
between the male and female respondents. She explained that the
foster fathers were more inclined to equate their role with that
of the adoptive or biological parents, where as the foster
mothers were "....significantly more inclined to select role

descriptions that by definition suggested a professional
orientation toward foster care practice, "Employee,"
"professional,"child care counsellor," "team worker,"
"consultant to natural parents," and "child advocate."

Social Characteristics of Foster Parents.

Summary

In the early part of this literature review foster
parents were described as working class, hard working and
limited in their education and interests mainly in the family
and in the home. Gradually, in the late 1960's and early
1970's, we see a "new breed" of foster parent developing. They
are younger than the traditional foster parent, less possessive
of the foster child and more able to maintain links with the
family of origin.

We also see a swing away from the traditional family
i.e. Mother the "caretaker" and father the "breadwinner" to a
more equal relationship, with both male and female foster
parents taking an active role in the parenting of their
children. Although one author firmly stated that the foster
parents have changed little over the last thirty years, it would
seem that they have changed.

In the attempts of the caring agencies to
professionalize the service that is offered and having a need to
involve foster parents in meetings, conferences, in training and
expecting them to be articulate their views, we are attracting

the "middle class" families. These families may be more at ease in working with the "professionals" but the agencies are failing to match the working class children in the care of local authorities with working class families and therefore are creating a conflict for the foster child. This interesting concept poses questions, which future researchers may care to consider.

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2) Training/preparation

The importance of foster parents being helped to understand and empathize with a child who has left his parents is emphasized by Trasler (21) who argued that "the degree of psychological disturbance which the child suffers is not greatly influenced by the objective circumstances of separation. A much more important factor appears to be the quality of his social environment both before and after the event." The role of foster parents is often made more difficult by the fact that the children in their care are likely to have been badly parented themselves and perhaps had not successfully bonded with their birth parents. If the child has difficulty forming positive relationships then the difficulties of caring for the child is heightened.

Gorrell-Barnes (22) highlighted that many skills are needed to affectively deal with children in care. Although discussing the communication skills needed by social workers,

these skills also apply equally to anyone who is directly
dealing with children which must include foster parents. She
states.... "Children can begin to understand what is said to
them at a very young age, provided that the appropriate way of
getting meaning across is worked out and secondly that the
amount that they are talked to appropriately, affects their
ability to do the same back.... When considering a child coming
into care and receiving a variety of communications from a large
number of often unfamiliar and different adults it becomes
particularly important to bear these two points in mind." Being
able to communicate with others is not a right of birth, for
some, these skills need to be taught, which heightens the need
for training for those who deal with children in care.

The 1970's were marked by considerable changes in
approach to child care practice and the Transatlantic influence
remained strong. Training and the need for it began to find its
place within the planning for children in foster care. The
training included a general sharing of information in order to
equip the carer for the daunting role which befell them.
Rowe (23) voiced the opinion that "In the next few years we
can expect to see a considerable increase in Special Placements,
more use of contracts and greater clarity about the purpose of
placement, more training for foster parents and better
recognition of them as professional partners, playing a key role
in planning...."

Although inroads were made into these areas on a
voluntary basis, it was not until the introduction of the 1988
Boarding Out Regulations, where there was a legal requirement to
provide written information to help the foster parent to cope
with the foster child, that the wide spread use of written
information become available.

When fostering a child, carers often deal with raw
emotions. Emotions expressed by the foster child and also the
carer having to or trying to deal with their own feelings and
emotions surrounding the child's situation. The same dilemma is
experienced by the social worker who is responsible for the
assessment and subsequent approval of the carer. Thompson (24)
in
her research drew our attention to the prospect of personal
relationships developing within the approval process between the
applicant and the assessor and thus potentially clouding any
issues which may need to be dealt with during the approval
process. Smales (25) had gone further and suggested that an
assessor can become a friend of the foster parent and therefore
avoid probing certain areas, which could be of vital
importance.

The D.H.S.S.(26) in a study of the operation of the then
Boarding Out Regulation emphasized that differing perceptions of
social worker and foster parent might be a problem area.
Teamwork was difficult if the issue of authority was not dealt
with honestly. A view later supported by Russel who when
considering the authority role of the social worker during

assessments he felt that they ".... have a difficult task in preparing a potential substitute family to become an actual substitute family. The prior values of the family and their intentions about fostering and adoption may block out essential pieces of their preparation as the actual substitute parents." He goes on to explain ".... properly understood authority, is of central importance in substitute family placements, especially where older children must be re-socialized into new families. The families have to learn too, but it is easier to re-socialize a child than mothers and fathers in their thirties or forties or fifties." Russel suggested that preparation for fostering does not rest with the foster parents, but needs to be extended to the foster child (27). They have to learn how to adapt to the value systems of the foster home and this he suggested is easier to achieve than the foster parents adjusting to the value systems of the child.

Thompson (28) in her M.Phil thesis recalled the introduction of the "Parenting Plus" course in 1979. This was viewed as a milestone for foster parent training funded by "Barnardo's" and "spearheaded " by the National Foster Care Association, who emerged in 1977 and who then developed a range of foster parent training courses, to meet the growing needs of a range of different problems and situations that foster carers found themselves in. These courses benefited not only the child in foster care but also the foster parents as well, raising their status, giving them confidence and a self respect and more

ably preparing them to cope with the hazards and demands of fostering. N.F.C.A. (29) " at that time the idea of foster parent training was strongly resisted in some quarters. Fostering was seen simply as an extension of the parenting role and since one became a good parent instinctively rather than through specific training, one became a good foster parent by that same route."

With greater emphasis being placed upon preventative work, less children were coming into care. The children who managed to be placed in foster homes were in the main more difficult to deal with and presented far more complex problems than did their predecessors. This gave rise to the development of a new form of training course.

In 1988 saw the launch of the "Challenge of Foster Care" a course which emphasized that fostering was a "job of work" requiring special knowledge, sensitivity, skill and commitment. It promoted a sharing of responsibilities and a partnership with the social worker dealing with the child. It also sought to address the growing problem of child sexual abuse. The course gave rise to the "Foster Care Charter" (30) in 1989 which was produced by the N.F.C.A. and considered:-

1. The need for partnership between carers and the Department of Social Services.

2. The preservation of racial, cultural and religious identities for children in care.

3. The need for continuity, maintaining identity and the promotion of the child's potential.

4. The need for paid carers, not relying upon a group of well meaning volunteers.

5. The need for training.

6. The need for support.

7. The need for written agreements.

8. A partnership in care involving natural parents, children in care, the Department of Social Services and foster parents.

9. The right to challenge decisions made by the Department of Social Services.

10. Support for young people leaving care.

This period proved to be exciting as it brought to the forefront of child care planning, issues which previously had only been considered in a minor way, such as racial identity for the child in foster care. Fostering once more gained in popularity. The need for further training became apparent. Not only to help foster parents to deal with every day problems, but also training for special placements, servicing children with "special" needs.

Changing Role of Foster Parents.

Bullock (31) in his summary of recent research findings of foster care emphasized the need for partnership for all those who are dealing with a child in foster care. He demonstrated the changing and demanding role of the foster parent, who is

having to cope with far more difficult children than previous generations of foster parents. Professionals he stated " no longer bring children unannounced to foster families for care and tending, to stay as long as those who know best decide." Foster carers have the day to day care of foster children, but they are expected to deal with a variety of children with an equal presentation of social and behavioural problems. Carers are expected to promote the child's health, education and family links they must therefore be treated as "partners rather than agents of social workers." He goes on to say that "They have to be involved in reviews and in framing contracts, they must be given responsibility to negotiate the style of placement with children and families and they must contribute to decisions about children's futures."

Preparation

If carers have to cope with such a variety of tasks, the literature suggests that they need to be prepared and trained, in order do their job to a reasonable standard of competence. They need to be pre-warned of the potential consequences for them as carers and for their own family, who would also participate in the caring role. Their families are also likely to be affected emotionally by the presence of a foster child within their family environment. To provide inadequate preparation for such a demanding role can lead to a sense of failure for the carer and possibly a further rejection for the foster child.

Interestingly in a study undertaken by SSRIU (32) over a third of foster parents had found the experience of fostering to be more difficult than they had expected. They suggested that this could have been overcome by better preparation.

The concept of fostering, has been built upon good will and has relied upon those who have a love of children. No formal qualifications have been required for the undertaking of such a role. Foster parents, have been recruited from a variety of backgrounds which have included those with little academic ability, but nevertheless provide a very loving and caring environment in which a foster child can develop. If preparation is provided in a formal sense, are we making the assumption that all carers should and can cope with it. If this be the case then, in practice we are intimidating those that can only cope on an practical level and thus effectively deter them from applying to be foster parents. Macaskill (33) found "It was a mistake to equate a lack of verbal ability with practical incompetence." Although she specifically referred to substitute families for mentally handicapped children, the comparison can be made between these parents and substitute parents for other categories of children. During the formal assessment the assessor would likely expect some form of verbal articulation from the applicant, in order to satisfy themselves that the applicant would have the verbal ability, not only to deal with the child in question, but also to be able to deal with a variety of professional staff, during their career as a foster parent.

Methods of information sharing and preparation vary from
agency to agency, but which is the most appropriate? and which
is the most affective? The use of groups in the selection
process was suggested by Freund (34). Berridge and Cleaver (35)
in their comparative study of foster homes and residential
children's homes also stated that the preparatory training of
foster parents was found to be rewarded with greater stability."
Crowley (36) in his survey of sixty foster parents found that
foster parents who had attended a training course felt much
better prepared for their role than those who had not.

Gross and Buzzard (37) stated that group preparation
was more appropriate for the articulate middle class. Boyd and
Remy (38) in their survey of 105 foster families compared
trained with untrained foster parents using the "placement
outcome," "length of placement," "foster parents rating of
placement" and "rate of retention" as criteria. The study
revealed that trained foster parents were more likely to keep
children in their care for longer periods of time.

The method of preparation can be a source of
disagreement. The need to prepare carers however, is long
established as being vital, in order for them to provide a
reasonable service to both the agency and the children in their
care. Harari (39) however, in his study of role perception,
questions this by stating that "The more the contributions of
foster parents are acknowledged and the more trained and
experienced foster parents become, the greater may be their

tendency to perceive their own roles in the fostering process as more important than those of social workers." This rather controversial statement has little support in the field of research.

The Nova model of foster parent selection wrote Pasztor (40) in her article entitled Permanency Planning and Foster parenting. " ....uses a positive approach based on shared decision making, problem solving and mutual selection, all of which are integral to building mutual trust and team work." She compared this method with "the home study process" which she believed "places the foster parents in the role of client" and by the nature of the process placed them in a very inferior role. She advocated a situation whereby the prospective foster parents would assess themselves in co-operation with agency staff and highlight the impact of fostering upon their own families themselves. Slowik (41) following her survey of professionals associated with child care, adoptive and foster parents, would advocate " ....that combined sessions for professionals and foster/adoptive parents are a successful alternative to, or supplement of, separate training."

Triseliotis (42) in his "introduction" to "Groupwork in Adoption and Foster Care" advocated the use of groups but went further and suggested that they be used as a form of preparation which provided a self selection process. This new concept provided the applicants with an opportunity to consider their own suitability as carers and the dignity to de-select

themselves if considered appropriate. This method would be far less painful than receiving a formal rejection from the agency.

Preparation for grief.

One area of possible neglect with regard to preparation, is the need to recognize the "grief" foster parents may experience at the end of the placement, i.e. "loss" of the foster child is either felt as a mini-bereavement or it could reactivate an old memory, which was painful for the foster parent to deal with. If they retain unresolved feelings, we may in affect, be preventing them from continuing as foster parents. McCoy, (43) and Fanshel and Shinn (44) highlighted the painfulness for foster parents who relinquish the care of foster children. Edelstein (45) stated that "....the agency should provide education and training related to loss and the grieving process...." He also advocated the use of "peer support through self help groups" which will provide an empathy to an emotional loss. Tiddy (46) later wrote "Research tells us that persons who experience significant unresolved cut offs from significant others are persons at higher risk emotionally than those who have resolved cut offs." It can be assumed that these earlier affects can limit the foster parents ability to deal with problem situation situations later on.

Racial, Cultural and Religious considerations.

Never before has legislation gone so far to protect the racial, cultural and religious backgrounds of a foster child as the 1989 Children Act. It considers that these aspects are important factors for consideration and need to be emphasized when preparing foster parents for fostering. "....in the great majority of cases, placement with a family of similar ethnic origin and religion is most likely to meet a child's needs.... Such a family is likely to provide a child with continuity in life and care and an environment which the child will find familiar and sympathetic.... opportunities will naturally arise to share fully in the culture and way of life of the ethnic group to which they belongs.... Families of similar ethnic origin are also usually best placed to prepare children for life as members of an ethnic minority group in a multi-racial society, where they may meet with racial prejudice and discrimination and to help them with their development towards independent living and adult life." (47)

There are clearly exceptions to this general rule, where siblings are of different ethnic backgrounds or where the child prior to being fostered has formed strong links with families from other cultural or racial or religious backgrounds. Choice, the act states, will be influenced by the child's previous family experiences and as with all placement decisions, influenced also by the child's wishes and feelings. The Act emphasizes that "Children of mixed ethnic origin, should be

helped to understand and to take a pride in both or all elements in their cultural heritage and to feel comfortable with their origins. Carers must be able to provide this with the help and support of others where necessary.... Where it has not proved possible to make a placement which entirely reflects the child's race and culture, an independent visitor could provide a link with the child's cultural and racial background." (48) One must remember that the independent visitor can be used to supplement the links provided by the natural parents. They can also be used in the absence of parental figures.

A greater awareness for carers of the the child's needs, is vital, to ensure a well balanced placement. But for the cross-cultural placement, the carers need, at least to be made aware of the issues for them and the child, but ideally to attend a specific training course.

Training/preparation

Summary

In order to be an affective foster parent does training have to be provided? In the 1970's saw the emergence of foster parent training, which recognized the changing role of the foster parent and sought to prepare them for the challenging role of foster parenting. At this time there were the sceptic's who thought that training was far more appropriate for the articulate middle class. But was the right sort of training being provided? and If training was being provided were foster

parents being given a false status? so that they perceived their role to be more important than it actually was. In reality by providing training were we unwittingly attracting the middle class families.

In the 1980's we began to take training far more seriously and look at various methods which varied from self assessment to group work. Clearly the emphasis during the last twenty years has been upon the training of foster parents, but having trained foster parents, have we produced a breed of people that are going to be competing against or working with the caring agencies?

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3) Dealings with the foster child's own family.

This section highlights the many potential difficulties which can lead to conflict between the foster parents and the birth family and unless it is handled appropriately, it may result in the foster parents giving up fostering.

Mapstone (49) compared the perceived capabilities of the birth parents with that of the perceived capabilities of the foster parents and suggested that they can easily be in competition with each other. Foster parents are deemed as "Good" parents, approved by the agency and therefore recognized by society. Deemed to be suitable to care for other peoples children, a very different image from the one presented of parents of children in care.

Mapstone went on to say that "The treatment of the
parents at the time of their children's Reception into Care
forms the foundation of their subsequent relationship with the
agency. If parents feel excluded from discussions about the
future plans for their children they well may respond by acting
in a way the authorities appear to wish; they may leave the
child to the powerful authorities and drop out of the child's
life.... the agency has then done much to create that
irresponsibility and lack of concern which society will
subsequently deplore. Alternatively the parent may remain in
the child's life adopting a negative attitude to all plans made
by the authority and creating a maximum of trouble and
difficulty for foster parents." It therefore can be assumed,
that to involve the birth parents in the planning for their
child is a recognition that their opinions are valued and that
they still have an active role to play in the lives of their
child.

It is a difficult role for the social worker to help the
birth parents to feel valued and still to have a purpose in
the life of their child, now in care, as they have to maintain a
certain distance, so that they can affectively represent the
views of their client (the child). Working intensively with the
birth parents can be misinterpreted by the foster parents,
them sensing an over identification between the two parties to
the detriment of the foster child.

Experience suggests that maintaining a positive and productive relationship with the birth family is at times difficult. Some parents fail to keep appointments or visit on impulse. Some act aggressively towards the foster parents and criticise the work they are doing. Others overindulge their child, causing jealousy's between the foster child and the children of the foster family. Mapstone (50) view was that in order to overcome their own feelings the birth parents may promise falsely to their children, eg. to provide toys, outings which often far outweigh their own personal income and therefore make it prohibitive for them to "make up" to the child for all they have lost. "Parents may protect themselves not only with unreality but also with hostility towards the agency." This obviously has implications for the foster parents, who are acting as an agent for the agency and attempting to help implement the decisions of that agency. Being in this position they can subject themselves not only to dealing with the trauma's of the foster child before and after access, but, may also become the recipient of the hostility aimed at the agency by the birth parents. SSRIU (51) reported ...."that where visits occurred the foster parents had stated that these visits had caused problems for the foster child in just over 50% of cases." Implying that the visit had unsettled the foster child and made it more difficult for the foster parents to cope.

Fanshel (52) supported Mapstone and suggested that "Much of the responsibility for the withering links between the natural family and the child, lies with the caring agencies who fail to appreciate the significance of parental links or to encourage contact." His study suggested that although children might be distressed by contact with parents in the short term, the long term affects were beneficial. Fanshel supported the notion that continued contact with parents, even when the functioning of the later is marginal, is good for most foster children. "Our data suggests that total abandonment by parents is associated with evidence/ of emotional turmoil in the children. We can think of no more profound insult to a child's personality than the evidence that the parent thinks so little of the relationship with him that there is no motivation to visit and see how he is faring.... good care from foster parents or residential care can mitigate the insult but cannot fully compensate for it." Fanshel was able to identify that foster children "whose parents visited the maximum permitted by the agency or who visited frequently, but irregularly were almost twice as likely to be discharged eventually as those not visited at all or only minimally."

In Aldgate's (53) study, where children returned home, there had been contact between at least one parent and the children in 90% of cases. "The reason why contact has such a significant effect on rehabilitation is related directly to the many benefits for parents and children in care. If a child sees his parents regularly, he will have an increased understanding

of why he cannot live at home; this helps to minimize fears of rejection." It can also help to put the foster parent/natural parent relationship into perspective and help to overcome situations of split loyalty.

Aldgate (54) also identified the factors which influenced a child's length of stay in care, she highlighted the need for careful planning when dealing with the complex issue of introductions between the foster parents and the foster child's birth family. She stated "for a fortunate number of families, the trauma of reception into care has been significantly eased by pre-placement visits to the care takers home." It provided reassurance for the parents that the children's physical needs would be adequately met and for the children it gave them reassurance that they were not being rejected by their parents. The giving of information on children's habits made parents feel valued and wanted. A view supported by Gostin (55) who felt that ".... the natural families by and large know better than anyone else the likes and dislikes and the particular foibles of their own children...." A meeting also dispelled any fantasies that the carers may have. Aldgate went on to say "It allows the social workers and families to get to know each other, so that everyone can be quite certain of the purpose of the reception into care. "Parents gained a considerable confidence in being allowed to participate in the placement particularly in the early stages.... " e.g. feeding, washing, putting to bed, but it takes a very adaptable carer to tolerate

the disruption of their routine for more than an occasional occurrence. ".... For the most part both foster parents and natural parents alike felt uncomfortable about parental visits. Discomfort stemmed from parents being placed in direct competition with natural parents, having no where to see their children in private and being made to feel that their parental skills are being scrutinize." This view was also highlighted by Holman (56) in his evaluation of fostering, as he saw the birth parent as seeing themselves as exclusively the child's parent and feeling in direct competition with the foster parents. He therefore advocated as early as (1973) that "We should not be looking for replacement parents when dealing in foster care, but people who are able to supplement the role of parent and be able to work with the natural parents."

More and frequent contact, pre placement visits of birth parents to the foster home. Birth parents being actively involved in tasks such as feeding, washing and putting to bed. A complexity of personal involvement between the carer and the parent, which is likely to benefit the relationships within this scenario and enhance the "successfulness" of the placement. All of this, but at what cost, emotionally and physically to the the foster family, who, in caring for a child, become host to a variety of visitors in their home, which can include social workers and natural family of the child. In essence. their own home ceases to be their own.

Despite potential disadvantages to the foster family, parental contact is seen as vital by Trisiliotis (57) "The available evidence suggests that the strongest factor which affects attachment to a new family is the involvement and the pattern of visiting by the birth family." A view supported by Adcock (58) Gibson and Parsloe (59) and Millam (60) all of which explored the issues relating to parental contact with children in care. It seems that all the time the birth parents visit their child, then they retain their attachment and feeling towards the parents. However if access lessens or stops altogether then the child would transfer its attachments to the foster parents. Trisiliotis goes on to say "Information and explanation about the family helps the child to integrate it into his developing personality and base his identity on the concept of two families.... it helps him to acknowledge feelings of loss and rejection surrounding the original parents."

Millan (61) goes further suggesting that the failure to have regular contact can create a situation whereby parent and child have little in common to share. Access is only part of the problem in helping to maintain relationships with the birth family, phone calls, photographs and a greater access to immediate and extended family and to friends can also play a useful part.

Johnson (62) held the view "That when children are received into care, parents in the majority of cases, feel complete and utter failures". He further explains that "....the majority of children received into care, still come from a traditionally disadvantaged group where the only remaining status left in society is that of parent, so having failed the final test. They feel desolate and dejected, anxious and guilty." This potentially, places foster carer and natural parent in a position of conflict, with can be exaggerated by continued criticism of each other. This is not always the case, in some situations, where natural parents have been inadequately parented themselves, the foster parent may find themselves in a position of also parenting the parents.

Falberg (63) in her introduction to a very comprehensive analysis of attachment and separation stressed the need to retain bonds between the birth family and the child in care pointed out that parents who have been badly parented themselves have difficulty in parenting their own children. They are unable to strike a balance between dependance and autonomy and therefore they become inadequate parents themselves. She prescribes the objective of foster care " should be to recognize the imbalances in the needs of the foster children and to help foster parents create an environment that allows the child to form a healthy bond....The social workers first responsibility is to maintain the child in his or her own family and to work to improve the child's attachments to the biological parents.... (assuming that this decision is in the best interests of the

child) if the child is placed in a foster home, the foster
parents role ought to be two fold. To help the child develop
healthy attachments and to aid in transferring these attachments
to the permanent caretakers."

Kline and Overstreet (64) believed that the person who
did not have sufficiently good parenting in his own childhood
to enable him to be able to parent his own children may find it
very difficult to accept his own children's reception into care
and this can cause problems between birth parents and Foster
Parents.

Dealing with foster child's own family

Summary

The complex relationship between the birth parents and
foster parents has been highlighted in the last thirty years.
In gaining status the foster parents in some ways were beginning
to over shadow the role of the birth parents. Birth parents were
very much in a disadvantaged position, in many cases having had
their rights as parents removed and therefore deemed unfit to
parent their own children. They were therefore in a weak
position to challenge foster parents, or the department which
the foster parents represented.

The late 1970's heralded the recognition for better
planning and this planning involved the birth parents. It
became apparent by the 1980's that parental access to children

in care was clearly linked to the child's length of stay in care
and the more frequent the access the more likely the child was
to be rehabilitated. However, involving the birth parents
more in the care of their child created a dilemma for the foster
parents as it changed their role significantly from being quasi
parent to the foster child, to in some cases a quasi parent to
the birth parents. No longer was the foster parent required
just to care for the child, they were required to develop a
healthy attachment and to aid in the transference of these
attachments to the permanent caretakers, which in many cases was
the birth parents.

Evidence suggests that we are witnessing a swing away
from the traditional long term fostering to that of task focused
work, involving birth parents and in many cases leading to
rehabilitation.

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4) Appropriate support.

The support which is offered by the agency can be
dependant upon a series of variables. Personal relationships
play a part in the service which is offered to the carer. It
follows that, dependant upon the perceived role of the carer,
determines the ability or willingness of the carer to accept the
support which is offered. A concept totally oblivious to Balls,
(65) who in her description of the role of a social worker,
adopted a global view by stating "Anything within reason, which
the visitor can do to lighten the load of a foster mother caring
for young children is worth while...."

George (66) an early British writer, drew to our attention the difficulties and ambiguities of foster parent and social worker relationships. His study showed that social workers considered foster parents as colleagues, where as foster parents liked to think of social workers as friends. The later view was supported by the SSRIU (67) as a third of their of their sample saw social workers as friends, it was suggested that they saw their relationship as being of equal importance to that of the social worker in the care of the foster child.

Prosser (68) in her summary of current research highlighted the basic problems which concerned foster parents when dealing with the Department of Social Services. She highlighted the inequalities in the relationships between the social worker and the foster parents. Unlike George (69) she found that foster parents were treated "more as clients than as colleagues and that as a result foster parents feel that they are not as much involved as they would like to be." she goes on to say that "insufficient information is initially given to them regarding the background of the child" a balance which has been redressed by the introduction of the 1988 Boarding Out Regulations, but was previously advocated by Aldgate and Howley (70) who recalled a small group of foster families who had experienced disruption. These carers expressed a wish to have more detailed information at the beginning of the placement.

Providing information in advance equips the carer to more affectively deal with the foster child, but it is not the only requisite, in supporting foster families. Because of the way agencies operate, they often deal with the female carer only, the male carer, if there is one, would often be at work. The disadvantage of this is commented upon by Parker (71) who stated "Foster mothers do not necessarily speak for the rest of the family or for the foster child. Help, support and attention may for example be most needed by the foster parents own child." He also emphasizes the need to use written agreements, "....to clarify the various levels of accountability and who is responsible for what. Everyone must be aware of their expected commitment and duration of it. If we fail to supply a written agreement, we would have to rely upon goodwill and presumed understanding and this is often hard to sustain." D.H.S.S. (72) made a study of Boarded Out children and concluded ".... foster parents would be much helped if they were to receive in advance, detailed information about the background and the experiences of the child being placed with them. This information should include details of the legal status of the child and what that means for the child as well as for the foster parents." A view supported by Triseliotis (73) in his analysis of the Beckford enquiry report voiced the opinion that a written agreement "....sets out the expectations, undertakings and obligations of the respective parties and can provide badly needed direction to the placement....The contract should include the role and part to be played by the social worker, the foster parent and where

of an age to understand, that of the child." Any written
agreement concerning the foster child affects not only the
foster child, but also the foster parents own family. It is not
practical to involve all members of the foster family in such
administration, so we are left with no choice but to accept the
views of the carer representing the foster family. Their views
must be accepted as a fair representation of the family's views
as a whole.

Aldgate and Hawley (74) stressed a lack of planning in
placements which had disrupted and stressed the need for written
agreements to minimize the risk of misunderstanding. They also
considered the affects of potential disruption upon the foster
family. They felt that too much parental access could dominate
the foster home causing their life to revolve around that of the
birth family.

Is direct support enough? Can the helping agency help in
other ways? Triseliotis (75) advocated the use of a support
group, as it relieves isolation, keeps social worker and foster
parents in touch with each other. It enables foster parents to
share problems with other carers. It also keeps interest alive
during a waiting period when the foster parents are without a
current child.

Triseliotis (76) Quoted from unpublished material
provided by foster carers "Foster carers seem to find it helpful
when social workers listen to the difficulties, show
understanding and make suggestions, when they are provided with

information about the child and its background: when they are
introduced to problem solving techniques, including behavioural
methods and when they are instructed on how to deal with
children's previous losses, rejections and distress. This
process of empowerment enables carers to feel in control and to
deal with difficult situations." This demonstrates that the
passing on of information is not enough in itself. More needs
to be done in further equipping carers with "tools" to
affectively work with. Thus giving them more opportunity to
positively work with the children in their care.

In providing support, we must consider the role of the
social worker within the foster home. Their first consideration
is the welfare of the foster child. In considering the foster
child first, it implies that the foster parent must come second.
Therefore , it would seem appropriate to provide a social worker
who could consider the needs of the foster parents first. A
person who could represent the needs and the views of the carers
and to mediate for them in times of conflict.

Rowe, Hundleby, Garnett. (77) in a research project of
six local authorities/boroughs discussed the use of specialist
workers, whose prime concern was the foster parent. The
following were commonly held views and related to the service
provided by the specialist worker, which will ultimately affect
the service/support they will be able to provide for the foster
parent. This is particularly valuable and referred to in detail
over:-

Advantages

"The most prevalent theme was the affectiveness of specialists in achieving placements. Time and again it was stated that social workers who were trying to manage a demanding caseload could not find the time to undertake the often all-consuming task of recruiting, preparing and supporting foster parents. Indeed, direct work with children who had been identified for fostering placement also lost out to the needs of children at risk and other onerous responsibilities."

Expertise

"Specialists were seen as having more expertise in child placement than their non-specialist colleagues for the obvious reason that they were carrying out this work all the time. This was felt to benefit colleagues as well as clients as the specialist could give advice on specific issues and keep the department up to date generally on matters relating to substitute family care.

In all the project authorities there was evidence of increasing effort to plan for children and where there was a reasonable number of specialists, they were able to attend some planning meetings and could make a useful contribution."

Disadvantages

"Relationships between specialists and area Social Workers consistently arose as the most problematic issue. Rightly of wrongly specialists tended to be viewed as an elite, carrying out tasks which were a "soft option" in comparison to colleagues undertaking a wide range of statutory responsibilities. The situation was more tense if the specialist was out posted. Specialists felt frustrated because they were powerless and as their posts were of an advisory nature, they were used selectively rather than appropriately."

Location of specialist posts

The siting of specialists within area teams can overcome the problems of communication. But is isolating for the "only" specialist within a generic team. In this situation the managers can be unsympathetic and know little about the job a specialist does. A general feeling of isolation was expressed by specialist staff.

From the observations and the comments made to the research staff, the specialists within the area office who were part of a specialist team seemed the most satisfactory positions. Joint posts seemed also unsatisfactory, leaving the worker with split loyalties where e.g. routine visits of support to foster parents would perhaps fail to happen."

Disruption meetings

Regardless of the amount of support which is offered to the foster parent placements have a habit of disrupting. Fitzgerald (78) stated "Often the search for a placement for a child is so difficult that once it is found, everything is invested in its success. Disruption is therefore very painful for the worker and likely to engender feelings of blame towards the foster families."

Aldgate and Hawley (79) impressed upon us the use of the disruption meeting as it would give all concerned an opportunity to express their feelings of failure. To analyse what went wrong. To provide an opportunity to plan their future contributions as foster parents and to negotiate any post placement contracts with the foster children. This was clearly seen as a means of support for the foster parent.

Support seems to be important, but does it affect the length of time a family will remain as a foster family? Bebbington and Miles (80) would suggest that there was no connection, they highlighted the fact that "....there is remarkably little solid evidence of whether high levels of support could be used to lower turnover."

Appropriate support.

Summary

Despite the good intentions of involving the foster parents in the planning of children in care and raising their status within the caring agency, it would appear from literature within the late 1970's that foster parents were not being involved. Although clearer and more formal agreements were beginning to emerge, it appeared that social workers although in principal were in favour of involving foster parents, in practice this was not being done and may have caused conflict between the foster parents and the social workers.

But who do the foster parents turn to for support? Is it the social worker whose primary concern is the child in care? or Should some other person be responsible for supporting foster parents in their own right? This discussion gave rise to the birth of the "fostering officer" who could act as an advocate for the foster parents. It also advanced the use of the self help groups.

Although having defined clearer lines of support for the foster parents, Were they given a better service? or Were the agencies just enabling the better use of the services that they offered?

Recent research highlighted that fostering officers were more affective in finding placements. In specializing, they were becoming experts in the placement of children and clearly this had benefits concerning the planning for children in care.

However, this also caused resentment from generic social
workers, clearly seeing the fostering officers role as a soft
option.

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5) Financial implications.

What is the motivation for fostering? Do families
foster for financial recompense? and Is this a negative motive?
Should families foster for the love of children only? All these
questions have been asked many times, but without receiving a
tangible answer. The belief exists that foster mothers, like
all mothers, work for love, not money. Care of children in the
home is not counted as labour requiring skill and expertise.
Foster care historically has been family embedded in the values
of volunteerism and charity and is seen as an extension of the
natural role of mothering within the family. This situation has
been re-enforced by low payment rates and similarly, as with
other services where volunteerism is prevalent. Motives other
than altruism are not considered legitimate. Financial payments
for services have been considered unacceptable regardless of the
skills and liability of the potential carer. The following
deals with responses from research studies and offers a variety
of opinions.

Balls (81) in her description of "good motives" e.g.
"Love of children," "a desire to help." She thought that the
foster parent could still be perceived as good even if the

motive was "coupled with the desire to make a little pocket money as well." An attitude demeaning at the very least, but one which still exists today. Balls goes on to describe a foster scheme set up in Northumberland where carers were paid a higher rate because of the "greater responsibility and labour involved and also for a compensation for the heavier wear and tear on their homes." The first extract from Balls almost contradicts the second, but highlights the emergence of a professional recognition of foster parents.

Adamson (82) raised the issue of whether Foster Parents should be paid for the services they dedicate to children in care. He recorded that three quarters of a survey felt that they should not be paid, but at the same time were anxious to get the allowances increased, particularly the clothing grant and holiday grant. This can only emphasize the dilemma that carers are faced with, in not wishing to be perceived as "doing it for the money."

SSRIU (83) stated that ...."50% of ex foster parents felt that they could not care adequately for foster children on the grant given to them by the local authority." They also stated that ...." of those who required more money, the manual workers tended to feel they needed a larger proportion increase than the non manual and the women more than the men."

Hazel (84) when describing the "Kent family placement project" likened fostering to employment and by being paid a "special" rate the foster parents were "seen as colleagues, equal in esteem and status as social workers." The placement of one child was considered to be the equivalent of a part time job: the placement of two children was regarded as one persons full time employment.

Rowe (85) found that the interest in foster care has been stimulated by the cost of residential care "....which is about twice as expensive as foster care, even when Social Work time for recruitment and supervision is allowed for." A view almost forecast by Packman (86). This long standing attraction to foster homes goes back some time.

N.F.C.A. (87) noted "In 1888 an inspector, appointed by Dr Barnardo, listed as the first of the advantages of Boarding Out, was that it is the most economical way of disposing of children. The same argument was used by the Audit Commission nearly one hundred years later in a 1985 Child Care Report encouraging Local Authorities to expand their fostering service."

Glickman (88) suggested a salary, along with fringe benefits and a career ladder, may be a significant factor in Foster Parent retention. But, he suggests, that this could go against a societal bias that people should not be paid to take care of children. He highlighted the fact that foster parents in the U.S.A. were the largest group of volunteers. Glickman

also revealed that large sums of money were saved by agencies because carers were using their own money to subsidize the allowances provided.

Mayers Pasztor (89) raised the issue of the changing role of foster parents, the current task focused short term placement with a view to rehabilitation, as opposed to the traditional role of Long term fostering. She stated that "New foster parents may be less economically willing or able to support the cost of fostering children." In an investigation of foster parent role ambiguity involving 427 foster parents in Massachusetts, it was determined that the more experienced foster parent (as defined by the number of years of foster parenting, number of children cared for, number of children currently in their care and length of time fostering one child.) the more likely they were to want payment for their work.

N.F.C.A. (90) recently surveyed the national Boarding Out Allowances which revealed that "There is no standard allowance that foster families receive for the children and the young people that they look after. The amount varies widely, sometimes within the same authority, depending on a variety of factors including the age of the child, the child's perceived difficulties and level of independence, the scarcity or availability of foster families at any one time." They went on to say that the basic allowance varies from authority to authority and does not include any financial reward to the

foster family. The figures are based upon the government
calculated cost to parents of bringing up children, but do not
reflect the additional cost of caring for a foster child.

The payment of foster parents is supported by Smith (91)
who interviewed foster mothers from the Barnado's Waverley
Temporary family Care agency and argued that "....in a society
that shows its appreciation in material ways, foster care
workers should have their fair share." She believed that foster
care brought together many issues about the role of women,
mothering and nuturing in our society. The perceptions of her
study sample seemed to illustrate the strength of traditional
ideas about women's role and the potential there is for this to
be exploited. Her study group were also aware of the many
skills which go into the care of foster children and the need
for them to be adequately rewarded for their efforts.

Maclean (92) offered her opinion, based upon experience
as an Assistant Principal Officer for Bradford Social Services.
She advocated the use of fee - paying and believed that the
advantages out weigh the disadvantages because of the following
reasons:-
"It recognizes and enhances the status of foster carers both in
their own eyes and in the eyes of professional workers.
It allows the local authority to make explicit the role and
expectations of carers. It means that professional child care
tasks can become an expected part of the job and not be seen as
a special favour. It means that carers are more accountable and

as they tend to be more organized and vocal as a group it also makes the local authority more accountable to carers. Their reciprocal expectations of adequate finance, training and support are expressed and usually acted upon. It keeps carers going when the emotional rewards are thin on the ground, thus reducing unplanned moves and breakdowns. It is an aid to recruitment, particularly where short falls are occurring. It begins to offer equal opportunities for one of the most exploited groups in our society: carers."

Financial implications

Summary

In the last thirty years we have seen a swing away from foster parents "making a little pocket money in return for caring for children in care" to a recognition that they have a valid contribution to make and should be paid for the skills they are providing. Yet, they are still volunteers, volunteers who are saving caring agencies millions of pounds every year, if we compare their costs with the cost of caring for a child in a residential home.

In creating this new breed of foster parent, who is better trained and more articulate, a number of issues are raised. Should we now pay them for their services? and the question arises, Do they want to be paid for their services? There is clearly a difference of opinion.

What is lacking is some form of consistent approach throughout the Country. All agencies have a different perception regarding the payment of foster parents and even within the same authority there are conflicting views, which can only lead to the undermining of the status which foster parents have accrued and a status which they richly deserve.

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6) Affect upon foster parents own family.

Foster parents are required to undertake a variety of tasks, some similar to those undertaken by themselves as parents of their own children, some very different. Regardless of the task, the role of foster parent is both time consuming and can be emotionally draining. It has implications for the structure and in the dynamics of family life. It can be both pleasurable and intensely destructive for all family members who are associated with it.

A view supported by Parker (93) who suggested that "The role of all the members of the family are altered and complicated by the presence of a foster child".

Wilkes (94) in their association with a research study, which considered the implications of retention of foster homes, characterized four main sources of stress for the Foster family which are listed over:-

1) "Disruption of family life.

2) "Coping with the children in transition.

3) "Dealing with the alien agency.

4) "Harbouring great expectations.

Wilkes has pointed out, that the foster family is expected to relate to the child in an open and loving way regardless of the length of stay. "This puts heavy emotional demands on the family members to invest their feelings knowing the relationship must end." Others advocate that deep emotional involvement is excessive and believe that emotional bonds should be held loose enough to be broken. Goldstein, Freud and Solnit. (95).

Often when foster children are placed, their length of stay is rarely certain. This, suggests Eastman (96), can affect the anxiety and attachment of the foster parent to the foster child and these two affects in themselves may increase the length of placement.

Trasler (97) in his comments regarding the role of the social worker to provide a social environment for the foster child to help him to develop, also commented upon the responsibilities of the foster parents "....it is vitally important that she...." (The foster parent) ".... should realize that the success of the placement and therefore the quality of the child's social experiences in a foster home, ultimately depends upon the extent to which the foster parents can find

satisfaction in their relationship with the child." The responsibility of such a task only adds to the "burden" of foster parenting.

Trasler when discussing the motives of the foster parents for wanting to foster, stresses the desirability for the foster parents to have their own needs met ".... as the failure to do so could lead to failed placements, a dis-satisfaction of the service offered to the carer and ultimately could cause them to cease to foster." SSRIU (98) took a different view and felt that ...."the greater expectations of the receiving family that fostering should satisfy some of their own needs, the more probable that disappointment will lead to frustration and rejection of the foster child." As with any relationship there is a degree of giving as well as receiving and meeting of both physical and emotional needs. It would appear that if one has too high an expectation with regard to the foster child, then the placement has a greater possibility of failing. Yet to have no expectation of having one's own needs met, undermines the very basis of the relationship.

Cann (99) viewed the affects of the "new child" upon the foster family and commented upon the vulnerability of carers who place too high an expectation upon the relationship experienced by the foster parent. "Often the child will form a closer relationship more quickly with one new parent than with the other. This means that the parent left out has to be helped to see that his time will come and that it is not a reflection

of his parenting, but more the particular need of that child at that particular time to make one special relationship. It may be that the child is unable to form a relationship with two people at once."

Dealing with Sexually Abused Child.

Foster parents are increasingly being asked to work with children who have been sexually abused. The most immediate problem faced by foster parents said Roberts (100) who whilst acting as a social worker for the London Borough of Lambeth made the following observations. She stated ".... that the sexually abused child will teach other children in the home sexual play.... a much more aware attitude to body messages and to sexual behaviour has to develop to avoid giving the child the wrong messages." Roberts goes on to say that foster parents may feel unable to act naturally within their own home and they have to learn to live with a continual risk of allegations being made against them by the foster child. An un-natural situation can therefore exist, whereby foster parents show a different response to their own children to that of the foster child, given similar circumstances. The foster parent in their attempt to treat the foster child in a similar way to that of their own children may in affect neglect their own children and deprive them of "normal" family intimacies which may have existed prior to the foster placement.

Following disruption

Sadly not all foster placements are successful. Aldgate and Hawley (101) dealt with the feelings of foster parents following the disruption of a long term foster placement. Although the interviews took place some two - three years after the disruption, families recalled with considerable detail the emotions they had experienced. "There were close parallels between their separation experiences and the feelings of "filial deprivation" experienced by natural parents at the point of entry to care. As with birth families the pre-dominant feelings for foster parents were those of failure and sadness about the separation. Some foster families were relieved, others were angry with the Social Services Department for not involving them in the decision to disrupt. Anger was also directed at social workers who seemed unable to understand foster parents perceptions of the problem.

Triseliotis (102) in his summary of fostering studies carried out over the last thirty years stated that "Breakdown seems more likely when the behaviour of the foster child threatens the well being of the foster carers children, even of older ones.... most foster carers put the needs of their own children first."

Bebbington and Miles (103) highlighted the fact that ".... the nature of fostering has changed, as is reflected by the increased number of hard to place children, the growth of specialization and the number of multiple placements ....

pressure on the supply of foster families seems very likely to
increase in the next few years." They put this down to the
steady rise in birth rate and the deflection of the resources
available to the other needy client groups, such as the elderly
living in the community. Other changes Bebbington and Miles
suggest ".... can be expected from the growth of professional
attitudes among foster carers and in particular the emergence of
independent foster care agencies.... Their existence must be
seen as a challenge to the traditional local authority
approaches to recruiting and managing foster care and to the
assumptions about supply which have led to low payment, lack of
training, incentives and support."

Neate (104) quoted Norman Tutt, former Director of Leeds
Social Services in his introduction to the video "Children who
foster." "Our general attitude to children is often a mixture of
protection and patronage." Neate stated that "Natural children
of foster carers often find themselves protected from
information, which social workers, patronizingly feel the
children cannot deal with." As a result of continued concern
about the affects of fostering upon the foster parents own
children a National Children's Support Group was formed.
Members of this group advocate a greater sharing of information.
Neate highlights the role of the child in not only supporting
their own parents in their role as foster parents, but also
acting as foster parents in their own right.

All placements come to an end, be they "successful" or less than "successful" but in coming to an end Edelstein (105) suggests that little attention is paid to the foster parents own grief.

Although rather negatively stated by Ward (106) who voiced the opinion that foster parenting was more demanding, more confusing and less rewarding than parenting one's own children. We must acknowledge that foster parenting is not a simple task and it does affect the whole of the foster family.

Affects upon the foster parents own family

Summary

Any personal relationships involve giving and receiving. But in the 1970's it was felt that foster parents could be giving too much and as a result were becoming too emotionally involved with the child in care and this could be damaging if the child had to move on. With the change of role for foster parents it seemed more appropriate that bonds should be held loose enough, in case they had to be broken. Thus having less affect upon the foster child and less adverse affects upon the foster parents and their own children.

The role of the foster parents having changed, the foster family were required to deal with the parents of the child in care more frequently. This situation could place added stress upon the foster family. The length of the placement also affected the final outcome, thus placing emotional strains and

constraints upon the carers. Foster parents gave greatly of themselves in dealing with a variety of children that may or may not have been abused. They had to live with the continual threats of allegations being made against them. They had to deal with success and failure and sometimes felt personally responsible for the breakdown in placement. It has been emphasized that fostering is more demanding, more confusing and less rewarding than parenting one's own children and by taking a foster child into their home the role of family members is altered and complicated. We have highlighted some of the many situations, restraints and roles that foster parents become involved in, but their job has not ended there as they still have the task of maintaining the stability of their own family.

The literature suggests that agencies are failing to recognize the needs of the carers and this could lead to them ceasing to foster.

There are other affects, hitherto uncalculated and these are the affects upon the foster parents own children. These seem to be the people who have to make the greatest sacrifices. They have to share their home, their parents, their possessions and sometimes their friends and as a reward for this, their parents have less time available to devote to them.

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Chapter
Three

Methodology

Methodology

The literature review provided a host of potential reasons as to why foster parents ceased to foster. There seemed to be a lack of preparation for foster parents which makes them less able to deal with the foster child's own family. In addition, a lack of appropriate support emerged and in particular the financial aspects which can undermine the security of the foster family. Finally there emerged the impact of the foster child upon the foster parents own family.

The development of the hypothesis.

We sought to develop a series of hypothesis to test out these themes and followed the tradition of creating a series of Null hypothesis, which is basically the opposite to the researcher's own belief. "The underlying rationale for doing so is based on the logic that a law is only a law for so long as it cannot be disproved.... by stating the hypothesis in a "null" manner the researcher's effort will be more rigorous than might otherwise be the case and he will be less likely to design, consciously or unconsciously, a study which would serve to support his views...."(Philip)(1).

The following "null" hypothesis are listed under the themes already established. Firstly with the main hypothesis, followed by two sub hypothesis.

Social characteristics of Foster Parents.

1) Foster parents have large families.

a) They prefer to care for the older child.

b) Foster fathers have a small role to play in the care of foster children.

Training and preparation

1) Foster parents receive adequate training.

a) Foster parents are experienced people, a preparation course does not help them to be better foster parents.

b) Training courses cannot be improved

Dealing with the foster child's own family

1) Foster parents and the birth parents are best kept apart to avoid conflict.

a) Access should be away from the foster home.

b) Foster parents should make no effort to get on with the birth family.

Appropriate Support.

1) Social work staff visit too often

a) Foster parents are a fully integrated members of the social work team.

b) Social work staff are available when they are needed.

Financial implications

1) Money paid to foster parents is adequate for their fostering needs.

a) Foster parents are fully aware of the allowances they are entitled to claim.

b) Children in care need to have more pocket money.

Affects upon the foster parents own family

1) The foster family are unlikely to be affected by the experience of fostering.

a) The foster parents own children are unlikely to have problems sharing their environment with the foster child.

b) Foster parents have difficulty relating to the foster child.

It may be of interest to the readers to view the following plan in order to guide them through the development of the project.

Planning for the survey.

1. Negotiating with the agency.

This involved initially writing to Area Managers to inform them of the research and to secure their co-operation regarding access to information. Also, a letter was sent to the Fostering Officers in order to make them aware of the research and ask them to identify the index group.

2. Design a questionnaire

This involved the preparation of a draft, piloting it and then making any alterations necessary.

3. Conducting the survey.

This involved sending an introductory letter to the index group. This was followed by a second letter which was accompanied by the questionnaire. If necessary a reminder letter was sent accompanied by a questionnaire. Finally a letter of thanks was sent to all respondents.

4. Sharing the findings.

At the earliest opportunity a written report of the findings was sent to all those concerned in the preparation and completion of the survey.

Method of data collection.

Having established the area of research there was a need to decide upon the method which would most appropriately obtain the information required. The number of former-foster parents identified within the defined population would ultimately affect the methods used in the research. It was therefore necessary to establish the likely number of foster parents who might realistically form a sample whose views would be sought through a survey. Fostering officers were able to identify a possible 89 families who had ceased to foster over the previous two years 1988-1989; but this was later modified to 80, when names and addresses were requested. This indicated that the problem of loss was less than had previously been thought.

A number of possible options of collecting data for this study were considered:-

1) Use of Foster Parent files.

Using the foster parents personal file as a means of data collection could prove to be very time consuming and may fail to yield the information required. All reports contained within the file are written by Social Workers; there is no control on bias and therefore foster parents views may not be accurately represented. West Sussex is a rural county and considerable distances would need to have been travelled to area offices in order to collect the data, which would be very time consuming. As we did not have the resources available, the use of foster parent files was rejected.

2) Interviews with Social Workers.

The whole purpose of the research was to obtain the views and perceptions of former foster parents. Although social workers have a similar area of work, share decisions with the foster parents and make plans together, their perceptions of their role, the service offered by the department and any other issues relating to the foster parents may differ. The information obtained therefore, would not necessarily represent the views and perceptions of the foster parents. This method of data collection was rejected.

3) Personal Interviews.

The use of a personal interview was considered. It was seen as a "A two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focused by them on content specified by research objectives of systematic prediction or explanation." Cohen & Manion (2). There were clear indications that personal interviews could obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. However, in considering this method, the sample size and the time available to conduct and transcribe had to be considered. The use of personal interviews were therefore not used as it was beyond the resources of the researcher to undertake sufficient numbers of interviews to make realistic statistical comparisons.

4) Self Administered Questionnaires

It was thought that although self administered questionnaires would likely provide less detailed and less comprehensive information compared with that of the personal interview, they were preferable because they could be more easily administered within the given constraints of the researcher. Self administered questionnaires require much preparation in order to get a reasonable response. The basic advantage of questionnaires are, that they allow anonymity, give time to answer (if self administered), provide uniformity and give rise to data that is easy to measure and analyse , as emphasized by Henderson, Lyons and Taylor Fitz-gibbon (3).

However in order to encourage a higher rate of response one must make the questionnaire of interest and easy to understand. Phillips (4) suggested the construction of simple sentences, each question having one single idea only. The questions must also be unbiased and neutral in tone. The use of self administered questionnaires was therefore seen as appropriate for this survey.

Ethical Issues

A number of ethical issues were raised in the preparation and administration of this survey. They are listed as follows:-

1) The contacting of former foster parents.

Who for what ever reason had ceased their involvement with the Department of Social Services.

Having ceased to foster, had we the right to seek them out? Yes was the decision. It would be of practical value for future foster parents and foster children. The sample group would have the option of responding, based upon the information which had been supplied to them by the researcher. They and they alone could decide whether to co-operate on the basis of informed choice and in this sense they remained completely in control.

2) Purpose of the research.

Colleagues naturally exhibit a degree of suspicion when research is undertaken, not because of what it might reveal, in fact most colleagues would welcome a greater insight into their working practices. Their suspicions would be aroused if they were uncertain of the purpose of the research and therefore this would need to be explained to them. This was done personally by the researcher, as a way of clarifying his own thoughts, but also to help his colleagues to feel involved with the research.

3. Preserving anonymity/confidentiality.

There were two issues here for both the former foster parents and the researcher's colleagues. Were they able to trust the researcher not only to be sensitive in the way he obtained any information, but would he, in obtaining this information be able, not only to highlight good practice, but also expose individuals be they foster parent or social worker and implicate them in incidents of bad practice? In order to overcome these potential problems, the area managers were contacted by letter, the purpose of the research was stated, they were then assured that any information obtained from the research would be in strict confidence and that individuals or the area in which they worked could not be identified. This was guaranteed by the use of number coded questionnaires. Having concluded the research all names and addresses pertaining to the research would be destroyed by the researcher. If any of the

area manager's retained any doubt as to the authenticity of the research they were invited to contact the researcher's agency supervisor, who was a senior manager in his own right.

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Having solicited the co-operation of the area manager, all fostering officers were contacted by letter. The aims and purpose of the research were re-stated. They already having been explained verbally. They were then invited to provide a list of former foster parents who had ceased to foster in the previous two years.

Similar letters were sent to the former foster parents reassuring them of the confidentiality of the research and the guarantee of anonymity. They were also reassured that by contacting them the researcher was not attempting to re-enlist their services as foster parents. An appeal was made to them which acknowledged that whilst the research was of no direct benefit to them, with their co-operation they would be assisting the Department of Social Services to provide a better service to future generations of foster parents and children in fostercare.

Index Group.

The selection of the index group was based upon a set criteria, which was kept as simple as possible and was as follows:- All the names of the former foster parents provided must have ceased to foster within the previous two years

(January 1988 - December 1989.) Had we extended this period further then there could have been difficulties with accurate memory and recall. A group of foster parents which often seem to be particularly excluded from any form of involvement are the foster fathers, who are often at work when the social worker visits. Therefore part of the survey, approximately one quarter, would involve sending the questionnaires to foster fathers only and the remainder, approximately three quarters, to the foster mothers, thus enabling the researcher to compare the differences, one with the other.

Obtaining the names of former foster parents was thought to be a simple task, yet it was discovered that there was no system for retrieving such a list, with the dates they were de-registered.

The existing system consisted of a card index, which was retained at the finance section of the Social Services Headquarters. When this section was notified of the de-registration of the foster parent, the card pertaining to them was physically removed from the system and stored in no particular order in a separate system. There was also a copy of the approval card retained within the area office in which the foster Parent lived. At the time of their de-registration, the card was retained on the foster parents own file and then the file was stored separately to the foster parents currently in use.

Solution

Fostering officer colleagues were asked to provide a list of foster parents who had ceased to foster during a previous two year period. As this information was committed to their memory, its accuracy could not be relied upon totally, this resulted in a proportion of the sample claiming that they ceased to foster prior to the two year period previously stated.

To add to the difficulty of obtaining a list of former foster parents it transpired that two fostering officers were planning to leave their posts during the initial stages of the researcher's planning. They would affectively take with them the information that was needed in order to complete the research.

Solution.

These two officers were approached and asked to list the names of former parents. This list was then retained within the area office, until consent was obtained from the area managers to use it.

Questionnaire design

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information which would be relevant to the question asked and would be reliable and unbiased. The questionnaire designed for this study contained a combination of open ended questions and

multiple choice questions. This format permitted the respondent
to express their personal view's. Phillips (5) concerned
about the use of open ended questions stated "These are more
time consuming to answer and to interpret and errors made as
respondents may not have time to clarify his thoughts and may be
flustered into making an incorrect response. Respondents may
also be inarticulate and therefore be unable or unused to
expressing himself in depth" However, the multiple choice
questions are useful because they can be scanned easily. They
can be used for measuring complex behaviours. They can
establish more than one right answer and are the least
threatening according to Fink and Kosecoff (6).

When designing a tool for collecting data, it is
important to be aware that the respondents are voluntarily
completing the questionnaire. They need stimulation and
encouragement to be honest. Each question needs to have a
central theme and be phrased in such a way as to hold their
interest so that they will complete the questionnaire in total.
The questionnaire itself needs to be presentable and easy on the
eye, with as much open area as possible to give the respondent
ample space to complete the answers.

The first questions should arouse the respondents
interest. Phillips (7). This was done by asking
the respondent for general information about him or her self, a
subject which was familiar to them and the information so
general as not to be confrontative. The more important

questions should be included in the middle of the questionnaire, where the rapport between the researcher and the respondent is at its highest. Phillips (8). The most crucial of the questions asked was "Why did you give up fostering" and this was therefore featured in the middle of the questionnaire.

The questions should be in some form of logical order where one question is related to the other. This was achieved by focusing the questions in a chronological order, initially focusing upon their preparation and training for the task of fostering, leading into their relationship with social work staff and their relationship with the foster child and the foster child's birth family. Having considered the relationship between the foster parent and the various people they would likely come into contact with, their attention was focused upon the support which was provided in order to help them to fulfil their role. Finance was a large component within this section, aimed at the age old problem of establishing whether foster parents should or should not be paid for their services. Finally their attention was focused upon the individual roles of the carers whilst considering the implications of fostering upon the family of the foster parents.

The respondent needed to feel appreciated, it was vitally important that we show courtesy, by thanking them for their contribution. Always enclose a s.a.e. and include with the questionnaire a simple guide to its completion.

Structure of the questionnaire

Essentially, the questionnaire was subdivided into seven separate sections, which matched the questions inherent in the hypothesis.

They are as follows:-

1) Social Characteristics of Foster Parents.

This provided personal details useful in its self for analysis, but would also ease the respondents gently into the arduous task of completing the questionnaire. It could identify the size of the foster family, whether there is a partner, how long they have been married, how long the family have been fostering and their social class. This section also identifies the preferred age range of the foster child.

2) Training/preparation

This section would be looking at the Department's use of fostering officers and their affectiveness as trainers. Was the training sufficient and appropriately timed? and Could foster parents be used as trainers? The research also sought to address whether the local support groups serve any useful purpose.

3) Dealing with the foster child's own family.

Experience suggests that this was the most anxiety provoking topic expressed by prospective foster parents during their induction course. Potentially there are a wide range of problems which could be raised when the two families meet giving

rise to a variety of emotions. An example was suggested by Holman (9) who reported that half of a sample of foster parents surveyed saw themselves as "mother" or "father" to the child, which can only highlight the potential competition which may exist between the two families. With the emergence of the 1989 Children Act and the re-enforcement of "partnership with parents of the child" Department of Health (10) it is of great significance to establish how the foster parent perceives their role in relationship to the birth family.

4) Appropriate support,

Were foster parents being lost through lack of support? Despite the generally held view that foster parents should be part of a social work team, they have been excluded from the planning for foster children and not given the basic information at the commencement of the placement, which would have assisted them to care for the child. Do they really feel appreciated by those who are employed to support them and do these people value the contribution the foster parents make? Do social workers and fostering officers visit often enough? Is there a difference in attitude between these two types of worker? and does this create a different kind of relationship with the foster parents?

5) Financial implications.

This section explored the extent of whether foster parents believed that adequate financial support was being provided. It would indicate whether the foster parent was directly subsidizing the department because they were having to

use their own money. It would also explain any differences between the Department of Social Services and the foster parents in attitudes towards finance and whether the department made available to foster parents information which indicated their eligibility for allowances. It also addressed the long standing debate of whether foster parents should be salaried, which in affect is a recognition of the devotion and the many hours of their own time they invest in caring for the foster child.

6) Affects upon foster parents own family,

A great deal of attention is focused upon the foster child within a foster home which may have the adverse affect of isolating the foster parents own children? They are the ones who are sharing their parents, their home and often their toys with the foster child and as a reward, their own parents have less time available to spend with them. The information gained from the research will enable us to establish whether parenting within a foster home is a shared or sole responsibility of the foster parents and whether it has far more reaching responsibilities for the whole family.

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In addition to focusing the research upon the six key areas as above, the research also concentrated upon the reasons why the former foster parents thought they had ceased to foster as can be seen below:-

7) <u>Reason for giving up fostering,</u>

During the planning of this survey a list of reasons why
foster parents and social work staff thought foster parents
ceased to foster was compiled. These reasons were categorized,
which helped to structure the literary review and to structure
the questionnaire itself. The reasons supplied were based upon
their own experience of fostering. Fostering officers
colleagues were also asked to supply a list of reasons why the
index group ceased to foster, these reasons were provided by
the respondents at the time they were de-registered and may have
no bearing on the truth at all, foster parents are not always
honest with us and we are not always accurate in our recording
of events or in our perception of what happened. It will be of
interest to compare the reasons stated by the respondents whilst
completing the questionnaire, with the reasons provided by
fostering officers.

<u>The Pilot Study.</u>

The purpose of a pilot study or "pretest" as outlined
by Selltiz et al (11) "is a try out of the questionnaire to see
how it works and whether changes are necessary before the start
of the full-scale study. The pretest provides a means of
catching and solving unforeseen problems in the administration
of the questionnaire, such as the phrasing and sequence of
questions, or its length. It could also indicate the need for
additional questions or the elimination of others." In affect
it tests the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire.

The Pilot was a selected group, comprising of three former foster parents known to the researcher and five social work colleagues who having completed the questionnaire were personally interviewed. They were asked to comment frankly and critically upon the content, i.e. its relevance to its purpose, the layout, Was it simple to complete? Were the questions clearly stated? Was there enough space for them to answer fully the open ended questions? Did it deal with all the issues that were likely to cause or have an effect upon foster parents ceasing to foster? How long did it take them to complete? Their joint comments were extremely helpful and the questionnaire was modified accordingly. The modifications primarily affected the structure of the questionnaire, in the use of more space to enable the respondent to fully answer the open ended questions. It was decided that the questionnaires from the three foster parents in the Pilot study, would be excluded from the final study. The decision was based upon the amount of extra time these people had contributed to the completion of the questionnaire and the bias this could inflict upon the final analysis.

The Survey.

Having already randomly selected a proportion of foster fathers to be included within the survey. Letters were then sent to the sample group. Firstly to introduce the researcher and to introduce the idea of research and to seek their co-operation. A second letter was then sent to the sample

group, re-stating the objectives but this time was accompanied by the questionnaire. This letter was accompanied by a S.A.E.

Problems.

Outlined below are the difficulties experienced by the researcher:-

One questionnaire was sent to a former foster parent who had recently died. The receipt of the questionnaire had caused the widow some concern. There was no way of knowing the then recent circumstances, so the situation could not have been avoided. A letter of apology was administered.

Two survey envelopes were incorrectly addressed. But they were passed on to the appropriate person, completed and later returned.

Five potential respondents had moved house and the questionnaire was not forwarded to them. The effect was to produce a lower response rate.

One respondent had had little experience of fostering and therefore did not feel qualified to complete the questionnaire. This also reduced the effective response rate.

Following the respondents completion of the questionnaire and its return, a letter of thanks was sent and for those who had not responded a reminder letter was provided accompanied by another questionnaire and a S.A.E. as the original may have been lost or destroyed. Upon receipt of questionnaires from the second request, the data was then analysed.

At the earliest opportunity reports were sent to area managers, fostering officers and to respondents informing them of the findings.

Control Group

The Need to provide a control group was seen as important to determine whether there were any differences between foster parents who were still fostering and those who had given up. The information obtained from the index group would therefore have a greater degree of validity.

The control group consisted of 46 existing foster parents who had fostered for an identical number of years to the 47 respondents used in the index group.
(Note: there is a difference of one, in the numbers used between the two groups. The reason for this is because one respondent from the index group had a missing response to the question which related to the length of time as a foster parent.)
The control group was obtained from the Western division of West Sussex Social Services, unlike the Index group which represented a County wide distribution of foster parents who had ceased to foster.

The two groups were to be compared with regard to the following:-

1) Age.

2) Partner's age.

3) Length of their relationship.

4) Number of children fostered.

5) Details of own children.

6) Ages of their own children when they started fostering.

7) The number of natural children born to the foster parents
   during their period of fostering.

8) Social class.

9) Category of approval.

10) Attendance at preparation courses.

11) Whether courses were available to them after approval.

12) Whether they attended these courses.

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Chapter
Four

The
Control Group

The Control Group

The index group was compiled from a county wide search of those who had ceased to foster during a two year period (1988-1989). In order to test the representative nature of our sample, we examined a control group of current foster parents who had <u>not</u> yet given up fostering. The two sample groups were matched exactly by the number of years they had fostered. The control group was obtained from files within a division of Social Services. There was no statistical differences between the groups, but there were some minor differences which may be of interest to the reader.

The following chapter gives a direct comparison between the control group and the index group. It lists the findings in table form.

Control Group compared with Index Group

<u>Age of respondents</u>   (Table One)

<u>Ages</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>Index</u>
25 - 34	7(15%)	10(21%)
34 - 44	17(37%)	22(47%)
45 - 54	15(33%)	11(23%)
55+	7(15%)	4(9%)

Age of Respondents Partners   (Table two)

Ages	Control	Index
25 - 34	4(9%)	4(9%)
35 - 44	12(26%)	21(46%)
45 - 54	15(33%)	12(26%)
55+	6(13%)	2(4%)
No Partner	9(19%)	7(15%)

Length of time respondents have been together   (Table three)

Years	Control	Index
0 -6	nil	3(7%)
9 - 18	13(28%)	17(37%)
20-29	18(39%)	15(33%)
30+	6(13%)	4(9%)
No partner	9(19%)	7(15%)

Number of years as a foster parent.   (Table four)

Years	Control	Index
one year or less	9(20%)	9(20%)
Two years only	7(15%)	7(15%)
3 - 5	3(7%)	3(7%)
6 - 10	15(33%)	15(33%)
11 - 20	11(24%)	11(24%)
30+	1(2%)	1(2%)

Number of children fostered   (Table five)

Number	control	Index
No children	1(2%)	
one child only	12(26%)	8(17%)
0 - 3	13(28%)	13(27%)
4 - 7	6(13%)	17(36%)
8 - 10	7(15%)	5(11%)
12+	7(15%)	4(9%)

This last category (12+) in the control group included numbers as high as 130 children and two others of 20 and 30 children.

Summary of tables 1-5.

Control group

This group had higher numbers over the age of forty five years. They fostered more single and specific children. They also fostered considerably more teenagers than the index group and generally cared for more children aged over seven years.

Index group.

This group had higher numbers aged below forty four years. They cared for more children below the age of seven compared to the control group.

Generally speaking. The two groups were partnered for a similar length of time and were of a similar age to that of their partners.

Details of own children.   (Table six)

Please note that the control group number is followed by a back slash and then the index group number.

	Ages 0-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	30+	Total
First named child	5\4	8\8	17\19	9\10	2\3	41\44
second "	3\4	5\6	17\18	10\3	3\3	38\34
third "	3\6	5\4	7\8	9\1	6\3	27\22
fourth "	-	1\2	2\3	1\-	4\2	10\7
fifth "	-	-	-	4\1	3\1	7\3
sixth "	-	-	-	2\2	2\-	4\2
seventh "	-	-	-	-	2\1	2\1
Totals	12\14	20\21	42\48	38\18	17\12	129\113

Social Class   (Table seven)

		Control	Index
1	Professional occupation	2(3%)	1(1%)
2	Intermediate occupation	33(41%)	42(45%)
3	Skilled occupation	25(31%)	24(26%)
4	Partly skilled	18(22%)	8(9%)
5	Unskilled	-	1(1%)
	Missing variables	-	17(18%)
	Retired	3(4%)	-
	Un-employed	2(3%)	-

Categories of approval.   (Table eight)

	Control	Index
Preschool	15(23%)	19(26%)
general	13(20%)	15(20%)
5-10 years	6(10%)	13(18%)
teenagers	16(24%)	10(14%)
pre-adoption	5(8%)	4(5%)
respite	8(12%)	
11-12 years	8(12%)	4(5%)
long term	2(3%)	4(5%)
specific child	5(8%)	3(4%)
Don't know	Nil	2(3%)

Attendance at a preparation course   (table nine)

	Control	Index
Yes	34(74%)	31(66%)
No	12(26%)	16(34%)

Courses available after approval   (Table ten)

Control	Index
46(100%)	24(51%) said courses were available

Foster parents who attended.   (Table eleven)

Control	Index
19(41%)	10(21%)

Ages of own children when respondents started to foster
(Table twelve)

Ages	Control	Index
0-4	14(12%)	29(35%)
5-11	30(27%)	35(43%)
12-17	24(21%)	9(11%)
18+	45(40%)	9(11%)

Children born whilst the family fostered:-   (Table thirteen)

Control	Index
16	24

Summary of tables 6-13.

control group

        Had higher numbers of skilled and partly skilled
workers. They were approved for more specific children than the
index group and approved for more children aged eleven and
above. They attended more preparation courses, had more courses
available to them after approval and attended more courses. They
also had a higher proportion of own children aged twelve and
above.

Index group.

        Were approved for more children aged 5-10 years and had
a higher percentage of own children of a similar age. More
children were born to this group, whilst fostering than to the
control group.

Generally, the two groups had a similar size of family with similar ages of children. They had similar numbers of workers representing intermediate and professional occupations, which depicts about half of both samples.

Chi-squared tests established that there was no statistical difference between the two groups. Interestingly however, there were area differences, which will be more fully described in Chapter Seven, which deals with the discussion.

Chapter
Five

The Findings
(Part One)
Multiple Choice
Questions

The Findings. (Multiple Choice Questions.)

The following deals with the analysis of data provided by respondents who were reported to have given up fostering during 1988 - 1989. The information provided in this chapter was obtained from the analysis of multiple choice questions and will be linked with the analysis of the open ended questions which are contained within the next chapter.

Sample.

Eighty former foster parents names and addresses were provided by fostering officer colleagues. Three were used in the pilot study and three more had moved house all of these were excluded from the final analysis.

Seventy-four questionnaires were circulated, to twenty former male foster parents and fifty-four were to former female foster parents.

Five questionnaires were returned as no longer at the address, one person was deceased, two were still fostering and another believed her experience was so brief as to be insufficient to complete the questionnaire. Of the final sixty-five questionnaires, fifty-one were returned (78%) but four questionnaires had to be excluded because they were in complete. This yielded an effective response rate of (72%) which is good for a postal questionnaire.

Forty-seven responses were used for the analysis ten were completed by males and thirty-two were completed by females and five were completed by both male and female respondents.

* *Note* *All percentages have been rounded off to the nearest whole figure.*

Gender differences.

It should be noted that from the literature review very little attention was given to gender differences in respect of foster parents. It had been hoped that by targeting twenty male respondents their responses could have been compared with the responses from the female respondents. However the majority of returns were so similar and were not statistically, significant. The few differences which were significant, have been listed separately.

Ethnic Origin

As far as the researcher is aware, only a few foster children and no foster parents originated from ethnic minority groups. Although this was not established by the questionnaire, subsequent discussions with fostering officer colleagues have confirmed that this was the case. Clearly this is an issue which is increasingly recognized as problematic. As Social Services strive to provide equal opportunities, ethnic groups need to be encouraged to take advantage of opportunities to become foster parents in order to meet the needs of children with similar

ethnic backgrounds. However, as our sample of respondents were already people who had given up fostering, the greater awareness of equal opportunities, would not have figured largely in their concept of fostering.

Social Characteristics.

The social characteristics of the respondents and their families are shown in tables fourteen-twenty.

Age of respondents

(Table fourteen)

Age of respondent	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Total number	10(21%)	22(47%)	11(23%)	4(9%)

The age categories were divided into four. A fifth of the respondents were aged 25-34, about half (47%) were aged 35-44, a further fifth (23%) were aged 45-54 and a final (9%) were aged 55 and above.

Respondents partners Age.

(Table fifteen)

Partners Age	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	No partner
	4(9%)	21(46%)	12(26%)	2(4%)	7(15%)

Table fifteen indicates the age of the respondents partner and this is subdivided into four categories. There was also a separate category which revealed that Seven did not have a partner. The majority with partners were aged between the years of 35-44 and this represented (46%). Of the remainder, Twelve (26%) were aged 45-54, four (9%) were aged 25-34 and two (4%) were over the age of 55.

The length of time respondents have been together.

(Table sixteen)

Length of time together in years	0-6	9-18	20-29	30+	Not Appropriate
Numbers	3	17	15	4	7

Table sixteen lists the length of time the respondents have been together as a couple. The majority fall between the two middle categories (9-29) years and represents 70% of the total.

It had been expected that there would be broadly two categories of foster parent. Those who had children of their own and those who were childfree. The analysis revealed that only three respondents were childfree. Of the families that did have

their own children, these ranged from one child to a maximum of seven and their ages varied from a few months to a maximum of over thirty years of age.

Their details are listed below:-

Ages and Numbers of foster parents children.   (Table seventeen)

Own children's ages.....	0-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	30+	Total
First named child	4	8	19	10	3	44
Second named child	4	6	18	3	3	34
Third named child	6	4	8	1	3	22
Fourth named child	0	2	3	0	2	7
Fifth named child	0	1	0	1	1	3
Sixth named child	0	0	0	2	0	2
Seventh named child	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	14	21	48	18	12	113

It can be seen from table seventeen that of the forty-four respondents who had children, Ten (23%) had one child only, Twelve (27%) had two children, fifteen (34%) had three children, four (10%) had four children and three former foster parents had a fifth, a sixth and a seventh child and each represented (2%).

Of the total 113 children listed over, 100 are listed within the first three categories. The majority of foster parents have between 1-3 children. There are a total of 24 male children and 89 female children. The majority of which fall in the centre category 11-20 years, (48 in total).

The percentage of male to female foster children is interesting. It reveals a 1:3.9 ratio. Bearing in mind that there is a higher percentage of male children in foster care than female, it could be assumed that foster patents "foster" in order to have dealings with male children.

Social Class.

It was difficult to accurately compile a list of social occupations of the respondents within this survey. The Registra Generals classification of occupations had been consulted and it was interesting to note that being a "foster parent" is itself classified under "social class 2". When considering the social class of the respondents and in the absence of any stated form of occupation the respondents have been allocated a missing variable, but where a carer has stated "house-wife"or"foster parent" they have been classified under social class 2.

* note Some respondents provided the spouse's occupation and that information was included in table five.

The following structure was established:-

(Table eighteen)

Social class 1.	Professional occupation	1
Social class 2.	Intermediate occupation.	42
Social class 3.	Skilled occupation.	24
Social class 4.	Partly skilled.	8
Social class 5.	Unskilled.	1
missing variables		17

The classification revealed an anomaly, which means that these classifications did not reflect the Socio-economic occupation, normally based upon the male occupation and the female would ascribe to the Social Class of her partner. What it did do was to take literally the guidance of the registra Generals classification and attribute to the woman of the household a status all of her own.

It was probably predictable that the majority of carers fell in the Social Class two and three, (intermediate/skilled occupation.) with about a tenth (12%) belonging to Social Class four and five (Partly skilled/Unskilled).

Details regarding the experience of respondents as foster parents.

Number of Years as foster parents.

This table records the number of years the respondents had fostered.

(Table nineteen)

One year or less	9	(20%)
Two years only	7	(15%)
Three - five years	3	(7%)
Six - ten years	15	(33%)
Eleven - twenty years	11	(24%)
Thirty years plus	1	(3%)

This table shows that one fifth (20%) ceased to foster after one year or less, a further (15%) gave up fostering within two years, making a accumulative total of (35%) who foster for less than three years. Despite this high turnover, the majority (65%) had three or more years experience with about a third (27%) having been involved in fostering for more than eleven years. In essence the sample was quite experienced as a group of foster parents.

Numbers of children fostered.

Table twenty shows the number of children fostered. The responses have been divided into five categories.

One child only	8 (17%)	(Table twenty)
Two-three children	13 (27%)	
four-seven children	17 (36%)	
Eight-ten children	5 (11%)	
Twelve plus children	4 (9%)	

This table shows about one fifth (17%) cared for only one child, over a quarter (27%) cared for two - three children. Over a third (36%) cared for four - seven children and about a tenth (11%) cared for eight - ten children and a similar number (9%) cared for twelve or more children. Not only were the foster parents experienced, as indicated by the number of years they had fostered, but also the majority (58%) had looked after three or more children.

Categories of Approval.

Following their assessment by the Department of Social Services the foster parents are approved for a specific category of child which is believed to suit their particular skills and can be based upon their experience, the age of their own children, the physical space available within their home and the Departments own needs at that particular time.

Below is a Table which lists the categories of approval and the number of respondents which were within that category. (Table twenty-one)

Category	Numbers
1) Pre-school	19
2) General	15
3) 5-10 year olds	13
4) Teenagers	10
5) Pre-adoption	4
6) 11-12 year olds	4
7) Long Term	4
8) Specific child	3
9) Don't Know	2

It is important to note that some respondents were approved for more than one category. Of the forty-five who knew which category they were approved for, two fifths (42%) were approved for pre-school children, About a third were approved for a general category, which could have included all of the categories specified. A further third (29%) were approved for five-ten year olds, a fifth (22%) were approved to care for teenagers. The categories of pre-adoption, eleven-twelve year olds and long term each represented about a tenth (9%) and two (4%) did not know the category they were approved for.

Forty three (92%) fostered children which fell into the category that they wished to foster and one fostered children which did not fall into the category that they wanted to foster.

When did they give up fostering?

The respondents were chosen because it was believed that they had ceased to foster in the previous two years (1988-1989), but it emerged that about a third (36%) ceased to foster up to four years prior to 1988.

Age of own children at time of starting and ceasing to foster.

(Table twenty-two.

When parents started to foster their childrens ages were:-

29 or 35% were aged 0-4 years

35 or 43% were aged 5-11 years

64 or 78% were aged 0-11 years

9 or 11% were aged 12-17 years

9 or 11% were aged 18-34 years.

4 children were born within the first year of parents giving up

24 were born whilst the parents fostered.

(Table twenty-three.)

When parents ceased to foster their childrens ages were:-

8 or 8% were aged 0-4 when parents ceased to foster

31 or 29% were aged 5-11 years

39 or 36% were aged 12-18 years

30 or 24% were aged 19-43 years.

A third (35%) of foster parents start to foster prior to
their own children starting school. Two fifths (43%) commence
fostering by the time their own children start senior school. A
further (11%) start when their children are aged 12-17 years and
a further tenth (11%) when their children are legal adults 18+.

It could be concluded from these findings that as
children become more independent and by the time they have
reached the age of 11 years (78%) of parents had started to
foster. It would seem that the child's developing independence
could create a void in the lives of their parents and this is
filled by them becoming foster parents.

Interesting almost a tenth (8%) of foster parents cease
to foster when their own children are pre-school 0-4 years.
Almost a third cease to foster when their children are between
the ages of 5-11 years. But the most significant finding is
that (64%) cease to foster after their child reaches the age of
12 years, the biggest exodus being (36%) between the ages of
12-15 years.

Training and preparation Courses

Of the total forty-seven respondents, thirty-one (66%) attended a preparation course.

Twenty respondents (65%) felt that the preparation course had prepared them for the task of foster Parenting and nine (35%) did not feel that it had prepared them for fostering.

Twenty four (51%) stated that there were post qualifying courses available to them and twenty two (47%) did not have post qualifying courses available to them.

Experiences of fostering.

Relationships with significant people connected with fostering.

* note. To avoid central tendency, all multiple choice questions offered, a choice of five potential responses. These responses were later collapsed to three to aid clarification and to assist with their statistical analysis.

The respondents were asked to indicate the quality of their working relationship which they experienced with a number of significant "groups". Their responses are listed in table twenty-four.

(Table twenty-four.)

"Generally did you have a good relationship with the following people?"	GOOD....(Relationship)....POOR		
	Always/ Usually	Sometimes	Hardly ever/ Never
Social Workers	39 (83%)	7 (15%)	1 (2%)
Fostering Officers	38 (86%)	4 (10%)	2 (5%)
Social Services	35 (76%)	9 (20%)	2 (4%)
Natural Parents	25 (60%)	11 (24%)	6 (13%)
Foster child	41 (93%)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)

The relationship between foster parents and social workers seems to have been a good one, about four fifths (83%) usually or always had a good relationship, more than a tenth (15%) sometimes had a good relationship and only (2%) never or hardly ever had a good relationship.

The relationship between foster parents and fostering officers was also good, about four fifths (86%) usually or always had a good relationship, a tenth (10%) sometimes had a good relationship and a twentieth (5%) hardly ever or never had a good relationship.

The relationship with the Department of Social Services was also good, three quarters (76%) always or usually had a good relationship, a fifth (20%) sometimes had a good relationship and about a twentieth (4%) hardly ever or never had a good relationship.

About two thirds (60%) had experienced a good relationship with natural parents of foster children. About a quarter (24%) sometimes had a good relationship and about a tenth (13%) hardly ever or never had a good relationship with a natural parents.

Not surprising, over nine tenths (93%) of foster parents had a good relationship with foster children, (5%) sometimes had a good relationship and only (2%) hardly ever or never had a good relationship.

It is interesting to note that the use of specialist workers for foster parents has been recommended over the years, yet in this survey it would seem that there was no significant difference between the relationship the foster parents had with either the fostering officer or the social worker.

Relationships.

The specific relationship the foster parents had with the natural parent of foster children was further explored. The respondents were invited to agree or disagree with statements which had been made by foster parents.

Below is a table which lists the responses received.

(Table Twenty-five)

Statements.	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1) "Foster children should not be allowed to see their natural family"	1 (2%)	8 (17%)	37 (79%)
2) "Social workers should always be present when parents are introduced"	36 (78%)	4 (9%)	6 (13%)
3) "Access should take place in the foster home"	18 (41%)	12 (27%)	14 (32%)
4) "Foster parents should try to get on with the child's family"	40 (87%)	2 (4%)	4 (9%)
5) "Foster children can't be treated the same as your own"	5 (11%)	1 (2%)	41 (87%)

1) It is reassuring to observe that when former foster parents are asked whether foster children should be allowed to see their natural families, about four-fifths (79%) said yes, about one fifth (17%) were unsure and only (2%) did not think that foster children should be allowed to see their natural families.

2) Confidence shown by former foster parents of social workers is recognized as about four-fifths (78%) thought that social workers should be present when parents are introduced to the foster family. About one tenth (9%) were unsure and a further tenth (13%) did not think it necessary for them to be present.

3) As to whether access should take place in the foster home, there was a very mixed response. Two fifths (41%) thought that it should, about a third (27%) were unsure and a further third (32%) thought that it should not take place within the foster home. When comparing male with female responses there was a strong indication that the male respondents felt it more appropriate for access to take place in the foster home than did the female respondents. There was a (64%) (33%) division.

4) When asked whether foster parents should make an effort to get on with the foster child's family, nine-tenths (87%) thought that they should. About a tenth (9%) did not feel that they had to make an effort and (4%) were unsure.

5) Can foster children be treated the same as the foster parent's own children? About nine-tenths (87%) thought that they could, (2%) were unsure and about one tenth (11%) thought that they had to be treated differently.

These responses demonstrate the commitment foster parents show, not only towards the child but also towards the natural family as well. The foster parents feeling that it was their place to make an effort to get on with the natural family. If a good working relationship can be established between these two parties this can have a positive affect upon the foster child and ultimately lead to a successful placement.

How much contact did foster parents have with natural parents?

In response to the question "How many parents of foster children have you dealt with?" The following table has been produced.

(Table Twenty-six)

Categories	numbers
2-5 parents	18
1 parent	14
6-10 parents	5
none	3
25 parents	1

Table twenty-six shows that almost half (44%) had dealt with between two and five natural parents. A third (34%) had only dealt with one natural parent. A tenth (12%) had experience of between six and twelve parents. Less than a tenth had not dealt with any natural parents at all and (2%) had dealt with twenty-five natural parents. It can therefore be concluded that the majority of foster parents (78%) had dealt with up to five natural parents.

Social Work Support

Views were sought about the professional input received by foster parents and comparisons were made between the service offered by the social worker with that of the fostering officer. Six statements were listed and respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with them.

(Table twenty-seven)

	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1) "Social workers don't visit often enough"	16 (34%)	3 (7%)	27 (59%)
2) "Some social workers are not interested in what foster parents have to say"	21 (46%)	4 (8%)	21 (46%)
3) "Social workers are never there when you want them"	19 (41%)	3 (7%)	24 (52%)
4) "Fostering Officers don't visit often enough"	16 (36%)	8 (18%)	20 (46%)
5) "Some Fostering officers aren't interested in what foster parents have to say"	9 (20%)	6 (14%)	29 (66%)
6) "Fostering Officers are never there when you want them".	10 (23%)	2 (5%)	31 (72%)

1) When asked if social workers visit often enough four-fifths (59%) thought that they did. Less than a tenth were unsure and just over a third would have liked them to visit more frequently.

2) Are some social workers not interested in what foster parents have to say? A split response was produced. Almost half (46%) thought that some were not interested and almost half (46%) thought that social worker were interested in what they had to say, about a tenth (8%) were unsure.

3) Are social workers always unavailable? Two fifths (41%) thought that they were, almost a tenth (7%) were unsure and half (52%) thought that they were available when they were needed.

4) Should fostering officers visit more frequently? About a third (36%) thought that they should, about a fifth (18%) were unsure and almost a half (46%) thought that they visited often enough.

5) Are some fostering officers not interested in what foster parents have to say? A fifth (20%) thought that some were not interested, Just over a tenth (14%) were unsure and almost seven-tenths (66%) thought that they were interested.

6) Are fostering officers never there when you want
them? About a fifth (23%) thought that they were not available
when needed, a twentieth (5%) were unsure and almost three
quarters (72%) thought that they were available when needed.

It is interesting to note that there is only one
significant difference statistically, between the views expressed
by the respondents with regard to fostering officers and social
workers.

A Chi-squared test was used to compare the respondents
perception of the availability of fostering officers and social
workers. The test revealed a score of 18.28, using two degrees
of freedom. The results proved to be significant and therefore
fostering officers generally made themselves more available for
foster parents than do social workers.

Never the less the overall response to social workers
and fostering officers by the foster parent was positive.

Are foster parents appreciated?

This section looks at whether the respondents felt appreciated by those who they strived to serve.

"As a foster parent. Did you generally feel appreciated by those mentioned below?" Table twenty-eight lists the responses received.

(Table twenty-eight)	Always/Usually	Occasionally	Rarely/Never
1. The Social worker	37 (80%)	7 (15%)	2 (4%)
2. The Fostering Officer	36 (82%)	6 (14%)	2 (5%)
3. The child's parents	16 (38%)	13 (31%)	13 (31%)
4. The foster child	33 (72%)	11 (24%)	2 (4%)

1) Four fifths (80%) usually or always felt appreciated by the social worker, three twentieth's (15%) occasionally felt appreciated and about one twentieth (4%) rarely or never felt appreciated by the social worker.

2) An almost identical response was recorded when the same question was asked of fostering officer. However the percentages varied slightly. Foster parents always or usually felt appreciated (82%) of the time, occasionally felt appreciated (14%) of the time and rarely or never felt appreciated (5%) of the time.

3) Foster parents were split in their response to their
dealings with natural parents. Two fifths (38%) usually or
always felt appreciated by the natural parents, three tenths
(31%) occasionally felt appreciated and three tenths also (31%)
felt that they were rarely or never appreciated by the natural
parents.

4) Foster parents felt appreciated by the foster child
seven tenths (72%) of the time, a quarter (24%) were appreciated
occasionally and one twentieth (4%) were never appreciated. It
is interesting to compare the male (45%) with the female (80%)
responses. This could indicate that the female, who on average
has more contact with the foster child can feel more appreciated
because of the relationship she has built up with them.

The total population of male respondents, 11 recorded
32 incidents of dealing with natural parents co-incidentally the
total population of female respondents 36 recorded 105 incidents
of dealing with natural family which meant on average they had
all dealt with 2.9 natural parents. This being the case then the
male foster parents seemed to feel less appreciated by natural
parents than did their partners.

Male respondents averaged contact with 4.4 children. Female respondents averaged contact with 6.2 children. It is interesting to note that the female respondents felt a greater appreciation by the foster child (77%) compared to (45%) by male respondents.

Were foster parents fully involved in the planning for children in care?

Respondents were asked "Were written agreements used when you were fostering?"

About half (49%) stated that they were usually or always used, in 2% of responses they were occasionally used and about half (47%) they were rarely or never used.

Respondents were then asked "Were you invited to attend reviews?"

Seven tenths (70%) usually or always attended, One fifteenth (7%) occasionally attended reviews and about a quarter (24%) rarely or never attended reviews.

Are Support Groups supported by the foster parents?

Respondents were asked whether there was a support group in their area.

Three quarters (73%) stated that there was a support group, the remainder, a quarter (27%) stated that there was not a support group.

Of the group which did have support groups seven tenths (69%) attended them.

When comparing these findings with other variables by Chi-squared tests, it was revealed that the group of respondents who thought that foster parenting ought to be salaried, half (50%) had a support group and of that half (75%) attended the group meetings. These findings were compared with the group that did not think that foster parenting ought to be salaried. Four fifths (81%) had a support group and nine tenths (92%) attended the meetings.

This suggests that the foster parents who wanted a professional status through financial reward had less of a need to attend a support group or perhaps had a higher expectation of what the group could or should provide.

It is also of interest to record that of the group who thought that foster parenting ought to be salaried, almost half (44%) experienced problems with their children sharing a room with a foster child. This figure was compared with those who did not wish to be salaried and they only experienced difficulties with their own children sharing a bedroom (13%) of the time.

There was no difference between the numbers of own children who had their own bedrooms, for both groups it ranged from (41-44%). Nor was the differences affected by the two groups social class, as (85-86%) fell between the categories Intermediate/ skilled occupations.

Financial matters!

The next section of the questionnaire dealt with the financial assistance provided by the Social Services Department. Six statements were made and the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with them.

The following table lists the statement and the responses given.

(Table twenty-nine)	Agree	unsure	disagree
1. "Boarding out rates should be increased"	28(62%)	13(29%)	4(9%)
2. "It was always difficult to ask Social Services for extra money"	22(48%)	7(15%)	17(37%)
3. "Children in care get too much pocket money"	20(44%)	13(28%)	13(28%)
4. "Foster parents are not told about the allowances they are entitled to"	27(59%)	5(11%)	14(30%)
5. "Foster parenting is a JOB OF WORK and should be salaried"	17(36%)	14(30%)	16(34%)
6. "Social Services should provide adequate insurance for foster parents"	46(98%)		1(2%)

1) The majority of respondents three fifths (62%) were in favour of higher Boarding Out Rates, three tenths (29%) were unsure whether they ought to be increased and a tenth (9%) were contented with the rates they had been paid.

2) Almost half (48%) had difficulty in asking the Department of Social Services for extra money to care for the foster child, three twentieths (15%) were unsure and four tenths (37%) experienced no difficulty in asking for extra money.

3) Four tenths (44%) thought that children in care received too much pocket money, three tenths (28%) were unsure and a further three tenths (28%) did not feel that the rate was too high.

4) Three fifths (59%) were not made aware of the allowances that they were entitled to. One tenth (11%) were unsure and three tenths (30%) felt adequately informed of the allowances.

5) Should foster parents be salaried? There was a three way split. A third (36%) thought that they should, a third (30%) were unsure and a further third (34%) did not think that they should be salaried. Because of this clear division, Chi-squared tests were carried out on variables associated with this particular question. Unfortunately there proved to be little difference between those that preferred foster parenting to be

salaried and those who preferred it not to be salaried. Where there is a significant difference, it has been recorded as seen below.

a) The respondents who thought that foster parenting ought to be salaried, over half (53%) felt that fostering officers did not visit often enough.

b) The respondents who thought that foster parenting should not be salaried, only three tenths (31%) thought that they did not visit often enough.

This could indicate that those who strove for a professional status through financial recognition had a higher expectation of what the fostering officer should do.

6) An over whelming (98%) thought that the Department of Social Services should provide adequate insurance cover for foster parents.

Does FOSTERING affect the foster parents own family?

We further explored the possible affects of Fostering upon the foster parents own family. Fostering is very much a family commitment, where all the family become involved and can be affected by incidents which happen in their own home. Incidents which can raise intense emotions and could eventually affect the final outcome of the placement. Four statements were made and respondents were asked to agree or disagree with them.

Below is a table which indicates the strength of feelings expressed by the respondents.

(Table thirty)	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1. "My partner always helped me with the foster children"	42(91%)	3(7%)	1(2%)
2. "My family were keen for us to foster"	38(81%)	7(15%)	2(4%)
3. "My family found the children more difficult than they expected"	25(53%)	5(11%)	17(36%)
4. "I felt frustrated in not being able to make decisions about the foster child"	22(47%)	5(11%)	20(43%)

1) Nine tenths (91%) said that their partners helped with the foster child. Almost a tenth (7%) were unsure and only (2%) did not help their partners. This response indicates that fostering is a shared experience and undertaken by both adults within the partnership

2) Four tenths (81%) felt that their family were keen to foster, three twentieths (15%) were unsure and one twentieth (4%) were not supported by their family. This highlights how the family generally become involved in the decision regarding whether they foster.

3) Despite the family being supportive at the time of approval, the task of fostering seemed to promote a mixed feeling once it had been put into practice. A half (53%) found fostering to be more difficult than they expected, a tenth (11%) were unsure and a third (36%) did not find it more difficult than they had imagined.

4) The role of "Parent" seemed to be unclear. Who makes the decisions? Almost half (47%) felt frustrated at not being able to make more decisions, a tenth (11%) were unsure and two tenths (43%) suffered no frustrations in not being able to make more decisions regarding the foster child.

<u>The respondents were then asked about the affect of
fostering upon their own children.</u>

"Were their difficulties for your children concerning
their need to share the following?". was the question asked.

Five separate categories were listed and below is a
table which indicates whether problems were experienced by the
foster parents own children.   <u>(Table thirty-one)</u>

ever/Never	Always/Usually	Sometimes	Hardly
1. Their room	4(9%)	8(18%)	32(73%)
2. Their toys	2(5%)	12(27%)	30(68%)
3. Their friends	1(2%)	13(30%)	30(68%)
4. Their mother	3(7%)	13(30%)	28(64%)
5. Their father	2(5%)	13(30%)	28(65%)

1) About a tenth (9%) always or usually had difficulty
in sharing their room with a foster child. Two tenths (18%) were
unsure and seven tenths (73%) hardly ever or never had difficulty
sharing their room. For two respondents the question was not
appropriate as the natural children of the family had a bedroom
of their own.

2) One twentieth (5%) always or usually had difficulty in sharing their toys with a foster child, a third (27%) sometimes had difficulty and about seven tenths (68%) hardly ever or never had difficulty in sharing their toys. For two respondents the question was not appropriate as they did not have natural children of their own.

3) Only one (2%) always or usually experienced difficulty in sharing their friends with a foster child. A third (30%) sometimes had difficulty and two thirds (64%) hardly ever or never had difficulty. For two respondents the question was not appropriate as they did not have any natural children in the household.

4) Almost a tenth (7%) always or usually experienced difficulty in sharing their mother with the foster child. A third (30%) sometimes had difficulty and two thirds (64%) hardly ever or never had difficulty. For two respondents the question was not appropriate as they did not have any natural children in the household.

5) One twentieth (5%) usually or always had difficulty in sharing their father with a foster child. A third (30%) some times had difficulty and two thirds (65%) hardly ever or never experienced difficulties. For two respondents the question was not appropriate as they did not have any natural children in the household.

The attitudes of the foster parents and their perceived affects of FOSTERING upon the foster family

We listed three statements which were considering the perceived affects of fostering upon the foster family. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with them.

(Table thirty-two)	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
1. I did not want to share my partner with the foster child.	2(4%)	1(2%)	43(94%)
2. I always treated the foster child as if it were my own.	40(85%)	2(4%)	5(11%)
3. I did not mind the Foster child's family visiting my home.	27(61%)	7(16%)	10(23%)

1) One twentieth (4%) did experience difficulties in sharing their partner with the foster child. Only (2%) were unsure and the majority, over nine tenths (94%) had no difficulties at all.

2) Although not a member of the family, in a legal sense. Over four fifths (85%) treated the foster child as if it were. One twentieth (4%) were unsure and about a tenth (11%) did not treat the child as if it were a member of their family.

3) Three fifths (61%) had no objection to the foster child being visited by his family within the foster home. About one twentieth (16%) were unsure and Two tenths (23%) did not want the natural family of the foster child to visit the foster home.

Did the foster child have their own bedroom?

In response to the question "Where did your foster child/ren sleep?" Almost half (45%) of foster children had their own room. A tenth (11%) shared a room with another foster child. Two tenths (23%) shared a bedroom with the natural children of the foster family and about two tenths the sleeping arrangements varied with each child that was placed.

The table below lists the responses.

(Table Thirty-three)

Own room.............................21

Shared with another foster child....5

Shared with your own child/ren.....11

Varied with each child.............10

Further Research

At the time of distributing the questionnaire it was intended to interview a small random selection of respondents, in order to accumulate Qualitative data. Nine tenths (87%) were agreeable for such an interview to take place, but a lack of the researchers resources prevented it.

Finally respondents were asked if they would like to have a copy of the research findings. Nine tenths (92%) said yes, about a tenth (9%) said no. This is a good indication of respondents still retaining an interest in fostering although they were not directly involved.

Chapter
Six

The Findings
(Part Two)
Open ended
Questions

The Findings. (Open Ended Questions.)

This Chapter forms the second part of the analysis and includes data collected from former foster parents in their response to the openended questions.

* Note. All percentages referred to in this chapter have been rounded off to the nearest whole figure.

This first question deals with the attendance of post qualifying courses for foster parents. Fostering courses have not always been available. Some respondents were approved without any form of preparation or training and therefore this next question is inappropriate to them. The question is therefore relevant to thirty-one (66%) of respondents.

Attendance at Post Qualifying courses.
"If appropriate state your reason for not attending."

This was the question asked. The responses have been divided into two categories and have been listed over.

1) Did not see the need

Five responses were recorded, which are listed below:-

Other respondents stated:-

"Preferred to learn from practice" "Did not feel the need" "Did not receive any benefit, it all seemed like common sense" "We had been approved for ten years before a course came out" "The course came out much later "

Summary.

As indicated by the title the respondents failed to see the need for formal training. All had experienced fostering in a practical way and had learnt through those experiences the problems and joys of fostering and perhaps arrogantly felt that they could not be taught how to foster.

2) Family commitments

Seven responses were recorded , which are listed below:-

"I used to do a P/T evening job." "I was very busy at the time." "I was a one parent family." "Had to care for small son." "Pressure of work"."

Two respondents expressed difficulties associated with Baby sitting.

Summary.

These responses highlighted the fact that foster parents are generally busy people. Fostering only occupies a part of their life and somehow they have to fit into their daily schedule many other duties. Whether they need to work in the evenings in order to provide a primary or secondary source of income is unclear. What is clear is that the need to earn an income is of a higher priority than the need to attend a training course, regardless of whether the training course was valued in its own right.

The responses also highlighted that single parents are amongst those that foster and by the nature of their situation they have less support within their own household to raise their own families and less of a choice financially to enable them to give up their time in order to attend formal training.

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Can Fostering courses be improved?

We refer to those who attended any fostering courses and asked "If you attended a fostering course. Please state in your own words how they might be improved."

The question was appropriate to thirty four former foster parents and (65%) of them felt that the course could be improved.

Eight respondents expressed the view that the course which they attended was a good one.

Twenty-two stated that the course could be improved and some made multiple suggestions as to how they might be achieved, which are listed below. Four although feeling that the course could be improved also stated that their particular course was a good one.

<u>Summary.</u>

The most popular method of improvement to foster parent training was the suggested inclusion of approved foster parents as trainers, (29%) made this recommendation, but other useful comments were made and are listed below:-
Two felt that it was too idealized. Three thought that the course dwelt too heavily on the negative side of fostering. Comments regarding a lack of experience on the part of the leaders and their lack of practical advice also supports the use of foster parents as trainers. Respondents also felt that there should be a greater use of small groups and to try to hold the groups locally. But their comments went further suggesting that there was a need for ongoing training.

<p align="center">********</p>

<u>Natural Parents</u>   <u>POSITIVE EXPERIENCES</u>

We reflect on the respondents dealings with Natural parents. The question asks "<u>If appropriate, please state in your own words Two good experiences that you may have had when dealing with Natural parents.</u>"

Twenty seven respondents (57%) volunteered an answer to this question. The responses were divided into two, those that had positive experiences when dealing with natural parents (74%) and those who had not (26%).

The responses are listed below and at first may look a little lengthy, but they will reward the reader by highlighting the true voice of the foster parent.

"The mother of our foster daughters once said "If my children have to be fostered, I am pleased that they have you. I feel that they are disciplined and safe, but most of all Loved."

"A nice thankyou and a Christmas bottle of sherry from foster child's new adoptive parents and a nice big thankyou from his natural parents."

"Appreciation of their child's general growth, during the fostering period and how a number of things would not have been achieved at home. Acknowledgement that the child being in our home, felt alright with them and that they knew she was safe with us."

"A feeling initially that a good partnership could be created."

"A family travelling from London to Plymouth at great expense on a cold and wet day for a naval passing out parade. After initial reluctance of the family to get too involved - a good rapport has been established and we are able to communicate very well."

"A mother expressed her gratitude for the two weeks break and for what we were doing for her son."

"Time to talk to natural parent once they are uninhibited by me to the advantage of the foster child. An opportunity to show

kindness and understanding to a natural mother and to share caring, when foster child in hospital."

"When parent collects their children the one's that return to a loving family. To see a child come to you, so unsure, but leave you full of confidence."

"In two experiences we had with natural parents, they were both unmarried mothers, with other children and we arranged for them to come round with their other children when convenient for them and us. It seemed to work very well."

"To stay friends afterwards, when the child is returned home. Each appreciating each others circumstances."

"We had two India children and there mother has since become a good friend to our family. One little boy we had. His mum has become a very good friend and comes to see us quite a lot and her little boy and my boy are very good friends."

"I became very good friends and still keep in touch with one now."

"Teenage mothers who I took into our home, to teach how to care for baby. Returning later with healthy, happy child to visit."

"One parent prepared her children for what she thought would be permanent placement with us voluntarily. She kept in touch throughout the placement, nine months, by phone and letter with her children and still sends the mothers day cards from them, ten years later. The mum of a three year old, who needed a break, was very distrustful at first but having realized we did not

intend to take her child away from her, was happy for her to come
for a second stay and is friendly if we meet out."

"We fostered a tiny baby recently as his mother was exhausted, it
was very rewarding to see her get better and want her baby back.
Mother of an infant we fostered and went on to adopt made it very
obvious that she approved emotionally of the decision that was
made for the child."

"Mr. H. was a father of two boys we looked after and was very
supportive. Fred came from a single mother when she was given a
flat, we helped decorate it."

"Natural father after mother dying, took his children back after
being with us. He regularly phoned and called into ask us about
certain needs etc. that he was unsure of. Natural mother who
obviously knew the child and her devious ways, like we did, but
still Social Workers could not see it and she totally agreed with
us and the way we treated the child."

"In both cases we were able to help the natural parents in the
way we looked after their child."

"When the foster child was 18 she returned to her mother, who
thanked me for all I had done. Since her return, I had
several visits and still keep in touch with the family."

Summary

When working with natural families the foster parents
need to get something for themselves. They need to feel
appreciated and to feel that they had established a good working
relationship. One actually gained a self satisfaction from
working with natural parents. Others gained a satisfaction from
the knowledge that natural parents were making an effort to see
their child.

For others a good experience was described as
establishing a friendship with the parents and maintaining
contact after the placement had ended. What is clear from these
responses is that foster parents have needs to gain satisfaction
from a job well done, in a professional way in order to establish
a good working relationship. But clearly they do not see their
job ending when the placement has finished and this could be a
distinction between professional and non-professional responses.
(i.e.) To be able to establish when the job has finished. Are
the foster parents then looking at their own needs by maintaining
contact with the natural family? or Are they being truly
professional and looking at the needs of the child long term and
offering support within the community? this work is not
recognized by the local authority or may be actively discouraged.
About 24% of the comments expressed, suggested that respondents
gained satisfaction by maintaining contact after the placement
had ended.

Natural Parents   **NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES**

We further explore the perceptions of former foster parents and their negative dealings with natural families of foster children.

The question asked "If appropriate , please state in your own words two bad experiences you may have had when dealing with natural parents". Twenty-four (51%) responded to this question, nineteen (79%) stated that they had had bad experiences and these are listed below, four (17%) stated that they had not had any bad experience with natural family and one (4%) stated that they had not had any contact with the natural family.

Listed below are comments made by the respondents:-

"Threatening attitude on part of mother. Preparing child to meet father who then turned up drunk. Meeting cancelled and child even more bemused."

"When I was lied to. Most contact."

"When I disciplined the foster child his father threatened us with physical violence."

"When collecting foster child after a weekend visit. Mother was found to be under the influence of drugs."

"Sometime they try to find fault in the way you bring up their child because they have failed-understandable."

"Constantly facing care proceedings for a revocation of a care order. Being ill equipped to deal with the natural mothers

emotionally instability."

"Two faced creating trouble, lying behind our backs (i.e. at school). Accusation that we were not doing a good job."

"Very few parents visit. Thank goodness. Parents came prepared for long term visit, staying for hours and consuming numerous cups of coffee, tea and biscuits etc."

Two children were left in my care, who could not speak or" understand English. One child was out for the day with his mother and did not return and I could not contact my social worker."

"When they expect them to be at their beck and call 24 hours a day. When they expect you to be at home all day and not carry on with your own life with the family (family includes foster child)."

"Having to entertain drunken father in my home with no social worker on hand. Having child taken out for a walk and not returned."

"Turning up on birthdays with no warning. Promising the children things, that were not possible to do."

"We found it difficult when a very distressed mother of a teenager came twice weekly during a three week placement. We did not know the full history of the case and I felt that I was put in the position of seeming to support the mother in a way that could have been against the interest of the child as social services saw it. We had a similar situation with the parent of

other children where I felt manipulated because of the
relationship between myself and the parent was one in which I
felt expected to be supportive."

"A mother who wouldn't bother to see her daughter, even though
social services provided transport. The child was distraught
every week. A mother who frightened her son and really
disturbed him."

"One parent turning up to visit her child without prior
arrangements, this happened on more than one occasion."

CHILD Y "was a lovely boy but his family would not leave us
alone, he ran back to them. CHILD Z lived near my mothers
house and her father was always at the school gates, telling her
what to do."

"Difficult to give a meaningful answer, due to complex
circumstances."

"The natural parents feel you are a threat to their status, with
their (your foster child) child. Natural mother finds fault in
the way you are bringing up, dressing, treating her child."

"When the natural father found out where the children were he
made threatening phone calls."

"Due to the mother not feeling very well, she came to my house on
one occasion and started to close all our internal doors, very
hard i.e. slamming the doors. Mother came when not expected."

Summary

By far the largest theme that emerges from these responses is the perceived unreliability of the natural parent which may well be realistic. Of the twenty five different comments made (56%) felt that in some way their authority was under minded, eg. by not returning the foster child after access, or not turning up for access in the first place, perhaps telling lies to the foster parent, or just being taken for granted.

The second largest theme (28%) of respondents felt threatened by the natural parents, because of their use of threatening behaviour or turning up for access under the influence of either drugs or alcohol.

The third theme concerns a confusion of role which can arise when foster parents are in a position of having to deal with the natural parents in the foster parents own home. This view was expressed in (16%) of cases where the foster parent felt that they were having to perform a social work task or the natural parents were being perhaps un-necessarily or inappropriately critical of the foster parents efforts in caring for the foster child. Are these negative themes contributory? probably not, but reflect the living process and time spent with adults, who by definition are likely to be vulnerable. What is interesting is that foster parents could respond positively even in bad situations.

Why do Foster Parents give up Fostering.?

"Generally, why do you think Foster Parents give up fostering?." was the next question asked. The responses were divided into four categories, listed below. Of the forty-seven respondents, thirty-eight (81%) volunteered one reason and nineteen (40%) provided a second reason.

When considering the reasons stated, about a fifth (19%) felt that foster parents ceased to foster because fostering was generally considered to be too demanding. A fifth (21%) gave up because of their own family priorities. A further two fifths (40%) gave-up because of problems associated with the Department of Social Services, and a fifth (19%) thought that foster parents gave-up because of problems associated with the foster child or the foster child's own family.

Below is a table which shows the number of responses recorded within each category.

(Table Thirty-four)

	Stated reason.
Foster parenting too demanding.	11 (19%)
Family priorities	12 (21%)
Problems with the Department of Social Services.	23 (40%)
Problems with the foster child or foster Child's natural family.	11 (19%)

Listed below is the actual responses provided by the respondents, in no order of preference and categorized under the headings illustrated above.

1) Foster parenting too demanding.

"foster parents are not able to cope with complicated emotional demands."

"Becoming too attached to the foster child."

"It puts more strain on women than men."

"It is harder than they first thought."

"Emotional exhaustion, damaging to the foster family."

"Inability to cope with rehabilitation after becoming attached to the foster child."

"Inability to cope with rehabilitation after becoming attached to the foster child."

"Inability to cope with rehabilitation after becoming attached to the foster child."

"Parting with foster children can be hard to live with."

"Disruption upon the family."

"Fostering is more difficult than they imagined."

Summary

Clearly, this group, thought that foster parents would have ceased to foster, because they would consider it to be emotionally draining. Over a half, thought that foster parents would become too emotionally attached to the foster child. Others thought that the general disruption to family would be enough to make them give up.

2) Family priorities

"Change in circumstances."

"Family pressures/bad experiences."

"A need to go out to work for financial reasons."

"Change of circumstances."

"Grew out of fostering."

"Cease to have the room."

"Own children get older"

"Own children grow up and need more room."

"Own family situation change, fostering no longer appropriate."

"Own family circumstances change."

"Because other commitments come along."

"Their lives move on - children no longer form part of it."

Summary

In this category respondents felt that foster parents would cease to foster because of the families personal needs. It would seem that the family situation changed, which would result in the foster family being unable to continue to act as carers of other peoples children.

3) Problems with Social Services

Actual responses received:-

"Some foster parents don't get on with the Social Workers."

"Lack of continuity with Social Workers."

"Social Workers are not honest."

"Misplacement of foster children."

"Lack of support and communication."

"Poor back-up by Social Services after a course full of promises."

"Poor remuneration."

"A thankless task, some foster parents do not get on with their Social Workers."

"foster parents taken for granted."

"Lack of the right help at the right time."

"Children inappropriately placed (wrong category)."

"Lack of co-operation between foster parents and Social Workers."

"Lack of help and direction."

"Not enough financial support."

"Social Workers practice is inconsistent."

"A feeling of isolation after the placement has ended."

"A bad experience with Social Services."

"foster parents views not taken into consideration."

"More emphasis should be placed upon training."

"Social Workers go too much by the book."

"foster parents are ill prepared for fostering."

"Mis-placement of foster child."

"Not listening to the foster parents."

Summary

        Clearly half the sample (50%) expressed problems associated with lack of support provided by the Department of Social Services. About a fifth (23%) felt that they either had a poor relationship with the social worker or they were not appreciated by them. Surprisingly only about a tenth (9%) thought foster parents would cease to foster because of a lack of financial support and (14%) thought that the wrong category of child placed in a foster home was a cause for the foster parent to cease to foster.

4) Problems with Foster Children/Natural Parents

Actual responses received:-

"A bad experience with the child."

"Some foster children can be very difficult."

"Difficulty in foster child adjusting to foster family's routines."

"foster child's own family placing high demands upon foster Parents."

"Bad experience of children in their care."

"To be free of the stress of dealing with children."

"A breakdown in foster parent/foster child relationships."

"Difficult experiences with foster children."

"Having a bad experience with the foster child."

"A bad experience with a particular child."

"Having to deal with the disrupted foster child after access to their family."

Summary

The majority of problems were in connection with the foster child and the apparent affects so severe as to cause the foster parents to cease to foster.

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Why did the respondents give up fostering?

Having established why the respondents thought that other people gave up fostering. The next question asks "Why did you give up fostering?"

The responses were divided into four categories, listed below. Of the forty-seven respondents, forty-six (98%) volunteered one reason and over a third (36%) provided a second reason.

When considering the stated reasons, a fifth (21%) ceased to foster because they found fostering to be too demanding. Two fifths (39%) because of their own family priorities. A further fifth (18%) gave-up because of problems associated with the Department of Social Services, and a fifth (21%) gave-up because of problems associated with the foster child or the foster child's own family.

Below is a table which shows the reasons stated as to why the respondents gave up fostering.

(Table thirty-five)

	Stated reason
Foster parenting too demanding.	13 (21%)
Family priorities.	24 (39%)
Problems with the Department of Social Services.	11 (18%)
Problems with the foster child or foster Child's natural family.	13 (21%)

1) Foster parenting too demanding.

Ten gave up because of the affect upon their family

One respondent needed the foster child to go.

One had difficulty parting with the foster child.

One had fostered once only and found it more difficult than expected.

Summary

The majority of this group ceased to foster because of the adverse affects of fostering upon their own families. Only one surprisingly became over attached to the foster child.

2) Family priorities

Two because they had adopted their foster child.

Four because of marital breakdown.

One needed the time to spend with own grand children.

Two because foster child reached the age of 18.

Four moved house/did not have the room.

One Fell pregnant.

Three because of ill health within the family

One was too selfish to do it again.

One had to choose between caring for a criminal lodger of fostering.

Five because foster parent had to go out to work.

Summary

There was a general spread of reasons. The biggest category, about a half (42%) gave up because of a natural progression, family life moved on, which made it impossible for them to continue with fostering. Interestingly a fifth (21%) gave up because of a need to earn a living. Ill health (13%) and marital disruption (17%) also played a part in foster parents ceasing to foster. A smaller percentage (8%), having completed their family through adoption, decided to give up.

3) <u>Problems with the Department of Social Services.</u>

One was told to give up because they were members of staff.

One was used as a dumping ground for teenagers and experienced poor backup both financial and emotional.

Two had a long gap between placements.

Two where the child stayed longer than planned.

Five because of a lack of co-operation from social work staff.

<u>Summary.</u>

The majority of these responses would indicate that there was poor communication between the foster parents and the Department of Social Services. But there also existed two sub groups, one which was over used and the other which was under used.

4) <u>Problems with the foster child or the parents of the foster child.</u>

Actual responses received:-

"Experienced difficulty in fostering a teenager."

One personally knew the natural family.

One where the foster child's family lived too near.

"child did not want to be in foster care."

"foster child could not accept discipline within the foster home.

"Disagreements with over intrusive parents."

"Total lack of communication with the foster child."

"Had money stolen by the foster child."

"Problems with natural father."

"The natural mother wanted the child back."

"Problems with the last foster child."

"Could not deal with problem parents."

"Disturbed behaviour of foster child."

Summary.

Almost half the respondents in this section experienced problems with natural family. Natural parents were considered intrusive by one respondent, another indicated that there was a dispute over who should have the care of the child; two others had non-specific problems, but one stated that she had difficulty dealing with the natural parents.

Over half experienced problems with their foster child. Two responses were non specific, but the remainder either suggested a lack of communication with the child or the child was acting out in such a way that it disrupted the foster home.

Reasons stated by Fostering Officer.

A direct comparison was made between the reasons given by the respondents and the reasons provided by the fostering Officers as to why the respondents ceased to foster. The findings are listed over.

Thirty-three (75%) of both responses matched each other,
but a third of the foster parent responses supplied other reasons
as to why they had given up fostering. So for this group their
reasons for ceasing to foster was far more complex than the
Department of Social Services had appreciated. Eleven responses
(25%) were very different and this can only highlight the
differences in perception of the two groups, or perhaps the lack
of clarity of the situation at the time of the respondents
ceasing to foster. There are likely to be a multiplicity of
reasons why foster parents cease to foster. Furthermore,
different explanations can be offered at different times and/or
to different people; much depends on the circumstances or
context.

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Can you teach Social Workers anything?

The respondents then had a great opportunity to voice
their opinions regarding social workers in general " If you could
teach a Social Workers three things. What would they be?"

The following table has been produced showing the
priority given by the respondents in their response to this
question. As can be seen in the table, the responses have been
categorized and listed (1-3).

(Table thirty-six)

Teaching a social worker three things.

	one	two	three
How to communicate with foster parents.	17 (43%)	13 (37%)	11 (41%)
How to communicate with foster children.	7 (18%)	11 (31%)	5 (18%)
Know what they are doing/have experience of life.	13 (31%)	10 (29%)	10 (36%)
Have had only good experiences when dealing with Social Workers.	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	1 (4%)

This table indicates that there is a clear lack of communication between social workers in general and foster Parents.

The actual responses received are listed below under the headings given in table thirty six. The written word of the respondents is an education in itself and the overall message is made clearer by the reading of it. However, communication is a vast subject, so to aid the reader and to focus specifically upon issues, the section which deals with communication has been sub-divided into individual themes. A summary has been made at the end of each section.

1) How to communicate with foster parents.

The themes of communication are listed below:-

1) Listening

2) Empathizing.

3) Honesty.

4) Recognizing the importance of the foster parent role.

The views of the respondents are listed below each theme and summarized at the end of each section. Comments relating to communication are dealt with in chapter seven.

1) Listening.

Actual responses:-

"Take more notice of what foster parents have to say."

"To listen more intently to foster parents comments and may be respond to them."

"To listen to foster parents more."

"The foster parents know more about the child's present feelings than any one. Therefore to consult them."

"To listen to foster parents."

"How to listen to what foster parents are actually telling them and to believe them."

"To listen to what foster parents are telling them."

"Listen to what foster parents say."

"Listen to a serious suggestion made by foster parents and act upon it."

"Listen to what we say about the childrens parents."

"Listen to what foster parents are saying they may not be experts but they bare the front line with the children and the parents and can see a lot of the background which may be relevant."

2) Empathizing.

Actual responses:-

"Appreciate that the foster parent knows the child."

"Try to take into account the foster parents feelings and needs."

"To be more considerate to foster parents."

"Look more interested in what foster parents have to say."

"foster parents should be given time to themselves, if this is needed, without feeling guilty about asking for respite care."

credit the foster parents with having more affection for their foster child than they often do. You don't do it for the money and you do care."

"Find courses for the foster parents to attend and assist in arrangements for them to attend."

"That younger less experienced foster parents may actually be more tolerant. Therefore, better for some children."

"Not to visit their own hangups, from their own bad experience of life upon everyone else."

3) Honesty.

Actual responses:-

"Be honest, however hurtful."

"Be honest about anticipated problems."

"To be open to the views to the foster parents."

"To tell the foster parents all the problems the child has had so they can help the child understand what is going on."

"To always keep foster parents informed about everything concerning the child they have in their care."

"Give foster parents far more information about the child's problems before placement."

"To be honest in their opinions about you as a family."

4) Recognizing the importance of the foster parent role.

Actual responses:-

"A social worker is always more for the child than for the foster parents."

"Talk to the foster parents about the content of your visit to the child."

"Not to assume the foster parents home is their property i.e. just walk in when they like."

"Not to make arrangements concerning the use of the foster parents home without consulting them first."

"To keep to their decisions and not to be pressured from other appointments."

"A willingness to work with the foster parent for the benefit of the child and not just the child in isolation."

"Be there for the foster parent when they are unsure of their rights."

"Remember that foster parents know a lot more about their foster child's emotional and physical feelings that they do."

"You were trained to deal with problem parents, we are not. So try not to leave the foster parents to face them alone."

"To be punctual when visiting."

"To be appreciative of the progress made and encourage rather than pour cold water on signs of progress."

"To take opportunity to talk to the foster parents away from the home to discuss freely any problems that they the foster parents are experiencing."

"Patience with all parties. Work as a team with foster parents rather than be their boss."

"Give as much support to foster family as the family who had to foster own child out."

"To encourage the foster parents. Realize what needs they encounter and try to assist them.

Summary

Almost nine tenths of the respondents (87%) thought that social workers needed to develop further skills in communicating with foster parents. So often was quoted "listen to what foster parents have to say" Their practical experience of dealing with the child and their ability to observe and understand the problems seems to have been ignored and in ignoring them they devalue their very existence. Almost four tenths (37%) contributed to this view.

A further three tenths (32%) did not feel appreciated or encouraged in their role as a foster parent and (16%) did not feel that the social worker was being honest with them and was with holding vital information which would have assisted the carer in providing a better service to the foster child. A similar figure (14%) felt unsupported and wanted to be further involved in discussions relating to their difficulties in dealing with the foster child.

2) How to communicate with Foster Children.

This section has been sub-divided in order to reflect a clearer picture of what the respondent is wishing to convey.

Lack of understanding of role.

Actual responses received:-

"Not to present as the "Official" as the children will resent you."

"Not to speak to foster children in private, in foster parents home."

"foster children should be treated the same as the foster parents own children."

"If foster children must be spoken to in private this should be done at Social Services department."

"Not to spoil foster kids, they seem to be used to having everything done for them."

"How to be unbiased in their views and to be able to see through deceitful children."

"To be as interested in the other children in the family and not single out the foster child."

"Not to detach the foster child from the natural children making them special when they should be treated as a whole family."

"Not to talk about the negative problems in front of the child."

"Money, foster kids do not know the value of money. They know foster parents are being paid and think they are making a profit from them."

Empathy

Actual responses received:-

"To try to find a positive improvement in the child (especially if they the children are very disturbed)."

"To look at the child's point and to help all they can."

"In some ways the social worker has great responsibility for the children and should be a guarantor for their well being."

"To listen to every ones feelings, mainly the childrens and to understand them. After all they are the ones who get hurt the most."

"The children are people that have a right to be heard."

"Try to come down to the child's level and help them understand what is going on in their lives."

"(When access is concerned) Where possible show them pictures of the family they are going to stay with, that way they are not frightened of the unknown."

Give more time.

Actual responses received:-

"More involvement and understanding with the children."

"To ensure good and frequent communication between all parties
concerned."

"Have far more contact with the child to be placed so that you
are more aware of the child's problem before placement."

"To visit to see the child more often, so problems can be seen to
before they get out of hand."

Summary.

Almost half (49%) thought that social workers experienced
difficulties in their dealings with the foster child and seven
tenths of this group (68%) thought that listening skills were in
question and the lack of involvement for the child. Social
workers were also criticised for being too negative and not
positively re-enforcing the child's achievements. Social workers
it was suggested, should visit more frequently. A small
percentage (9%) took a somewhat opposed view and accused the
social worker of being naive and taking too literally the child's
comments. Others were suggesting that the foster child was
singled out for preferential treatment, to the detriment of the
foster parent's own children. Others felt excluded because the
foster child was treated in isolation.

3) <u>Know what they are doing/Have experience of life.</u>

Actual responses received:-

"To keep appointments on time."

"To be familiar with all aspects of each child's case history."

"You can't do everything by the rule book."

"To realize that the foster child should only have what you can afford for your own children."

"Not to assume that everything the foster child said during the regular visit was the absolute truth."

"Some Social Workers seem to think that children needing fostering are little angels, not at all responsible for the mess they are in. This is not always so."

"That life and experience of people can teach more than University when dealing with people."

"Visit often, nothing too official."

"Give more understanding not just to child going into care, but for the family it is going to."

"Real life does not come from the book."

"Know more than 'facts' about the family who offers to foster."

"To understand the frustration felt when you feel when you are getting no where with a child."

"Not to preach what they have read in textbooks. That they live in a real world and should practice real world situations."

"Not to rely so much on the family aid, as in our case. Be
Flexible."

"Explain the financial situation better."

"All social workers should have a direct and first hand
experience of being a parent before advising prospective parents.
Book learning ain't enough."

"A realistic attitude to parents and children taking into account
the clients differing life styles and attitudes to bringing up
children."

"A little tact and consideration can go a long way to improving a
difficult situation."

"To try and take into account the foster child's feeling and
needs."

"To be more flexible."

"Understand that too much easy access for child's parents can be
such an upheaval for foster parents own children."

"That though funds are tight they do not actually come from the
social workers own pocket. There may be times when foster
parents need financial assistance to provide for the need
of the children."

"A change of social worker destroys the above and the children
lose faith."

"That they are doing a job of work for the help of less fortunate than themselves."

"To be confident and knowledgeable and to instill confidence in others."

"Each foster home and each foster child is different and should be treated as such. e.g. the routines, rules in one family are different in other families."

"To give more information at the beginning of a placement."

"That childless couples can make good foster parents but are particularly vulnerable and may need to have clearer expectations about the outcome of a placement."

"To make sure that the foster parents know what allowances they can claim."

"The social worker should recognize the potential for damage to the host home."

"How to be a real foster parent and I don't mean role play."

"To encourage a good relationship between the parents of the foster child and the foster parents."

"To relate experiences of the child and the family to real examples and not to theorize, be realistic."

Summary.

When considering the summary below we need to put it in perspective. In order to do this one must consider the general comments made in the previous chapter concerning the service offered to the foster parents as a whole and these are listed below.

Over a half (52%) of the respondents thought that social workers made themselves available when needed, almost half (46%) thought that they were interested in what foster parents had to say and almost four-fifths (59%) thought that social workers visited often enough and a similar percentage (80%) felt appreciated by the social worker. A higher figure (83%) generally felt that they had a good relationship with social workers. Bearing this in mind, we can more clearly consider the information contained below.

Seven tenths (70%) of the respondents thought that social workers needed more guidance in order to more affectively do their job.

A third of this group (31%) thought that social workers needed to be more realistic in their expectations of what could be achieved and their views would be improved if they themselves

had more practical experience of life, more experience of the children they deal with and one respondent even suggested that only "parents of children," should be allowed to be a social workers. They also suggested a more flexible approach to fostering, favouring a personalized method rather than an approach which firmly adhered to the "Rule Book".

Over two fifths (44%) felt there was a greater need for the social worker to consider the affects of fostering upon the foster family and to get to know them better by talking to them before plans for the foster child were made.

Over a fifth (22%) thought that social workers ought to be more organized. To arrive on time for appointments, to be familiar with the child's background. To be more aware of the Boarding Out rates and not to act as if the allowances were paid out of their own pocket and lastly to better plan the beginning of the placement, so that the foster parent is fully aware of what is going on.

4) <u>Have only had good experiences when dealing with Social</u>
<u>Workers.</u>

About a tenth of the respondents (9%) had no criticisms
to make about social workers who they had dealt with. They
described themselves as lucky. One described the social worker
as a friend and another did not experience any difficulties with
the foster child, so the role of the social worker could not be
called into question.

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<u>Financial experiences.</u>

"<u>Please list any financial difficulties you may have</u>
<u>experienced as a foster parent.</u>" This was the question asked.

The responses were subdivided into four categories. The
category title reflected the cause and the affect of the
financial difficulty , as stated by the respondents. They are as
follows:-

1) "<u>Boarding Out Payments</u>" Includes finance directly relating to
the County's Boarding Out payments.

2) "<u>Foster family</u>" Dealt with the direct affects of Boarding Out
payments and the hardships incurred by the foster parents.

3) "Theft or broken personal affects" Lists the problems experienced relating to damage of the foster parents home or their property by the foster child.

4) "No financial problems" This last section lists respondents who have indicated that they have not experienced financial problems.

Of all the respondents, three quarters (75%) volunteered one difficulty that they had experienced. A further third (32%) provided a second response.

The table below lists the numbers of responses received. (Table thirty-seven)

Financial problems	First financial difficulty	Second financial difficulty
1. Boarding out payments	26 (74%)	14 (93%)
2. Theft or broken personal affects	3 (9%)	1 (7%)
3. No financial problems	6 (17%)	

Of the total survey (62%) stated that they had experienced some form of financial difficulty whilst acting as a foster parent.

Over is a list of the responses received under the categories already listed in table thirty seven. There is a summary at the end of each section.

1) **Financial problems directly relating to the county's boarding Out payments.**

Actual responses received:-

"At the beginning because my husband was put on short time before he became self employed and having two extra children at once who did not have all their needs was rather difficult. But the social services did help us by supplying beds etc."

"The only problem was concerning one boy that came to us from a London Borough at the age of 16. He was one that came under the category of a child who had no known relatives having been abandoned as a baby. He had a full payment to help his school expenses while in the 5th form. On reaching the 6th form this ceased from the London Borough, who asked for the allowance to be transferred to this county. There were usually many difficulties over this which were never really resolved."

"Reimbursement for expenditure on clothes took 5 weeks. Any claims put forward for expenses or queries concerning delay in payment were treated in a far too leisurely fashion, giving the impression that the foster parent was in it for the money."

"In getting sufficient clothes for fast growing teenagers, warm clothes and shoes in particular are expensive."

"Bedding, pushchairs."

"It is small expenses but soon add up, like if a child is unsettled of course bedwetting occurs. You have extra washing, you need extra bed clothing. If a child turns up with nothing you need spare clothes, toys etc. You always need to be prepared for example, have extra food in the house, just in case you get a telephone call. We all know the cost of a child is expensive to keep but as a foster parent you have to have an emergency standby of everything because each individual child has her or his own needs."

"When a child came to us, we had to wait 6 weeks before we got any financial help, which was not the social workers fault as they always put the form through straight away. It was waiting for the main office to put it out."

"When I left my tied job through redundancy I lost my tied cottage on a farm, so I had to buy a house big enough for three children, so we had to buy a bigger house than we could afford, so that put a lot of pressure on me financially."

"Never received payment for travel to collect foster child and return after visits before placement. Long journey with only us available to do it, a social worker would be given mileage."

"It is difficult when children arrive with very little clothing etc but money is only paid after purchases have been made and proof provided. Because awards tend to be discretionary for many items a lot depends on the social workers attitude. One social worker made it clear she thought we were greedy to ask for bus fares being 3 miles from school i.e. outside L.E.A. provision, while another applied for every grant possible, bikes (special aptitude), interviews, clothes etc."

"Once the child becomes 18 the allowance is finished - how do we cope then? Put them on the streets or take a large drop in income."

"We found it difficult when a little boy came to us at the change of season and the short term foster parents before us had bought inappropriate clothes."

"I had to have a part time job as I couldn't get social security money."

"Having to continually phone social workers for a coat for one child I felt as if I was begging and pestering."

"A long wait when you've paid out for something and submit the receipt to the social worker who in turn forgets to fill their part of the necessary form in."

"I found it hard getting together all items required for the bedroom."

"Yes, when my ten week old baby was brought to me he came in a sleeping bag with only the clothes on his back, the social worker brought me food and nappies. I had a lot of blankets I did not know how long I was to have him and did not know what I should buy if anything. This could have caused me great financial Worry, but I was lucky to know someone who had a small baby who lent me everything I needed. Myself and my small children loved every minute of him."

"We are a professional family we lead life to the full. Our children have a varied experience of life – some of which costs money. There was no way that the amount paid to us did anything but cover the barest necessities for the child. We had to subsidize it."

"Only problem encountered was when presenting the West Sussex cheque at Boots after buying all the requirements to look after a foster baby. We were treated as though we were on social security and that the cheque was from the local DHSS office."

"School trips, although the cost of the trip was met the boarding out allowance was stopped for the duration of the trip and no account taken of extra clothing and equipment required."

"One of our girls was a bed wetter and in seven years we were allowed one rubber sheet. Foster parents in the same circumstances local to us got allowances for new mattresses. We paid for at least 7 out of our allowances."

"Feeling able to treat the foster child and buy new for them was difficult, as allowances were only adequate for maintaining needs and not for days out, expenses etc. Christmas and birthday allowances abysmal."

"The boarding out rate paid by social services barely covered the every day expenses incurred in raising children and if you wanted to treat the children with things like swimming, cinema or other trips out it was usually out of our pockets."

"We had no extra money to kit him out and he also needed a coat and shoes but that was with the one bad social worker we encountered."

"The overall finances coped with on a day to day basis, but did not cover overall a rapid rise in wear and tear to the fabric of house and decor. We thought holiday provisions were reasonable, but after year 1 the children were never satisfied."

"By fostering we moved house, to a larger one probably sooner than we would normally have done so, but of course no help was available, even from the financial institutions."

"We had to subsidize Social Services, he was an enormous child for his age, constantly growing out of clothes, the rate paid depended on his age but the clothes he wore were for a child three or four years older."

"Holidays, a set amount was given but never adequate to cover the whole cost. Birthdays/Christmas a set amount was given for presents but not cover parties and extras."

"By fostering we moved house, to a larger one probably sooner than we would normally have done so, but of course no help was available, even from the financial institutions."

"Did not have any, although for most of the time we did not know what we could claim for anyway."

"Due to low salary job my husband was a clergyman and the fact that we already had four children of our own."

"Although my husband and I enjoyed fostering we found in all but one case it generally cost us to do it."

"Our son must be treated the same as fostered children and should be recognized. As a a result he is the least financially responsible of our children, long term."

"By fostering we moved house, to a larger one probably sooner than we would normally have done so."

"We were always paying out of our own money, because the teenage allowance certainly was not sufficient."

"Farm workers poor pay. Poor but happy."

"With hindsight we can see our natural children suffered."

"Very difficult to give a lot of pocket money to a foster child when you can't afford the same for your own children."

"It should be possible to treat foster children in a way similar to how one's own are treated in terms of clothes possessions presents etc."

"We could not afford to buy a coat for a foster child at that time."

"I did not like to ask for help, maybe an initial allowance to cover the extra cost would help families like ours with a modest income."

Summary.

Nine tenths (90%) of those who experienced financial difficulties felt that it was because of a direct result of the Boarding Out payments.

There seemed to be a central theme running through these responses. The respondents stated quite clearly that the Boarding Out rates were insufficient to meet the needs of a foster child. Many instances were cited which include payments for Christmas presents, for birthdays, for holidays, also for clothing and special needs. It also highlighted the Boarding out

allowances did not take into consideration the lifestyle of the foster family, be it an affluent family who spent a considerable amount of money on clothing and on travel to the less fortunate foster parent and in particular the single parent who has opened their home to a foster child, but in order to survive themselves have to go out to work.

These responses also emphasized problems associated with the method of payment. Often foster parents have to spend there own money, which may or may not be re-imbursed. If it is re-imbursed, there seemed to be a considerable delay in receiving the money. To avoid the foster parent using their own money, a purchasing order could be supplied, but one respondent recalled the embarrassment she personally experienced because of the attitude of the staff of the particular retail shop.

The responses also demonstrate an inconsistency in social workers response to foster parents, some being overly generous and others being very reluctant to part with money. It also focused upon a general lack of knowledge from both social workers and foster parents as to what can be claimed for the foster child. Had this knowledge been available there would have been less of a problem.

Four respondents stated that they moved to a larger house than was necessary for their own family needs, burdening themselves with a larger mortgage in order to accommodate a foster child. This fact seemed not to be recognized by the department and as a result the foster parents were disadvantaged themselves for offering to care for a foster child.

2) Damaged caused to the foster parents home or their property by the foster child.

Actual responses received:-

"After horrific incidents when one of our girls would throw tantrums we tried to recover the cost of broken furniture, personal items and damage to our door and the such like, but were made to feel that we were seeking financial gain. Other "star" foster parents local to us were given help for every little thing, they lost out on."

"On a farm workers income incidental damage caused by a destructive child were magnified."

"My son "x" was my foster child and had a very bad temper and broke the front glass door which cost us £299.40 to repair.He broke my daughters organ 3 times and just lots of other small things which would take me too long to answer now."

"Through constant stealing from every member of our family. Out of the four only one learnt not to do this."

Summary.

This section revealed the inconsistency of using discretional payments as compensation for damage inflicted upon the foster home by the foster child. The inadequacy of this method is further demonstrated where those on a lower income have insufficient funds to replace or repair any household items that have been damaged. This response also showed how vulnerable foster families are to malicious damage from children in their care and how tolerant the foster family have to be.

Stealing is also highlighted in this section. A child may steal from the home for a variety of reasons and this form of behaviour may be used to test boundaries, to find weaknesses in the family structure or just for personal gain, what ever the reason, the behaviour is often viewed as unacceptable and without adequate compensation could lead to resentment on behalf of the foster parents.

3) This last section lists respondents who have indicated that they have not experienced financial problems.

"Money should not be a motivator."

Five other respondents stated that they did not experience any financial problems.

Attendance at the local support group.

We finally focused upon foster parents attendance at their local support group. Having established whether there is a group and whether the respondent attends, we then ask "Please state your reason for non attendance (If appropriate)" recognizing that for some there may not be a group for them to attend, but also indicating to those that do attend not to complete this question.

Thirty-two respondents have already stated that there are support groups in their area, ten of which did not attend, for the following reasons:-

Two because the group "too clicky."

One felt older than the average foster parent.

One did not see themselves as foster parents.

One was not interested.

Two because of transport problems.

Two because of commitments to own children.

One because spare time was limited, as they were caring for elderly mother.

One was a one parent family caring for two children and we can speculate as to why it prevented her from attending.

One had personal commitments (non-specific).

For one respondent the meeting time was inconvenient.

One had a lack of baby sitters.

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Chapter
Seven

The
Discussion

Discussion

Before discussing the findings, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the weakness in the research methodology.

As with all low cost research, there is clearly a difficulty in refining the research to meet the researchers expectations. The research had to be confined to the use of an self administered questionnaire, which provided a wealth of quantitative date, but, would ideally have benefited from being backed up with qualitative data. Although 87% of the respondents were agreeable to being visited by the researcher, because of time and travel constraints, this extra piece of work proved to be impossible.

The size of the sample was also a problem. During the process of analysis, some of the sub-groups were too small to provide reliable cross tabulations. Also, as so little research had been carried out on the subject of male foster parents, it would have been more appropriate to devote the whole of the research to them, rather than identifying a small section of the total sample.

It became apparent from the returns, that a proportion of respondents had become separated or divorced during their time as foster parents. This fact may have been as a direct result of fostering and whilst one could speculate that a

proportion of non-respondents also suffered from similar marital problems, as the questionnaire did not deal with this area, it can remain as speculation only.

Hypothesis

It may be helpful to the reader if we repeat the null hypothesis, as originally listed and offer a brief indication as to whether they have been rejected or confirmed, in order to provide a context in which to discuss the findings.

Social characteristics of Foster Parents.

1) Foster parents have large families. (reject)

a) They prefer to care for the older child. (reject)

b) Foster fathers have a small role to play in the care of foster children. (reject)

Training and preparation

1) Foster parents receive adequate training. The research did not identify whether the training of foster parents was adequate. (not proven)

a) Foster parents are experienced people, a preparation course does not help them to be better foster parents. (reject)

b) Training courses cannot be improved. (reject)

Dealing with the foster child's own family

1) Foster parents and the birth parents are best kept apart to avoid conflict.

a) Access should be away from the foster home.

There was a split response regarding access. The respondents were unsure whether it should take place in their own home. (confirmed).

b) Foster parents should make no effort to get on with the birth family. (reject)

Appropriate Support.

1) Social work staff visit often enough. (Confirmed)

a) Foster parents are a fully integrated members of the social work team. (reject)

b) Social work staff are available when they are needed. (confirmed)

Financial implications

1) Money paid to foster parents is adequate for their fostering needs. (reject)

a) Foster parents are fully aware of the allowances they are entitled to claim. (reject)

b) Children in care need to have more pocket money. (reject)

Affects upon the foster parents own family.

1) The foster family are unlikely to be affected by the experience of fostering. (reject)

a) The foster parents own children are unlikely to have problems sharing their environment with the foster child. (confirmed)

b) Foster parents have difficulty relating to the foster child.

(reject)

Key findings:-

Reasons for giving up fostering.

There seems to be no single reason as to why foster parents cease to foster. It would appear that families offer to care for foster children at a time when it suited their lifestyle. This could imply that as they were at home raising their own children, it would seem appropriate to offer to care for other children also, thus utilizing their parenting skills more profitably. Fostering at a time when one's own children are leaving the "nest" to start school could suggest, that this loss created a void which could be filled through fostering.

They ceased to foster at a time when their own children were needing their own independence. The need for these foster parents to remain as "parents" was therefore lessened. Our sample had in affect grown out of fostering, at a time when their own children had out grown them.

The actual reasons why foster parents ceased to foster was more complex for some than they had first thought. With hindsight, they were able to think through their decision and thus present a more complex reason for ceasing. S.S.R.I.U. (1973) devised two categories of those who ceased to foster. One group ceased to foster because of "External" reasons and the other for "internal reasons (1). If this research was categorized in a similar way, the ratio between the two would be similar. Thus confirming that foster parents ceased to foster for reasons associated with their own needs, at least twice as often as the second group, who experienced problems with either the foster child and its family or with the Department of Social Services.

These findings were surprising. The researcher had expected to report that foster parents ceased to foster because of lack of support provided by the Department of Social Services, or, because of conflict with parents of foster children. This could have not been further from the truth as for them ceasing to foster was by way of a natural process. Perhaps for them it was a completion of parenting, having raised their own children and still retaining a need to continue the role of "parent" until their own parenting needs were satisfied.

1) There emerged two categories of foster parent.

a) <u>Those who fostered for a very short period.</u> A third had ceased to foster within two years. This finding may cause some concern, but is clearly an improvement upon the " Portsmouth fostering study" (1973) who reported that 45% had ceased to foster by the end of the second year (2). The retention of foster homes has clear implications for staff time in the recruitment, preparation, and training of foster parents and will be dealt with in the section "Training/preparation".

b) <u>The second group were very experienced.</u> The fact that they were so experienced gave validity to the research findings. This is also a bonus for the department, as the respondents had had a range of experiences prior to their approval, which could not be re-created in a training course. These experiences have benefits for the foster child in their development and for the foster child's parents also, who may benefit from advice and guidance offered to them.

A most surprising feature of this sample was that only three respondents were child free. This might dispel suggestions that foster parents, foster, in order to provide themselves with a substitute family. However as this sample had four times more female children of their own than they had males and as there are more male foster children in foster homes than there are female, it might be that the respondents foster in

order to gain access to or experience of male children. But

unfortunately we do not know, but this is a feature which other

researchers might follow up.

Matching of Foster children.

In order to meet the requirements of the 1989 Children

Act. The Department of Social Services must pay special

attention to the cultural needs of the foster child (3). This

suggests, that Local authorities have an obligation to provide a

range of foster homes, in order to match the child

appropriately. To provide such a range of foster parents is

almost an impossible task. So often have we used "middle class"

foster parents to care for "working class" children and in so

doing, one can argue that we have inappropriately matched

children, as we provide them whilst in foster care with a second

system of values, which may cause confusion especially when the

child seeks to return to its birth family. It can also be

threatening for the birth family, who having "failed" as parents

themselves, are now having to associate with foster families who

do not appreciate or have little understanding of the plight of

the "working class" family.

Clearly, from this research we have seen foster

parenting work, despite the possibility of competition between

the two sets of "parents" and the possibilities of split

loyalties for the foster child. We have seen foster families

make an effort to relate to the foster child's own family and

these efforts have been appreciated by the foster children and

their parents. We have observed foster parents continuing to

foster for many years, so it can be argued that despite the

differences in the class of foster parents with that of the

foster child, or even because of the difference, placements have

been successful. Triseliotis (1980) found that the most

accomplished caretakers were those who amongst other

characteristics shared the parenting with their spouse (4), this

highlights a "middle class" value, but one which the

"enlightened man" has adopted and is now more widespread across

socioeconomic groups. Their success may also be mirrored in the

similarity in the age of the respondents, the majority being

between the age of 35-54 years and having been with their

partner (70%) for between 9-29 years. This, experience of

family life, one can assume, has provided the child with

stability also.

Foster fathers.

Because the sample of male respondents was so small and

in finding very little difference between the male and female

responses our results may be viewed as unreliable, but merit

reporting as so little has previously been paid to foster

fathers. We can however, make the assumption that there is very good communication between the male and female foster parents as their views are so similar. The inclusion of foster fathers in the planning for foster children is a dilemma. They have a role to play, yet we often ignore their existence, by visiting the foster home at a time when they are at work. D.H.S.S. (5) The obvious response, would be to visit everyone in the evening, which would create unrealistic pressures upon the social workers and impose a visiting practice upon them which could in affect be detrimental to their own families.

Parker (6) attributed little importance to the foster father, where as in this study the foster father would seem to have equal importance to that of the foster mother as their ideas and responses were so similar. But we must consider how much the male is influenced by the opinions of his spouse and therefore his views are likely to be biased towards the partners interpretations. Davids (7) suggested that there was potential conflict between the foster father in an authoritative sense with that of the caring agency. As traditionally the father would be responsible for the provision of the family and would therefore be undermined by agency decisions. This view was not supported by this research specifically with male foster

parents, but, almost half of the respondents felt frustrated in not being able to make more decisions with regard to the foster child.

Training/preparation.

The Department of Social Services ability to provide adequate training and preparation for those wishing to be approved as foster parents is established, because, " The Challenge of Foster Care" course forms part of the approval process. Their attempt to provide post qualifying training is being thwarted however, by respondents who for what ever reason, placed a higher priority in being able to earn a wage than attending training courses. It needs to be recognized that foster parents are very busy people, often involved in other activities other than fostering. They also care for children who often lack security, yet post qualifying courses are usually provided during the day where there attendance is prohibited, as it would mean the foster child would have to be minded by someone else.

The training should not rest with the foster parents. As the foster parents own children are becoming involved in the care or supervision of the foster child, we have a duty to provide some form of training for them. Russel (8) advocated

the education of foster children. Triseliotis (9) suggested that birth parents also need help in order for them to be able to handle their own complex situation, especially when contact is concerned.

Crowley (10) suggested that training helped foster parents to be better prepared for the role of fostering, but are we offering the right sort of training and can it be improved? The most popular suggested method of improvement to training was the inclusion of foster parents as trainers. This has already been identified by the Department of Social Services in West Sussex and was implemented in 1990.

Fostering officers are expected to provide the training necessary to enable foster parents to cope with a variety of complex and often traumatic situations. Although courses can be provided, it is often, if not always, at the expense of their other duties. If they are preparing and running a training course, they do not have time to provide adequate support to existing carers or to recruit new ones. Clearly this has implications for the recruitment of more fostering officers.

Dealings with the foster child's own family

Foster parents made an effort to relate to birth parents. The experience was enjoyed by the carer, who formed a more positive relationship. The experiences were wide ranging and in forming good relationships with the parents they were also meeting their own needs. They also felt appreciated by the foster child, which supports the findings of Trasler (11). The relationship was a two way process of communication, which lasted after the placement had officially ended, this highlighted the dilemma of the carer, in establishing their own role.

Planning for children in foster care is essential. The 1989 Children Act emphasizes the importance and advocates the involvement of a variety of people including the child's own parents. Previous research has demonstrated that the attitude displayed towards the birth family by the Department of Social Services forms the foundation of their future relationship Mapstone (12), yet, in this research, it is revealed that only 50% of birth parents had contact with the foster parents, which implies, that they may have had contact with their own children only 50% of the time.

The 1989 Children Act also places great emphasis upon
not removing the child from their home unless it is absolutely
necessary, using the "No Order" concept, unless it is better for
the child for an order to be made (13). Further more, if the
child has to be removed from its birth family, providing contact
is a serious consideration for the responsible agency.
Triseliotis (14) and Aldgate (15) stressed the importance
 of contact as it affected the likelihood of rehabilitation.
But, where does the contact take place? and How frequent should
it be?

There seemed not to be a consensus regarding Access
(contact) and where it ought to take place, be it in the foster
home or else where. It should therefore be a matter of
negotiation between the carers and the Department of Social
Services.

Research has already demonstrated the importance of
positive links between the birth and foster families, Trasler
(16). "The maintenance of links with the birth family appear to
be beneficial to children, to their sense of identity and self
esteem and for gaining a better understanding of their
genealogical background...." writes Triseliotis (17) when

referring to children who have been adopted, but the benefits can also be applied to those children who are being fostered as emphasized in the 1989 Children Act.

Foster parents try to cope with the affects of fostering upon their own children, but, almost half of the respondents felt frustrated in not being able to make more decisions with regard to the foster child. The 1989 Children Act emphasizes the need for partnership (18), not only with the foster child's parent/s, but also with the foster parents themselves, but in doing so and placing more emphasis upon the role of the birth parents, are we not diminishing the foster parents powers further and thus adding to their frustrations.

The frequency of contact is also of significance, not only to the child and its family, but also, to the foster family as well. Frequency of contact, should be based upon the aim of the placement. But, when planning for the foster child, the foster families needs must also be considered, as a failure to do so, could result in the placement failing. Only Seven respondents (15%) specifically gave up fostering because of the affects upon their own family, although, any of the other reasons volunteered by the respondents could have had a contributory factor.

Appropriate support

Part of this survey was to make a direct comparison, all be it simplistic, between fostering officers and social workers. Very few differences were established. However, what did become evident was that fostering officers were able to make themselves more available than were social workers in responding to the needs of the foster parents. This is supported by Rowe, Hundleby and Garnett (19) as working with foster parents continually gave the fostering officer a specialist knowledge, so that they knew when to respond to the needs of the carers. None the less, despite there being a difference in priorities for the fostering officer and the social worker, they seemed to be equally valued by the foster parent who felt appreciated by them.

About a third of respondents thought that social workers should visit more frequently, this suggests that social workers have the skills to support and are valued. Bebbington and Miles (20) highlighted the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that high levels of support could be used to lower the turnover of foster parents, but it must, by implication, improve the standard of service offered to the carer and to the child in their care.

Honesty and a satisfactory means to communicate is essential in any fostering placement. Working as a team, for the benefit of the foster child should be our priority. Each member of the team has a different status, dependent upon their role, but their importance should be equal, as, without one of the team members, the process and the ultimate success rate for the child will surely be lessened. Triseliotis (21) highlighted the helpfulness of social workers listening to what the foster carers have to say, but not only listening, but also providing them with information regarding the child's background and helping them to understand problem solving techniques. This Triseliotis says, empowers carers to feel in control. Seventy per cent of respondents thought that social workers did not really listen to what they had to say. This implies that the foster parent could have made a larger contribution to the planning for children in their care. Communication skills of social workers also needed to be improved to enable them to deal with adults and foster children, a fact demonstrated by this research and identified by Gorrel Barnes (22).

Elderstein (23) advocates the use of support groups as they help foster parents to work through their feelings of grief and this was supported by Triseliotis (24) as it relieves isolation and keeps social worker and foster parent in touch

with each other. The launch of the West Sussex Foster Care
Association on 16th November 1991 strengthens the links between
the department and the foster parents and re-enforces the need
for good communication between the carer and supporter.

The concept of written agreements has been with us for
many years, Parker (25) advocated their use, as it clarified
the various levels of accountability within many agencies, but
it did not have the enforcement of the law until the
introduction of the 1988 Boarding Out Regulations. It is
encouraging to learn from this research, that agreements were
used consistently in about half of the placements prior to the
1988 Boarding Out Regulations being introduced. Further more,
about three quarters of the foster parents were invited to
attend the statutory child care reviews, which must indicate a
basis for good practice and a recognition that the views of the
carers are valued and taken into consideration, when decisions
are made for the foster child.

Communicating with foster parents.

Listening

Listen, listen, listen. These words are echoed by foster parents. It would appear that foster parents perceive their role as having little value. One respondent rightly stated, they are in the front line with the children and the parents, yet social workers appear to be dismissive of their role and are failing to recognize that they are part of the social work team. Could it be that social workers are too busy? Could it be that they have insufficient time to effectively do their job? Could the information provided by foster parents be under valued, because the social worker has not the time to absorb its relevance?

Empathizing.

Can social workers really empathize with the role of the foster parent? For the foster parent, fostering, is a 24 hour a day job, with no time off, unless respite care is provided or the placement comes to an end. Social workers, despite the demanding nature of their job, can effectively leave the pressures of work behind, by returning to the sanctuary of their own homes. Having listened to foster parents, social workers are in a better position to be able to empathize with them and therefore credit them with some importance.

Honesty

In order for a foster parent to affectively do their job of work, they must be provided with affective tools. The tools of their trade, are associated with being provided with information. Information, at the beginning of the placement, can help them to gauge their method of child care and the way they respond to the child in their care. A failure to provide this information, can lead to a distrust by foster parents of social workers and lead to a feeling of being tricked into caring for a child, which they may not have agreed to care for, had they been provided with background information.

Recognizing the importance of the foster parents role.

Clearly there is an un-equal relationship between social worker and foster parent. Social workers are deemed as "professional", having undergone formal training and blessed with a social work qualification. Unlike foster parents, who in the majority of cases, do not have a social work qualification, but would have probably attended training courses provided by social services. Because there is an unequal relationship, how much importance should a social worker give to the opinions of the foster parent?

Despite the lack of formal qualification, foster parents
are offering a valuable service within their own home. What the
foster parent can provide is experience of life and experience
of raising children which the social worker may not have
benefited from. But in offering a service within their own
home, a further dilemma is created for the social worker, who is
reliant upon the goodwill of the carer, in order for the
placement to proceed. This situation could erode the
professional working relationship which can exist between the
two parties.

Within this section there emerges a confliction of role,
a social workers responsibility is towards the child within the
foster home. This specific role can leave the foster parent
feeling isolated. To overcome this, the fostering officer has a
role to play in supervising the foster parent and attending to
their personal needs.

If social workers are to recognize the importance of the
foster parents role, then the foster parent needs to be made
aware of the demanding nature of the role of the social worker.
A social worker, in the course of their working day is pulled in
many directions. They are continually prioritizing their work
and re-prioritizing their work as other commitments become their

responsibility. They are not always able to respond to the requests of the carers and may often arrive late for appointments, or may have to cancel appointments. This is in the nature of their employment and needs to be recognized by the foster parents.

Being honest regarding the foster parents performance is also important, as it gives them a measure of their perceived ability, to deal with foster children. However it can create a dilemma for the social worker, who wishing to retain or preserve a foster home, may be reluctant to be totally honest for fear of disrupting the existing placement.

Communicating with foster children

Lack of understanding of role.

Clearly, foster parents are expressing a dis-satisfaction in the way the social worker is dealing with the foster child. But in expressing their views, they are highlighting a personal lack of understanding, of the role of the social worker. They seek to have more openness, but fail to recognize the need for personal confidentiality.

Empathy

Try to appreciate and understand how the foster child feels, this message conveys a general concern for the welfare of the foster child.

Give more time.

The respondents are working on the assumption, that if the social worker visits the foster child more frequently, they will have a better understanding of the child's needs and therefore pre-empt the problems that are likely to occur.

Financial implications.

Generally speaking the majority of respondents (83%) experienced financial problems and of those, (90%) thought it to be the direct result of inadequate Boarding Out allowances.

The weekly recommended pocket money rate was considered to be too high. Clearly it did not reflect the amount of pocket money the foster parents gave to their own children and therefore created an inequality for all the children within the foster home.

This leads nicely into the age old issue of, paying foster parents for the work they do. Lowe (26) believed that foster families are not necessarily attracted to fostering by

money but their " feelings change when the realities of the job
hit them". This was true in over (50%) of our respondents.
There was no consensus of opinion however as to whether they
should, or should not be paid to care for children in their own
homes and the issue must revolve around the "home care" as
clearly, if the foster parents were caring for the same children
within a residential setting they would expect to be paid.

Maclean's (27) view of enhancing the carers status
through payment, making them more accountable and providing an
emotional stimulation, sadly was not supported by this research.
So embarrassed were the respondents regarding the issues of
money, that almost a half of them found it difficult to ask the
department for financial support. Should foster parents be
expected to ask, or should we be asking them what they need?
Despite the embarrassment or perhaps because of it, the
respondents advocated a rise in the basic allowances, it is
important to record that only (9%) of foster parents were
satisfied with the rates they were being paid. The research
also revealed, that foster parents were using their own money,
to supplement the allowances that they receive from The
Department of Social Services. This was achieved, either by not
claiming the extra allowances they were entitled to claim,

or/and were using their own money to purchase items for the child, on behalf of the department and then having to wait considerable lengths of time before they were reimbursed.

Foster parents did not know the range of entitlements they were permitted to claim. Perhaps the issue for them does not lie in whether they should be paid a wage for caring, but in helping them to understand the very complicated system of payments which exists at this present time, or by replacing the present system with a more easily administered one.

It would appear that we are demanding high standards of care from the foster parents, but at the same time expecting them to pay for the privilege. This supports the view of Glickman (28) who highlighted the savings made by agencies who were being subsidized by their carers.

Should adequate insurance be provided? Almost all respondents felt that it should. This almost unanimous response clearly supports the Department of Social Services decision to provide a retrospective cover for the carers of foster children. But does the policy go far enough? Should the foster parent really have to pay £50 excess? If the foster parent is acting as an agent for the Department of Social services, then they should be compensated in full for any damage to their property, caused by the foster child.

Affect upon foster parents own family.

Respondents perceived that their own children had little or no difficulty in sharing their family, friends or possessions with a foster child, although a third experienced transitory problems. This does not concur with general research findings. The question must be asked, Were these foster parents really in tune with the feelings of their own children? or Were they reluctant to admit that there were problems? or Having established good relationships with social workers and generally feeling appreciated by them, does their resulting self confidence perpetuate itself within their own children and therefore allow them greater freedom to enter into fostering and to enjoy it. Most respondents (94%), had no difficulty in sharing their own partners and therefore showed their own children by example, of how to reap the benefits of foster parenting.

Foster parents as already mentioned have had to change their attitude considerably in order to adapt to their changing role. How much change can we realistically expect them to cope with? For those who have been fostering for many years and being faced with the recent changes in legislation, may find the change too much. Where is all this leading to? Bebbington and

Miles (29) highlight the emergence of private fostering
agencies and they would clearly fall in line with the present
Governments philosophy. Is this therefore the way forward? Are
Local Authorities reaching extinction when considering the
family placement of children and are these "private agencies"
fortuitous in being able to "start afresh" by recruiting
families who have not had to deal with previous legislation and
therefore approach the 1989 Children Act with an open mind,
clear in their role and their understanding of the "spirit" of
the act.

   This research suggested that foster parents did not
differentiate between the foster child and their own children
and does this lead to a confusion of loyalty for the foster
child? The 1989 Children Act is clear in its deliberations of
the parental role of the foster parent, or is it? (30)
Regulation 3(6)(b) schedule 2. states that they are required "to
care for the child placed with the foster parent as if he were a
member of the foster parents family ...." This surely implies
that the foster parent is required to treat the child as if it
were its own and therefore as Holman (31) suggests is placing
the foster parent in direct competition with the birth parents
and not in partnership as the Act suggests.

What have we learnt from this research?

Careful thought needs to be given to the preparation of the foster parents.

The lack of cultural matching has produced successful placements.

Foster fathers have an important role to play in the caring of foster children. But their exclusion from the planning for children in their care has not greatly affect the outcome of the placement.

Thought needs to be given to post qualifying training for foster parents and their children. Also, formal preparation of birth parents may also be a consideration.

The provision of more fostering officer time to be made available to deal with the training of foster parents.

Foster parents are used as trainers, but the courses offered to them are usually during the day, which has a prohibitive affect upon their attendance, unless a creche can be provided and they are held during school hours.

Foster parents need to have their own needs met, in order to be able to continue to act as foster parents.

Thought needs to be given as to whether we encourage the continued support of foster children by foster parents after the placement has ended.

The views of foster parents need to be considered when planning contact.

Despite the fostering officer and the social worker having different roles, they are equally appreciated by the foster parents.

Foster parents have a feeling of low status because they are not listened to.

The department has a duty to provide the carers with as much information as is possible, to facilitate their role.

Foster parents will never have equal status to that of a social worker, but they are used as a mentor.

Serious consideration needs to be given to the foster parents perception of support at the time of placement and this should be incorporated within the foster placement agreement.

The majority of foster parents experience problems through inadequate foster care allowances and clearly do not foster for the money. Holman (32).

Serious consideration need to be given to:-

1) The introduction of a quicker and simpler system of payments which will recognize the time and effort the foster parents devote to foster children.

2) Realistic payments of pocket money.

3) Existing foster parents, who have to work with the 1989 Children Act, may wish to be paid for their services.

Foster parents are critical of the Department, but where do they develop these negative ideas? Do aggrieved foster parents influence other foster parents and does this produce an exaggerated and negative perception of the service which is being offered to them? Or is it an apathetic response from social work staff who feel impotent in affecting change within the department?

Why do foster parents continue to foster?

Having compared the findings between the control and the index group, the researcher is able to offer suggestions as to why some families, who have similar experiences to those that give up fostering, but never the less continue to offer a place in their own home to foster children.

Foster parents who continue to foster have predominantly older children, aged twenty-one and above. This fact affords the foster parents more time to spend with the foster child, un-encumbered by their own children. There could also be the added advantage, that these older children may wish to offer support to their own parents by sharing the parenting role of foster children.

Interestingly also, the control group had significantly more children aged twelve years and above, which would suggest that they fostered children of a similar age group to that of their own children.

The most surprising finding of all, deals with category of approval. It would appear that far from deterring foster parents from continuing to foster. The placement of children aged eleven and above may have encouraged them to continue.

More courses were available for the control group, to which they positively responded and attended more courses. Having been better prepared, it appears that they were better equipped to deal with children in their care and have continued to foster.

Future Research.

1) This research has concentrated upon reasons why foster parents cease to foster, taking into consideration a variety of experiences that they have had during their period as foster parents. It would be useful to survey all the existing foster parents of West Sussex, who, have had similar experiences to those who have ceased to foster, yet, continue to offer their services.

2) West Sussex is a rural county and are the responses to this research peculiar to West Sussex? It would be of interest to repeat this study within an inner city area.

3) The study has dealt with the perceptions of the foster parents only, it would be of interest to survey the recipients of the fostering service, i.e. the foster children or the foster children's own parents to establish whether the results would have been the same.

4) As a Department, we are doing a good job. But it would be of interest to conduct a tangential study of residential care and produce a cross analysis of comparative costs.

A summary.

The salient findings were that foster parents gave up fostering for them as a natural process. The social work support they received, although it could have been improved, was generally appreciated and found to be helpful. The economic costs to the family and the chronic under re-reimbursement, perhaps should not surprise us, but the most singular finding reflects upon the capacity of these foster parents who reached out to troubled and troublesome children and despite the complex agenda brought to them by the natural parents, these foster parents could extend their generosity, which seems to be the very essence of foster parenting.

<p align="center">★★★★</p>

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The
Appendix

(letter 1)   Introductory letter to Area Managers.

Dear
        I am writing to let you know that I am engaged in a
research project based at Southampton University. The research
is focused upon the perceptions of former foster parents. I am
therefore seeking your assistance in tracing those who have
given-up fostering during the last two years.
        This project has the full backing of our Department and
is being conducted under the supervision of Roger Meekings
Deputy Divisional Director, Western Division and Southampton
University. The next stage of the survey, will involve me
writing to your Fostering Officers, asking them to provide a
list of former foster parents.
        The study will be carried out in the strictest
confidence. It will involve sending a self administered
questionnaire to the former foster parents. From the analysis of
their returns it will not be possible to identify them or an
individual social worker or the Area Office involved. This
information will be destroyed as soon as it has been analysed
thus ensuring complete anonymity and confidentiality.
        Whilst doing the survey I will keep you informed of my
progress and will write to you periodically with up to-date
information. If there are any queries please contact either
Roger Meekings or myself.

                Thankyou for your help.

                Yours sincerely,

                        Phil Gregg.
                     Fostering Officer.
                  Chichester Area Office.

(letter <u>2</u>)

<u>Introductory letter to Fostering Officer Colleagues</u>.

Dear
         As you know I am researching into why Foster parents give
up fostering. The Department has given me their full backing and
I have now written to your Area Managers to inform them of my
research.
         The survey will be carried out in the strictest
confidence and the subsequent analysis of the data collected,
will not identify any individual foster parent or social worker or
the Area Office in which the foster parent lived.
         I propose to write to people who have given up fostering
over the last two years, asking them to fill in a questionnaire,
but this is only possible with your help. Please would you
kindly supply me with names of the people, in the strictest
confidence, who have given up fostering in the last two years
and also say a few words as to why you think they gave up.
         I have included with this letter a copy of a chart which
I used to record the numbers of foster parents who have ceased to
foster, from information supplied by yourselves. I thought it
would be of interest to you and I will keep you posted of the
findings as and when they happen.
         I really am grateful for your help,thankyou.

                Yours sincerely,

                    Phil Gregg.
                 Fostering Officer.
              Chichester Area Office

(letter 3a)

Introductory letter to former MALE foster carers.

Dear

I am engaged in a project that wishes to further improve the service the county offers its foster parents.

This is a research study that is seeking the opinions of former MALE foster parents whose unique and invaluable experience could help us meet better the needs of foster parents and children in the future.

Clearly such research is not of any direct benefit to you, nor am I asking you to be involved again in fostering , but rather as someone with crucial experience, to help me, to help the next generation of children and foster parents.

Your views are most important if I am to gain an insight into the role of a foster parent. I would therefore be grateful for your co-operation.

I will write to you again shortly and with that letter, I will include a questionnaire for you to complete and return to me.

Thankyou for your help,

yours sincerely,

Phil Gregg.

Senior Social Worker and
P/T Research Fellow (University of Southampton)

(letter 3)

Introductory letter to former FEMALE foster carers.

Dear

I am engaged in a project that wishes to further improve
the service the county offers its foster parents.
This is a research study that is seeking the opinions of
former FEMALE foster parents whose unique and invaluable
experience could help us meet better the needs of foster parents
and children in the future.
Clearly such research is not of any direct benefit to
you, nor am I asking you to be involved again in fostering , but
rather as someone with crucial experience, to help me, to help
the next generation of children and foster parents.
Your views are most important if I am to gain an insight
into the role of a foster parent. I would therefore be grateful
for your co-operation.
I will write to you again shortly and with that letter,
I will include a questionnaire for you to complete and return to
me.
Thankyou for your help,

        yours sincerely,

                Phil Gregg.

                Senior Social Worker and
        P/T Research Fellow (University of Southampton)

(letter <u>4</u>)

<u>Letter</u> <u>to</u> <u>the</u> <u>Target</u> <u>Group</u>, <u>accompanied</u> <u>by</u> <u>the</u> <u>questionnaire</u>.

Dear
        I wrote to you a little while ago, explaining that I was
involved in a research project and asked for your help. I have
therefore enclosed with this letter a questionnaire which is
asking about THE EXPERIENCES OF FOSTERING FROM A FOSTER PARENTS
POINT OF VIEW.

        At first sight it may appear somewhat daunting but I
believe that if you could give 20/30 minutes in its completion
you would find it both interesting and straight forward.

        I must emphasize that it is designed to be TOTALLY
ANONYMOUS and CONFIDENTIAL and it will <u>NOT</u> be possible to
identify individual answers in any subsequent report. Whilst the
project is based here in West Sussex it is being carried out
under the supervision of Southampton University to guarantee
independence.

        I do hope you will take the opportunity, in the
strictest confidence, of giving YOUR views about YOUR experience
of fostering. I realize that this is of no direct benefit to
you, but it could be of great benefit to foster parents and
foster children in the future.

        If you require further clarification or information
please leave a message for me on Chichester 777984 and I will
return your call as soon as possible.

I realize that Christmas is approaching and your time is precious, so I would be especially grateful if after completion you would return the questionnaire to me by the 12th. December in the s.a.e. provided.

Thankyou for your help,

Yours sincerely,

Phil Gregg.

Senior Social Worker and
P/t Research Fellow (University of Southampton)

(letter <u>5</u>)

<u>Reminder</u> <u>letter</u> <u>to</u> <u>those</u> <u>who</u> <u>had</u> <u>failed</u> <u>to</u> <u>return</u> <u>the</u> <u>completed</u>
<u>questionnaire</u>.

Dear
        You may remember that I sent you a questionnaire at the
end of November last year and asked you to complete it, so that
I could gain a greater insight into your experiences of
fostering. I do not appear to have received your reply and
wonder whether it has been lost in the Christmas post. I have
therefore included another copy which I would ask you kindly to
complete and return to me in the s.a.e. provided by the 17th.
January.

        Thankyou for your help,

                Yours sincerely,

                        Phil Gregg.

                Senior Social Worker and
        P/T Research Fellow (University of Southampton)

(<u>letter</u> <u>6</u>)

<u>A</u> <u>thankyou</u> <u>letter</u> <u>for</u> <u>those</u> <u>who</u> <u>completed</u> <u>and</u> <u>returned</u> <u>the</u>
<u>questionnaire</u>.

Dear

            I write to thankyou for completing the
questionnaire. This time of year is always busy, so to make
time for my research is very much appreciated. I hope to analyse
the data collected within the next few months so if you have
already indicated that you would like to have a copy of my
findings, a report of these will be sent automatically to you.

        Yours sincerely,

                Phil Gregg.

NOTES FOR GUIDANCE FOR YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE

Please read the following before answering any of the questions.

The questionnaire is in two parts, the first part deals with information about yourself and family and then about your different experiences as a foster parent.

There will be three kinds of question. The first will ask you a little about yourself. The second will require you to circle your answer to a given question,

example

(Please circle your answer)

Did you attend a preparation course?.....Yes/No

The third kind will ask you to tick a box, which will correspond with a choice of answers.

example   (please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	Agree	unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Christmas is a time of happiness and good will to all men.					

There are also opportunities for you to give your opinion.

We are looking at your overall experience of fostering and not at specific children. If there are any problems, please feel free to contact me on Chichester 777984 and leave a message. I will get back to you as soon as I am able.

Thankyou for your help,

Phil Gregg.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY.

Please give your present age   ....years

Have you a permanent partner?.........................Yes/No

                    (please circle your answer)

If Yes please give their age   ....years

If Yes please state how long you and your partner have been

together   ......years

About how long were you a foster parent?   ....years

Approximately how many children did you foster?................

Please give details of your own children regardless of whether
they are still at home.

        Sex

    Male/Female   Age   Relationship to you

        ....

        ....

        ....

        ....

        ....

        ....

Please state your main occupation during the period you were a
foster parent.

            Male..

            Female......................................

What category of children were you approved for?..............

....

example Teenagers/Pre-school/ Specific child/General approval
Don't know/Other, (please specify)

Was this the category of child you wanted to care for?...Yes/No

                    (please circle your answer)

What year did you give up fostering?   198...

NOW <u>A</u> <u>LITTLE</u> <u>ABOUT</u> <u>YOUR</u> EXPERIENCES.

Preparation for fostering.   (please circle your answer)

Did you attend a preparation course?.....Yes/No

If <u>Yes</u> Do you think it prepared you for fostering?.....Yes/No

Were any courses available to you <u>after</u> your

approval as a foster parent?.....Yes/No

If <u>Yes</u> Did you attend any?.....Yes/No

If appropriate, state your reason for <u>not</u> attending

....

....

If you attended a fostering course. Please state in your own
words how might they be improved.

....

....

....

....

....

Generally, did you have a good relationship with the people
listed below?

(please tick appropriate box)

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Social Workers					
Fostering Officers					
Social Services					
Parents of foster children					
Foster children					

<u>THE FOLLOWING ARE A LIST OF STATEMENTS MADE BY FOSTERPARENTS</u>
<u>ABOUT THEIR CONTACT WITH THE FOSTER CHILDRENS NATURAL PARENTS</u>.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with them?

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
"Foster children should not be allowed to see their natural family"					
"Social workers should always be present when parents are introduced"					
"Access should take place in the foster home"					
"Foster parents should try to get on with the child's family"					
"Foster children can't be treated the same as your own children"					

If appropriate, please state in your own words <u>Two Good</u>
experiences you may have had when dealing with natural parent's

1..

....

....

2..

....

....

If appropriate, please state in your own words <u>Two Bad</u>
experiences you may have had when dealing with natural parent's

1..

....

....

2..

....

....

How many parents of foster children have you dealt with? ....

THESE ARE COMMENTS MADE BY FOSTER PARENTS ABOUT SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT.

To what extent do you agree with them?

(Please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
"Social workers do not visit often enough"					
"Some Social Workers are not interested in what Foster parents have to say					
"Social workers are never there when you want them"					
"Fostering Officers do not visit often enough"					
"Some Fostering officers are not interested in what Foster parents have to say"					
"Fostering Officers are never there when you want them"					

Generally, why do you think Foster parents give up fostering?

....

....

....

....

....

Why did you give up fostering for West Sussex?

....

....

....

....

....

Do you foster for another Authority.....YES/NO

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCES

As a foster parent. Did you generally feel appreciated by those mentioned below?

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Always	Usually	occasionally	rarely	Never
The Social worker					
The Fostering Officer					
The Child's parents					
The foster child					
and Were written agreements used when you were fostering?					
Were you invited to attend reviews?					

Was there a support group (please circle your answer)
in your area?.....Yes/No

If...Yes...Did you attend?.....Yes/No

Please state your reason for non-attendance (if appropriate)

....

....

If you could teach a Social worker THREE things. What would they

be? 1...

....

....

2..

....

....

3..

....

....

A LITTLE ABOUT FINANCE

Do you agree with the following statements, made by
foster parents concerning Finance provided by Social Services?

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
"Boarding out rates should be increased"					
"It was always difficult to ask Social Services for extra money"					
"Children in care get too much pocket money"					
"Foster parents are not told about the allowances they are entitled to"					
"Foster parenting is a JOB OF WORK and should be salaried"					
"Social Services should provide adequate insurance for foster parents"					

Please list any financial difficulties you may have

experienced as a foster parent.....................................

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

THE NEXT SECTION CONSIDERS THE OVERALL EFFECTS OF ALL YOUR

FOSTERING EXPERIENCES UPON YOUR FAMILY.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
"My partner always helped me with the foster children"					
"My family were keen for us to foster"					
"My family found the children more difficult than they expected"					
"I felt frustrated in not being able to make decisions about the foster child"					

Were there difficulties for your children concerning their need to share the following:-

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Their room					
Their toys					
Their friends					
Their mother					
Their father					

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

(please tick the appropriate box)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
"I did not want to share my partner with a foster child"					
"I always treated the foster child as if it were my own"					
"I did not mind the foster child's family visiting my home"					

Where did your foster child/ren sleep?

(please tick the appropriate box)

own room..

shared with another foster child...........................

shared with your own child/ren.............................

<u>WHO</u> was mainly responsible for the completion of this form?

(please tick one of the following boxes below)

Male

Female

It may be possible for me to visit you, to discuss this questionnaire, in order to gain a greater depth of knowledge.

Would you be agreeable to this.....Yes/No

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR ALL THE TIME AND EFFORT YOU HAVE GIVEN IN THE COMPLETION OF THIS FORM IT IS VERY MUCH APPRECIATED. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE A SUMMARY OF MY FINDINGS PLEASE TICK THE BOX BELOW.

The
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