Foster Parent Satisfaction in Nova Scotia

by

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Abstract

In recent years, a decline in recruitment numbers, and retention rates for foster parents in Nova Scotia has intensified the need for a comprehensive delivery of services in an already severely fragmented child welfare system. The Nova Scotia Department of Community Services has been attempting to address the challenges associated, in part, with these needs. The research presented here examined various aspects of the provision of foster care: (1) the system that provides the framework for foster care; (2) the children for whom out-of-home placement is necessary; and (3) the foster parents themselves. The work has addressed in particular those issues which relate - both directly and indirectly - to job satisfaction among foster parents in Nova Scotia. Three questionnaires were distributed, one to regular foster parents, one to foster parents who had discontinued their services, and one to foster care workers. The initial questionnaire was completed, and returned by 341 of the 907 foster parents; follow-up questionnaires were administered to 18 foster parents, and to 4 foster care workers. Foster parents cited working with the foster children as their overall most satisfying experience, and gave inadequate support from the administering agency as the most unsatisfactory aspect of their work.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Child Welfare legislation in Nova Scotia is administered by 20 child welfare

offices throughout the province. They are classified as District Offices, Mi'kmaq Family

and Children's Services, and Children's Aid Societies. All of these offices were

legislated by the Children and Family Services Act (1990) to ensure both the safety of

and provision of services to children aged newborn to 21 years.

Throughout the early 1900's, children who were taken into care of the Nova Scotia

Minister of the Department of Community Services, were regularly placed into foster care

with very little consideration given to the effects of such placement on the child or on the

foster parent. This arbitrary method of placing abused and neglected children was used

until the 1930's, when the concept of assessing and approving foster homes was initiated

in Canada. Steinhauer (1991) wrote, "about this time, foster parents began to be paid a

basic per diem to cover the cost of the child's room and board, and for the first time, an

attempt to match children and foster homes was undertaken" (p. 5). In keeping with the

confidential aspects of Child Welfare legislation scant information was provided to the

receiving foster parent. With minimal support from child welfare agencies, foster parents

were expected to meet the basic needs of the child until such time as the professionals

(including social workers and courts) would make decisions in the best interest of the

child. Over the past thirty years, it has been well documented that children entered the

child welfare system with very complex physical, emotional and mental health issues that

directly affected foster parents.

As one of several complex services authorized under the Child Welfare and

Residential Services Division of Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia, the

foster care program registers foster parents who will provide safe, alternative homes for children-in-care until such time as more permanent plans can be realized. Many foster placements are short term. However, some children remain with the same foster parents for many years. As of March 31, 1999 there were 735 children placed in foster homes throughout the province - 609 of those in the care and custody of agencies, or district offices; 110 in temporary care, and 16 in care for adoption.

The Department of Community Services Child Welfare Division established the Foster Care Re-Design Program several years ago in order to examine better methods of recruiting and retaining foster parents. Two immediate recommendations made by the program were improved training programs, and co-ordination of services for foster parents. As a result, financial management of training programs previously supervised by the Department of Community Services is now administered by the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia.

One of the long term strategies of the Foster Care Re-Design Program was to scrutinize existing models designed to enhance the foster care system. Two years ago, foster parents, social workers, supervisors and mangers from across Nova Scotia gave a very positive critique of the Parent Resource, Information, Development and Education model (P.R.I.D.E.). Based on the feedback gathered during the presentations, the Foster Care Re-Design Program made a recommendation to the Minister of Community Services to purchase a foster care model from the Child Welfare League of America. This was the first step in the monumental task of re-designing the current foster care delivery system.

During an interview with the Foster Care Co-ordinator for the province of Nova

Scotia in October, 1999 she discussed the problems that are pervasive in the foster care system, the system's strengths, and the efforts made by the department over the years to address problem areas. She said, "The Nova Scotia Department of Community Services has been aware of the challenges faced by foster parents."

In 1992, the Federation of Foster Family Associations of Nova Scotia surveyed the entire population of foster families in Nova Scotia (approximately 750) to develop a foster parent profile and determine how foster parents felt about the foster care program. Two hundred and thirty-one completed surveys were returned and analyzed, revealing the following profile data: In 1992, the average foster parent in Nova Scotia was approximately 40 years old (foster father and/or foster mother), owned their home, and lived in a small town, or rural area. The information in the completed surveys allowed researchers to conclude that a little more than one third of the foster parents surveyed identified themselves as "professionals", one third preferred to identify themselves as simply "a parent" and less than one third identified as "volunteer". Nearly one half of the foster parents surveyed indicated that they were given inadequate information about the history when children were placed in their homes. The survey also found that 60 percent of foster parents were members of their local foster family associations, and 27 percent of the remainder indicated they did not have the time to attend meetings. Over one half the respondents felt that fostering was more challenging than in previous years. In spite of this, almost all of the foster parents responding to the survey, reported that their fostering experience was either satisfying or very satisfying, and considered the work they did as one of value to the community. These aspects of job satisfaction will also be examined in this research.

The Provincial Placement Review committee of the "Too Good To Lose Project"

(1996) wrote "Foster care is the foundation of our placement system for children; it must

be treated as central both in service delivery planning and in funding" (p. 3). In April,

2001, the Foster Care Re-Design Program plans to introduce the Parent Resource and

Information Development and Education model of foster care in Nova Scotia. The

purpose of this research was to examine current foster parent job satisfaction prior to the

implementation of the PRIDE model. A self- reporting questionnaire designed to assess

job satisfaction and retention rates was administered to foster parents across the province.

Follow- up interviews were completed with a sample of foster parents and foster care

workers. All three instruments used in the research included several measures of job

satisfaction.

While I considered foster parent attitudes and behaviors, the goal of my thesis was

to determine if foster parents in Nova Scotia feel satisfied, and to examine what factors

contributed to satisfaction for them. I wanted to hear their opinions, and to ensure that

specific details of their lives were not excluded. In order to maintain this focus, I

developed a list of follow-up questions to support the thesis question, and questionnaire.

Questions:

I proposed that foster parents in Nova Scotia apply to foster children with the

most honourable intentions, but become discouraged and disillusioned along the way. I

anticipated that many would express feelings of confusion about their roles in the child

welfare system, and would often feel at a loss of how to deal with the complexity of

problems that are presented to them by the very children they are attempting to shelter,

love and support. The main thesis research question was:

What is the current level of job satisfaction among foster parents in Nova Scotia?

Supporting questions emanated from the literature on retention and recruitment of foster

parents, and the additional questions demanding consideration and reflection were:

1   What is the current demographic data pertaining to foster parents?

2.   What factors contribute to retention and satisfaction of foster parents?

3.   How do foster parents interpret their role in the child welfare system?

4   Is the relationship with the child welfare agency a factor in job satisfaction?

5   What factors affect competency as foster parents and do they affect retention

        rates?

6.   What aspects of foster care are the most rewarding?

7.   What aspects of foster care are the least rewarding?

8.   What changes would foster parents like to see occur in the foster care system?

Statement and Significance of the Problem

Foster parents who provide an invaluable service to children, families and child

welfare agencies across the country. Effective methods of recruitment and retention of

foster parents has been a chronic problem for child welfare agencies in the province of

Nova Scotia, and the quandary of this thesis. In recent years, there has been a decline in

the number of individuals applying to foster children, and a decline in retention rates for

existing foster parents in Nova Scotia. Delaney (1997) stated that "Parents willing to

provide foster care or an adoptive home to children are an endangered species" (p. 1).

For various reasons, the foster care system in Nova Scotia is facing major transitions and

the factors that contribute to foster parent job satisfaction may provide insight for

improved recruitment and retention of foster parents. One of the most challenging tasks

for agencies, will be finding ways to effectively administer services to children and youth who have special needs, severe emotional and psychological problems, or physical disabilities. Other challenges include improving recruitment numbers and retention rates for foster parents, and developing a child-centered, comprehensive model that will address the problems existing in the current system.

Rationale for Study

Foster parent recruitment and retention have been important child welfare issues in Nova Scotia for more than twenty years. The Task Force on Foster Homes, Rutten et al (1978) stated that in 1967 there were a reported 2,021 foster homes in Nova Scotia, and by 1978 that number decreased to 1,760. As of January 28, 2000 there were 553 regular and 220 restricted Foster homes in Nova Scotia (Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia). Over the past several years the federation documented a total number of 354 foster home closures.

Many foster parent applicants are particularly motivated by the desire to offer a loving home to an abused or neglected child; they are unaware that issues relating to the day-to-day care for a foster child are more complex than the provision of basic shelter and nurturing. One of the issues relating to the care of foster children pertains to working effectively within the very complex child welfare system. Over time, some foster parents become discouraged and disillusioned with the foster care system. One reason for foster parents' discouragement may be that they are confused about their role in the child welfare system, and are often at a loss of how to deal with the complexity of problems that are presented to them by the very children they are attempting to shelter, love and support. Twenty-one- years ago, Rutten et al (1978) reported ". . . an increasing

percentage of the children-in-care will have significant problem areas, particularly in the social and emotional areas, requiring much more extensive care and specialized expertise" (p. 2.10).

The department of community services is attempting to address the challenges associated with the need for a comprehensive delivery of services in a fragmented child welfare system. Proficient and competent foster care is an essential service for foster children who require extraordinary care. This aspect is particularly challenging when foster parent recruitment and retention rates are decreasing and children's needs are increasing.

When children who have been abused and/or neglected are taken into the care and custody of the Minister of the Department of Community Services, it is assumed that a safe, nurturing, caring alternative foster placement will be available. This is not the reality in many areas of the province, and the numbers of registered foster parents available for placements rarely meet the needs of foster children. There are, no doubt, many reasons for the lower numbers of available foster parents, including inadequate monetary compensation, inadequate child welfare staffing, lack of training, insufficient respite care, insufficient support and inadequate funding for special needs.

In the research presented here various aspects of foster care were examined, namely the system that provides the framework for foster care, the children for whom out of home placement is necessary, and the foster parents themselves. Of particular interest are those issues which are directly and indirectly related to job satisfaction among foster parents.

Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of terms as determined by the Foster Care Manual:

Department of Community Services Family & Children's Services Manual of Policy and

Procedure (1998) Province of Nova Scotia.

1.1 Foster Parent	"Foster Parent" means a foster parent approved by an agency pursuant to the Children and Family Services Act.
1.2 Act	"Act" means Children and Family Services Act, Chapter 5, Statutes of Nova Scotia.
1.3 Agency	"Agency" means a children's aid society, family and children's services agency or district office of the Department of Community services.
1.4 Minister	"Minister" means Minister of Community Services or, as designated, Manager of Adoption and Foster Care.
1.5 Residence	"Residence" means the community where the foster parents live and have their home. Community means the territorial jurisdiction served by the agency.
1.8 Children in Care and Custody	A child who is in the "care and custody" of an agency that assumes all parental rights, duties and responsibilities towards the child.
1.9 Children in Temporary Care	A child who is the temporary care and custody of of an agency under a supervision order or under apprehension.
1.10 Restricted Homes	"Restricted home" is the home of a relative, neighbor or other interest person who wishes to provide the care and supervision of a specific child who is acquainted with them.

The following terms used in the research may require definition:

Attitudes	A learned predisposition to respond in a consistent favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object (Kottkamp 1990).
Morale	Used to express a person's outlook on society and his or her frame of mind (Miller 1991).
PRIDE	Parent Resource, Information, Development and Education, model for foster parent recruitment and training.

Assumptions

Several beliefs and assumptions influenced this research. These points of view emanate from my personal and professional experiences in the child welfare system. I worked in the field of human services for fifteen years, and in the past eight years as a caseworker with Family and Children's Services of Antigonish. This work presented an opportunity for me to take on a variety of social work roles, specifically child protection; children-in-care; in-home-support for children with special needs, and the adoption/foster care and single parent programs.

The foster care program is, without a doubt, the foundation of the child welfare system. Many people working in the field of child welfare agree that satisfied, well trained, and competent foster parents are the best resource the child welfare program has to address the needs of abused and neglected children who come into care. Steinhauer (1991), one of Canada's foremost authors, introduced well-documented information on the complex physical, emotional and mental health of foster children, and how it directly affected foster parents. He wrote:

> Foster parents are very much aware that the agency has the authority to remove a foster child at any time, or even to close down the foster home should it see fit to do so. They often feel trapped in a position of forced dependency on the agency. The agency supplies their monthly stipend, deals with any request for additional or out-of-pocket expenses, provides regular or not-so-regular supervision or even occasional consultation, for which the foster parents may or may not need. At times, decisions and demands of the agency, interpreted by their worker, may have major and unpleasant repercussions on the foster family. And yet, in many agencies, foster parents are rarely or minimally considered, let alone consulted, around decisions that involve them as much as they do the child . . . (p. 191).

Steinhauer provided a reasonable explanation for the frustration foster parents experience when attempting to work with seriously disturbed children. He identified the dilemmas

foster parents face without adequate agency support, and offered a rationale for the lower retention rates for foster parents and the repeated placement breakdowns for children.

As I reviewed the literature on foster care, I realized that scant information has been published about the uniqueness of fostering children in Nova Scotia. The bulk of significant data about fostering, retention rates, recruitment and foster parent satisfaction is imported from the United States, through the Child Welfare League of America. I believe relevant research should include data, information and documentation about the strengths, issues and problems facing the people in our own provincial communities. There are many facets of fostering that are unique to the Maritime and Atlantic provinces, given our particular social, economic, cultural and ethnic diversities.

It is essential for those involved in every facet of foster care to have input - a voice, and an opportunity to make comments or present recommendations for change. Since they are most directly affected by the service delivery system; the foster parents, the children, and front line child welfare staff must be directly consulted. I believe the best information about foster care derives from the people who live with it everyday and are directly affected by the service delivery system- the foster parents.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter one opened with an introduction to the child welfare system, including a description of the various components of the foster care service delivery system for abused and neglected children. The significance of the problem under investigation was stated, along with the rationale for the study. The chapter concluded with a statement of my personal bias and assumptions. Chapter two is a review of the literature pertaining to job satisfaction and foster care, including the history of foster care in Nova Scotia. The

methodology is explained in chapter three, where a detailed description of the methods and instruments used to evaluate and analyze foster parent job satisfaction is presented. An analysis of the data is introduced next in chapter four. Demographic information about foster parents in Nova Scotia is presented, as well as the most and least rewarding aspects of foster care as described by foster parents. Chapter four concludes with a discussion of the factors which contribute to foster parent satisfaction. Chapter five presents conclusions and recommendations for improving the foster care system in Nova Scotia.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter opens with a summary of the history of foster care and the origin of

the foster care program in Nova Scotia. Next, the determinants of job satisfaction are

discussed, including a review of the literature on job satisfaction. The review includes an

overall definition of satisfaction, models used to conduct job satisfaction research,

rewards which influence satisfaction, measures of job satisfaction and congruence,

predictors of commitment, burnout, performance, and productivity. Since there was scant

literature available on foster parent satisfaction, I reviewed the literature on teacher

satisfaction and made comparisons to that of foster parents. It is also significant to note

that I determined that there was a paucity of recent research and literature pertaining

specifically to Nova Scotia foster parents. Therefore much of the literature is reflective of

North American experience, and therefore a generalization of fostering vicissitude.

Canadian and Nova Scotia research and literature was preeminent, and cited most

frequently throughout this thesis.

Themes arising from the literature review indicated that there were several areas

that influenced job satisfaction for foster parents, and these were extensively reviewed.

The literature suggesting that foster children were the main motivators for foster parents'

engagement was included in the review. The literature reviewed also included issues

relating to foster parent role ambiguity and burnout, and these aspects were examined.

Organizational structure was another determining factor in job satisfaction, including

relationship with the agency, support, services and training. The chapter concludes with a

review of external rewards for foster parents.

The Evolution of Foster care in Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia's current child welfare system has evolved slowly over the last century. Changes in child welfare policy and legislation were significantly influenced by economics, political pressure, religion, philosophical doctrines and the standards of the society at the time they were implemented.

For almost 200 years, the province was influenced by the Elizabethan Poor Law which allowed minimal relief to impoverished citizens. The Poor Law allowed for institutions to be created for destitute individuals, and from the mid 1700 to mid 1800's the workhouse, the poorhouse and the orphanage were established in the colonies, where conditions were intolerable. Erickson (1971) provided a desolate description:

> They housed the aged, the disabled, the mentally retarded, the mentally ill, criminals, and children for whom there were no bidders. There was no segregation of the sexes or age groups, no sanitary facilities, and old cots and straw were used instead of beds. Orphans, foundlings, deserted and destitute children were bound out to any citizen who was willing to take them. If no free home was available, the child was sold to the lowest bidder (p. 1).

Orphaned children were often tied to substitute caregivers through apprenticeship, at a time when children were owned by masters. During the twentieth century, local governments compensated caregivers of orphaned children with a small stipend for their expenses, although older children were expected to work for lodging.

Children remained in deplorable conditions, in the workhouse and poorhouse where they were supposedly trained "through the apprenticeship system which in reality was a form of slavery . . . or 'farmed' out to the lowest bidder where supervision of the care they received was non-existent" (Brogan, 1991 pg.11). In 1886 the Nova Scotia

Legislature passed an act to allow municipalities to build asylums for those who were

considered mentally ill or disabled.

By the late 1800's organized religious groups and voluntary charitable

organizations introduced orphanages for children across Nova Scotia. In 1882, the Nova

Scotia legislature passed the "Act for the Prevention and Punishment of Wrongs to

Children"; it was administered by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

In the mid 1900's, influenced by the establishment of a federal Children's Bureau

in the United States, Canadians began to express concerns for the welfare of children in

their own country. The volunteer system was replaced by employed staff members as

social workers who arranged and supervised foster care placements. (Macintyre, 1993).

> The preferred type of care was the foster home. In many ways, the foster care
> system was an extension of the early emphasis on a strong volunteer contribution
> to child welfare, with foster parents being reimbursed only for out-of-pocket
> expenses rather than being paid for the care of children. This can be seen as an
> extension of the assumption that the care of children is a "natural" role of a
> mother and should be unpaid. Payment was regarded as not only unnecessary but
> undesirable and inimical to the natural expression of maternal love and affection
> (p. 33).

In 1912, the county of Halifax hired its first provincial officer for neglected and

delinquent children. During the years 1913 and 1914, eleven Children's Aid Societies

were introduced throughout the province. One of the first institutions built to house

orphaned children was the Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children, opened in

Dartmouth. The home was destroyed by fire in 1917, and re-built in 1921 (MacLeod,

1998).

Brogan (1991) explained that advances in technology, and prosperity in modern

society influenced traditional perceptions of children, and inspired changes in the foster

care system. Machinery replaced manual labor, which in turn translated into fewer labor intensive tasks for children. Education and training became more widely accepted as roles for children in society. Foster and substitute caregivers for abused, neglected and abandoned children were paid a minimal fee to cover board rate. This practice reflected cultural and societal expectations of the period.

Social and economic factors inspired transformations in the traditional family structure and its' identity. Two parent working families increased the demand of out-of-home child care, and promoted a greater emphasis on professional training for child care staff. Various authors (Department of Health and Human Services Administration of Children and Families, 1988; Steinhauer, 1991) explained that theoretical knowledge from psychology, sociology and social administration greatly influenced the direction of professional training for public and private daycare staff, and for the practice of child welfare, including the foster care system.

Fitzner (1967) detailed a chronology of the welfare system in Nova Scotia. In 1944, the Department of Public Welfare was developed under the umbrella of Public Health. Another significant piece of legislation was the Social Assistance Act of 1958 which signified policy changes, and influenced the quality of services for vulnerable individuals in society. Organizational changes in almost all provinces in Canada reflected increased awareness in the importance of preventative services. Throughout the 1960's the Children's Aid Societies of Nova Scotia broadened their focus to include the family as well as the child.

During the 1960's, the provincial government of Nova Scotia assumed financial responsibility for the provision of Children's Aid Societies and District Child Welfare

Offices, through joint service agreements with the municipalities (Erickson, 1971).

Around the same time, foster parent associations were formed as a forum where foster

parents shared experiences and linked them more closely with social workers. The

philosophy of placing abused, neglected and abandoned children in institutional settings

changed from the 1950's onward. Brogan (1991) explained that during the 1960's and

early 1970's child caring institutions were closed, and in-home and day-care services were

presented as an alternative to inhabitant care. Day care services for children made

advances through the introduction of legislation in the 1967 Day Care Nurseries Act and

the 1971 Day Care Services Act. Hepworth (1980) provides the following interpretation

of the evolution of foster care:

> Changes over time affect the types of care provided by the child welfare services
> as well as the demands for them. The tendency for foster homes to be used in
> greater numbers is apparent from at least the 1930's and the post war years served
> to confirm this trend. By 1959-60 some 55% of children in care were in foster
> homes compared with about 29% in institutional facilities. By 1966-67 70% of
> children in care were in foster homes (p. 14).

In the 1970's, throughout the United Kingdom and North America there was an

increase in the quantity of research into all aspects of life for children in care. Findings

from many of those studies emphasized deficiencies in the services provided by the

agencies entrusted with their care. Numerous strategies such as early intervention and/or

prevention and permanency planning were developed to address inadequacies in the child

welfare system (Jackson, 1995). Over the next twenty years there were various

government sponsored programs introduced across the country, as well as the province of

Nova Scotia to provide early intervention services to families. Unfortunately, the

strategies introduced specific to permanency planning for children in care did not evolve

into the development of provincially mandated programs or services.

Contemporary Services

Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services was established in 1985 to provide

services directly to native children and families, with an emphasis on ensuring the child's

safety and maintaining his or her cultural identity (Manual of Procedure for Children in

Care, 1998).

New legislation (Children and Family Services Act, 1990) reflected a move

toward "best interests of the child", "integrity of the family", and "least intrusive

measures" of child welfare intervention. Child welfare agencies and courts were directed

to maintain an abused or neglected child in his or her own home whenever possible.

Services were provided to children, and their families in an effort to alleviate the risk

factors which led to child protection involvement In instances where the risks

outweighed the benefits for a child remaining in the family home, the optimal alternative

caregiver was one who had biological or psychological ties to the child, and the

"restricted foster placement" was emphasized. A restricted foster parent is usually

someone who is familiar to the child. If this was not an option for the child, preference

would then be given to a foster placement within the child's community. Several authors

(Brogan, 1991; Steinhauer 1988; 1991) agree with the provisions made in the Children

and Family Services Act (1990). Steinhauer (1988; 1991) asserts that a sheltered, secure

and nurturing permanent living arrangement should be made available for every foster

child.

The evolution and administration of foster care programs appears to be influenced

by two very significant factors; first, empirical research in social sciences and health

which details experiences of foster parents and social workers in the field, and secondly,

moral and social values of the day.

The roles of foster parents have expanded over the years, and the promise of

quality of care is entrenched in provincial policies and procedures. Statistics (Federation

of Foster Families of Nova Scotia) show that the majority of Nova Scotia's children in

care continue to be placed in foster homes. Government departments, however, have

been slow to introduce provincial standards and guidelines that will address the need for

additional support, education and well-being of foster parents. Brogan (1991) reports:

> In addition to the ever-growing demands on foster care we also continue to face a
> shortage of foster homes which has reached a critical level. Community interest
> in foster care is declining and the number of approved foster homes in Nova
> Scotia has decreased from 891 to 625. . . . There has been a 10% decline in foster
> homes just in comparing the 1989-90 statistics. . . . There can be no dispute foster
> care in the1990's is a dwindling resource. (p. 16)

Foster families are also affected by current social and economic realities that

influence the lives of nuclear families all across the country. Twenty years before

Hepworth (1977; 1978) cited increased divorce rates (tripled from 1966 to 1972), and

poverty as the major issues in foster care and adoption at the time. Brogan (1991) agreed

with Steinhauer (1991) that Canadian society is challenged to address the following social

dilemmas:

> - a dramatic increase in the rate of separation and divorce
> - a rising incidence of woman battering and child abuse
> - deteriorating economic conditions
> - an increase in individuals and families living below the poverty line
> - an economic necessity that forces two parent working families
> - a high rate of unemployment
> - a lack of affordable housing
> - a lack of adequate day care especially for the people who need it the most
> - social alienation
> - Aids

- a lack of adequate resources, choices and opportunities
- increased inequalities with respect to wealth and power, age, race . . . (p.17).

As a result of escalating social problems and cutbacks to all levels of funding in health, education, justice and social services across the country, families and children are suffering. Although government has recently re-instated some of the funding for basic services and programs (i.e. health care, early intervention programs, child welfare programs), it has had minimal impact. Canada's social safety net, established in government legislation, fails to meet the needs of thousands of children across the country who continue to live in poverty.

Brogan (1991) and Steinhauer (1991) propose that challenging economic conditions for working families may be one of the reasons for the decline in foster parent applicants. It is difficult for wage earners to put in a full day at work, manage a family and home, and assume the additional responsibility of foster children. They imply that reimbursement board rates are so low that many working families may not be able to afford to care for foster children.

Along with social and economic factors, the literature also identifies inadequate agency support as influencing foster parent recruitment and retention rates. Orme, Buehler & Rhodes (1999), and the U. S. National Survey of Current and Former Foster Parents (1993) found several reasons why foster parents discontinued, or planned to discontinue:

> These included perceived agency insensitivity, a lack of say regarding the child's future, lack of adequate day care, lack of adequate respite care, inadequate financial support, poor communication with the caseworker, conflict between foster and biological children, grief over the loss of a foster child, and foster children's behavior problems. (p. 2)

Any or all of the above noted factors may influence foster parent job satisfaction.

Determinants of Job Satisfaction

In a review of job satisfaction literature, Holdaway (1978) concluded: "Overall and variable job satisfaction can both be viewed in terms of discrepancy between ideal and actual states. Research relating facet satisfaction to overall satisfaction is minimal"(p.34). In an attempt to create a clearer distinction between satisfiers and dissatisfiers, Pritchard and Shaw (1978) included the following: External motivators, organization, interaction with others, and internal motivators. Research by Vaughn & Dunn (1972) provided a model for conducting job satisfaction research in organizations, and their findings were reviewed.

Denby, Rindfleisch and Bean (1999) studied a sample of 539 foster parents from the United States Midwest. The factors they felt influenced satisfaction were "feeling competent to handle the children who were placed; wanting to take children who needed loving parents; no regrets about investment in foster children; foster mother's and agency social worker providing information and showing approval for a job well done. . . factors exerting influence on intent to continue to foster include overall satisfaction, readiness to phone social worker . . ." (p. 287).

Foster parents are motivated by many factors probably as numerous and unique as the foster parents themselves. Individuals and couples decide to foster for various reasons and many express a desire to "give of themselves" or "give something back" for one reason or another. Women, in particular, see their role as one of nurturer and caregiver, especially for children, and many individuals identify with the role of parent. Some foster parents choose to give temporary, short term care to infants, while others

prefer adolescents. Burke and Dawson (1987) report:

> Foster parents who care for young children and handicapped children are
> responding to the dependency needs of the young. Those who care for aggressive
> and older children respond to the social needs in the youngster. Some seek
> 'private gratification' while others seek social gratification. (p. 180)

Denby, Rindfleisch and Bean (1999) found parallels between satisfaction and

intent to continue fostering. They reported on data gathered from foster parents that

provided information to support the conclusion that improved foster parent training and

consistent and empathetic support for foster parents from agency staff and other foster

parents, was essential to maintain job satisfaction. Several years earlier, Steinhauer

(1991) advocated that those very same supports were fundamental elements in foster

parent retention.

Denby, Rindfleisch and Bean (1999) and Waldock (1996) recommended training

for foster parents and suggested that they be considered as para-professionals rather than

as subordinates in the child welfare system. Campbell, Whitelaw-Downs (1987)

advocated for the importance of economic incentives to increase job satisfaction among

foster parents.

<u>The Children in Foster Care</u>

Child welfare agencies and Nova Scotia Family and Children's Services

legislation recognize the intrinsic value of the family as the most influential and

appropriate setting for raising children. There is a consensus that the family should

always be the focus of efforts to serve and protect children (Children and Family Services

Act, 1990; Hepworth, 1980; Manual of Procedure for Children in Care, 1998; Manual of

Procedure for Foster Care, 1998; Steinhauer, 1991). The literature suggests that family

supports must be preventative in nature, inclusive, culturally responsive, family focused

and community based.   It is also essential to recognize that ties to biological, extended

and legal family, are crucial to a child's healthy growth and development.

Further to the discussion of family, and community supports that are inclusive and

acknowledge diversity, sexual orientation is a crucial area for gay and lesbian youth in

care, foster parents and social workers. A complex topic encompassing multifaceted

social and developmental areas, only a few will be discussed in this thesis due to the

nature and scope of the work, these include: acceptance, understanding, empowerment,

support, resources, and sensitivity training strategies for youth serving agencies.

Consideration for the child's safety is a priority by Child Welfare agencies,

however a child's social, developmental and cultural necessities should all be valued and

not deprived. Brown (1997) wrote:

> Safe, emotionally supportive housing, with people who accept and affirm gay or
> lesbian orientation was reviewed in the literature as a significant concern for
> lesbian and gay youth. Families, foster families and staff of group homes have
> been raised by the same heterosexist school curricula, myths and stereotypes that
> pervade our lives, and therefore the concern is well-founded (p. 73).

She continued: "The added priority of the young person in care who is gay or lesbian . . .

is for a home environment which also offers affirmation of sexual orientation and safety

to truly be oneself" (p. 74). Wright (1999) agreed, and included workers and other

community resources in her discussion:

> Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth need to have their issues and needs understood by
> frontline workers and other people entrusted with their care. To meet this need
> effectively, workers require support, training and education to examine their own
> attitudes, homophobic beliefs and practices (p. 67).

Specifically:

> Gay, lesbian and bisexual youth need resources within the community which provide equitable services regardless of a youth's sexual orientation . . . This includes access to residential services, foster and adoptive homes, community and medical services, as well as individual and family therapy . . . In addition, these services should be equitable about relevant issues, so that the unique needs of the youth will be met (p. 69).

Phillips, McMillen, Sparks, Ueberle (1997) discuss the theoretical conditions that encourage inclusive standards of casework practice:

> A philosophical groundwork must first be laid that demonstrates the agency's commitment to diversity and to creating a safe and welcoming climate for all clients. Once this philosophical foundation is set, it becomes natural for staff members to learn about, advocate for, and provide services to gay and lesbian youths (p. 396-397).

Mallon (1997) recommends a "collaborative" and "empowerment-based model" for training child welfare professionals, including foster and adoptive parents. Self-identified gay and lesbian youth and openly gay and lesbian caseworkers share experiences and provide education to child welfare staff and foster parents to "generate knowledge", while dispelling myths, pre-conceived ideas and stereotypes.

The above principals, information and philosophies lead to the recognition that effective foster parent recruitment strategies should include individuals from diverse cultural, social, economic and sexual minority groups.

The Manual of Foster Care (1998), Steinhauer (1991) and Ure (1995) all acknowledge that social agencies provide the highest quality of services to families when they are part of an interdisciplinary effort including social services, community members, justice, health and mental health, and education, as well as other public and private enterprises existing within the community.

Multi-Disciplinary Participation

Interagency co-operation appears to have effective results because the very circumstances that bring children into care are those that contribute to their unique physical, emotional, and social health needs. Studies (Hawkins, Meadowcroft, & Luster, 1985; Stein, Evans, Mazumdar, & Rar-Grant, 1996; Steinhauer, 1988; 1991) found that children in foster care exhibited higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses and developmental problems than children not in care. Many authors (Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, Brandt, 1996; Burland,1980; Emmrys,1999; Stein, Evans, Mazumdar, & Rar-Grant,1996) concur that children surviving in impoverished conditions, combined with abuse and neglect, have an environment created for them which has the potential for high risk and comprehensive health care needs. "Children entering out-of home care often are suffering from effects of poor medical care, including lack of preventive pediatric care and adequate treatment of disease"(Blatt & al, 1997, p. 345). This in particular effects those children who are the most medically and emotionally fragile. The developing fetus exposed to HIV infection, or drugs and alcohol, increases the future risk of a child who will subsequently develop health and learning problems. Children who live in unstable home environments, and experience frequent moves in and out of foster care may have developmental delays and exhibit behavior problems. As a result of repeated moves and school disruption these children often experience academic and social difficulties.

Planning for Children's Placement in Foster Care

In high risk instances, where the child has to be removed from the home to ensure his or her safety, efforts are made by child welfare staff to maintain the integrity of the family, and keep in mind the best interests of the child. The biological family is the

principal focus of efforts to ensure that children have a safe environment and are protected from harm. As discussed earlier, options for extended family placements, or placement with individuals who are affiliated with the family and known to the child, are initial avenues of alternative care that are explored prior to placement in foster care.

Palmer (1995) discussed the complexities of out-of-home placements for children in foster care and encouraged maintaining family ties as an inclusive practice in foster care. She argued that it is essential to maintain some connectedness to the biological family in order to nurture the child's identity. Steinhauer (1991) agreed, and stated that contact with biological family is especially important in those circumstances where the foster child may in future return to live with biological family, or for older children who are in long term foster care, and for those children who were adopted late. According to Pasztor and Wynne (1995), the term "family" should include nuclear family, and extended family, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, cousins, members of a band, or clan. Woodley Brown and Bailey-Etta (1997) add social, economic and cultural factors, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity as other influences that define the term "family". Once an agency, or court-ordered decision has been made to remove children and youth from their parents, the child welfare system is obligated to provide the necessary resources to support those children in a more nurturing and safe environment than the one from which they were removed. Abusive and neglectful situations that present high risk factors may precipitate the need for urgent out of home placements for children.

Steinhauer (1991) described emergency-style foster care placements for children in care as ineffective, and stated that they should be prohibited with the exception of the

most severe, high risk conditions where there are no other options available with relatives

or significant others. He indicated, and Brogan (1991) agreed, that child protection

caseworkers often respond to every abused and/or neglected child who requires out of

home placement as an emergency. This is precipitated and perpetuated by the chronic

shortage of staff, time and resources in child protection agencies across the country where

there is little human and fiscal energy left for prevention and planning.

Admissions into foster care that are voluntary, accompanied by parental

cooperation, and those that are court mandated but not emergency, should prepare

children for separation from biological family with a pre-placement visit to the proposed

foster parents. Steinhauer (1991) said that it was essential for children to have an

opportunity to express their pain and displeasure at their separation from parents. He

cautioned that this would inevitably be more difficult for parents, social workers and

possibly foster parents, but would present an opportunity for the child to work through his

or her grief. In the best interest of the child, it is unfair to rush through this component of

separation, loss and grief in order to save the adults some discomfort. Palmer (1995) also

recognized the importance of allowing children to grieve the loss of their biological

parents, and wrote: "Gradual moves, with parental accompaniment place increased strain

on workers, but they give children the time and opportunity to express their pain" (p. 98).

Steinhauer (1991) wrote that foster care should not be considered the final, devastating

effort to ensure the safety and well being of the abused and neglected child, but only one

aspect of a wide range of services offered as the best option for some children. The

Foster Care Manual of Policy and Procedure (1998) describes the foster family as:

The basic resource which makes it possible for the child who cannot remain with

his own parents, whether on a temporary or long term basis, to have the experience of living in a family; to form a relationship with a parent figure; to have opportunities for emotional development and socialization in accordance with the child's culture, race, language, religion; and to have a positive living experience (2.1).

Current Services for Abused and Neglected Children

As discussed in the history, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century children were considered property with no rights distinct from their parents. Over time circumstances changed for children who were given basic rights, and in Nova Scotia the Children and Family Services Act (1990) provided for state intervention to ensure those rights.

Chapter 5 of the Children and Family Services Act (1990) allows for specific provisions in the foster care program, through child welfare agencies. The Act defines "child" as a person under sixteen year of age and "child in care" as a child who is in the care and custody of an agency which assumes all parental rights, duties and responsibilities for the child. The Children and Family Services Act (1990) maintains:

> . . . the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of children and their families include a right to the least invasion of privacy and interference with freedom that is compatible with their own interests and of society's interest in protecting children from abuse and neglect. . . And whereas when it is necessary to remove children from the care and supervision of their parents or guardians, they should be provided for, as nearly as possible as if they were under the care and protection of wise and conscientious parents (p.1).

Child Welfare legislation has evolved to incorporate a more flexible framework for the provision of services to children and families in order to restore and strengthen family functioning.

As of March,1999 there were 1,906 children in care in Nova Scotia. These

children were documented under various sections of the legislation: 1,166 children in care

and custody (927 in care, carried over from the year prior, and 712 to March 1999), 251

children in temporary care or voluntary care, and 16 in care for adoption.

As discussed in the introduction, children were taken into care of the Minister of

the Department of Community Services, and placed with very little consideration given to

the effects of placement on the child, the suitability of the placement, or the needs of the

foster parent. Steinhauer (1988; 1991) argues that the optimal permanency placement

plan should be developed promptly for the child-in-care to prevent long term drifting in

the foster care system without stability. Maluccio, Fein & Olmstead (1986) described

permanency planning as:

> The systematic process of carrying out, within a limited time period, a set of goal-
> directed activities designed to help children and youths live in families that offer
> continuity or relationships with nurturing parents or caretakers and the
> opportunity to establish lifelong relationships (p. 5).

It was not considered unconventional for children to be placed in institutions or foster

homes without contemplating the effects of placement on them. A proponent of

permanency planning Festner (1997) wrote about the importance of government

legislation to fund the "movement known as Permanency Planning" (p. 119). The

ensuing implications of this "revolution", that occurred in the United States in 1980

meant that "agencies now would make it a priority to find each child a permanent living

situation" (p. 119). Out-of-home placements for children were given very little

consideration, and it was as late as the 1930's before the concept of assessing and

approving foster homes was initiated. Steinhauer (1991) wrote:

> ... in view of current funding and the organization of most foster care systems,
> they [social workers and child welfare officials] have little option but to continue

to repeat the wasteful and destructive process set in motion when a seriously disturbed child is placed in a foster family unable to tolerate and successfully deal with him. This change in the nature of the children coming into foster care has led to considerable role diffusion and confusion in the minds of many foster parents . . . . Until the change in their role is fully appreciated . . . Foster parents will continue to go without the recognition, remuneration, training, support, and /or the professional back-up they need. This situation has major implications for foster-parent recruitment, development, morale, and retention (p. 185-188).

Many authors (Children and Family Services Act, 1990; Manual of Procedure for Children in Care, 1998; Manual of Procedure for Foster Care, 1998; Steinhauer, 1991) argue that agency policies and programs should reflect the belief that all children, regardless of age, gender, emotional and intellectual ability, health or disabling condition are entitled to a permanent family. They also contend, and Delaney (1997) agrees that children should have the opportunity to develop enduring relationships with parents and caretakers and the opportunity to nurture lifelong relationships. No child should be fearful that there will be no one to love and care for him or her next week or next month. Attachment, separation and loss issues have serious consequences for children who are abused and neglected (Hughes, 1999) and subsequently removed from biological parents. Very few children in care are given the opportunity to grieve the intense loss of their parents and siblings.

According to Kadushin (1967), psychological problems and mental health issues may surface for a child who does not have an opportunity to grieve. Feelings may be present in the conscious or unconscious and are summarized by Kadushin into six categories:

1. Feelings of rejection which engender feelings of worthlessness.
2. Guilt which leads the child to feel he or she has contributed to breaking up the home
3. Hostility which reinforces the guilt, because hostile feelings, particularly

against one's own parents, are a punishable offence.

4. Fear of abandonment.
5. Fear of the unknown.
6. Shame (p.385).

These feelings may present themselves in the child who is angry, withdrawn, aggressive, deliberately sabotaging placements, moving from foster home to foster home, unable to form lifelong attachments. More current authors and therapists working with children (Hughes, 1997; Humphreys, 2000; Steinhauer, 1991) agree with Kadushin and report that children who have been separated from parents will frequently sustain an initial emotional distance from foster parents. They are likely to be confused about family commitment, fearful of rejection, and indignant about the loss of control over their lives.

Often, it is the most vulnerable and disturbed children who experience frequent placement breakdowns and multiple moves. According to Palmer (1995) who researched statistics from several studies on the number of placements endured by children in care, one of the major problems facing children in care is placement breakdown. The Ontario Crown Ward Administrative Review (1991) reported similar findings in a study that included statistics for the entire population of children in permanent care, in the province of Ontario. The researchers concluded that the foster child averaged three moves over a five year period. The authors compared other reports which had been completed prior to theirs, and indicated that some subgroups of children in care experienced four or more moves. Delaney (1998) advocated for continuity of care, while considering the most prudent option to be the maintenance of the child's best interests and long term attachment to a significant other:

We need to treat the long-term foster family to whom the child has a significant

tie, at the same level as the birth family. We should not remove the child unless his/her safety and well-being are at stake. . . We must keep in mind the principles of continuity of care, attachments, and psychological parenthood. Further, the least detrimental alternative may be to keep the child in the less than perfect family . . . (p. 9)

Subsequent disruption in the life of a child who has been separated from biological family because of abuse and or neglect has serious consequences. Children may have difficulty forming relationships and may demonstrate behaviors and emotional problems. According to Humphreys (2000) some children are entering foster care at an emotional age much younger than their chronological age, for example an eight year old child may only have the emotional development of a three year old. She determined that these older children require the nurturing that they did not have as infants to enable their healthy development.

As discussed previously, maintaining ties to biological family members, whenever and wherever possible, is essential for children in care, in particular for older children, and foster parents should be encouraged to support this association. Where it is in the best interest of the child, visits with biological family are integral to the child's long term case plan. The access plan should be detailed and include expected parental behaviors during the visits. Palmer (1995) suggested that "Parental and wider family links, however unsuitable they may seem on other grounds, may be the only enduring relationship the child enjoys" (p. 84).

Children's past painful experiences should be dealt with as part of a healthy healing process. Professionals who work with children in care maintain that it is important for children to talk about past experiences, to heal traumas that should not be

repressed, in order that they may not develop into problems later in life (Hughes, 1997).

Foster parents need education and support to understand and deal with the repercussions

of separation, loss, and unresolved pain, and develop the skills to help children deal with

past traumas.

Foster parents should anticipate that a child who has suffered abuse and neglect

will have difficulty attaching him/herself to new caregivers (Hughes, 1994; Humphries

2000; Steinhauer, 1991). These children should be encouraged to gradually move into

new relationships, at their own pace and time frame. Palmer (1995) anticipates that as

foster parents move toward a more paraprofessional role "they are likely to be less

competitive with children's families, and more willing to include those families in their

children's lives" (p. 92).

Traditionally, foster parents may have expected that the foster family would

replace the child's family of origin by providing a loving, nurturing environment for the

abused or neglected child. The problem with this approach is that attachments to

biological families are strong, and it is traumatic for the child when those ties are severed.

Palmer (1995) cited several studies that found more than 30 % of the foster mothers

studied rejected fostering as the defining role, while more than 50 % of foster caregivers

regarded the children "as their own" and over 50 % felt that biological parents should not

be encouraged to visit their children in care. Steinhauer (1991) found that many foster

mothers "acknowledge a need to be loved and appreciated by their foster children"

(p.160). Holman (1975) agreed, and added: "Social worker visits, parental contact, or

children's questions about their other lives represent a threat, because they contradict the

accepted view in the home, i.e., that the child is part of the foster family" (p. 82). This

emphasis on the present denies the importance of the child's past, making it more difficult for the child to integrate the two.

Foster parents need to be educated about attachment issues and the importance of supporting a child's affection for and identity with his or her own parents. The literature (Palmer, 1995; Pasztor and Wynn, 1995) relates the importance of encouraging and enhancing family ties wherever and whenever possible. There are times, however, when patterns of abuse are intentionally and unintentionally perpetuated by parents during access visits, and the child is re-traumatized. In these instances familial contacts are detrimental to the child and should be discontinued. Foster parents can play a key role in assessing the effects of access, and in facilitating the maintenance of family ties for children in care.

<center>Factors That Influence Satisfaction</center>

Expectations of Foster Parents

Defined in chapter 1, a "foster parent" is specified as a substitute caregiver for a foster child, and approved by an agency pursuant to the Children and Family Services Act (1990). Foster families in Nova Scotia may consist of two parent families, single parent families and either may include extended family members. In Section 2 of the Foster Care Manual (1998) the foster family is considered to be:

> the basic resource which makes it possible for the child who cannot remain with his own parents . . . to have the experience of living in a family; to form a relationship with a parent figure, to have opportunities for emotional development and socialization in accordance with the child's culture, race, language, religion; and to have a positive living experience (2.1).

The expectation is that the foster parent will provide:

> a warm, accepting family with skills of understanding, patience and endurance. . .

should be mature and have the ability to establish stable relationships. They should give a sense of flexibility, adaptability and consistency in their expectations, attitudes and behavior in relation to the needs and problems of children; have the ability to access and be open to using resources needed to meet problems of family living; having emotional stability; be able to function adequately in relation to family responsibilities (2.1).

Families who provide foster care should be prepared to protect and nurture infants, children and youths; meet social, emotional and medical needs resulting from physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment and possible exposure to alcohol or drugs. Some may be asked to care for children with HIV infection. Agencies anticipate that foster parents will improve the foster child's self esteem, cultivate his or her cultural and ethnic identity, socialize the child and advocate for the most appropriate educational opportunities. Foster parents share with social workers and other professionals the job of rehabilitating traumatized children, but sometimes need help, as clients, to cope with the demands of the fostering role. The expectation placed on foster parents' performance is high, especially for average Nova Scotians who often apply to foster simply because they want to provide a loving home for abused and neglected children (Brogan, 1991), and have given little thought to the complexities of the child welfare system, or the high emotional and psychological needs of children entering care.

Raising healthy, well adjusted children is in and of itself a challenge, but for children in care who have been abused and or neglected, the responsibilities are even more demanding. Morton (1990) wrote: "A child's normal development in foster care should not be an automatic assumption, nor should it be assumed that foster families will naturally respond to these needs"(p. 2).

<u>Role Ambiguity</u>

Eastman (1979) views the foster family as a social system and presented the many

factors that may cause disruption and anxiety to the family unit. She described the foster

family as an "open system" one that welcomes non-related children and agency

personnel. Children in care enter the foster home for an undetermined length of time and

the foster family is expected as well, to open itself to social workers and on occasion, the

child's natural parents. "The ambiguity that results from too much openness may be a

major cause of foster home dissatisfaction and dissolution " (p. 565). Eastman suggests

that norms, roles and identity are often indeterminate, especially for the new foster parent:

> The problem is most aggravated by the early stages of foster parenting, when
> foster parents are asked to fulfill a role that not only is new to them but is ill
> defined. This vague system identity can only add to the stress and breakdown of
> early placements of foster children that the literature characterizes as common. (p.
> 567)

Lewis (1978) and Waldock's (1996) views are compatible with those of Eastman's.

Waldock presents a convincing argument for the professionalization of foster care as a

way to alleviate role ambiguity, stating that this would relieve some of the existing role

confusion, and clarify the description of foster parents as professionals, rather than that of

"parent", "volunteer", or "professional" as they are currently known in the system.

Waldock suggested the pressure to increase professionalization of foster parents

originated with the current political and social philosophy of de-institutionalization for

foster children as a way of meeting their complex, physical, emotional and psychological

needs.

Burland (1980) believes that children are entering care at a developmental

disadvantage and that "their ability to cope is limited, their needs are huge, their capacity

to evoke the kinds of responses they need are poor, and their capacity to provoke

rejection is great" (p. 51). Well meaning foster parents often have very little experience,

training or information about the circumstances of children coming into care from

abusive and neglectful families. Burland warns that foster parents, more often than not,

expect loving, responsive, appreciative and obedient children. In the current child

welfare system both the children in care, and their foster parents are set up for failure.

In the move toward the professionalization of foster parents both Steinhauer

(1991) and Waldock (1996) recommend that training for foster parents include: education

about child welfare principles, such as the integrity of the family, the importance of

reunification of children with biological parents and early permanency planning for

children in care.

Delaney (1997) explained that it is difficult for foster parents who altruistically

open their families, homes and lives to children only to find they are casualties of the

child's severe emotional and behavioral problems. For some children, the residual effects

of chronic abuse and neglect are demonstrated by violent and aggressive behaviors

toward foster parents.

> In the case of chronic maltreatment, the child is raised in a nest of thorns.
> Growing up in the thorny, hostile home life, the child expects the worst from
> caregivers. His or her negative expectations may continue long after the child has
> been removed from the source of maltreatment. Even in the protective, loving
> foster or adoptive family, the child's suspicion, anger and anxiety about past
> caregivers, persist (p. 1).

Since foster care is the closest to a natural home environment for children, and the most

cost-efficient, it will likely remain the fundamental resource for out-of-home placements

for the majority of foster children.

Addressing the concern that professionalization of foster parents will undermine the nurturing and caring component of fostering children, Waldock (1996) asks the reader to give foster parents the credit to have more "common sense than to treat children as clients in their own home" (p.122). He recommended foster parents be considered as staff of the child protection agencies that employ them and suggested that the alternative to non-professionalization would be persistent "crisis" within the foster care system.

Paul Steinhauer (1988) wrote about the conditions which were necessary to recruit, train and retain 'professional foster parents':

1. We must start treating them - and paying them - as professionals; and stop talking down to them and patronizing them.
2. We must search the community for couples prepared to commit themselves to the program of training and supervision.
3. We must make it clear that the child they are about to foster will present unusual difficulties for them and their families and that both will need to participate in the program.
4. The agency must provide regular supervision by topnotch supervisors who have adequate consultation and backup services, and caseloads will be reduced. (p. 17)

Job Stress and Job Satisfaction

Friesen (1986) investigated the relationship between stress and job satisfaction to burnout. He examined data gained from a survey of 190 principals, vice principals and teachers, and reported that burnout may be more closely related to job satisfaction than to job stress. He concluded that "job satisfaction of one sort or another is a primary predictor of all three dimensions [Satisfaction, Status and Recognition] of burnout" (p. 12). Friesen's study would indicate that individuals who are dissatisfied are often vulnerable to burnout.

<u>Relationship with Agency</u>

A foster parent's relationship with the agency may be significant in terms of the level of trust the foster parent has in the agency. In a study designed to address the shortage of foster homes Campbell and Whitelaw-Downs (1987) examined three categories related to fostering: Board rates; the amount of available time individuals could offer for care, and problems with the agency. The authors found narrow support for their assumption that there is a direct relation between level of board rate and the supply of foster homes. They found foster parent satisfaction somewhat responsive to economic incentives, and concluded that people who do not consider the level of board rate to be adequate compensation, do not become licensed foster parents. The authors suggested that increased board rates would attract more new families to the program. They demonstrated a direct correlation between those foster parents who had more time available for fostering and the number of foster children presently in the home. Lastly, the foster parent's responses to the category that related to problems with agency demonstrated clearly that absence of problems with the agency is related to having more foster children in the home, and that a foster family would have any foster children at all. The authors concluded that a perceived poor relationship with the agency limits the amount of fostering a family performs.

<u>Support Provided to Foster Parents</u>

Steinhauer (1991) devoted three chapters to various aspects of the foster care service delivery system. He provided a history of adoption and foster care, explored the family court system, the quality of foster care, and examined the relationship between children in care, biological parents, foster parents and child welfare agencies. He

elaborated on the complex problems children in care are experiencing, the pressures on

agencies attempting to provide adequate levels of support with shrinking resources, and

the effects on foster parents:

> The chronic and, recently, increasingly acute shortage of adequate experienced
> foster homes . . . has led, far too often, to many excellent foster homes being
> abused by being treated as if they had inexhaustible resources. Too little care is
> taken to avoid overloading them . . . Foster families far too often receive
> inadequate training and insufficient supervision and back-up, and there is too little
> concern about the effects on them of fostering too many disturbed children (pp
> 187-188).

Many authors, (Block, 1981; Brogan, 1991; Erickson, 1971) agreed that the foster

parent's primary role was to influence the child, and the caseworker's role was to offer

support, supervise the placement, and strengthen the foster family's ability to understand

and help the child. The Foster Care Re-Design Program and the Federation of Foster

Families of Nova Scotia promotes foster parent training as an effective way to increase

knowledge, skills and abilities.

Foster Parent Training

Potential foster care applicants are expected to participate in a six-session Foster

Parent Orientation Program prior to approval as a regular foster home, and/or to

receiving a placement. As of September 2000, all foster parents must complete the Basic

Mandatory Core Training, which includes: Non-Violent Crisis Intervention, and

Sensitivity Training, First Aid and CPR within their first two years of involvement in the

foster care program. Jacobs (1980) recommended the implementation of a learning

model to enhance the current training trends:

> A key concept regarding adult learning is that the learner must be viewed as a full
> partner in the educational experience. . . . Interplay and balance between subject
> matter and the learner's needs are stressed. Experience is viewed as the

connecting factor between learner and the curriculum" (p. 619).

Gordon & Davidson (1981) agree with Jacob's behavioral approach to parent training.

Ure (1995) suggested that an inclusive "continuum of care" be available to all children entering foster care, and that the type of placement for a foster child be dependent on the needs of the foster child. He proposed that the Parent Counsellor Program be one of 19 placement options and services accessible to foster children. This program was initially implemented by the Halifax Children's Aid Society, and is now available in every geographic region of the province that provides specialized training for foster parents working with troubled teenagers. These particular foster parents participate in ongoing training and regular meetings with social workers and therapists. The Parent Counsellor Program in Nova Scotia provides specialized care for troubled children and adolescents at risk of multiple and/or institutional placements. Although this is an excellent program that provides intensive services for children, it is not without disadvantages. Parent counsellor homes are eliminated from their local agency listings and are therefore unavailable for regular and ongoing placements of children in care.

Parent counsellors and regular foster parents interested in fostering children with special needs, are expected to participate in specialized training. Behavior modification strategies used with children who have severe behavior problems due to a cognitive delay, require enormous time and effort on the part of caregivers. According to Steinhauer (1991) an entire team should participate in specialized training for caregivers and social workers, and may include foster parents, natural parents, trainers, mental health professionals, educators and social workers.

Specialized training for foster parents may be a viable alternative to institutional

care for children with special needs. Hawkins, Meadowcroft, Trout and Luster (1985) proposed that the child welfare field had underestimated the potential of specialized foster care:

> Specialized foster care is an intervention that differs from traditional foster care in at least four ways: (a) specialized foster parents are usually more carefully selected; (b) they are typically given some education or training on at least a preservice basis, and often on an inservice basis as well; (c) they are given more supervision and assistance; and (d) they are paid more (p. 221).

Many non-institutional treatment based programs advocate for an emphasis on the "professional" parent as the main "agent of treatment." Sanchirico and Jablonka (2000) agree that "specialized training and ongoing support should be considered necessary and complementary components of every agency's foster care program" (p. 2000).

Any review of training for foster parents should include strategies for encouraging positive behavior. Harsh or humiliating consequences are prohibited in any foster care environment and caregivers should be trained to learn how to use alternate methods of child management: "Foster care competency is being upgraded, as more foster carers are being trained in behavior management skills, thus increasing their ability to accept and cope with difficult children" (Palmer 1995, p. 92).

The degree to which foster parents are committed to any type of training program may be proportionate to the permanency plan for the foster child. Some foster parents may be more comfortable making a commitment to a child who will live with them long-term. When plans for training are discussed and implemented, it is important to keep in mind the 24 hour a day commitment foster parents make to foster children, and the sense of isolation that often accompanies the role of foster parent. Jacobs (1980) found:

> A sense of isolation and powerlessness often permeates their lives as foster

parents. Although all adults may experience these feelings, foster parents, by the nature of their jobs, are particularly vulnerable. Inconsistent and ineffective worker-foster parent relationships, minimal contact with other foster parents, a general lack of support, and unrealistic expectations of foster parents by agency personnel all contribute. (p. 617)

Unlike the child care counselor in a residential treatment program, the foster parent does not receive regular and professional supervision, does not have day-to-day peer relations, and cannot leave after 8 hours to rest and distance her/himself from the frustrations of the job.

The Report of Review of Foster Care in Ontario (Darnell, 1987) advocated for increased professionalization and compensation to adequately cover expenditures, time, training and competency of foster parents. The report quotes a foster parent who explains "Foster parents are in the dark about compensation. . . . You would not take a job you didn't know the salary and the benefits. Foster parents are asked to do just that" (p. 13).

Payments Made to Foster Parents

Conforming to the Department of Community Services, Family and Children's Services Child Welfare Policy Number 94, and effective November 1, 1999 the following rates were paid to foster parents in Nova Scotia:

Reimbursable Guidelines for Foster Parents

	Age	Rate per Diem
Board Rate	0-9 yrs	$13.77 per day
	10+	$20.02 per day
Clothing Allowance	0- 4 yrs	$471.00 yearly
	5- 9	$777.00 yearly
	10+	$1,088.00 yearly

The policy also includes guidelines for submitting for the following expenditures: Dental, prescriptions, camps, club memberships, child care, diapers and infant formula, driver's education, driver's license and insurance, equipment, furniture and bedding, corrective lenses, hair care, independent living, medical equipment, non-prescription medication orthodontics, school activities, telephone calls, post secondary education, vacation costs, transportation and recreation costs, spending allowance, school supplies, Christmas allowance and special occasion costs (Policy No. 94).

These rates have increased minimally over the past ten years. Brogan (1991) reported the board rates for children up to 10 years old were $10.06 per day and for those over 10 were $15.00. In nine years there have been increases of $3.71 and $5.02 respectively. Estimating a conservative eight hour work day Brogan calculated foster parents' earnings at $1.25/hour for children under 10 years, and $1.88/hour for children over 10 years old. The reality is that foster parenting is not an eight hour a day job, it is a twenty-four hour a day commitment.

As discussed earlier the traditional family were those most often approved as foster homes, where the caregiving for family members was delegated to women. Macintyre (1993) concluded that low economic reimbursement for caring for children is gender related, and perpetuated by a patriarchal society:

> Wives and children in the traditional family, then, are conceptualized as economic dependants of the man who is husband and father. The caring work that wives perform in the home for their family members tends to be unrecognized and unrewarded; neither is it seen as having any economic value. . . Women in traditional families are viewed as social subordinates to the adult men in the family by virtue of their gender and their work; they are defined in relation to the work they perform for other family members (p.15).

Economic incentives are important factors in satisfaction, ". . . caregivers in the home must receive an adequate wage and that the inadequate wages now paid to such caregivers as foster mothers . . . be increased " (Wharf, 1993). Foster parents should be paid more than basic maintenance rates for foster children, not only because they are often footing the bill for many extra expenses for children in their care, but also because the rates should accurately reflect the move toward professionalization (Brogan, 1991; Denby, Findfleisch, & Bean, 1999; Hepworth, 1977, Pasztor & Wynne, 1995; Waldock, 1996). For many years, authorities in the field of foster care have been advocating for remunerations to foster parents that more accurately reflect the work they do. In 1977 Hepworth wrote:

> Not only do foster homes seem to be a resource we can ill afford to lose, but they also seem to be called upon to perform an increasingly difficult and specialized tasks, for which payment is appropriate and necessary (p. 13).

Conclusion

In the next few years, foster parents across the province of Nova Scotia will have increased opportunities for training, advancement, monetary compensation and additional challenges. In conjunction with mandatory training there will be specialized training programs offered to meet the unique needs of many foster children. Those who take advantage of this opportunity will acquire the skills needed to meet developmental needs of the children and ultimately become eligible for increased board rates. Foster parents will have additional programs and services available to them, and can expect to have opportunities in the future for growth and professional development.

Together, foster parents and social workers share tasks that are essential for the

healthy development of children in care. The provision of co-ordinated services for foster

children is becoming a valued aspect of practice where foster parents and social workers

cooperate in case planning and assessments to determine the strengths and needs of the

child or youth in care. Both may provide support for the transition into care, including

support to biological families, if appropriate.

According to Steinhauer (1991), it is good practice for social workers and foster

parents to work together to provide a culturally sensitive environment for the child-in-

care. As well, foster parents should be enlisted to assist with the development of the

child's cultural and ethnic identity. Foster parents and social workers may, where

appropriate facilitate visits between the child in care and his or her family members.

Each may keep up-to-date records of the child's progress in care and share this

information with other team members. Both should be willing to support the transition of

the child from foster care to relatives, to a treatment centre or to independent living.

The literature on individual differences in job satisfaction in general (Schneider,

Gunnarson and Wheeler, 1992; Transberg, Slane and Ekeberg, 1992) and foster parent

job satisfaction in particular (Pasztor and Wynne, 1995) would suggest that improved

opportunities may increase job satisfaction levels for some foster parents. However,

Cranny, Smith and Stone (1992) caution that trust in management is highly correlated to

acceptance of job changes. Their research revealed that there was a high correlation

between a trust in management, and an acceptance of job changes. Tranberg, Slane and

Ekeberg (1992) reported that high trust scores were also affiliated with significant rates of

job satisfaction.

Crisis in the foster care system in Nova Scotia is defined by shrinking numbers of

individuals applying to foster, chronic shortage of appropriate placements for children, increased pressures on foster parents, and indiscriminate placement of high risk children in foster homes ill prepared to deal with the challenges these children present.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Methodology refers to the principles and assumptions that formulate the

foundation for any particular, or combination of approaches used in research. Neuman

(2000) introduced various approaches to research, two of these will be discussed as they

were significant in this research. Eclectic in nature, this thesis combines the positivist and

interpretive strategies described by Neuman, and are characterized in the following ways:

"Positive researchers prefer precise quantitative data and often use experiments,

surveys, and statistics. They seek rigorous, exact measures and 'objective' research" (p.

66). Quantitative data were collected on the initial questionnaire. Secondly, the goal of

interpretive research is "to learn what is meaningful or relevant to the people being

studied, or how individuals experience daily life" (p. 71). I wanted to determine what is

meaningful and relevant to foster parents in Nova Scotia, and those factors that contribute

to satisfaction.

Qualitative and quantitative designs were used in this study with data provided

from multiple sources. The design of the foster parent questionnaire was both

quantitative and qualitative in nature. Referring to numbers and details of specific

information, quantitative is statistical and numerical. More flexible in nature, many of

the characteristics of qualitative methods are unlike quantitative. Eisner (1998) described

the difference in this way: "unlike the experiment that demonstrates relations of cause and

effect or correlations that statistically describe the strength of association, qualitative

studies typically employ multiple forms of evidence, and they persuade by reason" (p.

39).

Meltzoff (1999) contended that the purpose of qualitative research "is to describe

a group or phenomenon" (p. 282). "Qualitative data consist of direct quotations from

people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Bogdan and Bilkin ,

1998, p. 67). Mirriam (1998) agrees, and Neuman (2000) elaborates by stating that

qualitative researchers "use a wider variety of techniques to measure and create new

measures while collecting data", furthermore, that "measurement for qualitative

researchers occurs in the data collection process, and only a little occurs in a separate,

planning stage prior to data gathering". He also indicated that qualitative data is more

often presented in words and other descriptors, and researchers do not usually "convert all

observation into a single, common medium such as numbers". Finally, he explained that

qualitative researchers "reflect on ideas before data collection, but they develop many, if

not most, of their concepts during data collection activities" (p. 157-158).

While qualitative is descriptive, quantitative research typically generates data into

numbers, and is "designed to describe the characteristics of objects, subclasses of people

or living things, or natural or contrived events or phenomena" (Meltzoff, 1999, p. 84).

Neuman (2000) described qualitative research, specific to the use of surveys in the

following way:

> The survey researcher asks people questions in a written questionnaire (mailed or
> handed to people) or during an interview, then records answers. He or she
> manipulates no situation or condition; people simply answer the questions. In
> *survey research,* the researcher asks many people numerous questions in a short
> time period. He or she typically summarizes answers to questions in percentages,
> tables, or graphs. Surveys give the researcher a picture of what many people
> think or report doing. (p. 34)

Incorporating both of these methods, I attempted to explore the characteristics, meaning

of events and interactions of foster parents with foster children, agencies and the

community. Neuman (2000) described the differences and similarities in this way:

> Qualitative and quantitative research differ in many ways, but they complement each other in many ways as well. All social researchers systematically collect and analyze empirical data and carefully examine the patterns in them to understand and explain social life. (p. 122)

The literature presented on job satisfaction relates to the feelings an individual has about his or her experience of work related activity. The quantitative and qualitative nature of the foster care questionnaire accumulated data that was both statistical and descriptive in nature. Adopting this eclectic design facilitated inclusiveness of the entire population of foster parents across the province, notwithstanding experience, abilities and length of time fostering. Using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data, this research explored the experiences of foster parents throughout Nova Scotia. Understanding the feelings, experiences and thoughts of as many foster parents as possible, and reporting it accurately, was an important element of this research.

Evaluating Job Satisfaction

Within the overall assessment of job satisfaction, factors that contribute to satisfaction were examined. These include recruitment and retention, foster parent stress and burnout, relationship with the agency, and given the complex needs of foster children, the challenges that they present to foster parents.

To evaluate job satisfaction among foster parents, it was essential to review the literature relating to satisfaction, and examine the meaning of job satisfaction in relation to attitude. Miller (1991) equates the measurement of job satisfaction to measuring social life feelings and presents a detailed scale of items which have been considered in the development of the research questionnaire for foster parents. They include: pride in

performance, involvement, financial and job status.

Kottkamp's (1990) conceptual framework on attitudes was applied for the purpose of evaluating foster parents' attitudes about job satisfaction. Many of the concepts and instrumentation used for his study of job satisfaction in education were derived directly from industrial and organizational psychology. Items such as relationships, organizational factors, role ambiguity, trust and participation in decision making were explored by Kottkamp and determined to affect job satisfaction. These items were also investigated with foster parents in this research, and they were asked to identify and discuss the following: Reasons why foster parents discontinue, their relationships with the children they foster, their relationship with the agency or department for whom they work, the organizational structure of the agency or department, communication with agency staff, allegations of abuse, training, monetary compensation, foster parent associations and services for foster parents and children. Foster parents were asked if they were satisfied with the current foster care system, and if their experiences as foster parents were satisfying, they were also asked to identify areas that could increase job satisfaction for foster parents. The concepts discussed above were asked specifically on the questionnaire (Appendix A), or in the follow-up questionnaire (Appendix B). They were measured separately in the data analysis and are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The research attempted to understand the experiences of foster parents throughout the province. Therefore, quotations from both the questionnaires and the follow-up interviews are included in the analysis. Bogdan and Biklin (1998) perceive qualitative research as descriptive and wrote: "data collected take the form of words or pictures

rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentations" (p. 5). Careful and painstaking consideration were given to the instruments employed to gather this data. A description of these instruments is presented in the next section.

<u>Instruments</u>

Various questionnaire formats were reviewed (Brogan, 1991; Fostering in Nova Scotia, 1992; Holdaway, 1978) to determine if an existing model could be used in this research. None were applicable because they did not entirely address the issues arising from the literature review. I developed the foster parent questionnaire used in this thesis with input and comments from staff of the child welfare program, foster care re-design and federation of foster families. Specific characteristics of each question that make up the questionnaire were considered. The demographic information section was developed first. Then, I examined literature on various aspects of writing reliable questionnaires. Alreck and Settle (1995) describe the following characteristics as the basic attributes of questions·

1. Focus; every questionnaire should focus on a single, specific issue or topic.
2. Brevity; the longer the questions, the more difficult the response task will be, shorter questions are less subject to error .
3. Clarity; the question must be completely clear, virtually everyone should interpret the question the same.
4. Vocabulary; use simple, familiar words, avoid jargon.
5. Grammar; arrange sentences that are grammatically correct and easy to read (p.88-90).

Consideration was also given to the abstract nature of the variables to be evaluated, for example; job satisfaction and determination to continue fostering. Pinsof (1981) cautions that highly abstract variables are subject to unintentional multi-

dimensionality - a situation in which a variable may contain a number of unspecified sub-variables that must be theoretically and methodologically "untangled" and differentiated. He suggested that researchers address this problem by having a clear concept of the variable or construct to be studied. He also stressed the importance of the use of nominal scales to measure behavior. Both of these factors are related to validity and feasibility of research, therefore I specifically asked questions regarding satisfaction such as: Would you describe your experience with fostering children as? (answers ranged from "not satisfied", to "very satisfied") How satisfied are you with the current foster care services offered in your area? (answers ranged from "not satisfied" to "very satisfied"). Factors identified in the literature as contributing to job satisfaction and discussed earlier in the chapter under the heading "Evaluating Job Satisfaction", were also included to address the concerns noted by Pinsof.

Three types of questionnaires were used to collect both the quantitative and quantitative data from foster parents, and foster care workers across the province. The language used in the questionnaires was plain and free from jargon, and sentence structure was as specific as possible. The following questionnaires were used:

1. Job Satisfaction questionnaires (appendix A). A total of 907 questionnaires were mailed to regular foster parents (553) and foster parents who discontinued (354). Of those, 343 (37.81%) questionnaires were returned. Two questionnaires were discarded as they were returned incomplete and the remaining 341 were used in the data analysis.

2. Interviews to complete the follow-up questionnaire with participants were made via telephone contact (appendix B). There was a section on the initial foster

parent questionnaire to write name, address and phone number if the respondent

was willing to answer additional questions. Due to time constraints and

geographical distance across the province, a maximum of 18 foster parents were

interviewed. The answers to those follow-up questions were documented by the

researcher, using quotation marks for those words that were direct quotes from the

foster parents. For general responses, paraphrasing was used to confirm or clarify

meaning, and for direct quotes, words and sentences were repeated back to the

interviewee.

3.   Interviews with 4 foster care workers, from different regions of the province were

completed via the telephone or email. The same method of clarification and

documentation used with the foster parent interviews was used with the foster care

workers.

Triangulation (information from three sources) was used to accumulate the data: the

original questionnaire to foster parents, a follow up questionnaire to foster parents, and

questionnaire to foster care workers. Careful attention was given to the assessment tools

to ensure that they would measure job satisfaction and the factors that contribute to

satisfaction.

Validity and Reliability

Validity is "the over-all concept used to refer to how good an answer the study

yields" (Simon, 1969, p. 24). Jackson (1988) was even more concise in his definition:

"The validity of a measurement refers to the extent to which a measure reflects the

concept, reflecting nothing more or less than that implied by the conceptual definition".

In the next paragraph he adds: "Reliability refers to the extent to which, on repeated

measures, an indicator will yield similar readings" (p. 8).

Face and content validity may be assessed by obtaining feedback from individuals who are knowledgeable in the subject area to be researched. A draft of the questionnaire was forwarded to the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia, the Foster Care Re-Design Program, and faculty advisors for comments, recommendations and input. For the same reasons, a pilot of the questionnaire was also administered to a selected number of child welfare staff in the northern region of Nova Scotia. They were asked to complete the pilot questionnaire from the perspective of a foster parent, to time themselves, and to be very critical of the format, grammar, wording, clarity, and sentence structure. Those individuals who completed the survey offered helpful written suggestions, and indicated that it took them between 25 to 35 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire was constructed after several revisions, and re-evaluated based on the feed-back from pilot participants, prior to its distribution to foster parents across the province. The questionnaire was re-evaluated and modified a third time to reflect input from various sources.

Pinsof (1981) identified the pitfalls of the use of various measurements and discussed the risk of increased validity at the expense of decreased reliability, and recommends keeping a balance between the two. He cautioned the researcher to be aware that regardless of the type of scale ultimately used, the specificity of the scale is probably the most critical determinant of its validity and usefulness. For this reason the "Likert" scale was chosen as the most effective for the purpose of this research. Alreck and Settle (1995) recommended the use of Likert scales when examining an individuals' position on certain issues or conclusions. They endorse the use of the Likert scale as an effective way

to measure people's opinion or attitude. They state: "Likert scaling is very popular with researchers because of the power and simplicity of the format" (p. 111).

In an attempt to clarify the ambiguity of the term "job satisfaction", I have broken it down into two subcategories; external, and internal rewards. In a comparison of published measures of satisfaction, Pritchard and Shaw (1978) developed an extensive list of 107 rewards with various categories and subcategories, from which I selected several considered relevant to this research. They include:

1.   General Organization: Relationship with agency.
2.   Intrinsic Rewards: Meaningfulness of work.
3.   Working Conditions: Availability of resources to do job well, physical demands of work, mental demands.
4.   Extrinsic Rewards: Pay and community status.

These were the categories used to develop sub-sections of the questionnaire. Throughout the time that I was developing the questionnaire, I remained aware of the individuals who would be asked to complete the forms, and that the intent of the research was to assess satisfaction.

<u>Participants</u>

The over-all goal of the thesis was to produce an intimate view of foster parents' experiences, therefore the criteria for selecting participants was examined. With support from the Foster Care Re-Design Program and the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia, surveys were sent to the entire population of foster parents in the province. The returned questionnaires were separated into those identifying that they wanted follow up contact and those who did not. The ones who requested follow-up were subdivided into two categories of foster parents; those who were still fostering, and those who had discontinued fostering. They were again subdivided into the four regions of the province.

Twenty-five random samples were selected from the 341 returned questionnaires, several from each region. The follow-up surveys were administered to foster parents chosen from the twenty-five samples, and included those who were fostering and those who had discontinued fostering.

The Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia supported this research by providing a mailing list of regular and discontinued foster parents, clerical support and mail outs. They also accepted responsibility to ensure the security and confidentiality of returned questionnaires until they were required for data analysis.

Data were collected from 37.59% of the total number of questionnaires, telephone interviews with 4 foster care workers, and 18 follow up telephone interviews with foster parents.

Procedure

In phase I of the research goals, objectives, tasks and time frames were developed and outlined in a 12 month calendar. Tasks required and time frames for completion of each component of the research was articulated.

Initially, a detailed letter (appendix D) was mailed to the foster parents and to discontinued foster parents, including an explanation about the research, who was conducting it, and stated that their responses would be confidential.

Approximately one month later, a non-identifying questionnaire was mailed to 907 foster parents with a cover letter (appendix E) attached. A return, self-addressed, stamped envelope for completed questionnaires was also included. The return address for completed questionnaires was that of the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia. Foster parents were advised that completed questionnaires would be secured in a locked

file cabinet until the data was used for analysis, and that a summary of the final report

would be made available to them by contacting the Federation of Foster Families of Nova

Scotia.

The follow-up questionnaires were administered via telephone interviews, and

arranged with survey respondents who expressed an interest, on the last section of the

original questionnaire. As discussed in more detail earlier, 25 of the foster parent's

completed original questionnaires were randomly chosen for the follow-up telephone

questionnaire, 18 of those foster parents were successfully contacted by telephone to

participate in the research. Two telephone numbers were either changed to unlisted, or no

longer in service. One foster parent changed her mind and decided not to participate in

the follow- up interview, while another was dealing with a family illness and did not have

time to participate. I attempted to contact 3 others several times without success.

The foster parents who participated were advised that the information they were

providing was confidential, that no names would be used in data presentation, and the

information he or she felt was especially significant would be quoted in the report. Foster

parents were asked four open-ended questions on the follow up questionnaire. As the

participant answered the questions, I paraphrased what he or she said to confirm that my

interpretation was the message he or she wanted to convey. As each question was

answered by the foster parent, I wrote down as much as I could to get the general idea of

the statement the participant communicating to me. I then paraphrased my interpretation

of the answer to the foster parent, so he or she could confirm my understanding, or

correct misinterpretation of his or her answer. Those answers or statements that the foster

parent noted as particularly emphatic or significant to them were quoted. When I quoted

a foster parent, I read the quote back to ensure the words I wrote down were verbatim.

Interviews were also completed by telephone and e-mail to a foster care worker in each of the four regions of Nova Scotia: Central, Northern, Western, and Cape Breton. Both foster parents and foster care workers were informed that the purpose of the survey was to assess the current level of satisfaction among foster parents in Nova Scotia and that copies of the results would be submitted to the Foster Care Re-design Program and the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since several variables were perceived to affect foster parent's motivation to foster and their willingness to remain in the system long term, the three methods of data collection that were previously discussed were utilized. First of all, the questionnaires sent to regular and former foster parents relied predominantly on the Likert scale of measurement. Secondly, the questionnaires completed during interviews with foster care workers accrued descriptive information, and third a thematic analysis was completed on the responses from the follow up interviews with foster parents. Questions were developed for the foster parent follow-up questionnaire, based on the information from the original questionnaire and considered to be relevant to this research.

Statistical Analysis

A variety of statistical methods were utilized in the data analysis, and the step by step process used to convert raw data into quantitative and qualitative information, for all three questionnaires will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs. Statistical evaluation provided demographic information about the foster parents. Frequencies provided the total numbers of foster parents who chose a particular answer

on the Likert scale, cross-tabulations were examined to compare answers to questions such as: How satisfied are you with the current services in your area? As compared to: In which are of the province do you live? The categories identified by the foster parents in the follow up interviews were separated into themes arising from their answers. This information was analyzed and compared to the answers given by foster care workers.

The intent of this paper was to determine level of satisfaction of foster parents in Nova Scotia. How satisfaction is measured was explored along with the various elements that determine satisfaction, scales and sub-scales of the data were analyzed and compared. Data in each of the three questionnaires was examined individually, and any relationships between the data on all three questionnaires were explored.

Statistical Analysis - Step 1

The original foster parent questionnaire was examined first, and each individual answer was numbered, and entered as data from the completed questionnaires. Every completed answer on the questionnaire was entered individually, into cells and rows created by the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). A program file was created on a computer disc to hold the information. Prior to the data entry, a key was developed to identify each of the 97 categories and or variables on the questionnaire, numbered 1 through 341, these created the cells in the data file. Every answer from the completed questionnaire was entered into a cell, on a specific row, and the corresponding number of the row was written on the questionnaire. Individual data entries were double checked for accuracy. This process took several months to complete, and the data was saved in a system file until the data from every questionnaire was entered.

The following will explain several procedures that were used to examine the data

in various ways: Statistical and frequency computations provided the demographic details for each variable: who completed the questionnaire, age, marital status, education, children, employment, area of residence, ethnic origin, roles, presently fostering. On the questionnaire, foster parents were asked to identify their ethnic origin. Reason for discontinuing fostering was divided into 11 sub-categories, including: illness, burnout, family demands, no reason, change in life circumstances, relocation, adoption, employment demands, closed involuntarily by agency, inadequate support from agency, and retired. From the 97 variables examined, 79 were examined in terms of frequency of answer chosen on the Likert scale. Individual answers to the scales were separated into several categories and compared. These categories were : internal rewards, external rewards, organizational rewards-relationship with agency, community recognition and competency.

After each tabulation, I examined the numbers and percentages, then documented the statistical information presented by the computer generated entries. I observed the data manually on each of the computer printouts, making notes on each of the variables, categories and sub-categories.

Statistical Analysis - Step 2

The follow-up questionnaires, completed via the telephone were designed to generate qualitative information from the foster parents, and foster care workers who were interviewed. The answer to each question was handwritten on legal sized sheets of paper that were attached to the original questionnaire and a copy of the follow up questions. When the interviews were completed with the foster parents, I examined them for common themes. I taped together sheets of flip-chart paper until they were large

enough to hold the information. The answers from the participants were typed, and attached to the flip-chart, under the heading of each question. These were divided into the questions and themes arising from the foster parent's answers, specifically:

1. What aspects of foster care are most rewarding?

2. What aspects of foster care are the least rewarding?

3. What changes would you like to see in the foster care system?

4. Comments: foster parents made comments and recommendations for change, these were listed on the flip chart and later documented in the conclusion.

Each answer was placed on the chart under the specific question, and as common themes continued to arise from the foster parents individual answers, I grouped them together. The redundant answers to the questions, that evolved into frequent themes included: The foster children, working with agency staff, disappointment when the children can't be helped, lack of communication, respite, training, respect and funding. The data gathered from the follow-up questionnaires were compared with the original data on the questionnaires to observe similarities and differences, those were reported in the section on data analysis.

Foster care workers in different regions of the province were contacted by telephone and or e-mail and asked to complete the questionnaire. The same procedure was used with the foster care workers as with the foster parents during their follow-up interview. Descriptive and thematic analysis was completed on the answers to the questions. These were compared with the data provided by the foster parents.

Ethics and Rigor

Anonymity of participants was maintained throughout the research and reporting.

The assurance of confidentiality was contracted with the foster parents both in writing, as noted in the cover letters (appendices D and E), and verbally during the telephone contacts. Confidentiality was contracted verbally and through e-mail with the foster care workers. Every attempt was made to refrain from interjecting my personal beliefs, or bias into the data.

Limitations of Research

The research document is a combination of statistical information and my translation of the data. The questionnaires returned by the foster parents and discontinued foster parents should be representative of the entire population's cultural, regional and ethnic diversity. Several variables on the questionnaire attempted to address this issue, and were discussed in earlier chapters.

Every effort was made to balance the reliability and validity of the instruments used to gather the data, by following the steps to ensure the questionnaires measured job satisfaction, and the factors that contributed to satisfaction, as well as dissatisfaction. Verification of true reliability is only accomplished by replication of the research.

Summary

In this paper I strived to honor the integrity of the information foster parents and caseworkers provided on the returned questionnaires and interviews. This was achieved by listening intently to what each one said to me, by then paraphrasing, and subsequently using direct quotes from both the dialogue and surveys. This thesis is based on ideas presented by the literature, by the foster parents and by the foster care workers who participated in the research.

Chapter 4

A Profile of Foster Parents

Overview

This chapter includes information about foster parents in Nova Scotia that is both quantitative and qualitative. The primary focus of this thesis was to scrutinize foster parent's collective responses to determine if they are satisfied, and identify the factors that contribute to satisfaction.

Below, I present demographic information pertaining to foster parents in Nova Scotia. Following this, there is a discussion of foster parents' attitudes and positions on certain issues, presented under headings discussed previously in the methodology, including: Organization/agency, reciprocal relationship and expectations, intrinsic rewards, external rewards, meaningfulness of work, pay, status, working conditions and community support. As well, included in this section is a discussion regarding the answers to the research questions identified in chapter 3. The chapter concludes with a summary of the presentation and analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Quantitative Data

As discussed earlier, a total of 341 foster parents returned completed questionnaires, and 119 agreed to participate in a follow up questionnaire. Of the total number of returned questionnaires, 252 foster parents reported that they were actively fostering children, while 89 were former foster parents who hadn't fostered children for one to three years.

The follow up telephone interviews were completed with 18 foster parents,

represented from each of the 4 regions of Nova Scotia. Of the total number of foster

parents who participated in the follow-up interviews, 11 said they were actively fostering,

while 7 reported that they had discontinued. Those respondents who chose not to

participate in the follow-up interview, but attached letters or made comments on the

questionnaire were included in the data analysis, regardless of the region where they

lived.

Demographic Information About Foster Parents

The first question on the survey asked foster parents to identify who was

completing the form, foster mother or father. Foster mothers reported that they

completed the form 62.2% of the time, while foster fathers said that they completed 2.9%

and 32.6% reported both having completed the form. Some foster parents did not answer

this question.

Foster parents were surveyed all across the 4 regions of the province of Nova

Scotia: The Western Region (Yarmouth to Hants County, including the South Shore),

Eastern Region (Cape Breton Island), the Northern Region (Guysborough to Cumberland

County) and Central Region (Halifax County). The largest response to the questionnaire

(110) came from foster parents from the western region. The central region was second

with 107 responses, the eastern region returned 55 completed questionnaires and 67 came

from the northern region. In 2 of the returned questionnaires the answer to this question

was not completed.

The largest number of foster parents (38.4%) have been fostering for less than five

years. More than one quarter (26.1%) of the total number of foster parents answering the

survey have been fostering for less than ten years.

The majority of foster parents who completed the questionnaire, were married (79.8%), while 5.3% of foster parents were divorced, 3.2% were widowed, and 07.0% were single parents. 4.7% identified themselves as other, specifically as living in a common-law relationship or separated from partner.

One assumption is that many foster parents enjoy the company of children and have a desire to share their lives and homes with biological, adopted and foster children. Foster parents confirmed this both in their responses to the question about rewarding aspects of foster care, and on the follow up questionnaire that I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter. 82.1% of foster parents reported that they have biological children and 28.4% said they have adopted children.

The ages reported by those who completed the questionnaire suggest that the population of existing foster parents is aging, and the numbers of younger foster parents applying and approved to foster are not meeting past volumes. The majority of foster mothers said they were between the ages of 40 and 52 years with a mean age of 46.34 years, while foster fathers reported that they were between 43 and 51 years with a mean age of 48.01 years.

With respect to data presented under the category of ethnic origin, it is important to note that although technically the classifications would be considered ethnicity, nationality and language, these were the words the foster parents used to describe their own ethnicity. Therefore, since I wanted to remain consistent in their self descriptions, I used their words. Although the term Canadian is a very broad descriptor, the numbers of foster parents who used this response is documented. The following table identifies the numbers of foster parents who said they identify with the emerging cultural categories:

Table 1

Ethnic Origin as Identified by Foster Parents

Ethnic Origin	Percentages
Black/African Canadian	4.1%
White/Caucasian	53.1%
Native	5.6%
European	1.2%
Acadian/French	3.8%
Mixed race	3.2%
Mixed language	1.8%
Canadian	7.6%

Note: n = 274. Of the 341 questionnaires returned, the question regarding ethnic origin was blank on 7.

As table 1 illustrates, more than one-half of the foster parents who returned

questionnaires identified themselves as either White/Caucasian, or Canadian, with the

second most noted ethnic origin reported as Native, and third as Black/African Canadian.

Current legislation and standards of practice for foster children make provisions

for the preservation of the child's cultural, racial and linguistic heritage as inherent to the

healthy development of the child. In order to successfully offer foster children a match

based on ethnicity, physical, social, spiritual and developmental needs, foster parents all

across the province should be representative of Nova Scotia's diverse ethnicity.

Education, Employment and Salaries of Foster Parents

Of the foster mothers surveyed, 5.3 % had less than grade eight education, while

6.7 % of the foster fathers reported that they had less than grade eight. The majority of

foster mothers either completed high school or graduated from college at a combined total

of 65.1%, while 41.4 % of foster fathers completed high school or graduated from

college. A significant number of foster mothers and fathers have completed graduate

study, with foster mothers at 9.7 % and foster fathers at 7.9 %. More foster mothers in Nova Scotia reported attending higher education than foster fathers, and foster mothers are pursuing higher levels of education than in previous years. In earlier reports (Fostering in Nova Scotia, 1992), the majority of foster mothers were recounted as achieving between grade 10 and 12 education or a trade. At that time, nearly one-half of foster fathers had either completed a degree or a trade.

The majority of foster mothers (62.8 %) reported that they are not employed outside the home, compared to 16. 4 % of foster fathers. Some foster mothers and fathers indicated on the questionnaire that although they were not employed outside the home they were either retired, or self employed and worked out of their home.

There was a discrepancy between salary levels for foster mothers, most of whom earned less than $20,000.00 annually, and the majority of foster fathers who earned between $30,000.00 and $50,000.00 annually. In spite of figures that show a higher number of foster mothers than foster fathers attended post secondary education, higher salary levels were reported by the foster fathers.

Conclusion of Demographic Information

Current demographic information on foster parents in Nova Scotia are consistent with other data collected over the past two decades, and describe the average North American foster parent as Caucasian, working class, in a married relationship (Brogan, 1991; Fostering in Nova Scotia, 1992; Hampson & Tavorminia, 1980; Pasztor & Wynne, 1995).

Foster Parent Retention and Satisfaction

The next section in the data analysis will attempt to answer the supporting

questions that were listed in the methodology. They are not presented in the order they are listed, but in a sequence that will facilitate continuity of the material, originating with a discussion of factors that foster parents say contribute to retention, affect their competency and increase satisfaction. Reasons why foster parents are dissatisfied and discontinue are also discussed.

The Foster Children Living with Foster Parents

The majority of foster parents (252) who responded to the questionnaire had foster children living in their home, or were waiting for a foster child to be placed with them, while 89 answered that they do not currently have children because they had discontinued fostering over the past number of years.

Over the term that they are open as a placement for an agency, or several agencies, a foster parent may provide a home for a multitude of children. The following percentages were reported by those who participated in the survey:

Table 2

Numbers of Children Fostered by Foster Parents

Number of children fostered	Percentage
1-10	51.3%
11-20	18.5%
21-35	10.9%
36-50	6.2%
50-99	7.9%
more than 100	3.5%

n = 335, 6 questions left blank for a total of 335

As shown in table 2, 3.5% (12) of foster parents in Nova Scotia disclosed that they had provided care for more than 100 foster children during the years that they were fostering.

Foster parents are often asked to take more than one foster child at a time, some take sibling groups or several children who are unrelated, but in a suitable age range. A large number (63.4%) of respondents have fostered 1 - 3 children at one time, while others (32.7%) fostered 4 - 6 children at one time, and 2.9% fostered more than 7 children at one time.

Foster Parents' Feelings of Competency

In spite of a strong desire to act altruistically, foster parents may feel overwhelmed by the frequency and intensity of foster children's misbehaviour. Foster parents responded in agreement to the following statements:

"I feel competent to deal with children's difficult behavior" . . . 57.8%
"I can get a break from parenting when I need one" . . . 39.9 %

It is significant to note that although nearly 40% of foster parents agreed they could get a break from parenting when they need one, a large number (41.7%) disagreed. The responsibility of parenting troubled or challenging children produces a level of stress previously unfamiliar to many foster parents. "Even if they are the right 'caliber' for the job, it's tough to keep them hanging in there day-in-day-out . . ."(Delaney 2000, p. 3).

Foster parents persist in their efforts to help children year after year because they acquire a sense of achievement when a foster child experiences success. Success for some may be as simple as starting the day by saying "good morning", for others it may be the completion of a high school education. An overwhelming majority of foster parents (83.7%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: " Fostering gives me a feeling of accomplishment."

Feelings of competency are reported by a majority of foster parents, however, a

high number also agreed that children's behaviour is more challenging than it was in the past. Most foster parents (66.2%) agreed with the statement: "Children's behaviour is more difficult now than ever before." Some said children are less respectful and simply refuse to follow any rules of social behaviour, that they have too many rights and freedoms, and this makes it difficult to set boundaries for children at risk.

As discussed in chapter 2, historically children had few rights, and corporal punishment was an acceptable form of behaviour modification. Throughout the 1990's social values changed to outlaw the use of corporal punishment in foster homes and child caring institutions. This necessitated the need for education regarding the use of alternative parenting techniques. Foster parents are discouraged from using any form of corporal punishment with foster children and directed to use alternative methods to encourage positive behaviour and relationship building. In instances when positive reinforcement, freedom of choice, and counselling are ineffective with foster children, foster parents are challenged to find ways to moderate violent or aggressive behaviour, while preserving the child's safety, and the safety of others. Foster parents said they would like more support to deal with foster children's behaviour and many (80%) agreed with the statement: "Sometimes foster parents feel frustrated, and find it difficult to deal with foster child's behaviour."

Although foster parents tend to be in agreement (that it is more challenging to parent foster children today), more than one half of the respondents felt competent to deal with the children's behaviour. Less than one half of the total number of foster parents responding to the survey felt they could get a break from parenting, to re-energize and relax when necessary. Foster parents and foster care workers reported

that respite care for both children in care and foster parents is not readily available across

the province, but strongly agree that respite is an essential service to both. Foster care

workers who were interviewed said agencies need to examine ways to increase the

competency and sense of accomplishment for foster parents.

Role Interpretation

Many of the recent research findings (Steinhauer, 1991; Waldock, 1996) on foster

parent recruitment and retention suggest that the most successful child welfare teams are

those where the foster parents are considered to be a member of a team of professionals

helping children.

Nearly one half of the foster parents (47.2%) who responded to the questionnaire

answered that they considered themselves as part of a team of professionals. Some of

these foster parents said that although they consider themselves to be part of a team of

professionals, the agency doesn't often treat them as such. Of the remaining foster

parents who responded, 17.9% simply considered themselves as "a professional", while

19.4% stated they were volunteers. 7.3% of foster parents did not know or were

unwilling to say what they considered themselves to be. Some of the foster parents

(4.4%) chose the category "other" and one explained that she "often feels like a glorified

babysitter" for the children in her care. Many of the foster parents who participated in

this study indicated that working together with the agency and other professionals as part

of a team would be rewarding experience for them, but said that it not common practice

across the province.

Community Perceptions

Foster parents were asked how they were perceived by the community where they

lived, and if they were supported and recognized for the work they do. Between 62% and 74% of respondents replied that the people in the community where they reside admire the work of foster parents, view fostering as worthwhile, and are supportive.

The community perception of foster parents is one that appears to be very positive and supportive for many foster parents, however a high number (73.5%) of foster parents would like more recognition for the work they do with children. Foster parents said they would like more acknowledgment of satisfactory job performance from agencies with whom they are working. The support and services foster parents received in their community were also identified by foster parents as contributors to satisfaction.

Rating Services

Foster parents were asked to rate 16 services and supports in their community that are most and least important to them, such as: Medical, dental, counselling and legal services for both the foster parents and foster children, training, education in their own community, allowances, board rates, support groups, respite care and agency staffing. Answers were rated from least to most important. Those rated very important and important were combined and reported in the following analysis, from highest to lowest percentages.

Respondents to the survey rated medical and health services as the most important service (94.2%) for foster families. The next most prominent was counselling services for foster children at 92.4%. Dental care was rated as very important or important by 91.5% of the respondents, while having someone available for the foster parents to talk to was important to 90% of the foster parents. Full time agency foster care staff was also rated as important or very important by the respondents at 88.8%. Adequate board rates

were next highest at 87.6%, while foster parent training was rated as meaningful by 86.5%. Increased funding for special needs and respite care were identified as equally important to foster parents at 85.7%. Support groups (84.2%) and special foster care allowances (84.1%) were also rated as important by a significant number of foster parents. Foster parents reported that expenses for training and legal services for foster parents were similarly important at 83.3%. Less than one half of the respondents felt that clothing allowances for children was either very important or important, however the combined total of both answers was 80.3%. Counselling for foster families was rated fairly low by foster parents with a merged total of 60.7%. As noted earlier, foster parents rated training very high, but did not consider training in the foster parent's community (60.6%) as significant.

The services rated highest by foster parents would be professional health and medical services offered in most communities, and would be considered important resources by most families. Adequate remuneration, support and training are all issues that are significant for professional people who require support from their organization, up-to-date training, and appropriate reimbursement for the job they perform.

<div align="center">Least Rewarding Aspects of Foster Care</div>

Reasons Why Foster Parents Discontinue

As discussed in preceding chapters, there are many reasons why foster parents discontinue, and they will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter. Discontinued foster parents were asked to identify the reasons why they ceased fostering, and the reported data fell into 11 categories, they are presented below.

Table 3. Reasons Why Foster Parents Discontinued

Reason Cited	Number (%)	
Illness	7	(7.8 %)
Need Time-out (burnout)	5	(5.6 %)
Family Demands	11	(12.3%)
Voluntary (no reason)	13	(14.6%)
Change in Life Circumstances (i.e. death of a partner)	3	(3.3%)
Relocation	1	(1.1%)
Adoption	8	(8.9 %)
Employment Demands	5	(5.6 %)
Closed (involuntarily) by Agency	8	(8.9 %)
Inadequate Support From Agency	23	(25.8%)
Conflict With Agency	5	(5.6%)

n = 89

As demonstrated in table 3, former foster parents cite inadequate support from the agency as the number one reason for choosing to discontinue, other reasons were family demands, illness, adoption and some foster parents indicated there was no particular reason why they discontinued.

Relationship With Agency

Foster parents were asked to agree or disagree with specific statements regarding contact and communication with agency staff, namely foster care workers, children-in-care workers and protection workers. Nearly one half of the foster parents (between 41% and 53%) felt they had a good relationship with the caseworkers, that regular contact with the workers is helpful and said they enjoyed having regular contact with the caseworkers. They reported that the foster care workers and children-in-care workers are the ones with whom they have the most contact, and from whom they receive information most often (between 44% and 52% of the time). Foster parents reported that although they may have contact with the social workers, visits to their homes are less frequent than they

would like. Lack of communication between foster parents and the agency is often cited

in the literature as one of the most frequent complaints made by foster parents

(Galwaway, 1978; Hampson and Tavormina, 1980; Steinhauer 1988).

A calculation of the responses from the survey found the majority of foster parents

in Nova Scotia felt comfortable contacting the agency to ask questions, express concerns

and discuss issues pertaining to the foster child. When asked if foster parents are

encouraged to express opinions, 61% replied that they are. A large number (69%) said

they felt confident that they could contact the agency for support and encouragement any

time. A higher number (75%) responded that they receive information about fostering

issues when they ask for it, while just over 63.1% said foster parents are treated with

respect by the social workers, and fairly by the agency. Using a cross-tabulation of data

the following comparison was examined: Data showing region where foster parents live,

and the number of times those foster parents agreed, strongly agreed, remained neutral,

disagreed or strongly disagreed that foster parents are treated with respect by the agency.

The results are presented in the graph below:

Figure 1.

A comparison of answers to the question regarding respect and the numbers of

responses from foster parents in each region.
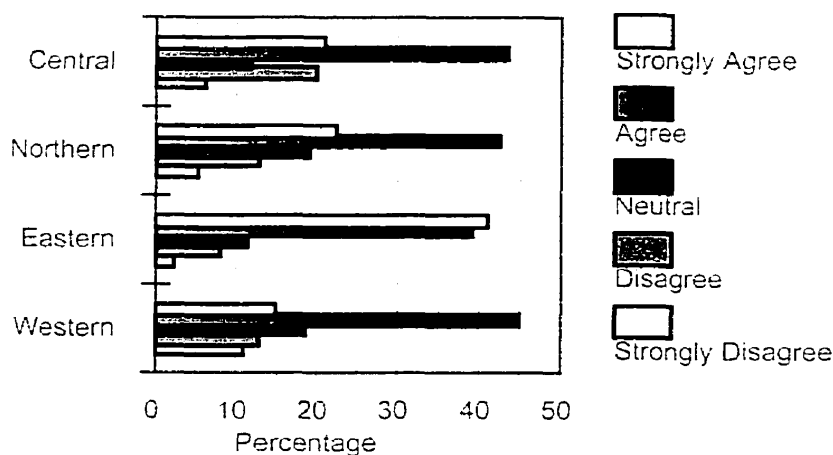
Figure 1. Numbers of foster parents who answered question, by region where they live.
Central (n = 107), Northern (n = 64), Eastern (n = 54), Western (n = 104).

Foster parents in the eastern region answered agree or strongly agree more times to this

question than in any other region of Nova Scotia. Foster parents all across the province

reported having both positive and negative experiences with the agency with whom they

work.

Allegations of Abuse

Any deliberation of foster parent satisfaction and relationship with agencies

should include a discussion about allegations of abuse and neglect in foster homes. This

is an area reported by many foster parents as contributing to dissatisfaction and isolation.

There is very little flexibility in this aspect of the foster care program, and agencies must

adhere to a provincial protocol when an allegation of abuse or neglect is made against a

foster parent.

Allegations of abuse or neglect are disconcerting to many foster parents, and the

majority of foster parents (87%) who participated in the survey said they are concerned

that false allegations of abuse may be made against them. There were mixed reactions to

the question of agency support in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect. 52% of

foster parents said they were confident the agency would support them if a child in their

home made allegations of abuse while 46% were unsure, or did not feel that the agency

would support them. Although many foster parents are concerned about allegations of

abuse, only a small percentage of foster home investigations result in closure. As

presented previously in table 3, only 8.9% of the total number of foster parents who

discontinued and responded to the survey revealed that their home was closed

involuntarily by the agency. Affiliation with foster parent associations is one way to

provide support to foster parents and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Foster Parent Associations

There are local and provincial foster parent associations and organizations

designed to support foster parents and enhance communication between the individual

parents and various levels of the foster parent associations: local, provincial and national.

Foster parents were asked in the questionnaire if there is a local association or foster

parent organization in their area of the province and 79.5% reported that there was, while

15.6% of foster parents said they do not have a local organization, or were unsure if there

is one. Only 56.6% of respondents to the survey said they were members of their local

foster parent association, while 40% of those reported that they attend association

meetings. The majority of foster parents 70.7% said they would attend more meetings if

they had the time.

Training

Education and training are two ways that foster parents can become more

informed and preventative regarding allegations of abuse. Foster parents said adequate

training would not only give foster parents information and skills they require to nurture foster children, but also provide fundamental training in techniques to prevent and protect themselves from false allegations of abuse.

Many foster parents have expressed the desire for additional training. Of those who responded to the initial survey, 68% feel that they should have more training to meet the needs of children coming into care. A large number of foster parents (76%) feel that training should be mandatory, and 79% agree that foster parents should be given regular opportunities to upgrade their skills.

The least rewarding aspects of foster care (discussed previously) included relationship with agency, lack of communication, allegations of abuse and inadequate training. In spite of the problems in the current system, foster parents said there were many aspects of foster care that were very rewarding. The majority of foster parents said that working with abused and neglected children was the most gratifying.

<u>Most Rewarding Aspects of Foster Care</u>

Without exception, all of the foster parents who were surveyed and interviewed said that the most rewarding aspect of the foster care experience is working with the children.

Many foster parents said they were grateful for the positive influence foster children had on their own family and that biological children learn empathy and understanding from discussions with the foster children, whose experiences are very different from their own. Foster parents reported that feelings of accomplishment result from helping abused and neglected children. Altruism is often the primary motivator for fostering, and a high number of foster parents agreed or strongly agreed with the

statements:

> "I became a foster parent to give children a home who needed loving parents". . . 95.3%

> "Sharing their home with foster children is a good experience for children . . . 70%

Some foster parents suggested that opening their home to other children in need, may inspire compassion and social values in their biological or adopted children.

Foster parents said the desire to make a difference in the lives of children is a powerful motivator and affects level of satisfaction. As previously noted, significant numbers of foster parents want to provide abused and neglected children with loving parents. A large number (89.2%) of foster parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: " I have no regrets about the time invested in foster children." Hampson and Tavomina (1980) also found the most common motivation for people to become foster parents were "love of children, desire to help someone else, and interest in children's well-being" (p. 110).

Satisfying Experience

Foster parents were asked specifically to rate their experience of fostering children in terms of satisfaction.

Table 4.   Satisfaction With Fostering Children

Rating	Number	(%)
Very satisfying	146	42.8 %
Satisfying	149	43.7 %
Less than satisfying	24	7.0 %
Very unsatisfying	14	4.1 %

n = 333. Of total number 341, 8 were left blank.

Participants were also asked if they are satisfied with the foster care services

provided in the area where they live. Nearly one half of the foster parents (48.7%) said

they are somewhat satisfied with the current foster care services offered in their area,

while 31.6% reported that they are very satisfied, 12.5% said they are not satisfied and

only 7.0 % agree that they are extremely satisfied with services.

Using a cross-tabulation of data the following comparison was examined: The

number of times those foster parents who answered that they were extremely satisfied,

very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied with the foster care services in their

area, by region where they live. The results are presented in the graph below:

Figure 2. The number of foster parents answering that they were satisfied compared to
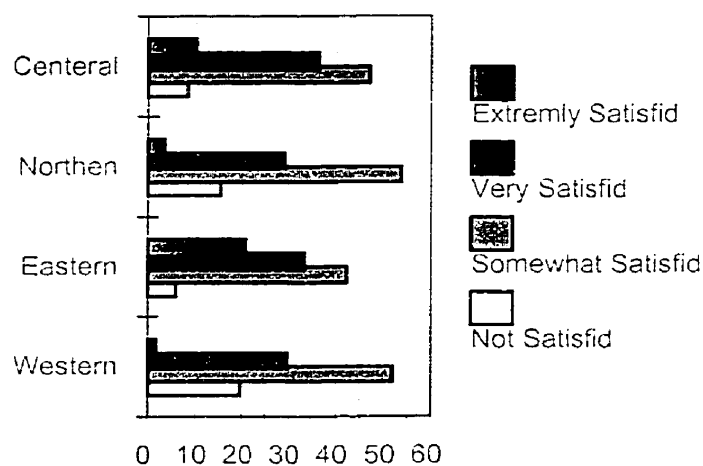the region where they reside.

Figure 2. Numbers of foster parents who answered question, by region where they live.
Central (n = 103), Northern (n = 66), Eastern (n = 55), Western (n = 100).

Foster parents in the eastern region of Nova Scotia answered that they were extremely

satisfied or very satisfied more often to this question than in any other region.

The preceding statistical information was gleaned from the questionnaires returned by foster parents. Using similar headings, the next section is a presentation of the qualitative data gathered from follow up interviews with foster parents and social workers.

<div align="center">Qualitative Data</div>

<div align="center">Least and Most Rewarding Aspects of Foster Care</div>

The Foster Children - Success and Failures

As noted in the presentation of the quantitative data, foster parents unilaterally agreed that they are most rewarded by helping the children. One foster mother explained her rewards in terms of the abused and neglected children who come to her home and "you have the opportunity to rescue kids from bad situations." Several foster parents said when a child who needs love and attention is taken to their foster home because he or she has experienced great difficulty, "it is a wonderful thing to see that child develop into an adult who does well."

Another foster mother said she delights in seeing her foster daughter becoming more confident, gaining weight and growing more secure, each additional month that she is with her. A very different child from the timid, undernourished, socially delayed fourteen-month old that was placed with them. She said it was very rewarding "to see some progress, to see some joy and see her be happy."

Older children can be a real challenge for foster parents. One described an adolescent foster children who came to her home having no self esteem, was very shy with few social skills, and even had no facial affect. When the children start responding to the foster parent's warmth and caring, and the nurturing stability and love eventually

pay off, it is very gratifying for foster parents to see the youth become happy and well adjusted. According to one foster mother, it may only take a week or two before positive changes are seen in the child, and added "I just love seeing the improvement in kids."

In follow up interviews several foster parents told me that sharing their home with a foster child is a wonderful experience for them and their biological children, but for other foster families the experience has been detrimental. Some foster parents disclosed that biological children may resent the time and energy parents give to foster children, or a foster child's misbehaviour may negatively influence a biological child's behaviour. When asked if sharing their home with a foster child was a good experience for biological children, one foster parent wrote:

> "Maybe in some cases, however our oldest daughter was sexually abused by our first foster son. She and we are still suffering from the effects of this. If we had the decision to make again and knowing what we know now, we would never take anyone older than our own, or of the opposite sex."

In these instances, foster families feel remorse that their own children have suffered and experienced victimization.

Relationships develop between a foster child and foster parent when children are placed in foster homes for extended periods of time. Foster parents said the ties between foster parent and foster child are often maintained, even after the child leaves their home. Some foster parents not only maintain regular contact with the foster child, but continue to act as parent, mentor, guide and advocate for adult foster children, some of whom have children of their own. Some foster parents said "I just love the children" and admit that they become very attached to their foster children. They express feelings of loss, sadness and hurt when a child leaves. According to Burke and Dawason (1987) separation and

loss experiences are repeated more with infants, than with any other kind of foster care.

As noted above, foster parents agreed that they are most rewarded by helping the children they serve, but sometimes this is also the area of greatest disappointment, and disillusionment. Foster parents reported feelings of inadequacy and failure when they are unsuccessful in initiating positive changes in children's behavior. This is most often the case when an abused child has been so damaged by his or her past negative experiences. One foster parent described it in the following manner: "No matter what you do you cannot break into their mind, and can't see any changes whatsoever." Another said there is a real sense of "disappointment, when your interventions don't get you anywhere with the child. When you don't see any improvement in the child." She said that many foster parents regard the day-to-day struggles with children as "part of the challenge, but it's very sad when the placement breaks down."

Adolescents often present the greatest challenges to foster parents, and some foster parents enjoy working with teenagers and young adults to provide them with opportunities for their growth and development. Several foster parents said they encounter success, while others do not and some adolescents experience multiple placement changes because their behavior is too challenging, even for the most accomplished and committed foster parents. One foster mother who was interviewed suggested that it is much easier to bond with younger children, to instill values and morals at an early age. She said "I think with teenagers, it's too late." Another foster parent said she would like to see teens have more respect for parents, and accept parental limit setting. She explained that she would "like to see the foster parents have more say and the foster care system back them up." This particular foster parent said in instances

where the child has contact with the parent, both foster and natural parents should come to some sort of compromise on establishing appropriate values and limits for the child. She said she would appreciate "more co-operation between the foster parents and the child's home." This way the child would get a consistent message from caregivers involved.

Solidarity between the child's worker and the foster parent is considered good practice by many foster parents. Foster parents reported that regular contact with the child's worker may help to ensure the safety of the child and reinforce efforts by the foster parents. One foster parent said that, in her experience, workers who make excuses for a child's misbehavior are not particularly helpful for the child, nor for the foster parent who is attempting to help the child change negative behavior and make more appropriate choices. This is especially important for adolescents who refuse to accept responsibility or consequences for violent, destructive and aggressive behaviour.

An issue for one foster parent who has an adolescent foster child was the difficulty for both foster parents and foster children to balance time between visits with natural family and foster family. She said that it's hard for children to make gains and settle into a routine with the foster family when he has frequent visits at home. She explained that it is problematic because of the number of changes occurring everyday for the foster child and said: "His body is here, but his heart always seems to be somewhere else." Both the foster mother and father said that it is important for their family to have more opportunity for input and involvement in case planning for the adolescent foster children who are placed in their home.

Several foster parents said it was very difficult to see the children continue to

suffer from contact with birth parents. "The disappointment for the children that comes along with the ups and downs and broken promises." One foster parent said she would like to testify in court, where decisions are made about children's futures because "we should be able to tell a judge how parental visits that do not go well affect them [the foster children]."

According to some foster parents, agencies frequently place the needs of the natural parents above those of the children, and one foster mother said "Their needs are catered to at the expense of the children." She explained that she had an infant foster child who was sleeping, eating and awake on a fairly routine schedule. Visits were court ordered every second day and scheduled to meet the parent's needs, not the child's routine. The child was visiting with the parent later in the evening when she would have been preparing for bed and going to sleep. This was very disruptive for the baby who was sleeping throughout the night before the evening visits, but afterward started waking several times during the night.

More involvement with the child's family was something one foster parent, who was interviewed, expressed an interest in having. She indicated that she would like to meet the birth parent, and have an opportunity to work with them, as well as the children. She said she would also like to meet the adoptive parents of the foster children she cares for as well, and would like follow-up information from the social worker about the child after he or she returns home or is placed for adoption. She explained that she worries because "when the children leave my home, I don't know where they are laying their heads at night".

Caring for children often requires intense energy from foster parents, even those

who stay for a short term, and foster parents feel agencies need to be more proactive in taking a co-ordinated approach to the provision of services for foster children.

Foster parents reported that inadequate support from the agency was a major problem and defined it specifically in the following terms: No participation in case planning for the child, lack of respite care and daycare for children, ineffective communication with agency, lack of respect from agency staff, and financial issues. These findings are not distinctive to Nova Scotia foster parents, but consistent with results from other studies across North America (Brogan, 1991; Stienhauer, 1991; Ure, 1995).

<p style="text-align:center">Relationship With Agency</p>

The Effects of Organizational/Agency Structure

Organizational and agency structure was the theme that dealt with foster parent's access to agency caseworkers, communication, provision of services and structures of the particular agencies. Children's Aid Societies and Community Services Child Welfare departments are structured, staffed and administered differently across the province. Some offices have separate units for child protection, foster care, adoption, and children-in-care, whereas others have a specific worker or workers assigned to various caseloads. In other offices one worker may carry a "mixed caseload" that may include any or all of the above. As discussed in the following sections, foster parents reported that agency inconsistencies are often problematic for them.

The majority of foster parents I interviewed said they would like more open, ongoing communication and co-operation with the agency they are working with. Foster parents indicated they had some contact with the social workers, but said they would like,

and feel that they need more. One foster parent said "I would call once every three or four weeks, but made to feel that I was bothering them."

Availability of caseworkers was a dilemma for one foster parent who stated that the worker was never available when she needed to talk to him. She expressed concern that the child's social worker had only contacted the foster child twice in the past two years. She said " I feel like I've been between a rock and a hard place many times without support." Some foster parents suggested that the social workers were working with a high number of foster families and children but help out when they can, one foster mother agreed, and added "but for some families this is not enough."

Foster care workers who were interviewed agreed with foster parents that they should have more frequent and open communication with foster parents, citing inadequate staffing and caseload size as barriers to this process. At the time this survey was completed, some caseworkers in the province said they were carrying three to six times the number of families recommended by the Child Welfare Standards and Guidelines (less than 25). Some were carrying caseloads of 30 or more foster families, along with responsibility for several other programs. In the smaller agencies the foster care, adoption and single parent programs may be administered by one caseworker, therefore caseload size would reflect the numbers of children, individuals, and families accessing services through these programs. Some caseworkers revealed that they were carrying 30-35, another had a total of 83 cases. In one instance a caseworker reported carrying a caseload of more than 100. In addition to the above duties, foster care workers often arrange placements for children in care. When troubled youth experience multiple placement breakdowns, it can be a very difficult and time consuming task to match youth

to appropriate care-givers.

Considering the high caseloads, program responsibilities and inadequate staffing, the field of child welfare is often a very stressful job, presenting unique challenges to social workers. The foster care workers who were interviewed reported that they have been working in the field of foster care for various lengths of time. One reported that she was new to the job, another had 2 years, one had 8 years, and another was working in the foster care program for more than 10 years. The majority of social workers transferred to the foster care program from other programs, such as child protection. Increased workloads, insufficient staffing and staff turn over effect the availability of social workers and influence the quality of the relationship between foster parents and caseworkers.

As discussed earlier, poor communication with the agency is one of the most difficult areas for foster parents to deal with. One foster parent said the agency that she was working with simply "stopped phoning", and no one offered her an explanation why this occurred. She said it had been months since children had been placed with her and she would have appreciated some contact from the worker to let her know why they stopped placing kids with her.

One foster parent said she becomes very frustrated when she "can't get in touch with workers, when they don't return my phone calls." She expressed frustration and disappointment on one particular occasion when she discovered that the child she was caring for was picked up at daycare for a parental visit without being notified. She said "it really frustrates me when rules, policies and procedures are more important than the children." She went on to say that she feels foster parents are considered by agencies to be "just low paid baby-sitters, not treated as one of the team, and I really resent that."

The current policy of allowing courts to make permanency decisions for long term foster children was difficult for a foster parent to accept, and she explained that "foster parents are not given an opportunity to present their information to the courts." In her experience, workers who carry very heavy workloads may "lose sight of what's happening for the children." Another foster parent said case planning for the child should be "more carefully considered." She said she becomes very discouraged for the children who enter foster care from a very bad situation start to do well in the foster home, and then are returned to an abusive and neglectful home. This foster mother said it is devastating for children and in all instances the child's best interest should be the foremost consideration, "the child, not the parent, should benefit from the return home."

Foster parents and foster care workers agree that it is essential for foster parents to have regular and ongoing contact with agency staff when a foster child is placed in the foster home. Program responsibilities, high caseloads and inadequate staffing were cited by foster care workers as reasons why child welfare staff and foster parents have limited contact, and poor communication.

Communication: Prevention. Respect and Information

Improvements in communication between workers and foster parents would not only enhance the relationship with agency staff, but also function as a way to prevent many of the problems that arise from insufficient communication and lack of foster parent's participation in the case planning for children.

Several foster parents, who were interviewed recommended a worker meet with them "before a crisis" to discuss areas of concern. One foster mother talked about her experiences with their first special needs child who was placed with them, and had

"heavy duty issues". She said it would have been helpful if the agency talked to them about respite, vacation, money, and funding for extra supports. She objected that "foster parents have to ask for every little thing" because "it's demoralizing" for them. This foster mother expected that the workers should have an understanding of the foster child's special needs and provide any support, services, and information up front.

Foster parents said they want and need to have information about the foster child's history as soon as possible upon placement. For one foster parent this lack of information was very embarrassing. Two weeks after she took a child to live with her, she attended a school conference with several other professionals who worked with the child. At that meeting she learned the child presented severe behaviour problems. She was displeased to be informed in that manner, and said those details should have been provided to her when the child was placed with her. Another foster mother who had an adolescent foster child placed with her, and registered in a class corresponding to her chronological agreed. Her foster child struggled for the first few months she lived with her, creating havoc at home and school. The foster parent was later informed that the child was enrolled in a lower grade, with a full time teacher assistant before coming to live with her. The problems were alleviated both at home and school when she was placed in a special education program. This foster parent said the "paperwork should come with the child." The dilemmas these foster parents and children experienced could have been prevented with more expedient and open communication between foster parents and social workers.

The statement "better communication with the agency" often translates into a more respectful relationship between foster parents and agency. Foster parents said that

workers should appreciate that their opinions and suggestions are valid because they are the ones who are actually living with the children. One foster mother said it would be good if "workers would actually make you feel that you actually know what you're doing", and suggested that it would be helpful for foster parents to have someone who could spend time with them, to listen to what they have to say.

The literature (Galaway, 1978; Steinhauer, 1988) and reports from foster parents indicate that improved communication between foster parents and agencies serves to nurture more stable placements for children, while poor communication opens the door for disaster. This was true for one foster family who had initially requested older foster children, but agreed to take three pre-school, special needs children. They repeatedly told the caseworker they were experiencing difficulty, and needed some extra help with the children, but none was provided. The placement broke down and when the family requested that the children be removed, only then was respite and in-home support offered. The family felt that at this point they just could not continue, because the agency "offered too little, too late." This foster family said they were exhausted and disillusioned by the experience.

Another foster parent wrote on her questionnaire "how about a survey on respite, sitters, support persons, cost to leave for time out, not just of money but things destroyed in home. Although foster parents say little for fear of losing kids, I see this as a problem in endless homes."

Foster children who are placed for unspecified time frames create difficulties for some foster parents. A foster parent who was interviewed said that there was rarely a time specified when children came to live with them, and they never knew when the

children would be leaving. She had one foster child who was young when placed with her and she became attached to him, she said it was very painful for her when he was moved. She would appreciate knowing the length of time foster children would be with her family, so she could prepare for the transition and not to become too attached. She stated "the workers need to be more honest up front."

One foster parent who had been fostering children for many years remembered a very painful experience she and her husband had starting out. After their first foster child had been placed with them for several months they received a telephone call from a worker telling them to have the child ready to go that afternoon because " his biological grandmother was arriving from another province and taking the child back with her. We were given two hours notice" and neither the child, nor the foster parents had time to prepare for the change. This foster mother said her family experienced difficulty adjusting to the abrupt loss of their first foster child for months afterward.

Throughout the previous discussion foster parents identified lack of communication and inadequate support from the agency, and community resulted in problems and subsequent sense of isolation. One of the themes that arose from a review of the literature (Jacobs, 1980; Steinhauer, 1988), as well as discussions with foster parents and social workers is the sense of isolation many foster parents reported experiencing.

Some foster parents surveyed agree that there is a lack of adequate support and a sense of isolation, while others disagree because their experiences have been different, depending on the support they receive from the agency and community where they live.

Almost all foster parents in Nova Scotia felt that the department of community

services should be responsible to fund more services and staffing resources for foster

parents and that all foster parents and foster children should have equal access to

resources regardless of where they live. One foster parent said "If a foster parent lives in

Halifax, or Truro, or Cape Breton, they should have equal resources." Foster parents

specifically defined the most essential resources/supports as the following:

* Emotional support, individuals who they could talk to and advocate for them at
  their local agencies.
* Regular workshops, information and training materials.
* Provincial manuals and booklets
* Regular increases in per diem rates.

Several foster parents who were interviewed felt that many problems with communication

and feelings of isolation could be alleviated if efforts were made by workers and foster

parents to work together, in an environment where mutual respect was encouraged and

practised. One foster mother said for her "respect is the big word".

As discussed previously in the presentation of qualitative data and communication

with agency, a high number of foster parent's are concerned about allegations of abuse in

foster homes, and any deliberation of issues affecting foster parent's sense of isolation

should include allegations of abuse. The protocol and investigation process excludes the

foster parent from direct contact with his or her agency, resulting in a deep sense of

isolation for the foster parent. Foster parents who were interviewed, and had allegations

of abuse made against them said the feelings of segregation and isolation were

overwhelming and incomparable to any other experience.

Allegations of Abuse

False allegations are a concern for many foster parents. One foster parent,

expressed concern that they may be "vulnerable" and "open to attack" from "natural

parents who are vindictive toward the agency or foster parent."

Several foster parents who reported that they were no longer fostering because their home was closed by the agency after allegations of abuse were made against them, wrote lengthy letters or notes on the questionnaires. The letters contained information about the allegations, their experiences throughout the investigation process and the sense of devastation, loss, grief, victimization and the sense of isolation they felt. One foster parent wrote pages of information documenting her experiences, the following is an excerpt from that letter:

> In 1996 [Social worker/name excluded] requested a meeting with us in our home.
> . . at that meeting [social worker] delivered us a devastating blow. False
> accusations that are totally without substance or justification. This has been very
> upsetting to us both and it has forced us to step back, examine the situation and
> decide where to go from here. . . We would like to advise how hurtful and
> harmful these accusations have been."

The distress and isolation foster parents felt was evident in their words and expressions. Another foster parent wrote:

> "After nine years of being extremely loving and involved parents to [names of the
> children excluded] I answered the door bell one night to find two social workers
> and two policemen. They took my children away and I've yet to get over it."

These foster parents said that their dignity and credibility had been destroyed by the false allegations, and their lives would never be the same again. One foster mother announced that she felt supported and competent as a foster parent until false allegations were made against her family, and then "what ever accomplishment we felt was quickly erased when everything we did was questioned and criticized."

Some foster parents were instructed to contact the federation of foster families for

support, others were not. Several were prohibited from having contact with the agency for months following the allegations. A foster parent who was interviewed disclosed that a baby she fostered for over two years was removed from her home, and the investigation went on for months with no contact from the agency. She said "I was not interviewed by anyone or kept up to date with any goings on."

Agencies have minimal flexibility in responding to allegations of abuse in a foster home, and are mandated to adhere to a protocol when allegations of abuse are made against a foster parent. Foster parents understand this, but feel that they should have opportunities for advocacy, support and information available to them in their own community when allegations are made against them. Some recommended that foster parent training include education about the agency policies and procedures.

The Benefits of Training

Mandatory training is administered and coordinated by the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia in amalgamation with the Department of Community Services, and has been implemented across the province. The training requirements are listed as follows:

- Foster Family Orientation

- Nonviolent Crisis Intervention and yearly re-certification

- Sensitivity Training

Additional training may be made available to foster parents in each region by individuals and organizations, or groups. Schools, hospitals, foster parent associations, agencies and department offices and the federation of foster families may also offer training and educational opportunities to foster parents. Larger urban areas especially those with

universities and teaching hospitals have the advantage of more access to local workshops, seminars and training than those of the smaller rural agencies.

As presented in earlier discussions the majority of foster parents reported that they should be given regular opportunities to upgrade their skills and are particularly interested in areas of instruction pertaining to the children that they foster. One foster mother who was interviewed said she became interested in taking a course specifically for parents of children who have been sexually abused after a foster child who had been sexually abused was brought to her home directly from daycare. She observed that the child was experiencing a great deal of distress and was discouraged because she "didn't have enough information or support to care for this foster child." This particular foster mother said she was fortunate to live in a the Halifax area and took workshops offered by the IWK Children's Hospital. She felt it would have been much easier for her and the child if she had this learning opportunity before the child came to live with them, because "you can't use your normal tools with these very abused children, if you know more, you can give more." This particular foster parent also felt that regular and ongoing courses should be provided for foster parents. She recommended that workshops and courses be video taped for those who cannot attend, or need to review the information. She suggested copies of tapes could be made available from a resource library. She said video tapes and a "hot line telephone number" should be available for parents, working with sexually abused children.

Although the majority of foster parents agree that annual training is helpful and should be made available to them, the implementation of mandatory training has created problems for other foster families. Both the foster mother and father are required to attend

mandatory training sessions and this may be problematic for a variety of reasons. One foster father said that he fostered 40 children and raised 7 of his own, so training at this point in his life is not something that he is interested in. He said his wife attends all the training sessions, shares the information with him and both are active members of their association. They are concerned about changes in mandatory training and the foster mother said "we have been told that we will be closed, no longer used after September if he doesn't attend the training."

Education, communication and training are all issues reported by foster parents to be problematic and create barriers for foster parents and agencies. Additionally, the distribution of maintenance rates for children in care and monetary compensation for foster parents generated feelings of dissatisfaction among foster parents.

Inadequate Compensation

Inadequate reimbursement is an issue for many foster parents who were interviewed and many felt that the per diem rates for children are much too low. According to one foster parent, "foster parents are grossly underpaid" and current rates are an insult to foster parents who provide exceptional care to children. One foster mother cautioned that if the agencies wanted to maintain high quality care for foster children the rates offered to foster parents have to increase. Another said "per diems have to change, or they're going to lose good foster parents." Some foster parents who were interviewed felt that they made choices for one parent to stay at home to care for foster children because "these children require a full time parent at home and it makes the difference . . . I feel strongly that a stay at home parent offers a stability that is rare today." Others believed that foster parents who chose to work outside the home and also

care for foster children, should have the opportunity to do so.

Foster parents who participated in the research overwhelmingly agreed that foster parents do a lot of work for little pay. The majority agree that maintenance rates paid to foster parents should increase every few years. Brogan (1991) wrote that inadequate reimbursement rates translated into negative messages about the value of the work foster parents do. "The messages we are sending to Nova Scotia foster parents are very clear when one considers their work is not even at par with minimum wage and are significantly lower" (p 46).

Other financial issues have become areas of contention for foster parents, such as reimbursements and lapses of time for reimbursements. One foster parent announced that she is frustrated by unrealistic expectations of the agency, given the time and energy it takes to parent many foster children, she feels saving receipts for essential items seems an inappropriate use of time. She reported that she is required to save receipts for diapers and this seemed ridiculous to her. She cares for an infant who requires several changes per day, and submits receipts for 5 packages of diapers per month. She remarked "you would think for anyone this would be common sense". This foster mother stated that work could be streamlined and instead of ensuring that every receipt for every item such as diapers is saved, calculated and attached to reimbursement forms, essential items that are regularly used could be submitted without receipts.

Another foster mother talked about the dissension that was generated between agency staff and a foster parent over non-prescription medications recommended by doctors. One particular foster child was brought to her severely malnourished and was prescribed a supplement that the agency was refusing to cover. Another foster child that

was living with her contracted chicken pox and was prescribed non-prescription medications and baths. The agency challenged these purchases for the child and the foster parent became frustrated. She said per diem rates are so low that any additional costs foster parents have to pay "ends up coming out of foster parent's pockets". This particular foster mother said that it's the ambiguity of agency rules that is most frustrating, some items will be covered for some children, others won't; some workers approve others won't; some agencies approve, some don't. She said "there seems to be constant battles over money. . . the worker is good, but it's not clear what items are covered for the children." Another foster parent said it seemed to her at times "the agency seems more interested in money than the child." This is discouraging for foster parents whose priority is the day to day care of the child.

One retired foster parent said it was always difficult for her financially. She said she lived on a fixed income and would sometimes have to wait up to five weeks to be reimbursed from the agency. She said if things were really tough for her she would "visit the agency and they would issue a payment" for her in the interim, but this was a complicated procedure and one she chose to avoid, unless it was an emergency. Another foster parent agreed and said that one of the things she would change about the current system is "the payments getting to foster parents on time."

Special needs funding for children who require exceptional care is another issue that can be frustrating for foster parents. A foster mother who was interviewed said that some workers told her that there wasn't much money available for special needs items, and she later discovered that there were other foster children in the community who had the same problems as her foster child and received more funding for services. She said

"we didn't know there were things available to us that other foster parents had."

Agencies across the province have different attitudes regarding inclusion of foster parents in case planning for children, liaison to agency, communication, training and remuneration. This disparity among agencies across the province was reported by foster parents to be very disconcerting.

<u>Disparity Among Agencies</u>

Lack of consistency between workers and policies appears to be another area of discontentment for foster parents. One foster parent who relocated from one area of the province to another in Nova Scotia explained it this way . . . "what one person sees as advocacy, another will see as trouble making. What should apply to all, doesn't." She indicated that the messages she receives from the workers in different agencies are conflicting. The agency she worked for when the interview was completed praised her families' commitment to the foster children, and said that their methods were very professional. She said this was not the case in the area where they lived before, where they were told by the agency that her family "shouldn't become so connected to the children, we felt that we were paid babysitters, that's all." She expressed concern that some foster parents are very concerned with pleasing the agency, and when this happens the needs of the agency take precedent over the needs of the child.

Many of the foster parents who were interviewed suggested that affiliation with their local foster parent association is helpful in dealing with many of the aforementioned issues. The local, provincial and national foster parent associations are forums for foster parents to have open discussion of experiences, problems and effective ways to deal with difficulties.

Foster parents who were interviewed said that the three main reasons why more foster parents don't attend foster parent association meetings are: 1) lack of adequate child care for high needs foster children, 2) geographical distances to travel to meetings and 3) time constraints, working parents with families and other commitments in the community.

Challenges to Foster Parent Satisfaction

One foster parent who was interviewed announced: "My biggest complaint is that foster parents are not listened to." Repeated throughout this chapter is the theme of dissatisfaction created by ineffective communication. Foster parents clearly stated that it is important for them to be respected, listened to, be considered part of the team, and participate in the foster child's case planning. They would like to have timely notifications of placement changes, visitations with biological family, and notifications of changes to the child's case plan. The foster mother who was quoted above recommended that all notifications should be given to the foster parents from the caseworkers in writing.

Bureaucracy in the child welfare system can be daunting for foster parents. After many years of working in the foster care system and unsuccessfully advocate for changes, one foster parent said: "The chain of command doesn't lead to the people who can actually change the problems in the system. We [foster parents] have no input. We either have to accept the way things are or get out. We are choosing to get out."

The first year of fostering is often the most difficult time for foster parents, and they require additional support. Many foster parents expressed a desire and need for increased support when they are receiving a child for the first time, and throughout the early stages of placement.

Other foster parents are comfortable with their role, are members of their

association and advocate for changes through collective efforts. A foster parent, who is

very active in the local and provincial association said "I think we are making headway in

Nova Scotia." In the area where she lives the agency provides regular support to foster

parents, therefore she feels respected by the workers and has a good working relationship

with them. Another foster parent said "We are very happy with our foster care services

and they respond quickly when ever we have any questions or need advice. We're very

grateful for everything the child care services has done for us."

Foster Parent's Ideas to Increase Satisfaction

The following were recommendations made directly by the foster parents on the

questionnaire, letters attached to the questionnaire and during follow up interviews. They

are listed in order of those mentioned most often by participants in the study:

1. Respite, regular respite for all foster parents. Foster homes should be approved and designated as respite homes. These foster parents should be paid a maintenance fee, similar to parent counsellors.

2. Increased funding - rates are too low. Foster parents said they are putting their own money into raising foster children because board rates just do not cover expenses. Some foster parents maintain that potential foster parent applicants may express an interest if board and reimbursable rates covered expenditures.

3. Training. Respondents recommended regular training be made available to foster parents.

4. Workers should have ample time for the children, foster parents and biological parents, and they should caseload sizes to facilitate this service. Caseworkers should be more available for foster parents in particular. They could be accessible certain times, certain days each week for phone calls or visits from foster parents, similar to an appointment block. Foster parents and child welfare agencies need to develop more professional, mutually respectful working relationships, where foster parent's roles are clearly defined.

5.   Allegations of abuse are a major concern for foster parents. A support person from the foster parent's community should be available to the family right away. Many foster parents feel that they are considered guilty until proven innocent, this leads to a sense of intimidation and isolation. They indicated federation representatives don't always know the foster parent, or the child and a local representative may provide more personalized support.

6.   The insurance system is inadequate. Foster parents have to apply for additional insurance coverage. This costs extra and may have negative implications for foster parents, especially those who have violent and/or destructive foster children. Foster parents may be penalized by their insurance company when they submit for claims. Insurance companies often increase rates, or consider foster parents a "bad risk" because there is no mechanism to note when damages are done by a foster child.

7.   Implementation of a buddy system where foster parents share information and experiences. In circumstances where one or the other cannot attend meetings or training, or for those who may be intimidated to approach the agency with a concern or problem. An experienced, specified foster parent could provide this support.

The implementation of a buddy system was successfully introduced by the Casey Family Program Project (1993). "A foster parent 'buddy' (i.e., another foster parent who can be called for advice or support) can provide an important source of support for a foster parent and may increase the chance of retention" (p 5).

<div align="center">Responses From Foster Care Staff</div>

Rating Satisfaction

The foster care workers who were interviewed were asked if, in their opinion, foster parents would rate their job satisfaction as high or low. All 4 caseworkers agreed that some foster parents would rate it high, some would rate it low or "medium to low", depending on the foster parents. A worker in an urban centre felt that most foster parents would rate their satisfaction low, while a worker from a rural area replied, "It is difficult to say how foster parents would rate their job satisfaction level. Probably a bit of both,

some saying high, some low." Another caseworker observed that even though some

foster parents have had negative experiences they are still fostering, and this probably

indicated they are experiencing some level of job satisfaction. He said: "Most foster

parents want to help, that's why they get in to know they are making a difference."

Increasing satisfaction

Caseworkers were asked to make recommendations that would create a higher

satisfaction level for foster parents. Some felt that if there was greater emphasis on foster

parent involvement in case planning for the child in care, this would increase

satisfaction. One worker declared: "Not enough ongoing information is provided about

the child by workers to foster parents, team approaches to placement and planning would

increase communication."

Additional field and placement staff at the agency was cited by another foster care

worker, who indicated that this would allow the program to be "done the way it's

supposed to be done." The general sense from all the foster care workers interviewed was

that increased staffing would allow caseworkers to spend more time addressing the issues

that may cause the foster parents to be dissatisfied.

Foster care workers said increasing payments to foster parents may help to

address one area of dissatisfaction. One worker recommended the foster parents be paid a

salary for travel, recreation and personal expenditures for the child. In this way foster

parents would have more autonomy and flexibility, and diminish the number of times

they contact the social worker for funding approval.

A worker in an urban area told me that it is not only departmental policies that

create frustration for the foster parents, but working with so many different caseworkers

whose approaches to fiscal management and funding approval varies so widely. The

foster care, child-in-care and child protection workers are all responsible for approving

different aspects of compensation for foster parents and children.

Local and provincial strategies

Foster care workers were asked to recommend programs or services the agency

could implement to increase foster parent satisfaction and willingness to continue

fostering. The caseworkers had several practical solutions, and their answers are listed as

follows:

- One office recently implemented a form to be completed by the child's caseworker prior to his or her placement in a foster home. It includes specific information on the child's current functioning, general historical and health information. A copy of this form is sent with the foster child when he or she is placed.

- Implement a protocol whereby foster parents are given copies of any reports or assessments that have been completed for the child. Precautions should be taken to ensure that identifying and collateral information is removed.

- Trained professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists) should be available to provide education and support to foster parents about severe trauma, i.e. attachment, post-traumatic stress disorder, and presented in individual or group sessions. Group education is often beneficial, because foster parents can learn from each others' experience, as well as the facilitator.

- Regular education sessions presented by guest speakers to the foster parents during a portion of their monthly association meetings. Topics may include, but are not limited to: youth-in-care issues, indicators of abuse and attachment. Topics should be identified by the foster parents as ones that are significant to them.

- Agency caseworkers should have small caseloads so that support and regular contact can be maintained. One worker felt that the ideal would be to have contact with each foster family once a month.

- Development of foster parent associations in areas were none currently exists. This would help the foster parents in those regions to develop a support network with other foster parents.

- Child welfare staff who are trained in issues pertaining to grieving and loss should be available to foster parents. Quite often foster parents are overlooked when a child who they had for a long time is placed or returns home.

Many foster care staff said that it is ineffective to make many changes at the front line, if the broader issues of staffing and resources are not addressed and remain insufficient for them to do their jobs effectively. The foster care workers reported that they are committed to the program, the foster parents and the children, and although they were prepared to do what they can to provide support, they also recognize their limitations. Many foster care workers are as dissatisfied with the current system as the foster parents reported to be.

Discussion of Thesis Question

I proposed that foster parents in Nova Scotia apply to foster children with the most honourable intentions, but become discouraged and disillusioned along the way. I speculated that many would be feeling confused about their roles in the child welfare system, and often at a loss of how to deal with the complexity of problems that are presented to them by the very children they are attempting to shelter, love and support.

The thesis question was answered in the responses from foster parents on the questionnaire, and during follow-up interviews with foster parents and foster care workers. As discussed in the previous chapter, under the heading "Foster Parents' Feelings of Competency" just over one-half of foster parents participating feel competent to deal with foster children's behavior, and little more than one-third reported that they have access to regular respite. The majority feel that foster children's behavior is more challenging than it was in the past.

Foster parents confirmed that their motivation to foster was to provide a safe,

nurturing home to abused and neglected children. Many foster parents acknowledged that they are not treated in a respectful way by the agencies they work for, and inadequate information is provided to them about the children they are caring for. Foster parents related that agency expectations are high, while reimbursement rates are low, and guidelines are vague. They said they often do not have the skills required to work with abused, neglected and traumatised children, and regularly experience feelings of isolation.

The additional questions that were considered in this research pertained to demographic information about foster parents, factors contributing to satisfaction, foster parent's interpretation of their role in the child welfare system, their relationship with the agency they work with.

Demographic information was discussed in detail in the previous chapter, with the majority of foster parents reporting that they are in a married relationship, and a mean age between 46 and 48 years old. Over one-half the foster parents in this study described themselves as White/Caucasian, the second largest responses were Native, and third as Black. Foster parents overall are well educated, earned above average salaries, and while most foster fathers conveyed that they were employed outside the home, the majority of foster mothers are not. Many of the foster families in Nova Scotia are inexperienced, and just under one-half of foster parents having less than five years experience.

The factors that foster parents identified as contributing to satisfaction were those aspects related to accomplishments with the foster children, and the support and training they receive from the agency they work with to be successful in this area.

Foster parents are very ambiguous about their role in the child welfare system. Some stated that they didn't know how to describe themselves as foster parents, while

other described themselves as glorified babysitters, volunteers, professionals, and part of team of professionals. Foster parents made it very clear that although they may consider themselves as professionals, the agency they work with rarely deals with them in a professional manner.

The relationship with agency was cited by foster parents as one of the major areas of dissatisfaction for foster parents. The foster parents who discontinued were asked to identify the reasons why, and the majority who responded attributed lack of adequate support from the agency they were working with as the reason why they withdrew. Specifically, foster parents said the following factors would increase satisfaction and retention rates: regular respite care, adequate reimbursement, training, and supportive relationship with agency, and regular contact with caseworkers.

Summary

This chapter presented information provided by the foster parents in the questionnaires, letters attached with the returned questionnaires, and follow up interviews with foster parents and foster care workers. Included in the presentation was demographic information about the foster parents in Nova Scotia, and an illustration of the most and least rewarding aspects of foster care. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were used in the investigation, and analysis that concluded with a discussion of the thesis question. Questions from the methodology section were incorporated into the chapter and included the following topics: Factors that contribute to foster parent satisfaction, internal and external rewards, competency, least rewarding aspects of foster care, foster parent's relationship with agency and staff, prevention, respect, isolation, allegations of abuse, training, foster parent associations and provision of services.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

"The first thing that should always be said about foster families is that the work they do is nothing short of heroic. Often with little advanced notice, they disrupt their own family lives in order to make a place for society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth. Under the most difficult of circumstances, they attempt to provide for them the protection, stability and nurturing that the child's own families could not give them. This resource is precious indeed. It is precious not only to the children and youth who come to live in these families but also to the schools, social service agencies and clinics who work with these same children and youth. But fostering is also hard work and it exacts a toll on those that take it on." (Charles Emmrys 1999, p. 1)

Conclusions

Details presented in the introduction, literature review and data analysis demonstrate the invaluable service provided by foster parents to children, families and child welfare agencies in the province of Nova Scotia.

Chapter 4 presents statistical information regarding retention rates for foster parents. A comparison of this data and the data from earlier studies clearly show that the numbers of foster parents have decreased significantly over the past 20 years. The information presented in the literature review, and compared to the data in this research clearly demonstrate that foster parent recruitment and retention rates are in fact declining. As detailed in chapter 1, there were 1,760 foster homes in Nova Scotia in 1978, that number decreased to 891 by 1989, and fell again to 625 homes by 1991. By the year 2000 the total number registered was 553 Nova Scotia foster homes.

The data collected in 1992 by the federation of foster families of Nova Scotia (discussed in chapter 1), and evaluated against the data in this study would suggest that the population of existing foster parents is aging, and the numbers of younger foster

parents applying to foster are lower than in the past. In 1992, the average foster mother and father was reported to be approximately 40 years old. In this research the majority of foster mothers were between 40 and 52 years old, with a mean age of 46.34 years, while foster fathers were calculated at a mean age of 48.01 years.

Relationship with Agency

Foster parents who were surveyed and interviewed indicated that there were numerous reasons for their decision to discontinue fostering. They included: Illness, needing time-out (burnout), family demands, changes in life circumstances, relocation, adoption, employment demands, no particular reason, and closed involuntarily by agency. The number one reason citied by foster parents for discontinuing was inadequate support from, or conflict with agency.

I noted a discrepancy between foster parent's responses to the questions regarding relationship with agency. In both the questionnaires and interviews the majority of foster parents described their relationship with agency staff as helpful and beneficial, and nearly one half the respondents said they were somewhat satisfied with the foster care services in their area. However, the number one reason why they discontinue and feel dissatisfied is either conflict with, or inadequate support from the agencies they work with. This is possibly explained by the foster parent's recognition of the difference between agency policies and the front line social workers, with whom they have regular contact. Respondents to the survey, indicated that for the most part they have good working relationships with the agency staff, but agency policies are sometimes restrictive and problematic.

In a letter to editor, Sandra MacNeil a senior social worker in Cape Breton wrote

about the frustrations social workers experience in the child welfare system. Foster

parents work in that same system:

> Workers become angry because there is little acknowledgment of the problems
> within the system: the limitations, the understaffing, the focus on documentation
> and administrative tasks at the expense of direct work with clients, and judges
> ruling on the removal and return of children. . . Child welfare workers often lead
> lives of quiet desperation - desperation because of the severity of problems and
> lack of resources, and quiet because they are afraid to speak publicly. It is a
> system that expresses concern for the welfare and rights of children but on a daily
> basis demands that workers perform tasks that do more to serve the interests of
> bureaucracy and government than the interests of children and their families
> (Cape Breton Post, April 4, 1998).

Foster parents reported having both positive and negative experiences with the agency

they work with, but many feel isolated and left without support to deal with serious issues

related to parenting abused and neglected children. According to Delaney (2000) foster

parents increase skills and competency through experience, parenting groups, other foster

parents, and professionals, but do not always have opportunities to build this knowledge

base, he cautions:

> Unfortunately, many parents who seek help cannot find what they need. Either
> they connect with professionals who don't understand their unique situation, or
> they find helpers who feel out of their depth with the level of disturbance
> presented by the children. While few parents are actually kicked out of offices,
> they are often referred on to others, who refer them on to still others (p. 3).

Compensation issues were also problematic for foster parents working in the child

welfare system. In particular, they identified the following issues: board and per diem

rates were too low, inconsistent payment schedules, and incongruities with approval for

reimbursable items; between workers in the same office, and from agency to agency.

Issues of inadequate compensation are not a new dilemma. A report of Review of Foster

Care in Ontario (1987) found that compensation issues were one of the major problems

cited by foster parents across the province. Specifically, the issues were identified as:

* "Basic board rate" is defined in a wide variety of ways. No two agencies pay the same basic board rate.
* Each agency identifies different items as eligible for reimbursement.
* Subsidies may or may not be paid by the agency. There is no clear rationale for paying or not.
* The reimbursement system is slow, cumbersome, misunderstood and generally unpopular with foster parents.
* The lack of standard terminology for comparing rates or classifications makes it impossible for agencies or foster parents to accurately compare rates paid (p.13).

Although board rates across the province of Nova Scotia are standardized, many of the

other complaints continue to persist in our current system.

Foster Parent Retention and Satisfaction

This thesis examined the factors that contribute to foster parent job satisfaction,

and the aspects of fostering considered to be most and least rewarding in that they may

provide insight for improved recruitment and retention of foster parents.

Throughout the preceding chapters, it is clearly documented that foster parents

achieve the highest gratification and satisfaction from the foster children they work with.

They are most highly motivated by the foster children's development, growth and

successes. In contrast, foster parents reported that they are least satisfied with the services

provided by the agencies they are registered with, and disappointed when their attempts

to help abused and neglected children fail.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, role ambiguity is a problem for many foster

parents. Although nearly one-half of the foster parents surveyed consider themselves to

be part of a team of professionals helping children, they reported that it is not common

practice for agencies across the province to treat them as professionals. As noted earlier in

the chapter, more than 10 percent of respondents did not know, or chose the category of other because they are unsure how to classify their role in the child welfare system.

There were several aspects of foster care that were noted by foster parents who were interviewed as least rewarding for them. The most significant of these were lack of communication with the agencies they work with, inadequate compensation, interventions with the children that effect no change. Working with the children was cited as the overall most rewarding aspect of foster care for foster parents, while inadequate support from agency is the most unsatisfactory aspect of fostering.

One of the most challenging tasks identified in the literature review was the development and effective administration of services to children and youth who have special needs, including severe emotional and psychological problems, or physical disabilities, resulting from abuse and neglect. Other challenges identified by foster parents and caseworkers as the most critical issues facing the future of foster care in Nova Scotia include: Improving relationships between foster parents and child welfare agencies, clarification of their respective roles, increased reimbursement rates, and training for foster parents.

Those aspects of foster care foster parents found to be most rewarding need to be strengthened and maintained. Least rewarding aspects identified by foster parents demand examination to make the system more effective for foster parents, children and caseworkers. By a process of gathering information from the literature review, from foster parents and caseworkers and adhering to suggestions from previous studies, recommendations were drawn up for this report. Ure (1995) provided valuable insight for foster care service delivery beyond the year 2000:

The purpose of a vision is to lead, to inspire, to describe both what is possible, and what is desirable. When we can imagine what is possible that is better than what we have right now, this is a natural and irresistible tendency to start moving in that direction. So, our hope is to continue what already works well in fostering, to do it more often and on purpose, everywhere in Nova Scotia.

Throughout this research I became increasingly more aware of the importance of asking the foster care workers and foster parents themselves what qualities contribute to their success and failures. Quite often we forget that it takes an entire child welfare system to provide adequate and dependable care for an abused or neglected child. As a system, we have shared responsibilities and cannot assume that success or failure of a child's placement is determined exclusively by qualities of the individual foster home, apart from the larger child welfare/foster care system. This is especially so if the child welfare system has chronically neglected to provide the funding for staffing and resources to meet the standards and guidelines in place.

The information highlighted in the literature review is not new. Foster parents, researchers, social scientists and social workers have been struggling with these problems throughout the twentieth century. Twenty years ago Social Scientists in England, Australia and America were examining issues inherent to the foster care system. Pasztor & Wynne (1995) give the following synopsis:

> By 1980, the child welfare field had made considerable gains in identifying a conceptual framework for recruitment and retention. The importance of 4 factors had been recognized: foster parent role clarity, a team approach, a comprehensive recruitment strategy in which foster parents and foster parent associations play a major role, and preservice and inservice training as a component of retention.
> Five others were still to be recognized: specification of the foster parent's role, with its commensurate rights, responsibilities, and rewards, the practice of teamwork (beyond the theory), community involvement in recruitment, comprehensive strategies for retention, and preservice training and inservice programs that are comprehensive, affordable, accessible, and congruent with

caseworker training (p 8).

Unfortunately outdated child welfare policy and practice create disadvantages to both foster parent retention and recruitment. Clearly, there needs to be a role defined for foster parents so that rights, responsibilities and rewards are clear and consistent. Other typically sensitive issues identified by foster parents and social workers were:

1.   Regular respite care services.

2.   Adequate reimbursement.

3.   Liability insurance that is more inclusive and reliable.

4.   Effective pre-service and in-service training.

5.   Caseworkers and supervisors who are skilled and supportive.

6.   Adequate and accurate information about the children placed in their homes.

7.   Counselling services for children and foster parents when necessary.

8.   Support in prevention and intervention regarding abuse allegations.

In the year 2000, the province of Nova Scotia introduced programs and legislation to enhance child welfare service delivery. The two most significant are; new staffing positions, and the purchase of a foster parent training model. New child welfare positions (71) were approved across the province. The majority of those positions were designated to child protection, but many agencies and district offices are allocating positions to the foster care program. Secondly, P.R.I..D.E.- A model for Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (1990) was purchased. Developed by Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and Child Welfare League of America, the program provides guidelines for inservice and ongoing professional development for foster parents. The overall goals and objectives are to "strengthen the quality of family

foster care and adoption services by providing a standardized, structured framework for

recruiting, preparing, and selecting foster parents and adoptive parents" (Child Welfare

League of America, 1995, p 1). The approach is one that is "competency-based" in that

it offers training in the information and proficiencies required to effectively foster and

adopt children they are:

- ► protecting and nurturing children
- ► meeting children's developmental needs and addressing developmental delays
- ► supporting relationships between children and their families
- ► connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime
- ► working as a member of a professional team. (CWLA, 1995, p. 2)

Pre-service training is intended for foster and adoptive applicants, prior to the placement
of a child. Core competency training is mandatory for all foster parents, and examined
over ten modules of the "Foster PRIDE Core Training Program". The PRIDE program
goals are to help:

- ● Meet the protective, developmental, cultural, and permanency needs of children
  placed with foster families and adoptive families
- ● Strengthen families, whether they are families of origin, blended families,
  extended or kinship families, foster families, adoptive families, or members of a
  tribe or clan.
- ● Strengthen the quality of family foster care and adoption services by providing a
  standardized, structured framework for preservice training and mutual assessment;
  for foster parent inservice training; and for ongoing professional development.
- ● Share resources among public and voluntary child welfare agencies, colleges and
  universities, foster parent and adoptive parent associations, and national child
  welfare organizations. (CWLA, 1995, p. 1)

More experienced foster parents will be given an opportunity for Advanced and

Specialized competencies. It is interesting to note that the above proficiencies

categorized in the P.R.I.D.E. model were identified by foster parents, who participated in

this study, as lacking in the current foster care system in Nova Scotia.

The most significant aspect of the PRIDE model is that it has been adapted to

apply Canadian and specifically, Nova Scotia content. The provincial program was

modified by Canadian and Nova Scotia social workers and foster parents to reflect

Maritime content, cultural diversity, experience and terminology. Within a few years,

foster parents all across the province will have the opportunity to participate in the

training model designed to enhance the foster care system.

Strategic goals have been identified and presented to government by the Foster

Care Consultation Project to address many of the issues identified by the foster parents

and caseworkers at the time the project was implemented. These goals also addressed the

issues identified by Nova Scotia foster parents in this thesis. The general statements that

are listed below should be the foundation for the objectives and tasks implemented over

the next few years to improve the foster care programs across the province, the goals

identified are:

1. To contribute to a continuum of care that provides complete, essential and integrated community services to children and their families in Nova Scotia.
2. To improve the effectiveness and the quality of the foster care system with professional standards, training resources, support mechanisms, teamwork strategies, and adequate compensation and recognition for the work of foster families.
3. To implement the foster care system as a stable, cost-effective, and community-based service throughout the province. (Ure, 1995)

Recommendations

Several issues were identified as collectively crucial by the foster parents and

caseworkers, as well as noted in the literature. Based on these, and listed in order of

importance the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Standards for foster parents should be developed, including: A job description,

foster care classification system, specifications and measures of performance, and

the requirements of the occupation.

2. Clear definition of the role of foster parent. Future foster applicants may view themselves as individuals who will provide special treatment to children, in a home and family environment rather than substitute biological families.

3. That a standard definition for specialized foster care be developed. Fees for service may be linked to the characteristics and expertise outlined in the definition.

4. Social work caseloads should be small enough to provide the adequate and timely support to children and families. In particular to new foster parents during their first year of fostering, if they have children placed in their homes.

5. That all foster care workers, supervisors and administrators attend mandatory training in the PRIDE model, the history of foster care, the value of the foster parent as professional, and facilitate a "teamwork" approach.

6. Foster Care caseworkers should have specialized training in all facets of the foster care program. CORE training for caseworkers would include: Competencies and professional social work skills required for the foster care program, in particular the ability to work as a team member and the responsibility to support children's relationships with, and feelings for their families. Overview of the history of child welfare and foster care in Nova Scotia. Familiarity with Children and Family Services Act (1990) and Child Protection Standards, Policies and Procedures Manual (1998 and knowledge of Nova Scotia Family and Children's Services Foster Care Manual (1998). Information about the issues of attachment and loss for children and foster parents. Problems with multiple placements and how to

avoid them. Promotion and preservation of the cultural and ethnic heritage of the children in foster care. Permanency planning for children in care, and the lifelong impact of foster care on children, youths and their families.

7. Case planning for children coming into care should include unique family strengths and needs, cultural and ethnic affiliations, continuity of care. More accurate matching of foster child to foster home should be implemented based on the therapeutic abilities of the parents, and the presenting problems of the child. Legislation should reflect the value of "restricted foster homes" as the most viable option for children coming into care. The policy and program guidelines should reflect the importance of providing financial and case management support to family members caring for children as it does for regular foster parents.

8. A contract should be drawn up for each and every child who is placed in a foster home. The contract between the foster parent, child, possibly biological family and foster care worker including: reasons why the placement is necessary, who is party to the contract, goals/objectives and tasks of placement, plans to maintain family involvement, regular contact times between foster parents, foster care worker and parents. Measurable time frames. Integral to case planning for the child, is the inclusion of pre-placement visits, as imperative.

9. Foster parents should expect to collaborate with social workers and other service providers as the norm rather than the exception. When it is anticipated that a child will be placed for a long term in a specific foster home, those foster parents should participate to the full extent in case planning. This may include, reviews on the child, documenting and preserving any information about the child's

progress and development, as well as making decisions for the child in their care. Wherever and whenever possible the foster parent must be committed to supporting the child's relationships with the family of origin.

10. Each child and youth coming into permanent care should be assigned a social worker, foster parent and therapeutic support. This team would take on specific tasks to ensure the continued well being and natural development of the child.

11. Caseworkers and foster parents should have the training necessary to anticipate limited emotional expectations of children in care. They should be aware that the trauma of abuse, neglect and multiple placements may produce some children who may never be able to attach to caregivers regardless of how much attention and affection they receive.

12. Foster parents who provide therapeutic care for special needs children require pre-service and in-service training, and ongoing professional development. They should have no more than two children placed in the home. Regular consultation with qualified social work and/or therapeutic support staff should be available, along with an opportunity for problem solving and evaluation as part of a team. Immediate response to crisis situations. Adequate salary compensations, and regular respite care.

13. Local mental health units should be approached to partner with the child welfare agencies to collaborate with the team, to better serve children with mental health needs. Risk conferences could be utilized, and include a member of the mental health unit. In this way, consultation about one or several children may occur simultaneously.

14. A recognition that the foster parents depend on the skills and abilities of social workers, the social workers cannot function well without the respect and support of foster parents. Mutual respect, support and exchange of ideas needs to be present to facilitate optimal functioning in the foster care system. Professional competence is the expectation of both foster parents and social workers.

15. The basic board rate should be uniform across the province, and include costs associated with:

a) food, shelter and all costs incurred on behalf of the children, regardless of age.

b) upon placement of a child, any anticipated extraordinary costs may be negotiated with the foster parent. A review of circumstances should occur every six months.

c) fees for services may also be negotiated with foster parents upon placement, for specific, predetermined services. (i.e. transportation costs).

16. Representatives of foster parent associations, together with local and provincial foster care personnel and financial planners should form a working group to identify procedures and resources to: set standards for foster care, develop a thorough system of foster parent support, a more reasonable benefits plan, including rates of pay, liability compensation to help cover the cost of damages done to foster parents' homes, vehicles etc. by children in care, vacations, respite and retirement.

17. Foster parents should be encouraged to engage in analysis of their own parenting strengths and weakness and identify areas where they need additional skills.

18. The annual review that is currently used to give foster parents feedback, may be

utilized to give foster parents an opportunity to provide feedback to agency staff. An appendix to the annual review form would assess foster parent satisfaction. Policy and procedures should reflect the importance of this feedback and develop a method to incorporate the feedback and suggestions, into the local foster care service system.

Summary

This chapter presented the conclusions that were drawn from and analysis of data gathered from foster parents and foster care workers in Nova Scotia. An examination of previous studies, compared to the data in this research indicates that recruitment and retention rates for foster parents have diminished over the past twenty years. Foster parent's relationship with the agency with whom they work significantly influences job satisfaction, and working in isolation, without adequate support contributes to dissatisfaction. Foster parents validated that they persevere in the current foster care system, in spite of it's deficiencies, to help abused and neglected children.

The future of foster care in Nova Scotia is looking brighter than in the past. Improvements in the child welfare system, that were noted earlier in the chapter have the potential to increase recruitment and retention rates, and most importantly foster parent satisfaction.

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Appendix "A"

Foster Parent Survey
(Socio-demographic Information)
Please check one answer
Please identify who is completing this questionnaire:
Foster mother _____ **Foster father** _____ **Both** _____

1. What is your age in years: Foster Mother _____ Foster Father _____

2. Marital status
Single ____ Married ____ Divorced ____ Widowed ____ Other ____

3. Education level:
Foster Mother:
    less than grade 8 ____ some high school ____ Graduate grade 12 ____
    College graduate ____ Graduate study ____

Foster Father:
    less than grade 8 ____ some high school ____ Graduate grade 12 ____
    College graduate ____ Graduate study ____

4. a) Do you have biological Children?
    No ____ Yes ____
    1-4 children _____ 5-10 children _____ more than 10 _____

    b) Do you have legally adopted children?
    No ____ Yes ____
    1-4 children _____ 5-10 children _____ more than 10 _____

5. Are you employed outside of home?
Foster Mother:No ____ Yes ____
    Your annual income is:
Under $20,000 ____ $20,000.-$29,000 ____ $30,000.-$50,000 ____ over $50,000 ____

Foster Father: No ____ Yes ____
    Your annual income is:
Under $20,000 ____ $20,000.-$30,000 ____ $30,000.-$50,000 ____ over $50,000 ____

6. You live in which area of the province?
Western Region (Yarmouth to Hants County, including South Shore)_____
Eastern Region (Cape Breton Island) _____
Northern Region (Guysborough to Cumberland Co.)_____
Central Region (Halifax County) _____

7. In your own words please describe your ethnic origin (race) ?

_____

8. As a foster parent, you consider yourself to be:
a member of a team of professionals _____ a professional _____ a volunteer _____
unknown _____ other (please specify) _____

9. a) Are you presently fostering children? Yes___ No ___

   b) If no, how long has it been since you fostered? _____ years.

   c) Why did you stop fostering? Please give specific details _____

_____

_____

10 a) How long have you fostered (did you foster) children?
      0-5 years _____   6-10 years _____   11-15 years

      16-20 years _____   20-25 years _____   26 years or more ____

   b) How many children have you fostered over the years?
      1-10 _____   11-20 _____   21-35 _____ 36 - 50_____
      50-99 _____   more than 100 _____
   c) How many children have you ever fostered at one time?
      1-3 ____   4-6 ____   7-10 ____

11. Would you describe your experience with fostering children as:
Very satisfying ____ Satisfying ___ Less than satisfying ___Very unsatisfying ___

**Please circle a number to show how much you agree or disagree with each statement **

1. I became a foster parent to give children a home who needed loving parents
     1   2   3   4   5
strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree
2. I (we) have no regrets about the time invested in foster children
     1   2   3   4   5
strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree
3. I (we) feel competent to deal with children's difficult behavior
     1   2   3   4   5
strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree
4. I (we) can get a break from parenting when I (we) need one
     1   2   3   4   5
strongly disagree   disagree   neutral   agree   strongly agree

5. Fostering gives me (us) a feeling of accomplishment

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

6. Sharing their home with foster children is a good experience for biological children

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

7. Children's behavior is more difficult now than ever before

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

8. Being a foster parent is more difficult today than it used to be

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

9. Sometimes foster parents feel frustrated and find it difficult to deal with foster child's behavior

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

10. a) A foster care worker visits my (our) home regularly to meet with the foster parents

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) A children in care worker visits my home regularly to meet with the foster child

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) A child protection worker visits my home regularly to see the foster child

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

11. a) I (we) enjoy having regular contact from the foster care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) I (we) enjoy having regular contact from the children in care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) I (we) enjoy having regular contact from the child protection worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

12. Foster parents are encouraged to express opinions and have input when decisions are made for children in care

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

13. a) I (we) have regular telephone contact with the foster care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) I (we) have regular telephone contact with the children in care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) I (we) have regular telephone contact with the child protection worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

14. a) Regular contact with the foster care worker is helpful

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) Regular contact with the children in care worker is helpful

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) Regular contact with the child protection worker is helpful

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

15. I (we) can contact a social worker (agency) any time for support and encouragement

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

16. a) I (we) receive information about parenting issues when I (we) ask the foster care worker for it

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) I (we) receive information about parenting issues when I (we) ask the children in care worker for it

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) I (we) receive information about parenting issues when I (we) ask the child protection worker for it

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

17. I (we) receive information about fostering issues when I (we) ask the foster care worker for it

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

18. a) As a foster parent, I (we) have a good relationship with the foster care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

b) As a foster parent, I (we) have a good relationship with the child in care worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

c) As a foster parent, I (we) have a good relationship with the child protection worker

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

19. Foster parents are treated with respect by the child welfare agency

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

20. Foster parents are treated fairly by the child welfare agency

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

21. Foster parents are concerned about allegations of abuse by foster children

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

22. I am confident that the agency would support me (us) if a child in my home made allegations   of abuse

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

**Please circle a number to show how much you agree or disagree with each statement **

23. Foster parents should have more training to meet the needs of children coming into care

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

24. Foster parent training should be mandatory

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

25. Foster parents are given regular opportunities to upgrade their skills

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

26. Foster parents do a lot of work for little pay

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

27. Foster parents have an opportunity to share experiences with other foster parents

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

28. There is a foster parent association and/or organization in my area

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

29. I (we are) am a member of my local foster parent association and/or organization

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

30. Maintenance rates paid to foster parents should increase every few years

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

31. I (we) attend meeting of my foster parent association and/or organization

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

32. Foster parents would attend more association meetings if they had the time

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Please check one answer

33. How satisfied are you with the current foster care services offered in your area?
not satisfied ___ somewhat satisfied ___ very satisfied ___ extremely satisfied ___

**Please circle a number to show how much you agree or disagree with each statement **

34. Foster parents need more recognition, for the work they do

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

35. People in my community view foster parenting as worthwhile

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

36. People in my community admire the job foster parents do

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

37. People in my community are generally supportive of my work as a foster parent

1	2	3	4	5
strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree

Rate the following supports in order of importance. The same rating may be used more than once.

1   **Very Important**
2   **Important**
3   **Neutral**
4   **Somewhat Important**
5   **Not important**

____   someone to talk to who understands fostering
____   medical and health services
____   dental services
____   respite care
____   counselling services for foster parents and their biological children
____   counselling services for foster children
____   legal services
____   Increased allowances for children with special or extraordinary needs
____   clothing allowances
____   monthly board rates
____   special foster care allowances
____   foster parent training
____   training should be provided in the community where I live
____   expenses for travel to training outside my community should be provided
____   foster parent support groups
____   full time foster care worker at the agency

The following section is optional - you may or may not choose to complete this section:

You are interested in discussing this issue further, and participating in a follow up questionnaire

Yes _____   No _____

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Appendix "B"

Follow Up Interview Questions for Foster Parents

What aspects of foster care are the most rewarding and/or positive?

What are the least rewarding and/or negative?

What changes would you like to see occur in the foster care system?

Comments: _____

_____

_____

Appendix "C"

<u>Foster Care Workers Questionnaire</u>

How many foster parents does your agency provide services to?

How many foster care workers are employed by your agency?

How long have you been a Foster Care Worker?

What is your caseload size?

Do you feel that foster parents would job satisfaction as high or low?

What do you think would create a higher level of job satisfaction for foster parents?

What programs or services could your agency implement locally, to increase satisfaction and willingness to continue fostering?

Appendix "D"

Dear Foster Parents:

As many of you are aware, over the past several years, the Department of Community Services has been making an effort to enhance the current foster care system. Discussions have been held and meetings organized across the province to discuss problems and solutions. Members of the Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia and Foster Care Re-design Initiative staff have worked together to acquire the most appropriate training model for our region.

Prior to the implementation of the P.R.I.D.E. (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) model of foster parent training, it will be important to determine how foster parents feel about the current service delivery system.

We are very proud of the rich diversity and commitment of our dedicated foster parents. This valuable resource is one that the province is making an effort to maintain and enhance.

The Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia is interested in the current level of job satisfaction among foster parents. As part of a thesis study program, Cathy Cashen will work with the Federation to gather information from foster parents all across the province. Confidentiality of foster parents will be respected. There will be no negative reaction, to those foster parents who choose not to complete and return the questionnaire.

A confidential questionnaire will be developed and mailed to all foster parents and foster parents who have been closed, or discontinued fostering, in the past three years, in Nova Scotia. Only the researcher and clerical support will have access to the completed questionnaires. They will be kept in a locked file cabinet to maintain confidentiality.

The main question which is currently on the minds of those working for changes in the system is: What is the current level of job satisfaction in Nova Scotia?

Hopefully, the information gathered will provide a foundation for the implementation of new programs and services.

Next month, a questionnaire will be mailed to you and we are asking for your full co-operation and forthright response. It is very important that we know how you are feeling about the current system.

If you have any questions about the Foster Parent Satisfaction study, please do not hesitate to contact Cathy Cashen at (902) 863-1514 (h) or (902) 922-2744 (w).

Yours truly;

Phyllis Parker   Catherine Cashen BSW, RSW
Executive Director
F. F.F.A.N.S.

Appendix "E"

Dear Foster Parents:

As a follow up to the letter you received in January, 2000, enclosed is the Foster Parent Questionnaire described to you at that time.

This confidential questionnaire has been mailed to all regular foster parents homes, foster parents homes that have been closed and those who have discontinued fostering, in the past three years, in Nova Scotia. It is very important that those foster parents whose homes have been closed involuntarily by the agency complete the questionnaire, and have an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about that process.

Only the researcher and clerical support will have access to the completed questionnaires. They will be kept in a locked file cabinet to maintain confidentiality

It should take approximately 25 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Please take the time to complete the answers on the questionnaire and return it to us, your input is appreciated and **very** valuable.

A copy of the report, or a summary of the report will be made available to all foster parents in November 2000. Any foster parent may obtain a copy of the report, may do so by telephoning a 1-800 telephone number which will be forwarded to you by the Federation of Foster Family Associations of Nova Scotia

Yours truly

Phyllis Parker   Catherine Cashen BSW. RSW
Executive Director
F.F.F.A.N.S.