



Should I stay or should I go? A mixed methods study examining the factors influencing foster parents' decisions to continue or discontinue providing foster care[☆]



Jennifer Mullins Geiger^{*}, Megan J. Hayes, Cynthia A. Lietz

Arizona State University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 November 2012
Received in revised form 23 March 2013
Accepted 7 May 2013
Available online 23 May 2013

Keywords:

Foster parents
Foster care
Intentions
Retention

ABSTRACT

The recent economic recession has resulted in dramatic cuts to child welfare programs and services. Licensed foster homes represent an essential component of the child welfare system as these families provide for the care and safety of children during times when their own families are not able to do so. Despite the important role foster parents serve, little attention has been given to understand what impacts their decision about whether to continue fostering. This is especially important when considering the context of recent economic stressors on families and on the systems on which families rely. The purpose of this study was to understand what factors impact a parent's likelihood of continuing fostering. To accomplish this objective, a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design was conducted by sending an online survey to foster parents in one state located in the southwest. Findings based on this sample of 649 foster parents suggest foster families' intentions to continue fostering are positively impacted by their own intrinsic rewards and motivations, satisfaction with fostering, locus of control, and level of emotional and practical supports. Reduction in reimbursement rates, decreases in the amount of quality services available for foster children and for foster families, difficulty navigating the system, and individual-level family changes were cited as reasons foster parents would consider discontinuing fostering. Open-ended responses offer increased understanding about how these factors are perceived by respondents to impact their ability to continue to provide for our nation's most vulnerable children.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Almost half (48%) of the 400,540 children in the foster care system reside in non-relative foster family homes (Administration of Children, Youth, and Families, 2012). Child welfare agencies across the United States have cut the amount of funding allocated for foster care payments, programs, and services in response to the recent economic recession (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2007). Despite the reduction in resources to support foster families, the demand for licensed foster homes continues to grow as the number of children entering care is now greater than the number leaving (Administration of Children, Youth, and Families, 2012). Although there are concerns about how shrinking resources may be impacting foster care, parents' intentions about whether to continue fostering remain unclear. Other factors related and unrelated to program and funding cuts are also important in explaining a foster family's decision to continue or discontinue

fostering, such as fostering satisfaction, feelings of control over decision making in fostering, tension or difficulty in the family, and factors related to the family makeup.

Despite the important role foster families serve in the child welfare system, foster parents are typically not consulted about their level of satisfaction during their tenure as foster parents. In addition, few studies have been conducted with foster families in the last decade, leaving many questions about how potential foster parent levels of satisfaction and motivations may change as a result of the impact of current social and financial climates. The purpose of the current study was to examine the experiences of foster care providers as it relates to retention and fostering satisfaction. This research question was considered within the context of a financial recession that impacts funding for services that support foster families and increased stress that these families may themselves be experiencing.

2. Literature review

2.1. Foster parent satisfaction

Several studies in the 1980s and 1990s identified factors that affect whether families decide to continue or discontinue fostering. Baring-Gould, Essick, Kelinkauf, and Miller (1983) identified life events or

[☆] Jennifer Mullins Geiger, MSW, doctoral candidate; Megan J. Hayes, MSW, doctoral student; Cynthia A. Lietz, PhD, LCSW, associate professor, School of Social Work, Arizona State University.

^{*} Corresponding author at: ASU School of Social Work, 411 N. Central Ave, Suite 800, Phoenix, AZ 85004, United States.

E-mail address: jmullins@asu.edu (J.M. Geiger).

changes within the foster family and lack of service provision as primary reasons for foster home closure in Alaska. Other studies suggested enhanced services and economic support improved retention rates of foster families (Campbell & Whitelaw Downs, 1987; Chamberlain, Moreland, & Reid, 1992). Further exploring perceptions of foster parents themselves, Rodwell and Biggerstaff (1993) studied foster parents' experiences in recruitment, training, and maintenance, indicating the importance of foster parent feedback and professional relationships for improved retention. Toward the turn of the 21st century, research continued to focus on the motivations and experiences of foster parents, indicating that social service support and appropriate role expectations in training and service planning were imperative to decisions to continue or discontinue fostering (Fees et al., 1998; Gillis-Arnold, Crase, Stockdale, & Shelley, 1998; Sanchirico, Lau, Jablonka, & Russell, 1998).

Although these studies examined foster home retention related to areas of satisfaction such as in training or relationships, few researchers were directly addressing the connection between satisfaction and intent to continue to foster. Denby, Rindfleisch, and Bean (1999) started to bridge this gap with a comprehensive study examining factors of foster parent satisfaction related to their intent to continue fostering, and developed the Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey. Satisfaction in fostering was influenced by confidence in abilities to handle children placed in their care, wanting to take in children in need, and feeling that caseworkers approved and provided necessary information (Denby et al., 1999). Overall satisfaction with their fostering situation exerted the strongest influence on foster families' intent to continue fostering. Other studies began to emerge which supported foster parents experiencing less satisfaction in areas of agency support, communication, training, and services had less successful fostering experiences and were more likely to discontinue fostering (Buehler, Cox, & Cuddeback, 2003; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Triseliotis, Borland, & Hill, 2000).

More recently, studies of foster parent satisfaction related to the decision of continuing or discontinuing fostering have been conducted primarily in countries outside the United States. A study in Canada reported that foster parent satisfaction is related to teamwork, communication, and confidence with service agency professionals and negative relationships were linked to discontinuing fostering (Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006). Marcellus (2010) also suggested that decreased satisfaction with the fostering situation contributes to an imbalance of expectations and stressors, from which foster parents might consider discontinuing fostering. In Australia, Whenan, Oxlán, and Lushington (2009) found that parenting self-efficacy was related to fostering satisfaction and intention to continue fostering. Locus of control and social support were also found to be related to fostering satisfaction, which resulted in increased likelihood of foster parent retention (Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009).

2.2. Professional relationships and role ambiguity

Over the years, research in foster parent retention has consistently identified that relationships with department and agency workers are important to their satisfaction with fostering and likely retention. Families often deal with potentially stressful issues including relationships with biological parents, unrealistic or unmet expectations, placement disruptions, allegations against them, and disagreements with department workers (Buehler et al., 2003; Coakley, Cuddeback, Buehler, & Cox, 2007). When foster parents consider discontinuing fostering, they often report challenging or negative relationships specifically with child welfare professionals (Rodger et al., 2006; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rhodes, Orme, Cox, & Buehler, 2001; Triseliotis et al., 2000). They consistently reported seeking teamwork and respect as well as efficient and practical help from their caseworkers; those who discontinued fostering also provided lower average ratings for the amount of support they received from their social workers (Fisher, Gibbs, Sinclair, & Wilson, 2000). Foster parents also recognized high

turnover rates of child welfare workers contributed to a lack of consistency in role expectations and support (MacGregor, Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006; Stukes-Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Other studies suggest that there may be role ambiguity as foster parents are caregivers but also professional members of the team responsible for the child's best interest. Colton, Roberts, and Williams (2008) compared global trends in foster care and identified the common sentiment of professionalism versus altruism, across many countries studied. Although foster parents consistently identify altruistic motivations for fostering, some foster parents wanted to be recognized as committed caregivers (Blythe, Halcomb, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2012) while others were in favor of a more professional image that they felt adequately reflected the demands and commitment required as a foster parent (Kirton, 2001). Feelings of inconsistency in involvement and uncertainty in responsibilities led foster parents to feel less in control. Studies that depict reasons for foster parents discontinuing fostering include lack of involvement in the future of the foster child and poor communication with the agency worker (Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rhodes, Orme, Cox, et al., 2001).

2.3. Foster parent locus of control and decision making

Although it may seem clear that foster parents should be involved in decision-making processes because of their everyday involvement with the children in their care, this can be a complicated process considering the multiple stakeholders involved in child welfare decision making. As agencies seek increased inclusion of the voice of biological parents, of the youth themselves, and of others involved in the case such as relatives and service providers, foster parents' opinions can at times be left out. This may represent a concern, because foster parents are more satisfied when they feel they have more control and support in their fostering situation (Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009). Sanchirico et al. (1998) agree that involvement in service planning improves foster parent satisfaction which also likely leads to increased retention. Making foster parents formal members of the service-planning team and ensuring their department worker has personal contact with them improves their opportunity for involvement and overall feeling of value (Sanchirico et al., 1998).

Locus of control and commitment both seem to affect decisions to continue or discontinue fostering (Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009). Foster parents would also like to be a stronger voice in decisions made regarding the children in their care. They spend the most time with children, likely being able to provide the most insight into their functioning; as a result, it makes sense they should have a more valued contribution to team decision-making (Buehler, Rhodes, Orme, & Cuddeback, 2006; Hudson & Lvasseur, 2002; Sanchirico et al., 1998; Stukes-Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). MacGregor et al. (2006) also indicate that some foster parents perceive department workers as not trusting their abilities to manage the children in their care, nor do they provide full information, which influences decisions to continue as foster parents. It also appears that unrealistic expectations and responsibilities contribute to uncertainty in feelings of control which contributes to the decision to continue fostering (Daniel, 2011; Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003; Triseliotis et al., 2000). Foster parents who viewed their roles as committed mothers appear to be more comfortable in their level of control and provide a more stable, long-term placement for children in their care (Blythe et al., 2012).

2.4. Social support

It is clear from the literature that adequate support is a necessary and often lacking component that leads to increased retention of foster parents (Denby et al., 1999; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rhodes, Orme, Cox, et al., 2001; Sanchirico et al., 1998). Satisfaction and retention have been linked to foster parents' perceived support from both formal and informal networks (Denby

et al., 1999; Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009; Fisher et al., 2000). For example, Sinclair, Gibbs, and Wilson (2004) conclude that the informal support of relatives and friends is important to enable foster parents to continue providing emotional support for the children they foster. They also consistently expressed the need to support and be supported by other foster parents, allowing opportunities to share common experiences and to mentor new foster parents who might be struggling, therein increasing the likelihood of continuing fostering (MacGregor et al., 2006; Maclay, Bunce, & Purves, 2006; Sinclair et al., 2004). Community support has also been identified as a factor for successful foster placement, as foster parents want help with outreach educational and mental health services to support the children in their care (Brown, 2008).

McDonald, Burgess, and Smith (2003) found that traditional support such as that from relatives and friends was not enough to handle the complex issues that often exist when working with children in foster care. Foster parents must also feel supported by department workers. Studies have shown the need for both physical and emotional availability of department workers, such as when phone calls are returned and there is open, honest communication (Fisher et al., 2000; Hudson & Levasseur, 2002; MacGregor et al., 2006; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Rhodes, Orme, Cox, et al., 2001). On the other hand, foster parents feel unappreciated by these formal networks when they are not provided adequate information or their attachments and grief are unacknowledged during placement transition (Cavazzi, Guilfoyle, & Sims, 2010; Daniel, 2011). Foster parents feel supported when considered part of the inter-disciplinary team which views them as equal members and values their input (McDonald et al., 2003; Triseliotis et al., 2000). Feeling left out from the decisions of the team, or that the agency is incompetent or inadequately supporting the foster family are stressors that lead to unsuccessful fostering and/or discontinuation (Buehler et al., 2003; MacGregor et al., 2006).

2.5. Foster parent retention

Previous research suggests that retention of foster parents is influenced by training, supportive relationships, agency and service interactions, and involvement in decision-making. When foster parents are prepared and have adequate training and feel valued and respected by the agency, they tend to continue fostering (Hudson & Levasseur, 2002). Foster parents who feel they are able to adequately navigate the foster care system in order to secure services feel more supported and also are more likely to continue fostering than those who have experienced strained relationships and lack of resources (Coakley et al., 2007; Maclay et al., 2006; Stukes-Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004). In the United States, most of the research in this area was conducted more than a decade ago, which fails to recognize the significant changes to the foster care system, especially in light of the economic downturn.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design

This study used a mixed methods concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 2003) to (a) examine factors related to foster parents' decision to continue or discontinue fostering, (b) explore foster parents' perceptions about why they choose to continue or discontinue fostering, and (c) understand what might change their mind if they are choosing to discontinue. Through this design, quantitative measures were triangulated with open ended comments allowing for greater understanding regarding the meaning of the quantitative findings.

Based on a review of the literature, the mixed-methods survey was created to measure the variables identified as important in previous literature supplemented with open-ended items that offered greater explanation about the closed-ended responses. When standardized

scales were available to measure a variable, they were used. In other cases, items were either created or adapted from previous studies about foster care experiences. Once a draft of the survey was created, it was reviewed by a foster parent advocate who is also a foster parent. Feedback about the content and style of questions was incorporated into the final draft of the survey. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted by the authors' institution to conduct the study.

3.2. Data collection

To increase the ability to reach a broad range of foster parents across one state in the southwest, an online survey methodology was used. This strategy allowed foster parents to complete a relatively lengthy survey in the convenience of their home and at a time that was feasible for a group that is hard to reach due to their complicated and demanding schedules. The benefit of this strategy was observed in that the time stamping provided on the survey indicated that several foster parents completed the survey late at night after their children were likely asleep. With that said, a limitation of this approach could be hindering the voice of foster parents who do not have access to internet or computer resources.

Once the questions were loaded into Qualtrics, an online survey software program, convenience sampling was used to recruit foster parents from a state located in the southwest. Specifically, a link to the online survey was sent through an email to foster parents through three different agencies. First, it was sent to a list of all licensed foster parents with an email address on file with the state by a leader from the statewide public child welfare system. Because the email was sent by a third party, the exact number of foster parents with a valid email address is unknown. The email was also sent to 300 members of the statewide foster and adoptive parents' association, and to approximately 120 foster parents through a non-profit organization for children in foster care to recruit foster care providers for the study. Foster parents taking the survey were also encouraged to invite other foster parents to take the survey. The survey remained open for one month during April 2012. At the time of the survey, there were 3922 licensed foster parents in the state, which includes licensed family foster homes, professional family foster homes, respite foster homes, receiving foster homes, and developmentally disabled foster homes. Not all of the 3922 licensed homes were occupied at the time nor did all of the licensed foster care providers care for children on a regular basis for an extended period of time. A strength of this project was the collaboration with these local foster parent organizations and the statewide child welfare agency that allowed the researchers to reach a large number of foster parents across this state.

3.3. Variables and measures

To measure a foster parent's intention to continue fostering, a dichotomous dependent variable was created from the question: "What is the likelihood of you giving up fostering in the next 18 months?" Foster parents who indicated they were 'somewhat likely' or 'very likely' to leave were coded as '1' and those who indicated they were 'somewhat unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to leave were coded as '0'. Demographic variables (foster parent's age, highest level of education, household type, and income) along with foster parents' level of satisfaction, foster parent locus of control, social support, family structure, family stress, and length of time fostering were tested as predictors of a foster parent's likelihood to discontinue fostering. Age and income (not including foster care payments) were treated as continuous variables. A dichotomous variable was created to represent foster parents' highest level of education where 0 represents no degree and 1 is an associate's degree or higher. Household type was a dichotomous variable with 0 representing a single-parent household and 1 representing a 2-parent household. Scale scores were standardized prior to the analysis.

3.3.1. Foster parent satisfaction

Level of foster parent satisfaction was measured by the Foster Carer Satisfaction Scale (FCSS) developed by Eaton and Caltabiano (2009) based on Spector's (1988) Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS), a 36-item scale used to assess employee attitudes about aspects of their job. The FCSS has the same number of items and was adapted to apply to foster care. The FCSS has 6 response choices that range from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' with some items written in reverse form. A total score, which can range from 36 to 216, is derived by adding the scores after adjusting for the reverse items. In Eaton and Caltabiano's (2009) study, the FCSS was found to have a high internal reliability of $\alpha = .90$.

3.3.2. Foster parent locus of control

Foster parent locus of control was measured by the 18-item Foster Carer Locus of Control Scale (FCLOC) also developed by Eaton and Caltabiano (2009) which is adapted from Spector's (1988) Work Locus of Control Scale (WLCS). The FCLOC was adjusted to include language pertaining to foster care. Responses are on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree very much' to 'agree very much,' with total scores ranging from 32 to 108, with higher scores indicating increased levels of external control. Eaton and Caltabiano (2009) reported a moderate internal consistency of $\alpha = .79$. This measure is designed to measure respondents' perception of control, internal (self) or external (other), over specific situations.

3.3.3. Number of years fostering

Study participants reported the years and months they had been fostering. This time was converted into a continuous variable of the number of years they had been fostering.

3.3.4. Social support

Participants were asked three questions about social support from their spouse/partner, best friend, another foster parent, an extended family member, an agency support person, and a CPS case manager. These questions were about the foster parent's ability to share feelings with that individual, lean on this person during difficult times, and the degree to which that person was there to offer practical help. These questions were adapted from Eaton and Caltabiano's (2009) Foster Carer Significant Other Scale (FCSOS), which was based on the Significant Other Scale (SOS) developed by Weinman, Wright, and Johnston (1995). Responses ranged from 'never' to 'always,' yielding sum scores for each individual providing support which could range from 3 to 21.

3.3.5. Family structure

Foster parents were asked about whether they were parenting as a single or 2-parent headed household. Single parent is represented with a 0, and 2-parent families a 1.

3.3.6. Family stress

Five questions were asked to determine foster parents' experiences regarding specific situations possibly causing stress (in the past 18 months). All questions were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'never' to 'very often.' The questions were: "How often have you experienced any of the following events: (1) Severe difficulties with your foster child's biological family/parents? (2) Severe disruptive behavior from a foster child after contact with biological family/parents? (3) Severe tension in your own family? (4) Removal of the foster child from your home against your advice? (5) Other strong disagreement with the 'department' over plans for a child in your care?"

3.4. Data analysis

Logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between the variables and foster parents' intentions to continue or discontinue fostering. Binary logistic regression was used as data were not normally distributed and do not meet the assumptions of a linear regression (Menard, 2002). The aim of this study was to determine the reasons foster parents chose to continue or discontinue fostering; therefore, by creating a dichotomous variable, we were able to capture these two contrasts. Unfortunately, a consequence was that data from participants who responded 'unsure' were not included in the quantitative portion of the analysis. Data were analyzed using statistical analysis software (SPSS 20). All variables were entered into the model including age, income, education, foster parent locus of control, foster parent satisfaction, family stress, social support, years fostering, and household makeup. Overall, there were very little missing data. Data for participants that were more than 90% incomplete were deleted and not included in the analysis. A missing data analysis was conducted to determine if there were any patterns of missing data among participants and the variables. Missing data appeared to be at random and a listwise deletion approach to managing missing data in the analysis was used (McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). In addition, as mentioned, the participants who responded 'unsure' to the question about their intentions of leaving foster care are not included in the logistic regression. These participants' data were not missing but intentionally left out of the final analysis allowing for a comparison between two specific groups who are more definitive about whether they plan to continue foster parenting.

In addition to the quantitative measures in the survey, foster parents were given the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts about staying or leaving foster care through open-ended responses to two questions: (1) "What are the main reasons that will influence your decision to stay/leave fostering in the next 18 months?" and (2) "If you are thinking of giving up fostering, what might change your mind?" The purpose of including these two questions was to allow foster parents to provide additional information about the reasons for their intention to leave, what might influence their departure or choice to stay, as well as the factors that might change their decision to leave fostering.

For the analysis, the researchers utilized a qualitative methods approach as described by Coleman and Unrau (2008). Two of the authors read through all responses separately for each of the questions and used open coding throughout the process. For the first question regarding reasons to stay or leave, researchers independently and then collaboratively decided which responses were considered reasons to 'stay' and those that were reasons to 'go'. Once these two lists were created, the researchers individually reviewed the lists of responses to select meaning units in the text. These meaning units were then assigned a master code to establish categories. The data were then collapsed into each category and further analyzed in greater depth to compare the comments within each category. The same procedure was used with the second question with the exception of having to separate the responses into two lists. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation by observer was used by having two researchers analyze the data separately and then collaborate on the decision making for establishing themes. In addition, the findings were presented to a group of foster parents and professionals working with foster parents. Valuable feedback was obtained which helped increase contextual understanding of the findings.

4. Results

4.1. Description of sample

A total of 649 foster parents completed the online survey, which represents approximately 17% of the licensed foster parent population in

the state. The average age of the survey participants was 44 years old and 80% of the respondents were White/Caucasian. Of the primary parents who responded, 9.2% were Latino/a, 6.1% were African American, and 2.8% identified as multiracial. African American and Latino or Hispanic families were underrepresented and Caucasian families were overrepresented in the study sample. According to State data, 65% of licensed foster parents are Caucasian, 21% are Latino or Hispanic, 11% are African American, less than 1% are American Indian, less than 1% are Asian, and less than 1% identify as Pacific Islander. The majority of respondents (69.3%) were made up of male/female couple headed households while 24.7% were single females, 2.8% were single males, and 2.9% were same sex couples. The state reported that 64% of licensed foster parents were married, but does not provide information about same-sex couples or the gender of single parents. Eighty-five percent of foster parents who participated in the study had some college or more. According to state data, 60% of foster parents had completed college or university. Almost 21% of the respondents had been fostering for less than a year, 45% for 1–4 years, 24.7% for 5–10 years, 7.3% for 11–20 years, and 2.4% for 21 years or more. Half of the sample had fostered 1–5 children, while 14.5% fostered more than 20 children. Foster parents were asked about their current employment status individually. Of the primary parents, 62.7% were working full time, 12.5% part time, and 24.8% were not employed. Data from the state indicate 70% of foster parents were employed either full or part time. For families with two parents, 63.1% of the other parents were working full-time, 10% part-time, and 27% were not employed. Sixty-two percent of families earned a household income over \$50,000 (not including foster care reimbursements) (Table 1).

4.2. Factors related to foster parents' decision to continue or discontinue fostering

Foster parents were asked about how likely it was that they would discontinue foster care in the next 18 months. Twelve percent reported it to be 'very likely', 12.6% reported being 'somewhat likely,' 23.6% reported being 'unsure,' 11.8% reported it being 'somewhat unlikely,' and 40.4% reported being 'very unlikely' that they would discontinue fostering in the next 18 months. At the time of the study, there were 12,453 children in the foster care system in the state, 5516 (44%) of which were in the care of licensed foster homes. There were a total of 3922 licensed homes in the state with an average of approximately 2 spaces available for children in each home. Relative placement and family foster homes are the preferred placements for children and if the number of licensed foster homes decreases, children may be more likely to reside in congregate group care and temporary shelters.

Table 2 presents the logistic regression model predicting foster parents' intention to continue or discontinue fostering. The overall model is significant, $\chi^2(18, N = 292) = 92.38, p < .001$. Several variables were significant in predicting foster parents' intentions to discontinue fostering. Controlling for other variables in the model, foster parents with higher external locus of control had higher odds of reporting intentions to leave, $\beta = .04, p < .05$ and foster parents reporting higher levels of satisfaction with fostering had lower odds of reporting intentions to leave, $\beta = -.89, p < .001$. Foster parents from two-parent headed households had lower odds of reporting intentions to leave than single-parent households, $\beta = -1.12, p < .05$. With regard to foster family stress, foster parents with higher levels of tension in the family had higher odds of reporting intentions to leave $\beta = .34, p < .01$.

4.3. Analysis of open ended responses

Foster parents were asked an open-ended question as a follow-up to their response about choosing to continue or discontinue fostering. The item asked, "What are the main reasons that will influence your decision to stay/leave fostering in the next 18 months?" Six hundred

Table 1
Sample description.

Variable	M(SD)	Frequency	Percent
Age	43.82(9.69)		
Race/ethnicity – parent 1			
African American		39	6.06
American Indian		3	.47
Asian		2	.31
White/Caucasian		517	80.28
Latino/a or Hispanic		59	9.16
Multiracial		18	2.80
Other		6	.93
Race/ethnicity – parent 2			
African American		22	4.69
American Indian		7	1.49
Asian		6	1.28
White/Caucasian		373	79.53
Latino/a or Hispanic		45	9.59
Multiracial		14	2.99
Other		2	.43
Income			
Below \$10,000		13	2.06
\$10,000–\$19,999		27	4.29
\$20,000–\$29,999		43	6.83
\$30,000–\$39,999		79	12.54
\$40,000–\$49,999		76	12.06
\$50,000–\$59,999		83	13.17
\$60,000–\$69,999		54	8.57
\$70,000–\$79,999		55	8.73
\$80,000–\$89,999		54	8.57
\$90,000 or more		146	23.17
Household			
Single female		160	24.65
Single male		18	2.77
Male/female couple		450	69.34
Same sex female couple		10	1.54
Same sex male couple		9	1.39
Employment – parent 1			
Full-time		401	62.66
Part-time		80	12.50
Not employed		159	24.84
Employment – parent 2			
Full-time		297	63.06
Part-time		47	9.98
Not employed		127	26.96
Highest level of education – parent 1 (%)			
Less than 8th grade		1	0.15
Completed some high school		10	1.55
High school diploma		62	9.60
GED		12	1.86
Some college – no degree		176	27.24
Associate's degree		88	13.62
Bachelor's degree		157	24.30
Master's degree or higher		140	21.67
Highest level of education – parent 2 (%)			
Less than 8th grade		1	0.21
Completed some high school		10	2.11
High school diploma		53	11.18
GED		12	2.53
Some college – no degree		119	25.11
Associate's degree		88	18.57
Bachelor's degree		109	23.00
Master's degree or higher		82	17.30
Number of years fostering	4.42(5.46)		
Relative placement (%)		71	11.31
Knew other families/children in foster care prior to becoming foster parent(s)		376	58.39
Fostering satisfaction total scores	132(28.06)		
Fostering locus of control	54.88(10.98)		
Intention to discontinue fostering			
Very likely		72	11.63
Somewhat likely		78	12.60
Unsure		146	23.59
Somewhat unlikely		73	11.79
Very unlikely		250	40.39
Adopted as child (%)		57	8.82
Fostered as child (%)		33	5.11
Prior adoption		285	44.32
Number of children adopted (μ)	2.48(1.99)		

Table 2
Logistic regression predicting foster parents' intention to discontinue fostering.

Variable	B (SE)	Wald	Exp. (B)	95% C.I.	
				Lower	Upper
Constant	−1.39 (1.03)	1.82	.25		
Demographic variables					
Age	.02 (.02)	.95	1.02	0.98	1.05
Education	.44 (.32)	1.87	1.56	0.83	2.94
Income	.04 (.06)	.33	1.04	0.92	1.17
Years Fostering	−.01 (.03)	.20	.99	0.93	1.04
Household Makeup	−1.12 (.52)*	4.68	.33	0.12	0.90
Foster parent locus of control	.40 (.19)*	4.51	1.49	1.03	2.16
Fostering satisfaction	−.89 (.26)***	11.41	.41	0.25	0.69
Support					
Spouse/partner	.31 (.18)	2.99	1.36	0.96	1.93
Best friend	−.09 (.17)	.26	.92	0.66	1.29
Another foster parent	−.07 (.17)	.18	.93	0.67	1.29
Extended family member	.17 (.16)	1.04	1.18	0.86	1.62
Agency person	−.08 (.17)	.20	.93	0.66	1.30
Case worker	−.23 (.20)	1.33	.80	0.54	1.17
Family stress					
Difficulties with child's biological family/parents	.19 (.12)	2.33	1.21	0.95	1.54
Disruptive behavior from child after contact	−.16 (.12)	1.74	.85	0.67	1.08
Tension in own family	.34 (.14)**	6.04	1.40	1.07	1.83
Removal against advice	.19 (.14)	1.80	1.21	0.92	1.58
Other disagreements with department	−.26 (.14)	3.43	.77	0.59	1.02

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

and twenty-eight participants responded to the question in a narrative form. Responses ranged from one sentence to large paragraphs with multiple sentences. These responses were coded and categorized into six themes that emerged from the qualitative data and describe the reasons parents discussed to explain their decisions about whether to continue fostering. These included (a) intrinsic motivation and rewards, (b) self-efficacy, (c) social support, (d) financial considerations, (e) systems issues and (f) family-related factors. When reporting these findings the content or wording of the quotes is reported exactly as typed. This includes times the respondent utilized ALL CAPS or extra exclamation marks for emphasis. However, for ease of reading, grammar edits were made to correct misspellings or to add needed punctuation.

4.3.1. Intrinsic motivation and rewards

The quantitative data suggest parents who are more satisfied are less likely to discontinue fostering. The qualitative data inform this finding by describing *what* foster parents find satisfying. The open-ended responses suggest the primary reason these foster parents choose to continue fostering is due to their own internal source of motivation stemming from the rewards they receive as caregivers. The rewards of fostering can include loving interactions with their foster children, such as one parent who explained, "Each day we are rewarded by the love we get from the children...this is what drives us to continue fostering." Others found great satisfaction in providing for the needs of children, as illustrated by a respondent who stated, "...helping a child to heal and grow is the only reward I need." Similarly, another respondent explained, "Watching a child grow and learn and know they are safe is a reward itself. Watching a child and parents be reunited again is the biggest reward you can get from fostering...a reward no one else can give you." Loving interactions with children and being able to support the growth process were motivating for many.

Many parents said they continue fostering because they feel a sense of collective responsibility to provide for the needs of children in their communities. One parent illustrated this theme when saying, "There is a need for children to be taken care of and loved in a home

with a family. I could not leave fostering for that reason." Similarly, one parent stated, "We believe that we have a duty to the children of our community," while another reiterated the point stating, "The kids need help. It's not about the money or reward, to me it's about doing what we can to make a safe place in their lives for a little while."

Related to this sense of duty, these parents also identified fulfillment of this collective responsibility as being a motivator for continuing fostering. One foster parent explained their family has, "a sense of pride and fulfillment knowing [we] are making a change in a child's life. They [foster children] need a loving and stable home, and we are glad we have the opportunity to provide that for them." Another parent described a sense of fulfillment when stating, "I am very proud of my work as a foster parent...I am also exceedingly grateful for every experience I have had and every child I have known." Intrinsic rewards such as loving interactions with foster children and youth, honoring this sense of collective responsibility, and making a difference in the life of child were identified as fundamental to a foster parent's desire to continue fostering.

4.3.2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy involves foster parents' sense that they can influence outcomes for themselves and the foster children placed in their care. The open-ended responses corroborate the quantitative findings further demonstrating the meaning foster parents attach to being included. Many respondents stated being involved as part of the child welfare team and included in decision making increases their desire to continue fostering. For example, one parent stated, "We would like our views and thoughts to be taken into consideration seriously, when it comes to the children who we care for day in and day out. As foster parents, we need a voice and [to] be heard."

Some respondents cited concerns regarding their ability to influence decision making. For example, one respondent stated, "Our concerns and thoughts are dismissed by caseworkers and we are treated like we don't even know the children that live with us 24/7." Another stated, "Working with CPS and the courts is very difficult. [CPS] doesn't listen to foster parents' input...our voices are not heard"

while another explained, “I wish that we as foster parents had more of a say. I go to all of the hearings but my wishes for the cases are never taken into account.” Foster parents discussed their disappointment with not being considered a member of ‘the team’. When foster parents perceived their voice was not incorporated into decision making, this led to a feeling of helplessness. For example, one parent stated, “Our biggest motivator for leaving is the feeling of helplessness regarding decisions that are made regarding our kids.” A lack of efficacy and sense of helplessness were cited as primary reasons foster parents considered discontinuing providing care.

4.3.3. Social support

Social support involves both emotional support, which includes words of encouragement and an expression of care, and practical support, which refers to meeting needs through the provision of goods or services. Although previous studies have found a link between social support and intention to continue fostering, social support was not shown to be a significant predictor in the quantitative component of this study. We find this surprising, because the qualitative data offer contradictory evidence suggesting that respondents of this study cite practical and emotional supports from family, friends, and professionals as instrumental to their ability to continue fostering. However, although foster parents’ social support may stem from their own families and friends, most of the comments in the open ended responses referred to emotional and practical supports related to that which was provided or not provided by CPS caseworkers and/or licensing agencies.

When discussing emotional support, participants discussed the importance of respect and recognition. For example, one parent explained, “I do wish that foster parents would receive more appreciation and recognition and were not made to feel greedy every time we ask for financial assistance for things we should be getting.” Another foster parent stated, “I would like more recognition and appreciation from case workers. I often feel like I am being judged as if I’m only interested in the money and feel I have to beg to ask for extra assistance for things like clothing.” Recognition and respect were identified as important for many respondents.

In addition to desiring recognition and respect, foster parents desired increased emotional support during the difficult transitions inherent in fostering. For example, some respondents reported experiencing a great sense of loss when children leave their home. As one parent described, “It is very hard getting attached to the children in your care and then when they leave you don’t know what happens to them.” These situations are further complicated when CPS does not acknowledge this loss and the emotional toll. For example, one parent stated, “When we dropped off our little girls, we were crying and the case manager and her supervisor rolled their eyes at us.” Sensitivity and emotional support during inevitable transitions in foster care were cited as highly valuable.

When discussing emotional and practical supports, participants described having poor communication with CPS as a concern. For example, one parent stated, “our phone calls go unanswered, even as the children we care for suffer through crisis” while another stated, “phone calls are not returned. When I share the needs of the children...there is either no response or they are not validated by the department.” Foster parents also talked about how the frequent turnover of workers is problematic in having open and accurate communication illustrated when one participant stated, “The fact that the workers change so frequently with little to no turnover of information feels like we are restarting the case every month or two.”

In addition to emotional support and acknowledgment, foster parents also reported a need for practical support such as respite services. For example, one foster parent stated, “Getting enough respite hours for my children is a problem. I rarely get a break and this is causing my family to have severe burnout” while another stated, “It is difficult for a foster parent to get away and recharge. Respite is an

extremely important aspect of care to continue in fostering.” Related to practical support, some foster parents reported lack of services for the children as the reason for leaving. As one parent stated, “Our greatest concern centers around the medical and psych[ological] needs of the child...we are also discouraged by the many weeks we have to wait to have the child seen by a doctor or nurse. In addition, we requested counseling for the child and it took over a year to put in place.”

Foster parents who responded to this survey also identified needing transportation and “assistance when taking children to so many appointments.” One parent stated, “the number of appointments and demands on my time, during work hours can be overwhelming...While I can accommodate these demands short term, long term (more than the first month), it interferes with my full time work to the extent I cannot do it all.” Parents also requested “more ease in finding care when children are out of school for holidays or illness.”

Foster parents emphasized the importance of open and up-front communication about the children in their care. Many reported frustration about not being able to prepare for the needs of the children without adequate background information, records, or open communication about the placement. One foster parent explained, “No one is responding to my calls or emails. We know NOTHING about this case, or where it stands, or what might be happening. There is no communication. It is like trying to care for a hurting child, blind and deaf.” This communication between team members was reported by many parents as something that would change their mind about leaving fostering. Emotional and practical supports appear to be essential to a parent’s decision about whether to continue fostering.

4.3.4. Financial considerations

Related to practical support, recent and proposed cuts to funding were consistently identified as factors weighing on foster parents’ decisions whether to continue fostering. One respondent spoke about this stating, “A smile on a child’s face is priceless. However funding does make it difficult to provide all of what we need to keep those smiles coming.” Many foster parents discussed the need for reimbursement rates to increase to accurately reflect the amount of money necessary to raise a child. For example, one parent explained, “The main frustration I have is the amount of money we receive each month. We spend WAY more in expenses than this small amount will cover. I am not fostering for the money it provides, but I didn’t realize before I took in a foster child how expensive it would be.”

It is clear that foster parents are concerned about being able to meet the basic needs of foster children. One parent said she would consider continuing foster care “if the state would give more funding for activities and events for the kids to get involved in. [They are] constantly cutting the budget.” As far as basic needs are concerned, one parent states “The \$150 a year is a joke when you work with teens...these kids come in with the clothes on their backs and no money to buy the needed supplies.” Another parent refers to the necessity of funding stating, “Without it, I cannot afford to take in additional children. I can maintain my own household costs and the costs of the children I have, but if the state needs help with caring for the kids, they have to know the cost it takes to do it. People cannot afford to cover things out of their own pockets.” Repeatedly, foster parents explained that while money does not serve as an incentive, these financial considerations affect whether they will be able to continue fostering.

Overwhelmingly, respondents were extremely concerned about additional cuts being made to services and foster care payments. Foster parents discussed struggling to be able to provide for the kids in their care and report additional cuts would make it impossible for them to continue fostering despite their strong desires to continue. For example, one respondent stated, “If they cut [the] reimbursement...we will no longer be able to afford to do foster care”, while

another parent explained, “Reimbursements are not enough to sustain [the] children in my care. I often pay out of my pocket for expenses related to caring for my foster children.” Others stated, “The budget cuts are going to greatly impact our decision, as we have no savings due to the needs of these kids already with the amount we are receiving,” and “Reimbursement is already less than the cost of fostering. If they further reduce reimbursement, we will not be able to afford to continue.” Even when motivations to continue fostering were high, many respondents highlighted financial considerations as instrumental to a family’s ability to continue fostering.

4.3.5. Systemic issues

Foster parents identified many concerns and suggestions related to the foster care system. This was an important finding uncovered through the open-ended responses, because a variable specifically testing system barriers or factors is not included in the model that was tested. Some aspects of systemic issues may be embedded in the locus of control and social support measures, however, the specific system level experiences seemed better understood through parents’ comments.

Foster parents had strong opinions about the foster care system and shared considerable feedback. One respondent stated, “A revamping of the system [is needed]...As a society, we will be much better off to be sure we support the family in an ongoing way when reunification occurs. Too many times they drop off the radar and here come the kids, back into the system; worse for the wear, more hurt and damaged than before.” Foster families are concerned about the system not just as it impacts their reimbursement rates and services, but they also assert a strong investment in the outcomes for the children for whom they care.

Specifically related to policies, respondents recognized systemic issues that affect a caseworker’s ability to adequately support them and the children they serve. For example, one parent explained, “Most of our workers have been as good as possible in their situation, but they are all overworked and underappreciated, and it makes it hard for them to do the best job possible for us, which in turn makes it hard for us to do the best job possible.” Respondents expressed system level changes are needed such as “for CPS to get more funding so they can do a better job. The workers are overworked with too many children on their caseloads.” These parents were able to describe how a lack of resources creates stress on workers that ultimately affects foster parents and the children in their care.

Related to systemic issues, foster parents consistently identified concerns related to acquiring and maintaining services affecting their willingness to continue providing foster care. For example, one foster parent stated, “If we do not get the services that we have asked for repeatedly over the last year, we will just have to say that we tried our best and let it go...the system is very chaotic and hard to navigate.” Parents would also appreciate increased flexibility in service providers, noting the desire for “more freedom to choose behavioral centers when needed” and “more flexibility in scheduling intake appointments...I get 10 days off a year and have foster children come and go all year. I cannot afford to take off work because they won’t schedule an intake after 3 pm.” Essentially, foster parents found the child welfare system hard to navigate and the lack of funding hinders services and availability of practical support from caseworkers. They also cited system level concerns about policies and programs related to reunification.

4.3.6. Family-related factors

The quantitative findings did indicate that increased levels of family stress increased one’s likelihood to leave fostering. A final theme that emerged from the open-ended responses highlights some additional family-related concerns. For example, respondents reported being concerned about the emotional impact inevitable transitions

caused by fostering can have on their families. Illustrating this point, one respondent stated, “[we will] evaluate after this placement is done by our family to see the toll it has taken on our older children and if we still all agree that fostering is what our family should be doing.” Foster parents also talk about the demands on the family’s time, employment, and finances as reasons they would consider leaving. For example, one foster parent expressed concern about “the effect fostering has had on my biological child and my ability to balance the demands of full-time employment with the demands of providing good care for my children.” At times, a lack of space left in their home was identified as a reason to discontinue fostering, stating their house is too small to accommodate additional children or that they are at their capacity for licensure. As one foster parent describes, “due to the number of biological and adopted children and the space in our home and car, we are currently maxed out unless we can afford a bigger home and car.”

Finally, some foster parents cited a major life change as the reason for discontinuing foster care such as a change in employment, illness, or another alteration to life circumstances. For example, one parent stated, “my home situation has changed (my biological child has gone to college), so I have decided to pursue an advanced degree, and [I] am starting a new business.” Another foster parent simply stated “my age and health” as reasons for leaving. Many foster parents cited adoption as the reason for discontinuing their tenure as foster care providers. As one parent stated, “we adopted our foster daughter and have run out of room and transportation resources for any other children.” Some said they may choose to take a hiatus from fostering while their family adjusts to a new adoption. For example, one foster parent explained, “we are adopting a sibling group that we need time to adjust to being our kids before fostering again.”

5. Discussion and implications

This study explored factors that impact a parent’s likelihood of continuing fostering. The themes reflect foster parents’ perspectives on what motivates them to continue fostering, such as their own intrinsic rewards and motivations, satisfaction with fostering, locus of control, and emotional and practical support, while also offering important practical and policy implications.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research, which suggests that locus of control and social support are related to fostering satisfaction and likelihood of continuing fostering (Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009), but also provide more details about the possible reasons foster parents are more or less satisfied and in ways in which they feel they have control over their fostering situation. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis reveals several factors that interfere with parents’ ability to continue fostering such as a reduction in reimbursement rates, decreases in the amount of quality services available for foster children and for foster families, lack of emotional and practical supports, difficulty navigating the system, and individual-level family changes.

Foster parents identified the need for social, emotional, and practical supports in the qualitative findings. Foster parents emphasized the need for additional support from professionals such as CPS, their licensing agency representatives, attorneys, courts, and the state licensing agency in the form of improved communication, better resources for their families and children, acknowledgment and respect. Foster parents also discussed their need for opportunities for natural support from partners, friends, and family as well as other foster parents which also supports previous studies in the literature (MacGregor et al., 2006; Maclay et al., 2006; Sinclair et al., 2004). To accomplish this, parents need respite from their caregiving duties like all parents in order to rejuvenate their mind and body. Foster parent organizations should be supported and promoted among new foster parents so that they can support each other through difficult and common situations where another foster parent can offer support. Foster parent

organizations can also share information about other community agencies that offer services to foster families and children in the form of advocacy and practical support. These types of organizations exist in the community and an increased awareness of their programs and services could be beneficial.

The findings also reveal the emotional toll and 'burnout' on parents and their families as a result of fostering without adequate support and respite. Approximately one-third of surveyed foster parents in this study reported considering discontinuing foster care, which is consistent with previous research by [Eaton and Caltabiano \(2009\)](#). Social, practical, and emotional supports for foster families are extremely important when considering foster parent recruitment and retention as they all lead to improved satisfaction, less tension, and can allow foster parents to focus their attention and energy on caring for the children in their home. Specifically, areas such as assistance in acquiring and maintaining services, respite care, and support during difficult transitions are all issues needing attention in policy and practice. It is imperative for foster care agencies and CPS to ensure the necessary time off and support each individual family needs. Additionally, agencies should encourage their providers, case managers, and other staff to ensure a respectful, thankful and encouraging tone and attitude with families. This may seem intuitive with those in the helping profession however as indicated in the findings, foster parents, like others, need recognition, respect, and encouragement given their dedication and efforts. This demeanor can also be reinforced with positive communication throughout the case and through the timely provision of appropriate services for the family and children.

The findings, particularly the qualitative responses, indicate the critical importance of foster parents being heard and including their thoughts, feelings, and voice into decisions being made about the children in their care and their home environment. Children in foster placements spend the majority of their time with their foster families. The foster parents who care for them are knowledgeable about their needs, development, and behavior. Their wealth of knowledge about the children is a valuable resource that can be incorporated in determining what is best for the children in their care and therefore foster parents should be included as contributing members of the team. This is consistent with previous literature which suggests that acknowledging foster parents' contributions as team members is an important consideration in decisions that affect the children in their care, due to their experience and expertise working directly with the children ([Hudson & Levasseur, 2002](#); [Triseliotis et al., 2000](#)). Foster parents should also be more involved in policy decisions such as program planning, training, and when considering reimbursement and services to be offered to foster families. CPS administrators should consider meeting regularly with foster parents and/or their representatives to receive much needed feedback. This will provide them with information and allow foster parents to express their thoughts simultaneously. This process may have an impact on the longevity of foster families, in turn improving retention and recruitment.

Systemic barriers faced by foster families were also a significant concern that emerged from the findings. The findings suggest planned cuts to the system could reduce the number of available foster homes and undermine our ability to meet the agency's mission of safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Foster parents discussed the need for stable and adequate financial reimbursement, the need for dedicated, caring, and supported case managers, and systemic reform as it relates to children and parental rights. Foster parents require sufficient financial support to provide the necessary care for children. Many are already using savings and other income to care for these children. There are various financial implications when parents have to take time off work for visits, appointments, meetings, court hearings, and other functions related to a child's case and care. These findings suggest that CPS and other child welfare agencies should refrain from implementing any additional cuts to financial support and services. Many parents discussed their passion

for fostering, but indicated that it would be impossible for them to continue if the reimbursements were cut any further. CPS and licensing agencies should also consider reevaluating the licensing and renewal processes that foster parents feel are ineffective and resource consuming. Agencies and policy makers need to consider that lack of funding hinders availability and timeliness of services, and limited resources impact a caseworker's ability to remain responsive to the needs of the foster parents and children in their care.

Foster parents were also quite concerned about the high turnover rate for CPS case managers, as the constant changes directly affect the care a child receives with regard to services (for parents and children), case progress, court processes, and regular visits to the foster home and with the parents. In addition, the hassle of 'starting over' with a new case manager and communication barriers are also experienced. Foster parents were concerned about the lack of support case managers receive in order to do the best job they can, and indicated they deserve better pay, supervision, training, and support from CPS. These elements of support for case managers affect their ability to positively support foster parents, which is also consistent with previous research indicating the nature of relationships with child welfare professionals can either promote or inhibit successful fostering ([Buehler et al., 2003](#); [Rodger et al., 2006](#); [Triseliotis et al., 2000](#)). Supporting case managers and addressing systemic concerns indirectly affect the support of foster parents and therein the children they serve.

Finally, findings indicated increased efforts by CPS staff and other professionals in the child welfare system to highlight the positive rewards of fostering may be beneficial. Foster parents are a great source of stories and resources that present the long-lasting, positive outcomes that result from children being in nurturing families while their own biological parents cannot care for them. Stories that highlight the efforts and positive outcomes that result from these dedicated caregivers help community members to value and support this critical and important service.

There were limitations to this study. The study used convenience sampling so the findings cannot be generalized to the population of foster parents in this state. The sample underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups and may have been biased toward foster families with access and comfort with technology due to the strategy of using a web-based survey. In addition, the study is cross-sectional and only solicits foster parents' beliefs and intentions about discontinuing foster care in the next 18 months at one point in time which may or may not reflect their actual future behavior. Other factors or circumstances may have influenced foster parents' response at that particular point in time. Cross-sectional samples also tend to over-represent the long-term foster parent who tends to be more available for a one-time study ([Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007](#)). When possible, the survey did incorporate standardized scales. However, some variables were measured through items created for the purpose of this study and do not therefore have established psychometric properties. The survey was long which could have hindered the ability of some foster parents to complete the survey. Finally, kinship foster providers that are not licensed were not represented in this sample, because our recruitment techniques focused on homes that were licensed. More efforts are needed to understand the motivations to continue fostering for kinship providers as well.

Despite these limitations, these findings are based on a large sample of foster parents who went to great efforts to complete an extensive online survey. Although findings cannot be generalized, these findings do offer important understanding regarding the motivations that many foster parents cite as important factors in their decision to continue fostering. Because an objective of the study was to incorporate the perspectives of foster parents into research, these findings do offer important insights from foster parents who were able to make their voice known through their participation in this mixed methods survey.

6. Future directions

This study provides an in-depth analysis of factors related to foster parents' satisfaction and decision to continue or discontinue fostering, in light of the recent economic downturn. Although the sample was specific to the southwest United States, previous literature in other areas of the country and in other countries suggests similar concerns identified with other groups of foster parents who have previously been studied. These recurrent themes of support, locus of control, and systemic issues indicate issues in practice and policy that still need to be addressed.

Although our sample did not include the entire statewide foster parent population, if we consider our findings of 34% of participants reporting they are somewhat likely or very likely to discontinue fostering, this could affect almost one-quarter of the children in foster care, possibly more. If foster parents are receiving the social, emotional, financial and practical supports they require and feel as though their thoughts and voices are being heard, the satisfaction they experience can be enhanced. By taking the needs of foster parents into consideration, agencies can build more positive relationships with foster parents which could result in increased retention. Recent literature indicates that other countries are pushing the issue of foster parent satisfaction and retention to the forefront of child welfare, which supports the implementation of similar strategies in the United States.

More research is needed in this area, to determine ways for agencies and CPS to improve their communication and relationship with foster families. One area that has been understudied is the effects of fostering on the biological/adoptive members of a foster family such as spousal/partner and sibling relationships. Other considerations such as how specific service and budget cuts affect foster parents' ability to provide and continue fostering, as well as potential links to education, employment, and household income would be beneficial. More research is also needed that examines the experience of kinship care. Future research should incorporate the voice of foster parents to determine what services are needed for children, what the true cost of fostering is and can be, and examining how best to foster positive relationships between foster families and CPS.

Acknowledgment

This research was conducted in collaboration with the statewide public child welfare system and two non-profit organizations that serve foster families. The authors would like to thank Kris Jacober, the Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation and the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents for their input and collaboration with this project.

References

- Administration of Children, Youth, and Families (2012). *The AFCARS report*. (Washington, D.C.).
- Baring-Gould, M., Essick, D., Kelinkauf, C., & Miller, M. (1983). Why do foster homes close? *Arete*, 8(2), 49–63.
- Blythe, S. L., Halcomb, E. J., Wilkes, L., & Jackson, D. (2012). Perceptions of long-term female foster carers: I'm not a carer. I'm a mother. *British Journal of Social Work*, 1–17.
- Brown, J. D. (2008). Foster parents' perceptions of factors needed for successful foster placements. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 17, 538–554.
- Buehler, C., Cox, M. E., & Cuddeback, G. (2003). Foster parents' perceptions of factors that promote or inhibit successful fostering. *Qualitative Social Work*, 2(1), 61–83.
- Buehler, C., Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G., & Cuddeback, G. (2006). The potential for successful family foster care: Conceptualizing competency domains for foster parents. *Child Welfare*, 85(3), 523–558.
- Campbell, C., & Whitelaw Downs, S. (1987). The impact of economic incentives on foster parents. *The Social Service Review*, 61(4), 599–609.
- Cavazzi, T., Guilfoyle, A., & Sims, M. (2010). A phenomenological study of foster caregivers' experiences of formal and informal support. *Illinois Child Welfare*, 5(1), 125–141.
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2007). *New Medicaid rules would limit care for children in foster care and people with disabilities in ways congress did not intend*. Washington, DC: J. Solomon.
- Chamberlain, P., Moreland, S., & Reid, K. (1992). Enhanced services and stipends for foster parents: Effects on retention rates and outcomes for children. *Child Welfare*, 71(5), 387–401.
- Coakley, T. M., Cuddeback, G., Buehler, C., & Cox, M. E. (2007). Kinship foster parents' perceptions of factors that promote or inhibit successful fostering. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(1), 92–109.
- Coleman, H., & Unrau, Y. (2008). Analyzing qualitative data. In R. Grinnell, & Y. Unrau (Eds.), *Social work research and evaluation* (pp. 387–408). New York: Oxford Press.
- Colton, M., Roberts, S., & Williams, M. (2008). The recruitment and retention of family foster-carers: An international and cross-cultural analysis. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38, 865–884.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Daniel, E. (2011). Gentle iron will: Foster parents' perspectives. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(6), 910–917.
- Denby, R., Rindfleisch, N., & Bean, G. (1999). Predictors of foster parents' satisfaction and intent to continue to foster. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 23(3), 287–303.
- Eaton, A., & Caltabiano, M. (2009). A four factor model predicting likelihood of foster carer retention. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 44(2), 215–229.
- Fees, B. S., Stockdale, D. F., Crase, S. J., Riggins-Caspers, K., Moeller Yates, A., Lekies, K. S., et al. (1998). *Satisfaction with foster parenting: Assessment one year after training*.
- Fisher, T., Gibbs, L., Sinclair, I., & Wilson, K. (2000). Sharing the care: The qualities sought of social workers by foster carers. *Child and Family Social Work*, 5, 225–233.
- Gibbs, D., & Wildfire, J. (2007). Length of service for foster parents: Using administrative data to understand retention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 588–599.
- Gillis-Arnold, R., Crase, S. J., Stockdale, D. F., & Shelley, M. C. (1998). Parenting attitudes, foster parenting attitudes, and motivations of adoptive and nonadoptive foster parent trainees. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20(8), 715–732.
- Hudson, P., & Levasseur, K. (2002). Supporting foster parents: Caring voices. *Child Welfare*, 81(6), 853–877.
- Kirton, D. (2001). Love and money: Payment, motivation and the fostering task. *Child and Family Social Work*, 6, 199–208.
- MacGregor, T. E., Rodger, S., Cummings, A. L., & Leschied, A. W. (2006). The needs of foster parents: A qualitative study of motivation, support, and retention. *Qualitative Social Work*, 5(3), 351–368.
- Maclay, F., Bunce, M., & Purves, D. G. (2006). Surviving the system as a foster carer. *Adoption and Fostering*, 30(1), 29–38.
- Marcellus, L. (2010). Supporting resilience in foster families: A model for program design that supports recruitment, retention, and satisfaction of foster families who care for infants with prenatal substance exposure. *Child Welfare*, 89(1), 7–29.
- McDonald, P. S., Burgess, C., & Smith, K. (2003). A support team for foster carers: The views and perceptions of service users. *British Journal of Social Work*, 33(6), 825–832.
- McKnight, P. E., McKnight, K. M., Sidani, S., & Figueredo, A. J. (2007). *Missing data: A gentle introduction*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Menard, S. (2002). *Applied logistic regression analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G., & Buehler, C. (2001a). A comparison of family foster parents who quit, consider, quitting, and plan to continue fostering. *The Social Service Review*, 75(1), 84–114.
- Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G., Cox, M. E., & Buehler, C. (2001b). Foster family resources, psychosocial functioning, and retention. *Social Work Research*, 27(3), 136–150.
- Rhodes, K. W., Orme, J. G., & McSurdy, M. (2003). Foster parents' role performance responsibilities: Perceptions of foster mothers, fathers, and workers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 25(12), 935–964.
- Rodger, S., Cummings, A., & Leschied, A. W. (2006). Who is caring for our most vulnerable children? The motivation to foster in child welfare. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30, 1129–1142.
- Rodwell, M. K., & Biggerstaff, M. A. (1993). Strategies for recruitment and retention of foster families. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 15, 403–419.
- Sanchirico, A., Lau, W. J., Jablonka, K., & Russell, S. J. (1998). Foster parent involvement in service planning: Does it increase job satisfaction? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 20(40), 325–346.
- Sinclair, I., Gibbs, L., & Wilson, K. (2004). *Foster carers: Why they stay and why they leave*. London, GBR: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Spector (1988). Development of work locus of control scale. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 61, 335–340.
- Stukes-Chipungu, S., & Bent-Goodley, T. B. (2004). Meeting the challenges of contemporary foster care. *The Future of Children*, 14(1), 74–93 (Systemic challenges: 90% of state welfare agencies).
- Triseliotis, J. P., Borland, M., & Hill, M. (2000). *Delivering foster care*. London, England: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering.
- Weinman, Wright, & Johnston (1995). *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio*. Windsor: Nfer-Nelson.
- Whenan, R., Oxlam, M., & Lushington, K. (2009). Factors associated with foster carer well-being, satisfaction and intention to continue providing out-of-home care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 752–780.