2011

The Foster Care and Adoption Process through the Eyes of Prospective Parents

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The Foster Care and Adoption Process through the Eyes of Prospective Parents

Abstract
Every year, thousands of children wait in the Michigan foster care system for a permanent family. Families that express interest in foster care or adoption encounter a complicated and complex child welfare system. In the end, the majority of families that express interest do not progress to fostering or adopting (Katz, Wilson & Green, 2005). There are potential barriers at every step of the process that can impact a family’s progress towards providing a home and a family for a waiting child (McRoy, 2007). This study seeks to answer the question: Once interest has been expressed, what are the reasons behind a family’s decision to continue, or discontinue the foster care licensing or adoption home study process? One hundred and thirty-nine Michigan families who expressed an interest in foster care or adoption in 2009 completed an online questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to examine the results.

Degree Type
Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department
Social Work

First Advisor
Tana Bridge

Keywords
adoption, foster care, prospective parents, home study, licensing, child welfare

Subject Categories
Social Work

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THE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION PROCESS
THROUGH THE EYES OF PROSPECTIVE PARENTS

By

Nancy Hocking Berger

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the
Eastern Michigan University
Honors College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
with Honors in Social Work

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date April 14, 2011

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The Foster Care and Adoption Process Through the Eyes of Prospective Parents

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Abstract

Every year, thousands of children wait in the Michigan foster care system for a permanent family. Families that express interest in foster care or adoption encounter a complicated and complex child welfare system. In the end, the majority of families that express interest do not progress to fostering or adopting (Katz, Wilson & Green, 2005). There are potential barriers at every step of the process that can impact a family's progress towards providing a home and family for a waiting child (McRoy, 2007). This study seeks to answer the question: Once interest has been expressed, what are the reasons behind a family's decision to continue, or discontinue the foster care licensing or adoption home study process? One hundred and thirty-nine Michigan families who expressed an interest in foster care or adoption in 2009 completed an online questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to examine the results.

*Keywords:* Adoption, foster care, prospective parents, home study, licensing, child welfare
The Foster Care and Adoption Process Through the Eyes of Prospective Parents

A family's decision to adopt or provide foster care is not made quickly, thoughtlessly, or lightly. Once that decision has been made, the first contact with an agency or an information center is one of the most critical points in the process. Often, families are vulnerable due to their inexperience, high expectations and unrealistic views of foster care and/or adoption. The experience they have during that initial contact can impact their decision to proceed or discontinue the home study or licensing process. Without families willing to foster or adopt, children will continue to linger in the foster care system. For waiting children, "[a]n alienating experience for a prospective parent can mean the difference between a life spent in the uncertainty of temporary homes and the loving embrace of a permanent family. The cost to these children, and to society as a whole, is incalculable" (Katz et al., 2005, p. 4).

Purpose of Study

Nationwide, approximately 424,000 children were in foster care on September 30, 2009, and 115,000 of those children were waiting for adoption (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families [USDHHS ACF], n.d.). In Michigan, 5,309 children had their parental rights terminated; of those children, 3,826 had a goal of adoption. While many people consider adoption to be a viable way to build a family, only one in 28 people who contact a child welfare agency goes on to actually adopt a child from the foster care system (Katz et al., 2005). This statistic is startling, indicating a vast numbers of resources are lost for waiting children. Identifying the reasons behind a family’s decision to discontinue their foster care licensing or
adoption home study process provides invaluable information that can affect powerful changes in the child welfare system.
The Foster Care and Adoption Process

Literature Review

History

Although often informal, providing foster care and adoption for needy children has always been a part of American culture and society. For centuries, family members cared for relative children or kin without formal arrangements. Orphans trains, orphanages and infants born to single women were often an avenue used to build families. Families were minimally screened, if at all, and were matched with infants based primarily on religion (Smith, McRoy, Freundlich, & Kroll, 2008).

Adoption and foster care changed from an informal to a more formal process during the 1950s. Emerging research highlighted the detrimental effects of long-term foster care to children and recognized the importance of permanency (USDHHS ACF, n.d.). In the 1960s, the introduction of easily accessible birth control and changing societal norms regarding single mothers meant fewer infants were available for adoption (Smith et al, 2008). Programs developed in the 1960s and 1970s aimed to decrease the indefinite number of placement for a child in foster care while concentrating on reunifying children with their family of origin or making them available for adoption. Passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (AACWA) of 1980 further changed the concept of foster care from a potentially long-term placement to a temporary situation (USDHHS ACF, n.d.). This created a need for foster parents who would provide temporary care, as well as a need for adoptive parents who would provide permanent care. Foster parents were not encouraged nor in many instances even allowed to adopt. This resulted in children being moved from one placement to the next until, hopefully, a permanent family was identified.
The search for permanent families for foster children brings unique challenges. According to McRoy (2007), finding permanent families for waiting children was difficult, given that many children had “special needs” based on their age, race, sibling status, or emotional, mental or physical health. AACWA provided funding to states to create an incentive for families to adopt “special needs” children in the form of subsidies that would offset the cost (McRoy, 2007). While this legislation made significant changes to the system, it did little to stem the growing tide of children entering the foster care system.

In response to the large number of children in care, Congress enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), P.L. 105-89, which encouraged concurrent planning – adoption planning occurring simultaneously with reunification planning, if the child could not return home. Since ASFA, the number of adoptions from foster care rose from 31,000 in 1997 to over 51,000 in 2005 (McRoy, 2007). While the standards for foster care licensing and adoption home studies became more rigorous, the decline of available infants and the growing number of children in foster care have prompted families to consider foster care and adoption as a way to complete their families (Katz et al., 2005).

The process of screening foster and adoptive families is completed through the lens of the child, ensuring the family has the ability to meet the needs of the child. However, little empirical research has been done to explore the experiences of families as they complete the foster care licensing or adoption home study process. Of the studies that do exist, many are based on existing data gleaned from prior questionnaires, interviews, or reviews of case files.
The Foster Care and Adoption Process

In one study, Katz et al. (2005) seeks to learn more about child welfare agency's recruitment efforts as they relate to "general" applicants (non-foster or -relative adoption applicants). It seeks to "estimate the number of general applicants who seek to adopt foster children, understand the factors that influence whether they succeed in having a child placed with them, and document how general applicant adoptions are different from adoptions by foster parents and relatives" (Katz et al., 2005, p. 12). The Katz study also sought to explore those aspects of the process that were most difficult, and make suggestions for improving the adoption process. The sample for this study was obtained from four different sources: (1) an analysis of data from the federal 1999 AFCARS; (2) a national survey of state adoption directors; (3) case studies of adoption practices; and (4) an analysis of adoption applicant case records (Katz et al., 2005). The authors also conducted focus groups of adoption workers and individuals currently in the midst of the adoption process.

In an effort to gather the perspective of minority communities, the Harris Interactive (2002) study was conducted. This study was completed by phone and used random sampling to survey a total of 1,416 Americans ages 18 or older. This survey was developed after working with six focus groups, including groups comprised of only Hispanic and only African American participants.

As surveyed in the Harris Interactive (2002), opinions and beliefs are critical to family consideration adoption or foster care. In general, Americans have a positive view of adoption, and the majority (66%) favor adoption as a means of building a family and helping a child. While two-thirds of Americans have also had a personal experience with
adoption, only 39% have considered adoption at some point in their life (Harris Interactive, 2002).

According to McRoy (2007), motivation to provide care for waiting children may affect the experiences for families. Many families have a strong desire to help a child, particularly a neglected or needy child, or a child with special needs that they fear might otherwise not be part of a family. The kind of child a family is interested in parenting can also have a huge impact on their licensing or home study experience. More families preferred to adopt females, and most preferred children as young as possible, but at least under the age of 12. In addition, the majority of families preferred to adopt Caucasian children. The findings of McRoy (2007) parallel the adoption patterns in Michigan. In 2006 (the latest Michigan AFCARS data available), half of all children adopted in Michigan were female; 75% were 10 years of age and younger; and 47% were White/non-Hispanic (USDHHS ACF, March, 2008). Even though the majority of children adopted meet the criteria families desire, this still leaves a large number of children waiting.

A family’s experience in the foster care licensing or adoption home study process can be a determinant in whether they ultimately become a resource for a waiting child. In the McRoy et al. (2007) study, the experiences of families are related to three categories of both success and failure, including family, agency, and child-related factors. These factors can have both positive and negative aspects, and can affect every step in the pre- and post-placement process. The authors note their survey initially included 300 families, with 84 families not responding to requests for updates, and 16 families were actively proceeding with placement, thus being eliminated from the study. Of the
remaining 200 families, 102 chose to discontinue the adoption process, and 98 finalized an adoption (McRoy et al., 2007).

The 200 families were divided into five groups based on what part of the process they completed, from dropping out of the adoption process shortly after starting the application process to having a child placed with them and having the adoption finalized. Families who discontinued very early in the process were more likely to report family factors (including parent/child match, family distress, and child no longer available for adoption). Families who had a disrupted placement of a child reported more child factors than other groups of families. Families in all five groups reported agency-related barriers as an impediment to their success.

Current Michigan Practice

Families come to foster care and adoption for a variety of reasons. They see advertisements on television and hear announcements on the radio and feel they, “have something important to give and share” (foster and adoptive family). Some have personal experience with foster care or adoption in their extended families; others have a professional connection to child welfare. Some are dealing with infertility issues; others have birth children but want to provide care for a child in need of a family. Still others choose to adopt a waiting child rather than have a child of their own. Regardless of what brought these families to foster care and adoption, the underlying reason is clear: They desire to provide a loving family for a child in need.

The message families hear is clear: Waiting children desperately need “forever” families, and adoption is the proposed solution. However, families do not hear the entirety of that message: The majority of Michigan’s waiting children are adopted by
their current foster parents (48%) or a relative (46%). Very few children are adopted by families that do not already have an established relationship with the child (6%) (Michigan Department of Human Services [DHS], 2009a).

Important changes have occurred in Michigan’s child welfare system since 2009, primarily due to the Children’s Rights federal lawsuit settlement of 2008. These changes include a significant shift in the way child welfare services are administered through both public and private agencies, including reducing caseload sizes per worker; increasing the amount of training families are required to complete; reducing the number of children a family may have in their home at one time; placing children within a 75-mile radius of their home of origin; and requiring all families, including relatives, to be licensed for foster care if a child is placed in their home (Dwayne B. et al. v Granholm et al., 2008). Additionally, the State of Michigan has been working towards streamlining the process for foster care licensing and adoption home study by making these once-different processes virtually the same, including using the same format and requiring the same supporting documentation from families. The foster care licensing study can easily be adapted for adoption, instead of requiring a second study, which vastly shortens the foster-to-adopt process (Michigan DHS Adoption Services Manual, ADM 510). It also reduces the amount of time a worker has to complete the licensing or home study process, and provides clear timelines for doing so (Michigan DHS Childrens Foster Care Manual, FOM 922-1).

The foster care license and adoption home study are fluid documents that are updated as there are changes in the family’s life, circumstances or location. In order to keep them as up-to-date as possible, these assessments and some of the supporting
documentation must be renewed yearly. All adults that live in the home must be fingerprinted. They then become part of the “RAP back” system, and they do not need to resubmit to fingerprinting again (Michigan DHS, 2009b, p. 28).

Physicals for all family members, physicals and vaccinations for family pets, and septic system inspections can quickly become expensive investments, particularly if they must be repeated. Keeping this information updated is important to ensuring the safety and security of foster children, but it can and does become a barrier for families.

Under the Settlement Agreement, reunification is to happen “as soon and as is safely possible” (Dwayne B. et al. v Granholm et al., 2008, p. 3). When that cannot happen, DHS, “must strive to make the first placement the best and only placement” (Dwayne B. et al. v Granholm et al., p. 3). This shift towards “concurrent planning” focuses first on family reunification efforts, and secondarily on adoption if it is determined that reunification is not in the best interests of the child. While concurrent planning has been used for many years, it has recently become administered mandate. In this scenario, interested families are strongly encouraged to become foster parents first, and to focus secondarily on adoption if the child becomes available for adoption. Concurrent planning aims to keep children in one home, when possible, and avoids having them bounced around between different foster and adoptive homes.

The first informational call is key to a family’s decision to proceed. Katz et al. (2005) suggests that agencies do not often handle that first call or contact well and instead focus on “weeding out applicants rather than recruitment them” (p. 5). The study also suggests making qualifications and guidelines known early in the process, and providing a clearly written and easy-to-understand “roadmap” of the process, and what
families can expect along the way. Inquiries need to be answered by qualified staff who also have an empathetic ear, understanding the reasons behind a family's decision to consider adoption, including the death of a child, infertility issues, or religious choices.

As Michigan's child welfare system changes under Dwayne B. v Granholm, we must ensure successful recruitment and retention of foster/adoption families. Thus, this lawsuit and current statistics of only one in 28 families successfully completing the process, provides urgency in understanding the barriers and strengths within the current process. This research aims to study The Foster Care and Adoption Process Through the Eyes of Prospective Parents.
Methodology

Parents coming to foster care and adoption have hopes and dreams for this experience – for themselves, and for the children placed in their families. This research is a mixed design, and provides a unique window into the experiences of some of these families. The purposive sample for this study is derived from a group of families that sought information about the foster care licensing or adoption home study process, or to express interest in being considered as a resource for a waiting child. A mixed qualitative/quantitative questionnaire allowed for the collection of data. Quantitative data provide measurable concepts off which to apply grounded theory to the qualitative data.

Marlow (2001) describes the primary task of analyzing qualitative data as, “look[ing] for patterns in the data, noting similarities and differences” (p. 208). Using these patterns in a contextual manner creates findings “grounded in real life patterns” (p. 209).

Definitions

“Adoptive” or “adoptive families” refers to families who are interested in adopting only.

“Foster” or “foster families” refers to families who are interested in providing only foster care.

“Foster/adopt” or “foster/adopt families” refers to families who are interested in providing both foster care and adoption.

“Licensing” refers to the foster care licensing process.

“Home study” refers to the adoption home study process.

“Process” refers to the foster care licensing or adoption home study process.
Data Collection

Survey links were sent via email to 1,086 families that inquired about foster care and adoption during 2009. One-hundred and five emails were returned as undeliverable, leaving a distribution to 981 total participants. One hundred and fifty-four surveys were received between January 13, 2010 and February 13, 2010; 15 were incomplete (minimal information provided) and were excluded, leaving a total of 139 completed surveys (14.2%). A "completed survey" is defined as a survey in which at least 80% of the questions were completed.
Findings

Demographics of Participants

The overwhelming majority of respondents are Caucasian (91%, n=127). Nine respondents (6%) are African American, one respondent is Asian, one respondent is Native American, and one respondent identifies as being multiracial. The majority of respondents are married (73%, n=101). Twenty-five respondents (18%) are single, five (3%) are divorced, and eight (6%) are in a live-together partnership. Ninety-one percent (n=127) of respondents are Eighty-seven percent (n=121) of respondents are female. The average age of all respondents is 42 years; female respondents also average 42 years while male respondents average 44 years (see Table 1). Nineteen percent (n=26) of families indicate they contacted a public (Department of Human Services) agency. Forty percent (n=54) contacted a private agency, and 41% (n=57) contacted both public and private agencies. Two families indicate they contacted a recruitment organization (see Table 2).

In deference to the personal stories and experiences shared by participants in this study, all quotes contained herein are in their own words.

Foster Care, Adoption, or Both?

Five percent (n=7) of respondents are interested in providing only foster care for children, while 35% (n= 49) wish to consider only adoption. Sixty percent (n=83) of respondents will consider both foster care and adoption, as a means to secure adoption: “…we know that if we want younger children you have a better chance for adoption if you are their foster parent.”
The Foster Care and Adoption Process

If a family wishes to adopt only, their chances of completing an adoption without also first being a foster parent falls dramatically. Additionally, a family who intends to foster only may later choose to adopt a child they have fostered.

The efforts of this study are to identify the unique experiences of families moving toward foster care and/or adoption. This qualitative study allowed for the examination of reoccurring themes, both those that were anticipated (researcher constructed) and those that emerged through the review of the data (indigenous). Outcomes allowed for five overarching themes. In addition to evaluating these themes, their inter-relationship and dependence will be analyzed. These themes include: communication, licensing / home study process, worker and agency, personal and family and the child welfare system.

Communication

Information

For families new to foster care or adoption, communication begins with the first call or email seeking information. This is a critical moment in the process, as it can be a considerable determinant in a family’s decision to proceed. Outcomes were mixed. Some families felt encouraged: “The initial information received was informative and we were excited to continue the process.”

Other families expressed concern about their ability to meet the qualifications for adoption or foster care: “Eventually, but as a single male, i [sic] feel my chances are very slim. it [sic] might be a wast [sic] of time. I don’t know…”

Nineteen of the 30 families that made initial contact did not plan to continue the licensing or home study process. Although agency communication and process may be
responsible for some drop-out, personal reasons were also cited: “We have decided this is not the right decision for our family at this time.”

Some families choose not to proceed because they feel disillusioned with the process, or overwhelmed. Many indicate the need for further consideration. Those who move to the orientation/application process are provide with and expected to absorb a great deal of information about foster care, adoption, the court/legal process, parenting, children, agency policies and procedures, post-placement services, advocacy, and other related areas. With the vast amount of information being shared with families, the content and clarity of that information is an important factor. Sixty-eight percent (n=95) indicate the information they received was clear and easy to understand, even in light of the complexity of the entire process. For the remaining 32% (n=44), the information was incomplete or unhelpful. In some cases, families’ questions went unanswered; for others, they felt the information was confusing or overwhelming. This became a barrier:

The package that we received was large, contained a series of forms with longer questions and we were unclear about where to begin, what needed to be done in what order, to the point that we divided the pile between us and tried to parse it out. It remains unfilled, a large barrier to our continuing in the process.

While 67% (n=93) of all families indicate the information they received adequately addressed their questions and concerns, many also expressed ambivalence about whether the information would ultimately prove to be helpful.

Sixty percent (n=84) of families indicate they are satisfied overall with the information they received, while 53% (n=73) indicate they would have liked additional information, particularly with regard to how the process works: “More information about how the whole process works, from start to finish so that we had an understanding of the whole process.”
Contact Between Workers and Prospective Families

Continual communication between families, adoption and foster care workers and agencies is vital to keeping families engaged in the lengthy and multi-step process. One of the greatest concerns for families is the lack of contact between themselves and their worker/agency. This lack of contact ranges from not returning a telephone call or email in a timely fashion ("I receive [sic] only two phone calls within a three month period of time and no follow-up return calls.") to cutting off all contact completely ("They just stopped communication with us."). Lack of communication was a barrier to success, as families felt their time, attention and efforts were unwanted and unappreciated. Further, families fear their questions were unimportant: "...limited communication because I don't want to waste her precious time..."

For families who completed the licensing and/or home study process and have children placed in their homes, ongoing communication proves to be a factor in successful completion of the process. These 29 families indicate they are more than satisfied with the services provided by their worker, in large part due to the flow of communication and information:

All the workers at the agency have a vested interest in our family and our foster son. We can easily email them with questions or requests and they have been very punctual. They provide advice and additional services.

Licensing / Home Study Process

Length of Time

Families that choose to complete the licensing and/or home study process understand the need to provide an impressive amount of information: "We understand
the process and do not have a problem with it. It is quite intrusive, but the children are worth the uncomfortableness of the home study.”

However, the time and financial cost to families pales in comparison to the vulnerability and exposure families often felt in completing these requirements:

I really hated having to divulge so much private information like copies of taxes and proof of income. I resented having to have state and federal clearances every six months and doctor visits every six months. My word meant nothing and these costs are huge. I felt naked and exposed and vulnerable to the person(s) receiving this information constantly.

Length of time needed to move through the process was a significant concern.

Families indicate this process took anywhere from one year to upwards of five years to complete.

Ninety families completed the foster care licensing and/or adoption home study process. While 61 (68%) families were satisfied or very satisfied with the process, five of those families (8%) indicate dissatisfaction in the length of time it took to complete the process. Of the 14 families who are undecided about their level of satisfaction, half indicate length of time was a critical factor. Of the 15 families unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the process, seven indicate length of time is an issue:

This is a VERY time consuming, and over complicated process. It is because of this process this will be the last time we are seeking a license…the licensing and Home Study is seen as a deterrent.

Families became frustrated when they felt passively or actively ignored, and hold agencies accountable for their part in delaying the licensing or home study process:

we [sic] jumped through hoops got all our paper work in…only to wait cause they were too busy for us. and [sic] having to redu [sic] everything was expensive for us we thought foster care and adoptive parents were in demand…can’t be true if it takes 2 years to complete everything.
Training

Training provides not only a valuable opportunity for families to learn more about foster care and adoption, but is also a requirement for being licensed or approved. Training consists of a three-hour orientation, 12 hours of pre-placement training, and an additional 12 hours of post-placement training. Seven families completed the orientation. While the majority (n=5) of those families indicate they did not plan to complete the remainder of the training, the orientation proved to be an important educational experience that allowed them to make an informed decision about foster care and adoption: “After our orientation and much prayer and discussion, we have decided that...this is not the direction God has for our lives at this time.”

One-hundred-and-two families completed the orientation and continued on to attend training, although the number of training hours completed was not measured. Seventy-seven families (75%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the training they received. Families indicate the training was informative and interesting, and felt prepared for the realities of foster care and adoption. One parent described the training as “the best part of the process.”

Another stated,

We were thorough [sic] educated. One must be educated by their agency on all that children in foster care face...Reactive Attachment Disorder...Fetal Alcohol Syndrome...Post Traumatic Stress Disorder...etc. These children face so many challenges and our agency educated us properly and we felt prepared.

For one family that completed PRIDE training in another state, Michigan’s training gave even more detail about child mental, physical and emotional development, which they found “insightful.” Another family shared they, “...work in this field, and still learned
vital info from this training.” Even experienced families believe the training is, and continues to be, useful.

Eleven families were undecided about their level of satisfaction with their training experience, and 14 families were unsatisfied. Examination of their comments suggests this dissatisfaction is content-related. Training appears to be important to these families, however, they believe the training they received lacked in depth and detail: “The training we received, (PRIDE) did not really address the issues that we have seen in the real world. We have received better and more applicable training thru [sic] other private sources.”

Fourteen families were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their training experience. Three families commented the training was, “not worth [my] time,” or was scheduled at inconvenient times or locations. Three families felt they learned more “realistic” and informative information about parenting foster and adopted children from reading, attending convenient online trainings, and other sources.

Families felt that receiving adequate, and perhaps even additional training was fundamental to preparing them for parenting foster and adopted children, particularly related to child-specific topics not typically seen in families created by birth:

...I certainly would appreciate a series of training classes on topics not currently covered, like post-adoption services, how to handle medical issues that arise, meeting the birth parents, etc.

Post-Placement

Once a child is placed in a family’s home, support becomes crucial in maintaining the placement:
It was good to know that the potential existed...I think anyone would have some issues, especially if they were pulled from their home where they thought behavior was normal even though it wasn’t.

Twenty-two families indicate they have a child or children placed in their home. The majority of these families (n=15) are satisfied with the information they received about their child or children, yet 13 would have liked additional information, including birth family background, and failure of previous placements. Four families were undecided about their level of satisfaction. For those families that were unsatisfied (n=3), ongoing support and services are important needs:

I feel that the agency or someone knows something about him and wont [sic] tell us what the problem is. I would still adopt him either way. I would like to get the help that he needs.

**Agency / Worker**

When asked to describe one positive experience in their journey, many families listed their connection with their worker, their agency, or both. They described workers as being “easy to relate to and very understanding,” and “helpful and honest.” Being able to easily reach their worker, particularly in times of stress or crisis, was an important consideration for families. The positivity of the relationship they shared with their worker was markedly increased when they felt their worker was advocating on their behalf: “I appreciated feeling like someone was eager to help us adopt.” Families were also impressed with the dedication of staff to finding families for children, and were pleased to meet, “so many people who truly want to help kids and help these kids find a family.”

The overwhelming majority of families are satisfied or very satisfied (n=17) with the services provided to them by their worker, and 20 families are satisfied or very
satisfied with the services provided by their agency. This is true even in cases where families also indicate conflict with their agency or worker. Almost every family comments that their worker has taken a personal interest in their child and family, being “responsive, understanding and helpful.”

Four families were unsatisfied with the services provided by their workers, and one family was unsatisfied with the services provided by their agency. Results are mixed, but are primarily focused on lack of support for child-related issues:

I’m considering disrupting my placement due to behavior issues and feel like I am going through this alone. I get tired of hearing ‘things will get better’...I was in a crisis...and felt like I was alone. Know my caseworker is busy but I need help and support.

Many families consider their agency to be an integral part of their foster care and adoption experience. They recognize that workers cannot do their jobs without the support of their parent agency, and families look to that agency to provide support not only to their worker, but to themselves, as well.

In examining the responses of 90 families who completed the foster care licensing and/or adoption home study process, families are overwhelmingly (n=61, 68%) satisfied with the services they receive from their agencies. Many of the families who admit satisfaction, however, share experiences of being unhappy with the length of time the process takes and the amount of paperwork involved. Simultaneously, though, they understand the need for both time and amount.

Fourteen families admit to being undecided, and 15 families were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied, with their level of satisfaction with the services provided by their agency.
Personal and Family

While this study did not set out to capture personal or family issues, they readily became apparent in examining the data. Many families shared stories that revealed issues outside the scope of the survey, and are important to capture.

Seven families disclosed they had experienced disrupted (prior to finalization) or dissolved (after finalization) adoptions, or had requested removal of a foster child from their home. Examination of their responses indicates this was primarily due to the child’s behavior, and secondarily due to the lack of knowledge families received about their child’s background and behaviors pre-placement. Lack of support for issues post-placement was an important consideration in families’ decisions to disrupt the placement:

I did have a child in my home the summer of 2010. The only help I received for a ‘severe’ child were emails of local places to call. The help I was told would be there WAS NOT. It was to be an adoption but it ended horribly.

For five families, this disruption so disillusioned them that they actively chose not to consider future placements. Two are willing to consider having a child placed in their home in the future.

Several families expressed concern about being single parents, and how their marital status was being received by agencies:

I don't know about the rest of the state, but here in [county] i [sic] think the system is discouraging single males from adoption and or fostering. If you were to mention a plan to adopt or foster to any kind of official, i [sic] think they are looking at you like "um,,,,your [sic] a single man"...Bottom line is i [sic] can't figure out why single males get the cold shoulder if they consider adoption or foster care.......

One family indicated receiving a negative response to their sexual orientation from the agency they contacted:
"Hidden" discrimination that certain caseworkers...had towards the fact that we were a same-sex couple and having to address the whole issue of how we could not jointly adopt children under MI law. They had no professional skills for dealing with this elephant in the living room!

Yet another same-sex couple felt openly welcomed by their worker and agency, and families they encountered in their PRIDE training.

A family's geographic location can be a factor in ease of completing the foster care and/or adoption process. For one family that lives in a rural county in northern Michigan, their remote location made it difficult, if not almost impossible, to attend matching parties and other activities, which are often held "down state." Additionally, the family indicates that agencies are hesitant to place children in "such a remote location."

The financial cost for families can be a concern. While literature describes, "Most adoptions from foster care are free (there may be some minimal fees depending on the agency you use and these fees are often reimbursable)," (AdoptUsKids, n.d.), there are often initial costs that families must pay which can be prohibitive, even if expenses will be reimbursed at a later date. Expenses can include the cost for physicals for every member of the household; septic system inspections; smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; veterinary check-ups, immunization and licensing, if necessary; and fees for birth certificates, marriage licenses and divorce decrees (if applicable). This initial outlay of money can be a deterrent to families that are living on a fixed income or a tight budget.

**Child Welfare System**

Overall, families are understanding of the need for regulations with regards to placing children in safe, loving and appropriate families, and are supportive of what it takes to make that happen. Regulations and rules, however, become a double-edged
sword when families cannot easily meet the criteria for foster and adoption licensure.

One family described completing all of the necessary paperwork and attending the required orientation and foster care training, only to be told they could not be licensed after the background check was completed: “I have a misdemeanor trespassing charge still open against me from May of 2009 related to my praying on the campus of Notre Dame University...”

Another family described how their home, location, and lifestyle has made being licensed for foster care difficult:

…it makes u [sic] feel like your [sic] the most horrible family. Like we have an old farm house that doesnt [sic] have a septic field just a tank...the latest homestudy, they didnt [sic] like my husbands [sic] income since he owns his own business...they also didnt [sic] like we eat to [sic] healthy, we are vegan and now we homeschooling...and sometimes they dont [sic] like we live in a rural community.

The amount of paperwork involved, and the length of time to complete the process, are two of the most often-referenced issues noted by families. The vast amount of paperwork can take weeks or months to complete, and may require families to resubmit supporting documentation or retake training:

We started PRIDE in 2007 and it was not finished till [sic] 2008. We ended up taking PRIDE classes again and having our fingerprints done twice before we were licensed because the agency took so long.

The high turnover rate and loss of staff are other concerns for families, particularly with regard to continuity of communication and consistency of services:

Turnover of staff is a loss because it creates delays. This process is about relationships and people. When people change, you have to repeat, re-focus, and re-submit paperwork. Time is a big concern, and your life is placed on hold in this process.
Discussion

The foster care and adoption process have become less about the "art" of social work and more about administering a legal process. The vast amounts of paperwork involved to meet current policy guidelines have eclipsed the once-personal connection that was the foundation of the family/worker relationship. Agencies and workers are required to do more work with fewer resources, including time, energy and dollars, yet they continue to go "above and beyond" to try and ensure that the needs of waiting children and families are being met.

The issues that families experience regarding communication, licensing / home study process, worker and agency, and personal and family all fall under the umbrella of the child welfare system as a whole. Data cannot be examined without the understanding that every experience families have is tied, in one way or another, to the policies, practices and laws of the state child welfare system. Within this context, it becomes easier to understand the complexity of families' experience.

Foster and adoptive families are often unaware of the requirements agencies and workers face in completing their jobs, and may feel as though they are being neglected. Families see this increase in paperwork and requirements as simply more bureaucracy that creates delays in placing children: "We keep getting the same refrain about budget cuts, overworked case workers, too much red tape, clogged courts, etc."

By making that first step towards fostering or adopting, families are opening themselves up to the bureaucracy of the child welfare system. Families wish to be considered as members of a resource team for waiting children; when they feel they are
viewed solely as caretakers, they feel less than valued and are more likely to discontinue providing services for children:

Families need to be considered more as partners in this process. Yes, the child welfare system is there for the child, but many families that would take a waiting child don't do [sic] to the hoops they must jump through and lack of communication.

Communication is an important key to keeping families engaged in the process. When families are overwhelmed by paperwork they may find complicated and confusing, they often choose to discontinue the process before being licensed for foster care or approved for adoption. Additionally, when families feel ignored by agencies or workers, whether intentionally or not, they assume their desire to provide a safe home for a child is unneeded or unwanted. On the other hand, good communication allows families to understand the difficult job that workers do, and respect the long hours and overwork they experience. It also builds a trusting relationship where prospective parents feel they can depend on their worker.

Workers and agencies consistently do a great job of sharing general information about abuse and neglect and the outcomes. Negative wording imparts a feeling of hopelessness. Describing children in a strength-based manner, irrespective of their diagnoses, gives hope to families that the child can be helped. For families who have never been parents, or are unaccustomed to parenting children who have behavior issues, a true, solid understanding of the long-term potential outcomes is important. Further they must gain the tools or skills to best help the children with their unique needs. Families desire more information rather than less, and also want to know "the truth":

I think anyone who inquires on adopting and fostering needs to know the pros and cons. Especially the cons. I have met many people since inquiring that have told me horror stories about adopting and fostering. It is important to us that we
would be WELL INFORMED about the negatives. The mental health and destructive behavior of any child needs to be kept honest and open.

Recruiting permanent families for waiting children means, in essence, recruiting foster families who will also adopt. Since the initial goal of foster care is reunification, this requires foster families to support and encourage visitation with birth parents. This contact is essential to rebuilding and maintaining family relationships during out-of-home care, and can increase a child’s well-being while in foster care (Sanchirico & Jablonka, 2000, p. 185). This can become a challenge for foster parents, who may have concerns about making and maintaining contact with birth parents through visitation and other meetings. Families also fear becoming attached to a child and having to “give them up” when and if they return home: “If you want to adopt you must take a chance getting your heart broken over and over again with Foster Care children who ultimately will get sent back home...”

In addition, foster families may harbor feelings of ill will or anger towards birth parents, who they perceive as being abusive and neglectful (Sanchirico & Jablonka, 2000, p. 188).

In the end, some families feel pressured to choose foster care because they believe it is their only path to adoption:

We have spoken with families throughout the state and the verdict is clear. If you do not “do your time” fostering children first - something we definitively did not want to do - the agencies will not work to get a child into your home permanently...

**Limitations**

While the results of this survey cannot be generalized to the population at large, they also cannot be generalized to the initial set of survey recipients. One important note:
These results do not include a proper representation of the experiences of minority families, single parents, and male respondents, many of whom have considerably different parenting experiences. It would be beneficial to seek out those experiences in future studies.
Implications for Practice

Communication

Timely communication. Keeping families engaged entails responding to their phone calls and emails in a timely manner. Families understand that workers are busy and they may not get a return call or email on the same day. However, returning a call or email within 72 business hours would help establish a strong, trusting relationship between agency, worker and family. Additionally, responding to families when they initially inquire, or are early in the process, can have a direct impact on whether the family continues the licensing or home study process. As one family indicated, “…the information that you are able to share, might be what convinces a person who is half interested in becoming very interested.”

Licensing / Home Study Process

A checklist and timeline for the licensing and home study process. A checklist of documentation required, along with a timeline for the process, would empower families to feel as though they were an integral part of the process, rather than a peripheral participant. A checklist would give families a solid understanding of requisite documents. It would provide an understanding of how and when documents expire, and the family’s responsibility in providing timely documentation. A timeline gives families an understanding of the process from “start to finish,” and what they can expect to happen along the way. It allows them to feel that all involved in the process are accountable for meeting deadlines. It also gives them the opportunity to “check in” with their worker when a timeline is upcoming or has passed with no contact.
An agency liaison for families. Families suggest having “one point of contact” at the beginning of the process who is not a licensing or adoption worker. The liaison would organization the initial orientation, collect applications, give families the checklist and timeline to get started on the paperwork, and be a touchstone for families until they are assigned a caseworker.

Families would also prefer honest communication from their agency and worker with regards to the length of time it will take to complete the licensing and home study process, the kinds of children who are waiting for adoption, and how long it could take to have a child placed in their home.

Mentor programs. Families repeatedly asked for the ability to meet and connect with experienced foster and adoptive parents. These experienced families can mentor prospective families, and provide a “personal touch” that counteracts the bureaucratic feeling many prospective families get from the process. These mentor families have the benefit of real-life experience that provides insight into the realities of fostering and adopting, particularly if they have had a less-than-ideal experience along the way.

Pre- and post-placement support groups. Pre-placement support groups that begin during or directly after PRIDE training has been completed can keep parents engaged in the process, help them feel in control in the direction their lives are taking, and keep them connected to other families. They can also share information with other families, learn about waiting children, and support each other as they wait.

Post-placement support groups are a valuable resource for parents as they take on the challenge of parenting foster and adopted children. One family expressed, “It allows
for venting, bouncing ideas of each other, possible solutions for problems, and a realization that you aren't the only one swimming upstream at times.”

**Post-placement services.** The availability of post-placement support in the form of therapy, trainings, respite care and connections with other families is an important resource for foster and adoptive parents. Training issues raised include how to establish and build a relationship with birth parents; what to expect from the court system; how to find and access respite care; and child-specific topics such as Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD); Attachment Disorder; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); Bipolar Disorder; Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD); sexual abuse; trauma; violent behaviors; self-abusive behaviors; medication management; and school advocacy. Having skilled therapists familiar with foster care- and adoption-specific issues, can be a key factor in keeping placements intact. Families parenting children with these issues may already be feeling significant emotional and even financial stress. Having services available in their agency can leave them feeling supported and encouraged by their agency.

**Agency / Worker**

**Reduced caseload size.** The majority of families want workers to have reduced caseload sizes, not just so they are better able to serve families and children, but also to prevent burn out. Under the Settlement Agreement, caseload sizes are slowly being reduced, which will allow workers to better care for their clients and themselves.

**Patience with families.** Many families are confused or fearful when they approach an agency hoping to foster or adopt. They may need a little extra support from agencies and workers in the form of patience and guidance as they gather information and begin
training. Of particular concern is the relationship that foster families may have to establish with birth families. This in and of itself may be a deterrent to prospective families who, with proper education and respect for their feelings, may be able to work past their fears and become strong advocates for the children in their care.

Interagency collaboration. Collaborating with other agencies would support children and families by sharing information not only about waiting children, but waiting families, so that both families and children wait shorter periods of time and are connected with each other in a more expedient manner.

Personal and Family

Relationship with agencies and workers. Above all, families want to be treated with respect. They need to know their decision to foster or adopt has value and worth because they have made the choice, not simply because they are there. They want to be considered partners in the process, not just another piece of the puzzle. They need to have a good, solid, honest relationship with their agency and worker. This is the person who is placing a child in their home, and they see this relationship as far more than just a "business arrangement." They are sharing personal, detailed information about their lives with this worker. This intimacy and importance means their worker becomes almost a part of their family, and they expect to have a close relationship. They want workers to be patient with "all these...emotions" they are experiencing, and to remember that, "prospective parents have hearts, too."

Child Welfare System

Recruiting foster and adoptive parents. Interestingly, many families said there is still a strong need to recruitment foster and adoptive families. They suggest recruiting
The Foster Care and Adoption Process

specifically for foster parents since that appears to be a need greater than for adoptive parents, which is what most current recruitment efforts target.

Current foster and adoptive parents are the greatest recruitment resource available. If they are discouraged or feel disrespected by the process, they will share those feelings with others who may be interested in foster care or adoption. On the other hand, if they feel their needs have been met and that they have been a respected and valuable member of a team, they will share that experience. "Get the word out better about all these kids that need homes and have successful families help promote it!"

**Best interests of children.** Last but not least, families encourage workers, agencies and the system to continue to put the best interests of the children first. As much as they are frustrated by the length of time the process takes, they feel it is vitally important to appropriately screen foster and adoptive parents. They ask that foster parents be held accountable for gathering important information to be shared with the child’s birth parents should they return home, or with the next foster or adoptive family if the child must move. Suggestions include mandatory use of life books so the child has some connection to their experience, as well.
Conclusion

Foster and adoptive families share a unique culture of parenting. Ascribing the holistic theory, the child welfare system ensures the interconnectedness of all participants, with the potential for both positive and negative outcomes. The overall child welfare system sets the stage for the tenor and tone of the process. Agencies put into action the policies and procedures of the child welfare system; workers put into practice the policies and procedures of their agencies. Families are an integral part of the system, but find themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy. However, without foster and adoptive parents the child welfare system cannot continue to serve waiting children.

While the child welfare system is, and should be, child-focused, it is unwise to ignore the importance of families. Without families to foster or adopt, children will continue to wait for permanency. While relatives make up a significant portion of families who adopt, more attention must be paid to recruiting and retaining general applicants who will both foster and adopt. This requires professionally and compassionately addressing the fears and concerns that prospective families have regarding birth parents, reunification, and their place in that process. Building a strong, trustworthy working relationship requires open, ongoing communication between families and agencies. Further education on child-related issues helps establish a solid foundation for the parent-child relationship. Ultimately, understanding and attending to the needs of families is vital to keeping them engaged in the process, and helping them become loving, healing resources for waiting children. Michigan’s foster children cannot afford to spend one more day waiting for a family.
References


### Table 1
Demographics

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* one family self-identifies as being multi-racial

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Agency Contact

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**Current Point in Process**

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Figure 1
Recurring Themes
December 6, 2010

Nancy Berger

c/o Tana Bridge

Eastern Michigan University

School of Social Work

Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

Dear Nancy Berger,

The CHHS Human Subjects Review Committee has reviewed the revisions to your proposal entitled: “The Foster Care and Adoption Process Through the Eyes of Prospective Parents” (CHHS 11-006).

The committee reviewed your proposal and its revisions and concluded that the risk to participants is minimal. Your study is approved by the committee.

Good luck in your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

George Lipsa, Ph.D.

Chair, CHHS Human Subjects Review Committee
## Experiences of Foster and Adoptive Parents

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons behind a family's decision to continue, or discontinue, the foster care licensing or adoption home study process. We are looking to gather data from families who have had a range of experiences with Michigan's child welfare system, including first contact with an agency, the foster care licensing or adoption home study process, and the child matching and placement process.

It is expected that the outcomes of this study will provide information that can have a significant impact on the way prospective foster and adoptive families are recruited, responded to, and engaged in the process. Understanding the experiences that families have will allow us to make suggestions to agencies so that families feel respected, appreciated, and valued for the important choice they are making—parenting a child from the foster care system.

No identifying information is being requested. Responses will be coded to ensure anonymity and will be kept completely confidential. The final report will contain aggregate data, and no identifying information will be shared. Any quotes made by you will be attributed using only gender, marital status and/or age.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind at any time before completing this survey without negative consequences. This survey should take on average no longer than 5 minutes to complete.

### Section 1: Current Demographics

Please answer the following questions for the person completing this survey:

**Gender**
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Female

**Race (please choose all that apply):**
- [ ] African American
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Caucasian
- [ ] Hispanic/Latino
- [ ] Native American
- [ ] Other (please specify)

**Marital Status:**
- [ ] Married
- [ ] Single
- [ ] Divorced
- [ ] Widowed/Widower
- [ ] Live-Together Partner
Age:

Current County of Residence:

With respect to your most recent experience, are you interested in or have you explored:
- Adoption
- Foster Care
- Both Foster Care and Adoption

Section 2: Motivation to Adopt

What first prompted you to consider adopting a child?

Section 2: Motivation to Adopt - International Adoption

Have you ever considered adopting a child from another country ("international adoption")?
- Yes
- No

Section 2: Motivation to Adopt - International Adoption

Did you decide to move forward with an international adoption?
- Yes
- No

If no, what happened to make you reconsider international adoption?

Section 2: Motivation to Adopt - International Adoption

Have you finalized an international adoption?
- Yes
- No
**Section 2: Motivation to Adopt - Infant Adoption**

Have you ever considered adopting an infant from the United States ("Infant adoption")?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

**Section 2: Motivation to Adopt - Infant Adoption**

Did you decide to move forward with an infant adoption?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If no, what happened to make you reconsider infant adoption?

**Section 3: Experience with Agency**

Please answer these questions with respect to your most recent contact with a person, group, organization or agency when considering adoption.

**With which type of Michigan-based adoption agencies have you had contact?**
- [ ] Public agency (Department of Human Services)?
- [ ] Private agency (non-DHS agency)
- [ ] Both
- [ ] Other (please specify)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you feel your questions and concerns were addressed promptly and courteously?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please explain:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Unsatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Very Unsatisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please explain:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is there other information you would have liked to receive that would have been helpful to you?

- Yes
- No

If so, what information would you like to have received?

Section 4: Adoption Process

As of today, where are you in the adoption process?

- Made initial contact with an agency.
- Attended an orientation session and/or completed an application.
- Attended adoption training.
- Completed the adoption home study process.
- Have a child placed in my home, but have not yet finalized the adoption.
- Have a finalized adoption.

Section 4: Adoption Process

Do you plan to attend an orientation session and/or complete an application for adoption?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

Do you plan to attend adoption training?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the adoption training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

Do you plan to complete the adoption home study process?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your adoption worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the adoption training you received?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the adoption home study process?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to continue with the adoption process by having a child placed in your home?
- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your adoption worker?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the adoption training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the adoption home study process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

Section 4: Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your adoption worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the adoption training you received?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the adoption home study process?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to adopt another child or children in the future?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please explain:

Section 2: Motivation to Foster

What first prompted you to consider providing foster care to a child?

Section 3: Experience with Agency

Please answer these questions with respect to your most recent contact with a person, group, organization or agency when considering foster care.

With which type of Michigan-based foster care agencies have you had contact?

☐ Public agency (Department of Human Services)

☐ Private agency (non-DHS agency)

☐ Both

☐ Other (please specify)

Do you feel your questions and concerns were addressed promptly and courteously?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please explain:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes or No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Is there other information you would have liked to receive that would have been helpful to you?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If so, what information would you liked to have received?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 4: Foster Care Process

As of today, where are you in the foster care licensing process?

☐ Made initial contact with an agency.
☐ Attended an orientation session and/or completed an application.
☐ Attended foster care training.
☐ Completed the foster care licensing process.
☐ Have foster children placed in my home.

Section 4: Foster Care Process

Do you plan to attend an orientation session and/or complete an application for foster care?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to attend foster care training?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to complete the foster care licensing process?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your foster care worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the foster care training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care licensing process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

Do you plan to continue with the foster care licensing process by having a child placed in your home?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care Process
How satisfied are you with the services provided by your foster care worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the foster care licensing process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

Do you plan to continue providing foster care for other children, after this current child/children leaves your home?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 2: Motivation to Foster and Adopt

What first prompted you to consider providing foster care to and adopting a child?

Section 3: Experience with Agency

Please answer these questions with respect to your most recent contact with a person, group, organization or agency when considering adoption and foster care.

With which type of Michigan-based adoption or foster care agencies have you had contact?

- Public agency (Department of Human Service)?
- Private agency (non-DHS agency)
- Both
- Other (please specify)


Do you feel your questions and concerns were addressed promptly and courteously?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain:

Do you feel the information you received was clear and easy to understand?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain:

Do you feel the information you received addressed your questions and concerns adequately?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the information you received?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

As of today, where are you in the foster care or adoption process?

- Made initial contact with an agency.
- Attended an orientation session and/or completed an application.
- Attended foster care and adoption training.
- Completed the foster care licensing and adoption home study process.
- Have a child/ren placed in my home.
- Have a finalized adoption.

Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

Do you plan to attend an orientation session and/or complete an application?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process
### Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- [ ] Very Satisfied
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Unsatisfied
- [ ] Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

---

Do you plan to attend foster care and adoption training?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Please explain:

---

---
How satisfied are you with the foster care and adoption training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

---

Do you plan to complete the foster care licensing and adoption home study process?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

---

Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your foster care and/or adoption worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care and adoption training you received?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care licensing and adoption home study process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to continue with the foster care and adoption process by having a child placed in your home?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your foster care and/or adoption worker?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
How satisfied are you with the foster care and adoption training you received?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

---

How satisfied are you with the foster care licensing and adoption home study process?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

---

Section 4: Foster Care and Adoption Process

How satisfied are you with the services provided by your foster care and/or adoption worker?

☐ Very Satisfied
☐ Satisfied
☐ Undecided
☐ Unsatisfied
☐ Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

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How satisfied are you with the services provided by the agency through the orientation or application process?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care and adoption training you received?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:

How satisfied are you with the foster care licensing and adoption home study process?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Undecided
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied

Please explain:
Do you plan to foster and/or adopt another child or children in the future?

- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 5: Children of Interest

Please describe the child or children you hoped to have placed in your home, when you first considered adoption.

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range:</th>
<th>Minimum Age</th>
<th>Maximum Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Gender

- Male
- Female
- Both
- No Preference

Race (please choose all that apply):

- African American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic / Latino
- Native American
- Other (please specify)

[Please specify]
The Foster Care and Adoption Process

Sibling
- Single child / no siblings
- Sibling group of 2 children
- Sibling group of 3 children
- Sibling group of 4 children
- Sibling group of 5 children
- Sibling group of 6 or more children
- No preference (single child or sibling group)

Willing to consider the following

- Mental impairments (e.g., developmental delay)
- Physical/Medical disabilities (e.g., medical diagnosis or physical limitation)
- Learning/Educational issues (e.g., educational delays, learning disabilities)
- Emotional/Behavioral Issues (e.g., attachment disorder, sexual acting out)

Do you feel your adoption worker and/or agency were supportive of your desire to adopt this type of child/children?
- Yes
- No

Please explain:

Section 5: Children of Interest

Please describe the child or children you hoped to have placed in your home, when you first considered foster care.

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Minimum Age</th>
<th>Maximum Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Gender
- Male
- Female
- Both
- No Preference

Race (please choose all that apply):
- African American
- Asian
- Caucasian
- Hispanic / Latino
- Native American
- Other (please specify)

Siblings
- Single child / no siblings
- Sibling group of 2 children
- Sibling group of 3 children
- Sibling group of 4 children
- Sibling group of 5 children
- Sibling group of 6 or more children
- No preference (single child or sibling group)

Willing to consider the following

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Impairments (e.g., developmental delays)</th>
<th>Mild</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Severe</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel your foster care worker and/or agency were supportive of your desire to foster this type of child/children?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please explain:

Section 6: Children of Interest

Please describe the child or children you hoped to have placed in your home, when you first considered foster care and adoption.

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range:</th>
<th>Minimum Age</th>
<th>Maximum Age</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Gender

☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Both
☐ No Preference

Race (please choose all that apply):

☐ African American
☐ Asian
☐ Caucasian
☐ Hispanic / Latino
☐ Native American
☐ Other (please specify)