National Louis University

Digital Commons@NLU

Dissertations

7-2023

Foster Parent Knowledge and the Need for Information - Sharing Technology

Amy Lynne Averbuch

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/diss

Part of the Science and Technology Studies Commons

Community Psychology Doctoral Program

Dissertation Notification of Completion

 Doctoral Candidate: Amy Averbuch

Title of Dissertation: Foster Parent Information-Sharing Capabilities

 Dissertation Chair: Tiffany Jimenez, PhD

Dissertation Committee: Bradley Olson, PhD

                                       Judah Viola, PhD

Date of Final Defense Meeting: May 1, 2023

The above-named candidate has satisfactorily completed a dissertation as required for attaining the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Community Psychology Doctoral Program.

Signature_____   _____ Date _____5/1/2023____

Signature____   _____ Date _____5/1/2023____

Signature _____   _____ Date _____5/1/2023____

Foster Parent Information-Sharing Capabilities

A Dissertation

Submitted to National Louis University

Graduate Faculty of the College of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Community Psychology

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Amy Averbuch

Amy Averbuch

Dissertation Advisor: Tiffeny Jimenez

Foster Parent Knowledge and the Need for Information - Sharing Technology

In 2023, the United States child welfare system suffers from disorganization, role ambiguity, and deficient transparency. With 12 contempt of court strikes for the system's Director in 2022, it is clear why child welfare actors are unable to successfully perform. Foster parents, a key stakeholder in the proper care of children, report being unable to successfully perform because they are raising children with significant needs and trauma while having to locate and navigate child welfare system laws, policies, and procedures on their own. The purpose of this research project was to 1) identify whether foster parents know who is accountable for their foster child's mental and physical health, legal case, medical care, and finances, 2) identify if foster parents know how to directly contact this party, 3) identify additional knowledge foster parents need about the system or their foster child, 4) connect with the Illinois foster parent community encouraging participant empowerment and self-efficacy, 5) work as a community identifying oppressive constructs that hinder information-sharing between the Illinois foster care system and foster parents, and 6) construct and implement a sustainable information-sharing, crowd-sourced platform for foster parents and other child welfare professionals to access information. The data for this project was collected using a quantitative and qualitative survey and 2 focus group sessions. The findings show that foster parents need additional information about the foster care system and

their foster child, specifically medical information, indicating that a platform for foster parents, case workers, and other child welfare stakeholders, is critical.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In complete gratitude to HKB" H. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the individuals who have been instrumental in the completion of this dissertation. I thank my husband, Sam, for overseeing and protecting the path to reaching my goals. Without your support and passion for my work and for justice, this dissertation would not have been completed. To my children, Aiden, Isaac, Judah, Hazel and Raine, thank you for your encouragement, advice, and for your insistence on completing my research and this project. I would like to thank Dr. Tiffeny Jimenez, Dr. Judah Viola, and Dr. Bradley Olsen for their direction while conducting my research. I would also like to extend my acknowledgment and appreciation to the Hecht family of Evanston, Illinois for their commitment to our community and to our family, and for their continual support and wisdom. This study is intended to be the first step toward accessing the necessary information foster parents, child welfare professionals, and foster child service providers need to make sure the children in their care thrive.

Foster Parent Knowledge and the Need for Information-Sharing Technology

Study Part 1

Amy Averbuch

National Louis University

September 2023

History

Globally 140 million children do not live with their biological parents because of poverty, illness, war, or abandonment. These children live with kin or non-kin families, or in institutional group homes or orphanages (UNICEF, 2015). The number of these children living in institutional settings is about 2.7 million worldwide (Petroski et al., 2017). In the United States, there are approximately 440,000 children in the foster care system (U.S. Department of Children and Family Services, 2018). When a child enters the foster care system the goal is to reunify the child with the biological family, however, in 2019 there were 122,216 children waiting[aa1] to be adopted, and 20,445 children that exited the foster care system as orphans (AFCARS, 2019). In the U.S., 88% of foster children reside in foster care, while the rest reside in an institutional setting (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Studies show that when foster children move homes, they develop mental and behavioral health problems which land them in institutions (James et

al., 2006; Rubin et al., 2004; Rubin et al., 2007). A study of 142 youth in a Cleveland, Ohio institutional setting found that 47% of the youth had been exposed to sexual abuse, 63% were exposure to physical abuse, and 69% had histories of significant neglect (Hussey & Guo, 2002).

An in-depth review of literature provides an understanding of the factors that contribute to the foster care system's problem of foster parent turnover. Most of the literature covers topics pertaining to foster parent satisfaction. Three dominant factors affect foster parent turnover: 1) having a voice in decision making for a foster child, 2) the quantity and quality of communication between agency caseworker and foster parent, and 3) foster care system logistics. Interestingly, most of the research concluded that foster parent retention rates are low because foster parents have problems with the foster care agency, and more specifically, a lack of support and poor communication exists (Brown & Campbell, 2007; Geiger, et al., 2013; Geiger, et al., 2014; MacGregor, et al., 2006; Stone & Stone, 1983). When examining this problem, the researcher attempted to find studies done about foster parent access to system departments and employees other than their foster child's assigned caseworker. The researcher was unable to locate any studies identifying what foster parents know of the departments and roles within the foster care system, and if foster parents have contact information for departments and employees that pertain to their foster child's case.
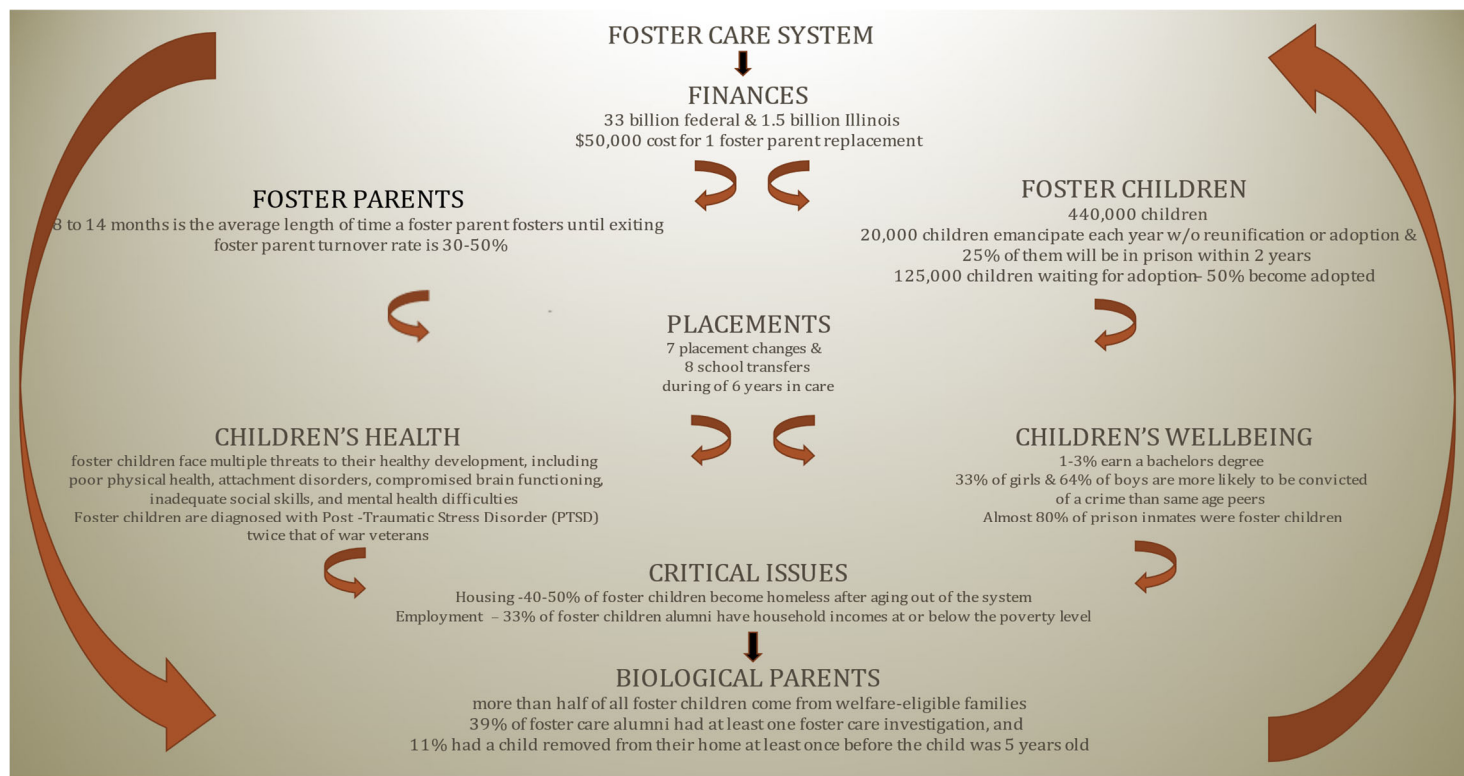
In the child welfare system, foster homes are meant to play a vital role by providing resources that help to support a child's safety, well-being, and permanency (Geiger, et al., 2013). Research and federal legislation (42 U.S.C 675(5)) supports the notion that a child in foster care should be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like environment available. In a healthy foster care home, children have the opportunity to reach their full developmental potential. Research shows that institutional care settings stunt children's growth; every three months in one

of these settings, children lose a month of development (Johnson, D.E., 2000). Knowing that adequate foster homes are essential, and that appropriate communication between foster parent and caseworker is vital, it is important to look at foster parent communication with other system employees. Caseworker time constraints are restrictive, and caseworker knowledge is limited given the vast breadth of a foster child's case, therefore it would be likely for other employees to be involved in a foster child's case. Past research to identify reasons for foster parent exit has looked at caseworker and foster parent communication but has not looked at communication between foster parents and other appropriate parties in the foster care system, or lack thereof. Knowing who to contact and how to contact the appropriate party is a necessity that should be afforded to foster parents for them to take care of their foster child. Not knowing who is accountable for a foster child and the varying details involved in a child's case is detrimental, but also illogical. In one study, three different participants stated: "your whole life changes once that child walks into the door"; "I never really knew who was responsible for what" and "when people ask us [about fostering] we just say it has been very chaotic (Cooley et al., 2017)".

The United States foster care system's federal budget is $33 billion (Congressional Research Service, 2021), and its Illinois budget is 1.5 billion (Governor's Office of Management and Budget, 2019). This is opportunistic for a United States premier foster care system, therefore it is important to understand the cause of failure and how system shortcomings affect the lives of everyone living within the United States. On a macro level, this system aids in the continuation of poverty, homelessness, crime, and substance abuse; 1-3% of children in foster care earn a bachelor's degree (Sarubbi, M., 2019), 33% of girls & 64% of boys are more likely to be convicted of a crime than same-age peers (Courtney & Heuring, 2005), 80% of death row inmates are former foster youth (Nordberg et al., 2017; Wylie, 2014), 40-50% of foster children

become homeless after aging out of the system (Federal Register, 2020), 33% of foster care

alumni have household incomes at or below the poverty level (Federal Register, 2020), more

than half of foster children come from welfare-eligible families (Geen et al., 2001), and

according to Dworsky (2015), 39% of foster care alumni had at least one foster care

investigation, and 11% had a child removed from their home at least once before the child was 5

years old. Here we see a critical cycle of poverty, criminalization, and child welfare sabotage.

Figure 1, below, shows the cycle of foster care, including how foster parent exit affects a child's

life. This visual shows the exorbitant financial investment in a system created for child welfare,

only to produce unhealthy children likely to grow into unhealthy adults. You see how foster care

finances are filtered in to either "foster parents" or "foster children"; foster parents exit between

8-14 months after beginning to foster, and foster children in the United States, totaling 440,000,

20,000 of which are emancipated without a family annually, of which 25% will be in prison with

2 years of emancipation, and 125,000 are waiting to be adopted. This shows that a high number

of placements leads to problems with children's health and wellbeing as well as systematic

problems of critical employment and homelessness issues. Further it shows that if adults were in

the foster care system as a child, they are likely to be low-income, have a foster care

investigation against them, or have a had a child removed from their home. In the Northwest

Foster Care Alumni Study, results showed alumni of the foster care system experience social

phobia, depression, and sleep and attention problems that accompany Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder, (Pecora, P.J., et al., 2006)".

Fig. 1 Foster Care System Cycle

FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

FINANCES
33 billion federal & 1.5 billion Illinois
$50,000 cost for 1 foster parent replacement

FOSTER PARENTS
8 to 14 months is the average length of time a foster parent fosters until exiting
foster parent turnover rate is 30-50%

FOSTER CHILDREN
440,000 children
20,000 children emancipate each year w/o reunification or adoption &
25% of them will be in prison within 2 years
125,000 children waiting for adoption- 50% become adopted

PLACEMENTS
7 placement changes &
8 school transfers
during of 6 years in care

CHILDREN'S HEALTH
foster children face multiple threats to their healthy development, including
poor physical health, attachment disorders, compromised brain functioning,
inadequate social skills, and mental health difficulties
Foster children are diagnosed with Post -Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
twice that of war veterans

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING
1-3% earn a bachelors degree
33% of girls & 64% of boys are more likely to be convicted
of a crime than same age peers
Almost 80% of prison inmates were foster children

CRITICAL ISSUES
Housing -40-50% of foster children become homeless after aging out of the system
Employment – 33% of foster children alumni have household incomes at or below the poverty level

BIOLOGICAL PARENTS
more than half of all foster children come from welfare-eligible families
39% of foster care alumni had at least one foster care investigation, and
11% had a child removed from their home at least once before the child was 5 years old

Research shows that impairments foster children acquire are from the system's inability to keep children in a single foster care placement. When a foster child is moved there is detachment from their foster family, friends, school, and community. A study by Font & Sattler (2018) found that "multiple placement changes for children in foster care are associated with increased mental and behavioral health problems throughout childhood and into adulthood". Foster children "face multiple threats to their healthy development, including poor physical health, attachment disorders, compromised brain functioning, inadequate social skills, and mental health difficulties" (Harden, 2004). When "children have frequent changes of placement, they are deprived of continuous attachment figures and thus may become increasingly unable to establish trust and affection with their caregivers (Font & Settler, 2018)". In addition, while the

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014) recognizes the importance of family stability stating that "safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are important to promote", there are gaps evident by the work of the Children's Bureau (2017) which states that up to 44% of children of children that have been in the system for 12-24 months, and 42 – 80% of children that have been in the system for more than 24 months, have at least 3 different placements. This number does not include the move from the child's original home. In addition, according to the 2010 Children and Youth Services Review, a child in care for 6.6 years experiences 7.35 placement changes and a mean of 8.26 school transfers. Given this information, it is understandable that foster children are diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) twice that of war veterans (Sarubbi, M., 2019).

The reasons why foster children are moved so often is explained in greater detail in the literature review below, however it is important to understand here that multiple foster care placements are often because of foster parent turnover. Within the United States, there is a need for experienced, long-term foster parents. As quoted by Cooley et al., (2015) "Foster parents can play a critical role in the stability of young people who have already experienced significant traumatic events and often broken attachments". Minimizing the number of times that a foster child must move encourages permanency, which is "necessary for meeting the developmental needs of children and youth (Vanderwill et al., 2020). When a foster parent exits the system, their foster child often suffers through a change of home, school, and community. One study concludes that foster parent duration is 8 to 14 months, and that foster parent exit rate is 30-50% (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007).

Foster parents are a highly undervalued asset, one that should not be overlooked as an answer to some of America's critical social problems. Mandatory training, licensure

requirements, placement processes, and exposure to the unknown indicate that foster parents are deeply invested. Despite this commitment, existing research shows a strong correlation between foster parent exit and dissatisfaction with the foster care system. While research has identified some causes for low retention, there is a lack of research about how ambiguity of the system's departments and employees play a role. This is an important topic for Community Psychology because we need to look beyond the foster parent and caseworker relationship, and toward accountability within large government systems. The researcher is unsure how many government departments and foster care system roles are assigned to oversee foster children and their needs. It is possible that there is a sufficient amount, and that this topic has not been studied, but it is also possible that a shortage of departments and roles exists within the foster care system, supporting a lack of accountability and oversight. The researcher believes that the former is a more likely depiction of the foster care system. It is essential to understand the reasons for foster parent license relinquishment and to assess what can be done to extend the length of, and reduce the exit of, licensed foster parents. Because research has identified foster parent exit as one reason for the system's pitfalls, many studies have been conducted on foster parent satisfaction. Below shows past studies identifying three reasons for foster parent exit; foster parent exclusion in decision making for the child, logistical failures in the system, and lack of communication between a foster parent and their agency.

Excluded in Decision Making

One reason that contributes to foster parent turnover is exclusion from the decision-making processes for a foster child. In several studies, foster parents express the belief that they

should be a member of the child's team in decision-making because they have the most current information about the child. The Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey found that foster parents want their "observations, experiences, and day-to-day interactions with the children in their care" (Geiger et al., 2014) to be heard. Another study found that foster parents want their views and thoughts to be seriously considered when it comes to the children they take care of "day in and day out". The study also found that foster parents feel dismissed by caseworkers, "we are treated as if we don't even know the children that live with us 24/7". Foster parents also noted that the system as a whole, and the courts, are difficult to work with because "they do not listen to foster parents' input…our voices are not heard" (Geiger et al., 2013).

Statements identifying foster parent's desire to be included as part of the child's team when making decisions, and how this affects the desire to continue fostering, should not be taken as an indication that foster parents crave acknowledgment. One survey found foster parents expressed wanting " respect that we know these kids better than most people, and we are in this because we are genuinely concerned about their well-being. Understand that we are striving for the best interest of the children and are wanting to be helpful in the case plan" (Geiger et al., 2014). Foster parents see themselves as a "reliable and important source of information and would like to see their perspectives valued throughout the case" (Geiger et al., 2014). Another study (Shklarski, 2019) identified foster parents having to tolerate uncertainty, "with no control over necessary information about the child and decision-making, the information is kept from us, and we are sort of, we are just doing a job, do that job and don't ask questions". Here a foster parent states that she wanted to modify her foster child's medication, feeling that the system was giving him "all sorts of stuff", and noted that she needs to be able to make decisions that affect how she "parents" inside her home. Another participant in this study stated "You allow me to be

the parent, but yet you take away my parenting decisions. You take away my ability to discern

what's right and what's wrong". Research shows that foster parents who view themselves as part

of an agency team with a goal of meeting the needs of children have more successful placements

(Stone, 1983).

A literature review by Geiger et al., (2013) concluded "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. While agencies state that inclusion is

important for retention, the system neglects the current, and therefore valuable data that foster

parents have that other parties do not.

System Logistic Failures

A second reason for foster parent turnover is dissatisfaction with foster care system

structures, and perspectives that these structures are destructive. In one study by Cooley,

Thompson and Wojciak, (2017), data revealed foster parents' most prevalent concerns were an

"unnecessarily complex and convoluted system, contradictions between intentions and what is

actually practiced within the child welfare system, and delays or lags for getting things done in

the system". One participant commented, "the system as a whole is overloaded… [it] takes too

long to get certain things done. I have had numerous children reside in my home for one year,

two years…. Currently, I have a child who I am not adopting that has been here two and half years. We are finally going to *termination* of parental rights next week [because] dad is in prison for sexual abuse of the kids and mom is still in denial. Why has it taken 30 months to realize we need to terminate rights?" (Cooley et al., 2017). Another study participant voiced that their training agency was in one county, but their licensing agency was in another. They note having 4 different caseworkers and not knowing which caseworker was responsible for the varying needs of the child, which made caring for their child more difficult than it needed to be. Another problem with having multiple caseworkers is that the more caseworkers a foster child has, the longer their stay is in the system, and the likelihood of them being reunified with their family decreases (Weiner & Cull, 2019). While the United States claims that it tries to ensure permanency for every child, be it through reunification with their biological family or through adoption, approximately only half of the 125,000 children that are available for adoption actually do get adopted (Pesavento, 2021). While the Child Welfare Executive Order 13930 pertains to foster children and the purpose to establish permanency; "every child deserves a family" (The Federal Register, 2020), the number of children waiting for adoption indicates otherwise. This could suggest complexity within the system, although foster parent claims like these must be investigated; "It seemed so simple, but the system is so complicated", "There has to be a simpler way to fix this", and "When people say the system is broken, that is an understatement" (Cooley et al., 2017).

For those familiar with the system, the perspective of a "broken foster care system" is common, yet research is lacking in detailed information about the different parts of the system, how they are intended to work, and who is accountable for making sure that they work. Weiner & Cull (2019) identify "role ambiguity" as a predominant factor in logistical failures in the foster

care system. Ambiguity in roles lends itself to accountability nebulosity. To further clarify the system and its challenges, Geiger, Julien-Chinn, and Lietz (2014) as part of their "recommendations and opportunities" suggest that research be done about court and legal system processes, and interactions with judicial officers and attorneys be conducted." They further note "The department might consider partnering with the legal/courts system to solicit feedback from foster parents on how to improve interactions and collaborations within these systems" (Geiger et al., 2014).

Lack of Communication

A third and dominant trend within the literature is the lack of communication between the caseworker and foster parent. Throughout the research on retention, overall, foster parents feel ignored. Foster parents withstand unreturned phone calls, and questions foster parents have about their foster children; *Who is this child? Who is this child's health care provider? Does this child have siblings?* go unanswered. The lack of communication between foster parents and caseworkers, and the lack of support foster parents report receiving from agencies, leave foster parents unable to navigate the system. Overwhelmingly, foster parents note a lack of communication with the caseworker as one, if not the leading, reason for discontinuing fostering. Because communication affects all processes, a lack thereof can support several foster parent complaints. Foster parent communication complaints begin early on in the foster parent process of licensure and placement. Geiger (2017) notes that many foster parents state frustrations with "not yet having any placements, experiencing communication issues with [the system], and frustration and confusion with licensing regulations". Research by Orme (2001) found foster parent discontinuation was predominantly due to two factors consistently stated in other

research. One-third of foster parents reported having poor communication with their caseworker, and an additional 40% of foster parents identify a lack of support from their agency as the reason for discontinuing.

Communicating effectively with caseworkers is challenging because caseworkers have a large caseload, and possibly because the variety of questions that they are supposed to field surpasses their knowledge of the system. According to Reiman et al. (2017), obtaining "accurate and timely information about foster children and good overall communication with the caseworkers had a strong influence on a foster parent's intention to continue to foster". When discussing emotional and practical supports participants described having poor communication with the system 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. This is explained here by one participant; "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" (Geiger et al., 2013). A study conducted by Shklarski (2019), asked participants about their relationship with caseworkers. Foster parents explained that the relationship mainly depended on the caseworker. "If a caseworker was new, or if the family did not have good rapport with the caseworker, then communication was disrupted. Another participant in Shklarski's study stated, "I was telling *him* stuff about the case that he didn't know, and then information feels, like sometimes, [it] is leaked to us informally".

Shklarski and Geiger et al., found that open communication between foster parents, caseworkers, supervisors, licensing agency representatives, attorneys, courts, and CASA workers contribute significantly to the retention of foster parents. This is especially important because neglecting to communicate can, as well, negatively impact the child (Shklarski, 2019). This same standard level of communication between parties, particularly with caseworkers, strongly affects foster parent retention (Brown & Campbell 2007). Note here that "CASA" stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate.

Although this literature review does not extensively report on foster care system caseworker challenges, it should be noted that the caseworker national average turnover rate is 30%, and that each caseworker replacement cost is about $50,000 according to the Casey Foundation (2017). Geiger, Julien - Chenn, and Leitz, (2014) report while that 60% of foster parents surveyed said that their child's initial placement was "done in a professional and courteous manner and that their input was taken seriously", the same participants reported "a lack of returned emails and phone calls" and stated "I believe [caseworkers] have a hard job because of their high volume caseloads and it is hard for them to give the individual attention to each case/child."

Common themes in the research identified the critical need foster parents have in receiving timely and accurate information about children in their care so that they can provide the child with what is needed (Geiger et al., 2014; Geiger et al., 2013). One participant voiced their experience with the foster care system; "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" (Geiger et al., 2013).

Many parents also reported wanting information, however, information necessary for the foster parent to be able to care for the child is kept secret. "Information provided and released to the foster parent at the time of placement is minimal and seemingly guarded. In my experience, the more information we have as foster parents regarding the child we have taken into care, the better we are able to help them heal and get them the care they need. In each case, I have been either left in the dark for days/weeks or left scrounging up information strategically from the corners of the case over time. Had the full facts been given soon after the time of placement many days of frustration and difficulty in adjustment could have been avoided" (Cooley, et al., 2017). Foster parents overwhelmingly reported poor communication between team members as a reason for relinquishing their foster parent license.

Summary

Most of the literature reviewed covered topics pertaining to foster parent satisfaction regarding decision making for the child, foster care system logistics, and caseworker communication. The majority concluded that foster parent retention was low because foster parents had problems with the foster care agency, more specifically there was a lack of support and poor communication (Brown & Campbell, 2007; Geiger et al., 2013; Geiger et al., 2014; MacGregor, et al., 2006; Stone & Stone, 1983). An in-depth review of the literature led the researcher to an understanding of the factors that had been studied that contributed to foster parent turnover. Within the literature, the predominant factor was foster care agency deficiencies in communication and supportive staff. There were not any studies where accountability within

the system was considered, nor how ambiguity of the departments and employee roles affect foster parent exit.

Purpose of Study 1

This study is important because it will first identify if foster parents know who is accountable for their foster child's mental and physical health, legal case, medical care, and finances, secondly, it will identify if foster parents know how to make direct contact with this party, and third, it will identify what, if any, additional knowledge foster parents need about the system or their foster child. Another purpose for this study is to avert from foster parent satisfaction, and approach foster parent stewardship. Satisfaction, a variable common in foster parent studies to date, can ebb and flow, while stewardship addresses foster parent perspectives on their ability to take care of their foster child's needs. This study strives to understand if foster parents are able to care for their children by way of connections to appropriate foster care system employees and departments. Satisfaction is about how the foster parent feels irrespective of whether the child's need is being met. A gap in data exists about foster parents' knowledge about the system entirely. Past research has neglected to study foster parent exit and system accountability within foster care employee and department roles and responsibilities. For example, long, temporary placements may harm foster children and cause family-unit stress leading to foster parent exit, but why are the placements temporary for so long? Who is accountable?

In this study, the researcher was seeking to answer three main questions 1) "what do foster parents know about foster care system employees and departmental roles and responsibilities pertaining to their foster child's case?", 2) "how do foster parents reach these

employees and departments?", 3) what additional knowledge do foster parents need about their foster child and the foster care system?"

Study Part 1

METHODS

Researcher Positionality

The main researcher led and facilitated this process bringing her own extensive knowledge about the foster care system, which is based on her experiences as a foster parent along with being a foster care system researcher. While a foster parent, she learned that vital information critical to a foster child's success in a foster home was disorganized, inaccessible, or fragmented and incomplete. In her experience, fostering was unnecessarily complicated and stressful. Due to the stress and hopelessness this caused, the researcher and her husband relinquished their foster care license three years after fostering their first child. Having been committed to fostering several children, the researcher's plans were spoiled by this experience.

Study Design

To explore the participants' knowledge about foster care system employee and department roles, responsibilities, and contact information, a descriptive, quantitative and cross-sectional study approach was used. This allowed for a large number of foster parent participants to be viewed at one point in time. In addition to the survey's quantitative items, there were two open-ended, qualitative questions to learn more about the additional knowledge that foster parents need to care for their foster children.

In respect to the participant's time, this study was made intentionally simple; to construct a survey that spoke directly to each participant and then to collect important data that would be useful. An additional intent was to directly identify if foster parents need more knowledge, and if so, what type of knowledge. It was not of importance for the survey to measure correlations or other statistical formats.

Participants

The researcher recruited former and current foster parents from online foster parent groups where members offer support, services, or goods to one another. Qualified participants demonstrated an interest in the research topic and have fostered children in the past or are currently fostering a child that is a ward of the Illinois child welfare system. The participants were from all cultures and ethnicities. Although the researcher marketed to 4000 participants, inactive members, busy parents, and eligibility requirements greatly reduced the number of participants. Foster care system current or past employees were disqualified from participating in the survey. The researcher collected data from 124 participants using the snowball sampling method.

Recruitment Procedures

In this study, the researcher looked at the variation in foster parent knowledge of foster care system and employee roles, responsibilities, and rosters, and the variation in foster parent perspective of partnership with the foster care system. A self-administered survey was posted to three Facebook groups; Illinois Foster Parents Support Group (IFPSG), West and Central Illinois Foster Parents (WCIFP), and Illinois Foster/Adoptive Advocacy Group (IFAAG). These group

members offer support, services, and goods to one another. Due diligence was conducted to confirm that these groups do allow survey solicitation. These named groups do not restrict members from recruiting participants and posting surveys on their sites. Rules for the IFPSG are as follows:

1.Be kind and courteous

2.No hate speech or bullying

3.Respect everyone's privacy

4.No screen shots

5.Do not block administrators

6.No pictures

There are no rules listed anywhere on the WCIFP Facebook Page. There are no rules listed anywhere on the IFAAG Facebook Page.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit participants by marketing a request for partaking in a survey to online foster parent groups. The researcher offered the survey for 2 weeks during October 2021. Although the study methods did not require personal information, and the data collected did not reveal any personal information about caseworkers or foster children, one ethical consideration was the participant's concern about confidentiality. The researcher questioned how the pressure to remain anonymous affected the answers that current foster parents provided in the survey. Participants may have worried that there would be repercussions for providing any negative review of the foster care system. Past studies have identified that foster parents face retaliation by the foster care system when vocalizing opinions

about employees or the system. The researcher explained the confidentiality procedures and ensured the participants that no one, other than the researcher, would have access to personal participant information. The survey was self-administered, instructed the participants to answer the questions, explained how to submit the survey, and offered the participant a Walmart gift card via attached link.

Instruments/Measures

After an in-depth literature review was completed to understand what studies have been done about foster parent retention, the researcher created a survey using a modified "Knowledge-Management" (Garvin et al., 2008)" framework. "Knowledge Management" is "a formal process of figuring out the information about a company that could benefit others in the company rather than finding ways to make it easily available (Harvard Business Review, 2008)". The Knowledge-Management Survey (KMS) assesses "concrete learning processes and practices" by assessing experimentation, information collection analysis, education and training, and information transfer (Harvard Business Review, 2008)". The data collected included foster parent perceptions about what information they have, what information they need, and their communicative capabilities with various parties in the foster care system.

For the reader to understand the research question results, it is important to define each foster care employee and department role mentioned in this study. Here are the general responsibilities for each:

The Caseworker schedules foster parent courses, ensures that foster parents are licensed, perform home studies, conducts regular visits to foster homes, monitors foster home resources, provides needed information, arranges for a foster child's mental or physical care, coordinates and ensures

necessary services and/or treatments are provided, completes required documentation, articulates goals, gathers and analyzes data, formulates treatment plans, facilitates sibling/parental visitation, transports child to supervised visits, attends collaborative conferences with DCFS/ Juvenile Court and school conferences, formulates an understanding of each client's situation, record-keeping functions and other administrative duties, holds regular (at least bi-weekly) meetings to discuss and document current caseload, submits required weekly, monthly and quarterly reports to DCFS, and works with adoption caseworkers.

The Supervisor supervises the Caseworker, manages the intake process with the DCFS liaison, determines case assignments for staff, provides direct supervision and training to direct service staff, provides direct social work services to clients as required, works effectively with other supervisors to assure the orderly transfer of cases into the proper unit, monitors the quality and quantity of casework services provided by the caseworkers, and conducts team meetings on a weekly basis.

The GAL is the foster child's lawyer/attorney. The GAL's job is to help the Judge decide what is in the best interests of the child and to protect the child's best interests during a court case.

The Foster Parent Support Specialist (FPSS) works with foster families to prevent placement disruption, stabilizes foster care placements, facilitates youth development, and promotes family reunification. A foster family's FPSS may attend court hearings, offer crisis in-home visit support, and have an emergency support hotline 24/7/365.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) accepts complaints regarding the conduct of child welfare service providers employed by the foster care system.

The survey asked 15 items using a dichotomous scale, each providing the researcher with a separate data point. These items addressed foster parent knowledge of specific foster care system departments and employee roles, for example, "You know who you are able to reach for assistance if your GAL is not responsive". These items were structured to identify if the foster parent knows which employee or department within the foster care system is accountable for their foster child's mental and physical health and wellbeing, legal case, health care, and if the foster parent knows how to reach this person or department. Additionally, there were 2 open-ended questions. The questions in this section provided the researcher with information about foster parent's communication needs. An example question was, "What additional knowledge about your foster child would you like to have?" The final question offered the opportunity for the participant to share their email address on the survey "to find out about a centralized data system should one become available". By providing an email address the researcher can offer foster parents information about a knowledge-sharing opportunity should one become available. The demographic information collected identified foster parent status as a 1) current foster parent, 2) a former foster parent, 3) a foster care employee (at which point the survey ended). Demographic information such as age, race, or income was not important for this study.

Data Analysis

For this study, the researcher used a descriptive, univariate, frequency distribution statistical technique. This technique was chosen because the researcher was trying to describe the data so that it could be easily comprehended. If the researcher were looking for patterns or for associations between variables, then the researcher would use bi-variate or multivariate

techniques, however, the researcher was looking to understand the frequency of answers that identify if foster parents know who to contact, and if they know how to contact, the appropriate foster care departments and employees accountable for their foster child's case. This data answered the research questions:

1) "what do foster parents know about foster care system employees and departmental roles and responsibilities pertaining to their foster child's case?".

The items that answered this question were:

- The YouthCare website has accurate and updated service provider information (YouthCare Health Choice Illinois).
- I have adequate knowledge about court hearings, including the goal and purpose of the hearing.
- I have been given the necessary information about my foster child's past in order to appropriately care for him/her.
- I know how the Office of the Inspector General assists foster parents.
- I understand how the 'reunification' process works.
- I get updated information about biological parental visits that could be helpful in parenting my foster child.

2) "how do foster parents reach these employees and departments?"

- I know how to reach someone that will help me if our case worker is not responsive.
- I know who I am supposed to call or email for assistance if our GAL is not responsive.

- I am able to access adequate health care, therapy, educational, and other services for my foster child through the foster care system.

- I have a satisfactory relationship with our assigned Foster Parent Support Specialist.

- I feel that the foster care system and its employees partner with me in tending to my foster child's needs.

3) "what additional knowledge do foster parents need about their foster child and the foster care system?"

- Current interactions between your foster child and their biological parents are important events. Do you get updated information that could be helpful in parenting this child?

- What additional knowledge about the foster care system would you like to have?

- What additional knowledge about your foster child would you like to have?

The data has been reported as frequency distributions, percentages, and visuals.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if foster parents know who to contact, and how to make contact, with the appropriate foster care system employees and departments involved in their foster child's case. A survey was conducted to collect data showing the perceptions of foster parents regarding their knowledge about foster care system departments and employees. The data that was gathered was intended to provide an understanding of foster parents' ability to connect with foster care system employees and departments in order to meet

their foster child's needs. In this study there were 124 participants, 11% (12) of the participants were past foster parents, and 89% (112) were current foster parents. In this section the researcher will give the data collected for the 3 research questions.

From this data, it is concluded that foster parents; need more knowledge about the foster care system, need more knowledge about the child that they are fostering, and need an increased number of foster care employees that they can successfully contact whenever necessary. The following research questions drove the collection of this data.

Research Question 1: W*hat do foster parents know about foster care system employees and departmental roles and responsibilities pertaining to their foster child's case*?

The data here suggests that parents need more knowledge about employees and departments. The percentage of foster parents that reported the Youthcare website does not have accurate and updated service provider information is 41% (51), while 24% (30) of foster parents reported that the site does have accurate and updated service provider information, and 35% (43) reported not having any knowledge about Youthcare. The percentage of foster parents that reported having adequate knowledge about court hearings, including the goal and purpose of the hearing was 62% (77), and 38% (47) of foster parents reported they did not have adequate knowledge. The majority of foster parents reported that they have not been given the necessary information about their foster child's past in order to appropriately care for their foster child at 53% (65), while 47% (59) of foster parents reported that they have been given the necessary information. The percentage of foster parents that do not know how the Office of the Inspector General assists foster parents is 87% (108), and 13% (16) of foster parents reported that they do. The majority of foster parents at 81% (100) reported knowing how the 'reunification process'

works and 19% (24) reported not knowing. The percentage of foster parents that reported not receiving updated information about biological parental visits that could be helpful in parenting their foster child is 58% (71), while 42% (53) reported that they do receive this information.

Research Question 2: *How do foster parents reach these employees and departments*?

In general, foster parents need knowledge about how to contact employees and departments. The percentage of foster parents that reported knowing how to reach someone that can help them if their caseworker is not responsive was 63% (78), and 37% (46) of foster parents reported they do not know how to reach someone. The percentage of foster parents that reported not knowing who to call or email for assistance if their GAL is not responsive was 81% (100), while 19% (24) of foster parents reported knowing who to call. The percentage of foster parents that reported not being able to access adequate health care, therapy, education, and other services for their foster child through the foster care system was 56% (70), while 44% (54) reported that they are able to access this information through the foster care system. The percentage of foster parents that reported having a satisfactory relationship with their assigned Foster Parents Support Specialist was 35% (44), while 2% (3) reported not having a satisfactory relationship, and 63% (77) reported not having been assigned a Foster Parents Support Specialist. The percentage of foster parents that reported the foster care system and its employees' not acting as their partner in tending to their foster child's needs was 55% (68), while 45% (56) of foster parents reported that they do act as their partner.

Research Question 3: *What additional information do foster parents need about their foster child and the foster care system*?

The qualitative data in Table 1 shows the Themes, Categories, and Language used by parents, as well as the number of parents that mentioned each Category. A more in-depth examination of the data is discussed in the narrative below.

Table 1 The Information Parents Need About the Foster Care System and their Foster Child

Themes	Categories	Repeated Language
History	Medical 64 participants	medical records, psychological health, mental health, physical health, behavioral issues, medications, physical and mental medical history of family, birth records, surgeries
History	Prenatal Health 11 participants	pregnancy, birth, drug exposure, substance exposure
History	Trauma 10 people total participants	traumatic events, trauma caused by the system, inconsistency causing confusion and trauma, trauma informed information for foster parents, trauma support services.
System	Foster Care System Court System 53 participants	laws, policies, rules, processes, reunification, permanency, changes in case, foster child placements, information, foster child data system, training court laws, policies, rules, hearings and processes, reunification, termination of parental rights, administrative court review, ajudication
System	Services and Resources 51 participants	respite, specialists, dental, therapy, doctors, database, agency reviews, knowledge, foster parent local roster, valid insurance, transportation, college application assistance, accurate and on-time stipend, on-call crisis phone number, foster care system roster, "how to" processes handbook, accessible answers to questions, flow chart of employee and department titles and responsibilities, CASA
System	Truth and Honesty 10 participants	truth about the case, honesty about the child's history, honesty with the child about the case

Case	Case File 12 people total	case progress, therapy progress, biological parent progress, case expected timeline
Case	Siblings 9 participants	location of, how to connect
Case	Interest and Preferences 8 participants	routines, likes, dislikes, schools, friends, photos, daycare, important people from past placements
Accountability	Foster child's case Foster child's well-being 32 participants	GAL responsibilities, Caseworker responsibilities, accountability for DCFS proposed timeline, court processes, child's case, mishandling of cases, standard policies, monitoring of complaints children's needs first, permanency priority, system trauma and abuse, wait times for children, visits with biological parents, agency retaliation reports

Fig. 2 Number of Foster Parents and the Type of Information that they Need
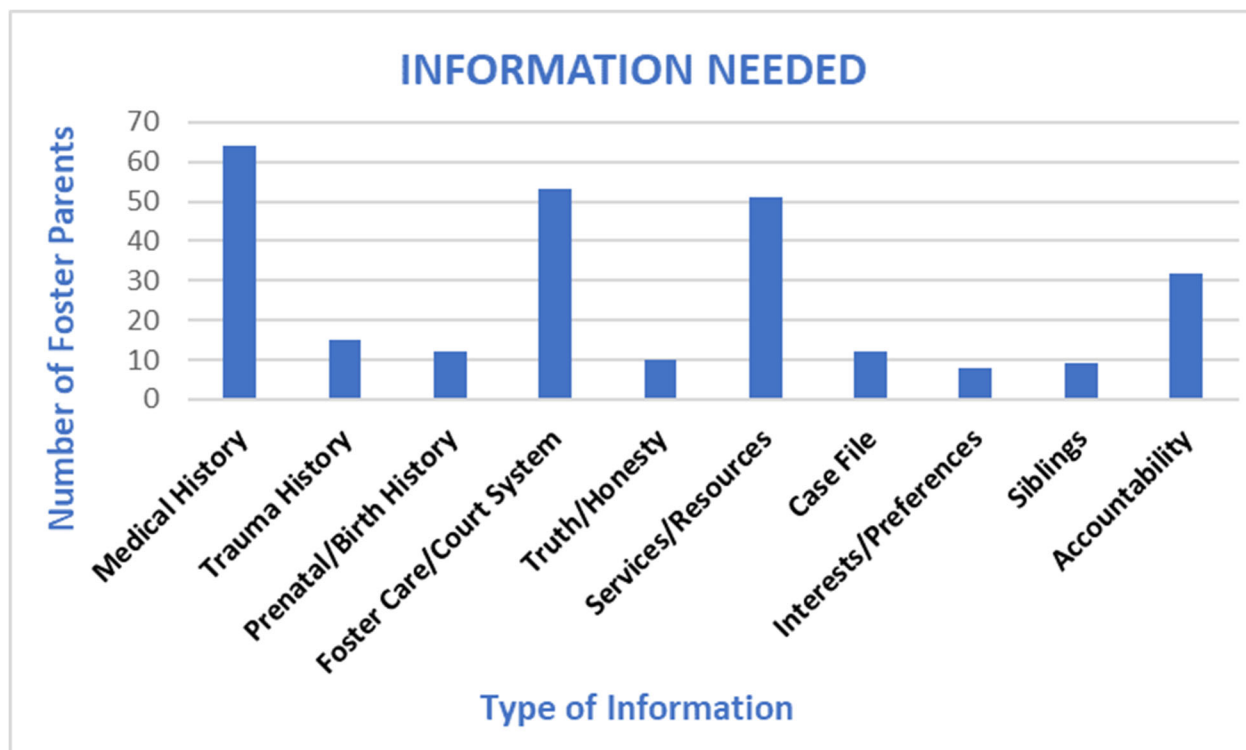
The most often mentioned category from the qualitative data was "medical history"; 63 foster parents mentioned that they need information about their foster child's medical history. The number of foster parents that mentioned "trauma" was 15, and the number of foster parents that mentioned "prenatal, birth and/or substance exposure" was 12. The number of foster parents that mentioned that they need more information about the "foster care system and/or court system" was 53. Ten (10) foster parents mentioned "truth or honesty" when discussing what they need from the foster care system, and 51 foster parents mentioned that they need "services and/or resources" from the foster care system. Pertaining to the foster child's case, 12 foster parents mentioned needing more information about the child's "case file", 9 foster parents mentioned the foster child's "sibling(s)", and 8 foster parents mentioned needing more information about the child's "interests or preferences". The final category "accountability" was mentioned 32 times by foster parents. Accountability here is the need to identify what each foster care system employee and department is responsible for, if those responsible are fulfilling their obligations, if those obligations are being met, and what consequences, if any, are there for not meeting these obligations.

Overall, the lack of knowledge expressed by foster parents identifies the need for a knowledge-sharing network, and 79 of the participants provided their email addresses to be contacted should a foster care "centralized data system" become available. The need for knowledge is all encompassing, as one foster parent mentions not knowing how a visit with a biological parent went; "It helps us to know if we should prepare dinner for them upon their return… if they were crying we could offer more support". Another foster parent stated, "we can't parent him if we are not actively involved in his healing".

Additionally, foster parents made the following questions and statements when answering the qualitative question *"what additional knowledge about your foster child would you like to have?";* "Was he exposed to drugs, and what kind?", "What kind of neglect or abuse happened?", "Likes, dislikes, routines, schooling, illnesses, social skills, behaviors?", "Assaulted and locked in rooms and left without basic needs for long periods of time?", "Siblings?"

Throughout the study, as seen below, results show that the foster care system's information-sharing tools are severely inadequate and suggest that three obstacles interfere with knowledge-sharing; lack of employee contacts, disorganization, and questionable intentions.

Lack of Employee Contacts

Generally, the data here shows that there is a lack of accessible employees available to parents when they need something for their child. A shortage of available employees for foster parents to access when in need inhibits knowledge-sharing and is one challenge interfering with adequate foster parent knowledge. In the qualitative data here, one foster parent states; "what's the specific protocol for needing to call the [Crisis Line] -- during/after a crisis, often no one answers the on-call number?"

When foster parents were asked if they know who to reach out to when their caseworker is not responsive, 63% answered that they do, which is one of the higher percentages regarding parental knowledge of employee contacts in the survey conducted. This is likely because caseworkers often rely on their supervisors to field phone calls from foster parents. This subsequent contact, albeit a supervisor, serves as second in command and provides the foster parent with an additional resource, a necessary post as past studies show that caseworkers are assigned too many cases. While the researcher believes 63% to yet be an unacceptable

percentage, foster parents are far more likely to find someone that can field a call for the caseworker than for the GAL. Only 19% of foster parents know who to reach out to if their GAL is not responsive, a position that is not assigned a subsequent contact.

While the Supervisor position was not created to assist caseworkers, the researcher believes that parents, after not hearing from their caseworker, will call the agency directly for support and the call is diverted to the supervisor. In contrast, if a GAL is unresponsive, a parent would have to reach the Cook County Public Guardian, Charles P. Golbert, for example, yet he represents not only all foster children in the county, but also all children in custody/divorce cases in the county, and over 700 adults with disabilities. A subsequent GAL contact is of utmost importance, as one parent in this study states: "I would like to see the child's GAL meet the child. In 5 years of fostering no GAL has ever contacted me. How can they represent a child they don't know?"

The issue of not connecting does not end with the caseworker/supervisor and GAL. One foster parent stated, "When we run into issues and go to the caseworker, supervisor, sometimes even up to the foster care VP or the GAL no one can help. They aren't able to give me information for someone who can help. At that point we are not partners or team members, we are foster parents, closed out of most critical meetings and decisions, and hanging out there on our own. We have been foster parents for 19 years so we are not newbies!"

Each foster child likely comes with abundant needs upon entering a new home. According to the data their needs may be atypical or may be magnified and include, 1) medical needs: mental, physical and psychological components that likely require a form of evaluations, therapies, medicines and appointments, 2) educational needs: academics, social / emotional, fees,

and transportation, and 3) case file needs: court proceedings, mandatory meetings, visitation protocols, and finances. The data in this study shows that within each of these categories there are several questions foster parents have that present themselves every day. It is the researcher's opinion that it is impossible for 2 employees to answer all of these questions for the innumerable cases on their docket, during which time the Supervisor tends to his/her role as well. However, the data here, when looking at the likelihood of a parent knowing who to reach out to if a caseworker (63%), relative to a GAL (20%), is not responsive, is more than 3 to 1. This shows that one (1) subsequent contact more than triples a parent's chance of getting the support that they need. One foster parent in response to the qualitative question "what additional knowledge about the foster care system would you like to have?" stated "contact information for different people if the caseworker is not responsive", a simple answer with a likely simple solution. This is important because past research identifies that "foster parent exit" is often contributed to a lack of foster care system support. As noted in the literature review above, most research concludes foster parent retention rates are low because foster parents have problems with the foster care agency, more specifically, a lack of support and poor communication exists (Brown & Campbell, 2007; Geiger, et. al 2013; Geiger, et. al 2014; MacGregor, et. al 2006, Stone & Stone, 1983).

A potential additional contact provided by the foster care system for foster parents based on their geographical location is the Foster Parent Support Specialist. Among the services that a FPSS offers are court hearing attendance and support, crisis in-home visit support, and an emergency support hotline 24/7/365. When a parent is assigned a FPSS, 94% of parents report having a "satisfactory relationship". Satisfactory relationship is interpreted here as one that supports the parent in their quest to fulfill their foster child's needs. The data shows that 62% of parents reported not having been assigned a FPSS. From this data and other similar results, we

see that when the foster care system does provide adequate contacts to foster parents, the results are promising. This data is important because it identifies that when the system provides parents with a FPSS the parent is likely to be satisfied with the relationship, decreasing the likelihood of foster parent exit as seen in previous research studies.

Disorganization

Overall, the data shows that there is severe disorganization within the foster care system. The disorganization inhibits knowledge-sharing and is a second obstacle to adequate foster parent knowledge. The results noted above identify a multitude of disorganized processes; out of 124 parents, 53 of them mentioned that they need more information about the foster care system or the court system laws, policies and rules, processes, reunification, permanency, changes in case, and courtroom procedures. Some parents requested a handbook of information, some a flow chart. Without proper information of these structures the system creates disorganization. One foster parent stated; "I would like to understand what order and what certain court dates mean. What are caseworkers actually allowed to tell you and what are they not allowed to tell you? "

One extremely important, yet disorganized child welfare system that is highlighted by parents as a problem in both the qualitative and quantitative results, is the health care system. YouthCare Health Choice Illinois is the insurance provider for Illinois foster children. One quantitative item in this study questioning parent's knowledge of YouthCare, showed 35% of foster parents "do not have any knowledge about Youthcare". Additionally, the qualitative data showed that 41% of parents need information about how to find medical "Services and Resources". Parents used the terms "doctors, specialists, dental care, and therapy" to identify

what services and resources they need. When asked here "what additional knowledge about the foster care system would you like to have?", one parent stated, "how to find doctors that take Medicaid".

While it is possible that caseworkers mistakenly introduce the Youthcare plan as "Medicaid" to parents, additionally revealing the magnitude of disorganization in the system, the data would still indicate that foster parents do not have knowledge about how to find provider's that accept Youthcare, as 40% of parents answered that the YouthCare website does not have accurate and updated service provider information. Although not part of this study, the researcher further investigated the accuracy of the service provider information by accessing the online YouthCare Provider Portal three (3) times at https://findaprovider.ilyouthcare.com, and customer service two (2) times, via their toll-free phone number. The researcher found the online portal to be user friendly, and that the customer service representatives were efficient and effective on the telephone. The researcher was able to find, within 10 miles of the zipcode 60202, 751 MDs in total; 79 Physical Therapists, 64 Child & Adolescent Psychiatrists, 56 Cardiologists, 33 Speech & Language Pathologists, and 14 Developmental-Behavioral doctors listed that accept Youthcare and were accepting new patients on the provider portal. Access to health care providers appeared to be substantial, mainly from Lurie Children's Hospital and Rush University Medical Center. To confirm this validity, the researcher called 6 providers, and the information for four of the six providers was accurate. This is not to indicate that there are enough providers in each county throughout the state of Illinois, or that the information provided is accurate beyond this small sample. It is likely that some foster parents are unable to find health care providers in their county because their county is smaller and with fewer resources than the zip code 60202, metropolitan Chicago area. The researcher confirmed accurate information with

large hospitals, such as Lurie Children's Hospital (seeing 60,000 patients each year) and Rush

University Medical Center (nationally ranked academic medical center); institutions that a small

city would not be home to. The importance of this practice was not to show the validity of

Youthcare, but to exemplify the importance of information-sharing practices.

Although speculative, the researcher believes that the "service and resource"

shortcomings are largely due to a disorganized structure within the department responsible for

medical provider access. This disorganization contributes to weak information-sharing between

the system and the parents and between department personnel.

Intentions

Overall, the data here shows that the Illinois foster care system has questionable intensions

regarding information-sharing processes. The data shows that when the foster care system intends

to provide foster parents with information, they do an adequate job in doing so, as seen in the

"knowledge of reunification" data. The foster care system's primary goal is reunifying children

with their biological parent(s). Results show that 80% of participants understand how the

reunification process works. In contrast to the "knowledge of reunification" data, results here show

that 86% of participants do not know how the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) assists foster

parents. The researcher believes this is likely because the OIG's primary responsibility is to accept

formal complaints regarding the conduct of foster care system employees. Although speculating,

the researcher believes that OIG knowledge is intentionally not communicated to foster parents.

The qualitative data collected here also shows that foster parents may be making

complaints to an employee or department other than OIG and suffer because of their actions. Had

they known about the OIG complaint process, which is anonymous, complaints would have served

their purpose and be addressed appropriately. One foster parent's statement regarding this; "There should be a way to alert when workers, GALs, and other case partners are not doing their jobs or are doing something harmful to the child that doesn't then put the reporting party in direct harm of retaliation, because it happens". Another foster parent, when asked "what additional knowledge about the foster care system would you like to have?" replied "...how to prevent vindictive caseworkers from taking their anger out on the child in care." The data in this study reveals that the intentions of the foster care system are questionable. By maintaining its ambiguity, the system can keep foster parents from obtaining the information they are seeking.

Conclusion

It is concluded that information-sharing between the foster care system and foster parents is weak. Well intentioned foster parents should have access to information they need to adequately care for their foster children. The data here shows parents' needs are in support of their child's health, not one participant mentioned that they need a healthy child. In a system where adequate knowledge exists, the researcher believes that the foster care community would benefit from the creation of a knowledge-sharing system for foster parents to efficiently access the information they need to adequately care for their foster child. Additionally, the researcher believes that it would be advantageous to conduct a study about the State of Illinois' intentions for foster children. A further study to identify what the state's intentions are would give researchers and practitioners an understanding of how they can improve the foster care system.

Limitations

There were limitations of this study that should be noted. The study participants are users of the online platform, Facebook, and are members of Facebook foster parent groups. Foster parents that do not use online platforms could not have participated in the study. The researcher, however, does not believe that a socio-economic separation exists between online platform users and non-online platform users. An additional limitation to note is the lack of variation the survey answers allowed for. While the researcher wanted to clearly define what foster parents "know", how they obtain this knowledge is not addressed in this survey. For example, a qualitative response by one foster parent was "my answers of *yes* to many questions [here] are *yes*, but it takes a LOT of phone calls and reaching out to find the care, get the info, etc. Nothing is easy and no info[rmation] is just handed over."

Study Part 2
METHODS

Researcher Positionality

The main researcher led and facilitated this process bringing her own extensive knowledge about the foster care system, which is based on her experiences as a foster parent along with being a foster care system researcher. While a foster parent, she learned that vital information critical to a foster child's success in a foster home was disorganized, inaccessible, or fragmented and incomplete. In her experience, fostering was unnecessarily complicated and stressful. Due to the stress and hopelessness this ambiguity caused, the researcher and her husband relinquished their foster care license three years after fostering their first child despite their initial commitment to fostering several children.

Study Design

To understand information-sharing practices within the Illinois foster care system, and to create and implement an information-sharing wiki platform, this study utilized a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. The participants actively participated in the research process using Information Analysis (IA). The use of focus groups was the participatory mechanism used for convening foster parent participants, decision-making on IA, and obtaining feedback on the development of the wiki site.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology is a "systematic inquiry with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for purposes of education and taking action or effecting change" (Green et al., 2003). This study heavily relied on PAR methodologies; the researcher was a foster parent, and the foster parent participants' involvement in the IA process of identifying, organizing, and managing the content was a vital part of the study's validity. Information about the child welfare system is fragmented and often inaccurate or incomplete, however, foster parents have had the practice of locating information that would otherwise be potentially impossible to find. The participants were also able to identify false from accurate information. Having foster parent participants resulted in data that shows experiences in navigating the system firsthand. While the foster parent Facebook community was strong and established prior to this study, the PAR methodology was used to create an additional layer of community connections and support for Illinois' foster parents. PAR allowed for open-ended conversations between foster parents to learn about what medical information should be on the wiki, what will drive foster parents to use the wiki, and how the wiki can be created and adjusted to better serve foster parents.

To respect foster parent's time, this study was made intentionally simple. Two, 60-minute video-telecommunication focus group sessions were scheduled at the foster parent's convenience, and additional times to discuss the progress of the wiki were offered and fluctuated dependent on the parent's availability. The foster parent participants are raising children that have experienced trauma and may have specialized medical issues, therefore, the researcher made sure to be flexible and adjust to the participant's schedules. On three occasions foster parents did not attend the meeting on time, so the researcher met with these foster parents after the focus group session, or at another date. Both focus group sessions extended past 60-minutes at some of the foster parent's requests. This was beneficial to the study as additional information was provided by the participants.

Information Analysis (IA)

The primary category the dissertation focused on is "medical information" being that medical information was the leading request foster parents had in the data collected during the researcher's Study 1. For Study 2, the medical information broad categories were "medical records" (of foster children) and "medical structures" (of the foster care system). Their respective sub-categories were "medical statutes", "bills", "policies, and practices", and "medical services and resources". Each sub-category included definitions and "how to" instructions. For example, as seen in Title 89 of the State of Illinois Administrative Code, "Record information about child abuse and neglect investigations may be shared with the following individuals without the consent of the subjects of the report. A person who has legal responsibility or authorization to care for, treat, or supervise a child or a parent, foster parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the welfare of a child who is the subject of a report" (Illinois General Assembly,

2015); foster parents are permitted medical history information related to a child's abuse or neglect. This non-exhaustive list of accounts included, prenatal history, birth history, neo-natal history, newborn history, abandonment history, neglect history, physical abuse history, physical punishment history, mental abuse history, emotional abuse history, psychological abuse history, and sexual abuse history. Each of these categories have additional sub-categories, for example, physical abuse includes the definition of physical abuse and examples of physical abuse; beating, slapping, hitting, pushing, shaking, kicking, throwing, pinching, biting, choking, hair-pulling, burning with cigarettes, scalding water, or other hot objects. The "how to" included abuse services and resources, and treatments. To obtain this knowledge, foster parent participants utilized websites Illinois.gov, Childwelfare.gov, Youthcare.com, ILGA.gov, and DCFS.illinois.gov, among several others including private and public websites. Participants used their own experiential knowledge as a resource for IA.

According to Science Direct, Information Analysis Centers "maintain extensive databases, produce reports, handbooks, and data books, and perform technology assessments" (Carthcart et al., 2010). For this study, IA was used to facilitate the investigation of already existing textual materials such as documents and records from journals, scholarly peer-reviewed articles, video databases, conferences proceedings, private websites, and public websites, theses, dissertations, newspapers, reference sources, handbooks, and dictionaries. The IA process used in this study was to discover and interpret information. This process included searching, source validation, information gathering, categorization, and modeling.

Focus Groups

As part of the PAR methods, focus groups were used as the format for the participatory data collection and analysis process. According to H. Jung Yun, "a focus group is a gathering of a

small number of individuals who share common interests in specific issues or events and who are asked to take part in an interactive discussion. Focus groups typically are used to understand how people with common interests feel and think about an issue, a product, a service, or an idea" (Jung, Y.H. (2018).

The focus groups had two purposes; 1) to ensure the dissertation process was achieving its IA goals and its PAR goals, and 2) to encourage a social and communal component, encouraging community connections, support, collective empowerment, and self-efficacy among participants resulting in bonds and ties to further their work together as a unit long-term.

The researcher utilized methods for conducting focus groups from Richard Krueger's book Developing Questions for Focus Groups. To accomplish this, eleven participants attended one or two 60-minute focus group sessions throughout the dissertation; early in the formation process before the documents and text were submitted for website development, and nearing dissemination. Each participant was offered $25 to participate in each of the two focus group sessions, totaling $50. The funds were electronically transferred to the participant.

Focus group session 1 took place in December 2022. Prior to this session, the researcher emailed the participants information about Study 1 and Study 2 including the purpose and goals of the dissertation. The participants were expected to read the material sent to them before the first focus group session took place.

During the first focus group, the researcher presented the following questions:

1. *"What topics within the category of Medical do you think are the most important?"*
2. *"What topics within the category of Medical will draw you to visit the wiki to find information as a User? A "User" searches for information on the wiki."*
3. *"What topics within the category of Medical will draw you to visit the wiki as an Editor? An "Editor" adds and/or edits wiki content."*
4. *"What topics outside the category of Medical do you want to see on the wiki?"*

The time between Focus Group Session 1 and Focus Group Session 2, the participants

followed the development of the wiki and at times contributed additional information to be added

to the platform. The researcher stayed in close contact with each participant via Facebook

messenger and Zoom, and would inform the participants about wiki progression while

encouraging them to visit the wiki and share their suggestions.

During the second focus group, the researcher presented the following questions:
5. *"How was your experience using the wiki."*
6. *"How can these experiences be more effective?"*
7. *"How can these experiences be more efficient?"*
8. *"What are the barriers you have experienced regarding usage of the wiki, and how can these barriers be removed?"*

The focus group goals were to collect soft data and to document participant feedback to ensure

that the platform meets its expected development, growth, and traction post-dissertation.

Participants

The researcher recruited former or current foster parents from the online Facebook group

Illinois Foster Parent Support Group (IFPSG) where members offer support, referrals, and

references as information to one another. Qualified participants demonstrated an interest in the

research topic and were currently or formally fostering a child in the Illinois Foster Care System.

Foster care system current or past employees were disqualified from participating in the study.

Using the purposive sampling method, the researcher collected data from 11 participants

believed to be between the ages of 22-60. Demographics such as age, gender, income, and

ethnicity were irrelevant to the project and therefore the data for such demographics were not

collected. It should be noted that at the beginning of this study, participants appeared skeptical

of the researcher's motives to conduct this work, but as information was exchanged through

conversations between the researcher and participants, previous notions and biases seemed negated.

Recruitment Procedures

To conduct this dissertation project, the researcher identified potential foster parent participants depending on their activity and interests communicated through posts to the IFPSG Facebook group. The researcher directly contacted these potential participants via Facebook messenger. The criterion to participate in the study were as follows: participants must be: 1) former or current foster parents, 2) active in seeking information online, 3) exhibiting a personal interest in the dissertation topic and goals, and 4) accepting of the time commitment of two focus group sessions and following the development of wiki topics and information including email and video-telecommunications conversations with the researcher. Due diligence was conducted to confirm that the IFPSG does allow focus group solicitation. IFPSG does not restrict members from recruiting participants. Rules for the IFPSG are as follows:

1.Be kind and courteous

2.No hate speech or bullying

3.Respect everyone's privacy

4.No screen shots

5.Do not block administrators

6.No pictures

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher used purposive sampling to recruit foster parents by marketing a request to some Illinois Foster Parent Support Group Facebook members. The researcher contacted foster parents during October 2022. The initial request stated:

"Hello. I am an IFPSG member, and I see that you are active in helping direct foster parents to the information or resources that they need. In 2008 my family fostered, and as you know, the lack of information available to us made fostering unnecessarily complicated. Last year I decided to create an information-sharing wiki for foster parents to access the information they need to successfully raise their foster children. This wiki is already in the works. I could really use your help to make this successful. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please let me know. Thank you."

The study methods did not require personal information, and the data collected did not reveal any personal information about child welfare professionals or foster children. Every participant was a former or current foster parent so that the participants did not have any ethical concerns. Past studies have identified that foster parents face retaliation by the foster care system when vocalizing opinions about employees or the system. This was not a concern for the focus group participants. Each participant was offered $25 to participate in each of the two focus group sessions, totaling $50. The funds were electronically transferred to the participant.

Data Analysis Process

To understand the medical structures, laws, bills, policies, and practices of the Illinois foster care system, documents and sites of the Illinois foster care system were analyzed. The information was accessible on various public and private organization's websites. These websites are Illinois.gov, Childwelfare.gov, Youthcare.com, dhs.state.il.us, ILGA.gov, DCFS.illinois.gov, ilyouthcare.com, dph.illinois.gov, macadopt.org, oeig.illinois.gov, spider.dcfs.illinois.gov,

hfs.illinois.gov, ffrcsi.org, illinoislegalaid.org, childrensresearchtriangle.org, rileychildrens.org, uchicagomedicine.org, teladoc.com, youtube.com, luriechildrens.org, pharmacytimes.com. childserve.org., and lawrencehall.org. The participants had, to some degree, experience with seeking and interpreting child welfare documents and texts. By identifying and seeking specific medical information, the foster parent participants created an outline for medical structures, laws, bills, policies, and practices for a foster care system wiki.

Grounded Theory Analysis Approach

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory involves using a process of data collection, coding, and analysis to develop a theory that is grounded in the data. They believed that data should guide development of the theory rather than be restricted by preconceived notions or biases, and that comparing new data to previously analyzed data will refine a developing theory. Using Grounded Theory, the researcher applied inductive reasoning to understand what information foster parents believe the wiki should contain, what will draw foster parents to use the wiki, and how the experiences foster parents have when using the wiki affect their success as information seekers and therefore the success of the wiki's growth. The data instructed the researcher on information that was to be present on the wiki, and what information was to be omitted. As mentioned above, the IA included locating incorrect information about the Illinois foster care system to identify what information should not be included in the wiki. To collect information about the Illinois foster care system, participants worked together using their own knowledge and the world wide web. The data from Study 1 and Study 2 allowed the

researcher to determine what information was needed in the wiki, enabling the maximization of the best possible information.

During this process, the researcher obtained, managed, and lead a team of data and software engineers. While the researcher is not skilled in technological sciences, because the software itself was free and the cost for services was minimal, the team was able to create, manage and maintain the wiki software. The researcher collaborated with foster parents to brainstorm how information could be organized and made available to the foster parent community while looking for a cost-effective software program that offered an open-source platform. After deciding on wiki software as the most viable option, the researcher posted a request for a wiki developer on Upwork.com. Although the software no cost, the researcher required training and support, so she secured a wiki software developer. During the process of development, the researcher worked with the developer to learn the basic knowledge required to manage the wiki. The information was easy to learn, and the researcher requested support from the developer as needed. During this process, the researcher retained foster parent participants. While the participant study group was forming, the researcher created a framework for the website based on data and her knowledge of the foster care system. In preparation of the first focus group, the goal, purpose and objectives of the study, and the framework, were shared with the participants. During Focus Group 1 the researcher and participants together added headings, key words, phrases, and definitions. Every participant contributed and insisted on gathering additional documents, text, and general information to be emailed to the researcher at a later date. There was ongoing conversation between the participants and the researcher to identify, define and organize the content, which later was checked for accuracy. Additionally, the researcher recorded the focus group session to revisit the material. The first focus group added

substantial information to the framework. The researcher believed that potential suggestions were restricted due to the focus group allotted time. The researcher met with the various parties on a regular basis, and daily correspondence was expected and documented, to some degree. This participatory action research process included debating various data and information for use grounded in the collective expertise of the participants.

Data Use for Wiki Development

The wiki has both a mobile face option and a desktop face option. On every page there is a disclaimer statement. The disclaimer explains that the administrators and creators of the wiki are not to be held responsible for the information present in the wiki. An example of this statement is below in Appendix 1. The wiki is an independent site for crowd-sourced information sharing. Participants can create a username and password. This can be the user's true name or an alias. Once a username has been created, the user is able to participate anonymously if they choose to. On the site there is a protected space called "foster parent tips" for sensitive information sharing between foster parents that care to participate. This space is password protected and the process to receive access to the space is heavily monitored. The user can also become an editor of information on the wiki; to do this training is required and identity is confirmed by wiki administration to approve the editor's identity. Foster parent experiences show that they can suffer retaliation from caseworkers, therefore administration of the wiki must be diligent in identifying editors and those admitted to the password protected space. Because wikis are crowdsourced, there is an ongoing dialogue of information for those trained to edit. For example, a user may want to contribute information. What happens then is the user sends the information to an administrator or trained editor. Next, the administrator or trained editor "fact

checks" the information and either sends back the information message to the user with editing suggestions or publishes the information. If a foster parent becomes an editor, they can edit and add information at their leisure. If any user or editor believes contradictory information exists, a request to edit already published information can be made. It should be noted that wiki software identifies and blocks or bans users that do not follow wiki editorial policies. See Appendix 2 for MediaWiki Block and Ban policies. These policies have sub-protection options for individual administrators to choose and implement blocks and bans depending on their needs.

In the infancy stages of this wiki, the researcher and engineer team constructed the software, and the researcher and foster parent participants vetted the content and created an outline for an Illinois foster care system single source of medical information. After the initial system and outline were produced, the wiki was shared with a limited number of foster parents for pilot use. Post dissemination, the wiki will be open to the public. On a larger scale, the researcher hopes that users and editors will be foster parents, biological parents, case workers, lawyers, legislators, and other child welfare actors and stakeholders. The researcher is hopeful that, for example, a child welfare policy analyst may use the wiki for information and edit the wiki to add their own knowledge. The wiki is intended to be accurate and immediately accessible for foster parents who are already stretched for time, as well as a valid resource for the other child welfare actors mentioned above.

To ensure the wiki continues to receive the necessary technical support post-dissertation, essential information has been written so that the researcher is prepared to request funding from private and public entities. The researcher has ensured three (3) board members and (4) formal advisors. Additionally, the researcher has secured a pro bono marketing officer and a software developer for wiki technology growth.

Study part 2

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to 1) connect with the Illinois foster parent community to encourage participant empowerment and self-efficacy, 2) work as a community to identify oppressive constructs that hinder information-sharing between the Illinois foster care system and Illinois foster parents, and 3) construct and implement a sustainable wiki platform for foster parents to access foster care system information. Two 60-minute focus group sessions were held to collect data identifying what medical information foster parents need to be present on the wiki, and what foster parent perceptions and experiences are while using the site. The data that was gathered was intended to provide an understanding of 1) what medical knowledge is necessary to have on the wiki, so that foster parents use the platform, and 2) how foster parents can successfully use the wiki.

The data here is in response to the four main questions the researcher sought answers for. From the results, it is concluded that foster parents have perspectives and suggestions about important medical topics for the wiki, what will draw foster parents to visit the wiki, topics outside of *medical* that should be on the wiki, effectiveness and efficiency while using the wiki, and barriers that occurred while using the wiki and how they can be minimized.

For Focus Group 1 the researcher asked 4 questions:

1: "*What medical topics are most important to have on the wiki?*"

For focus group 1, the researcher first asked the participants what medical topics they believe are important for the wiki. The researcher grouped the results into 3 medical categories;

1. Services for foster children, including providers, therapies, hospitalization, medical procedures, mental health, physical health, and behavioral health evaluations and treatments, 2. Resources for foster children, including medically challenged, medically fragile children, adoption, portals to various providers, list of questions to ask before a placement, proxies, electronic medical records, insurance information, advocates, employee directory, WIC (women, infant, and children), and 3. Regulations, including laws, policies, rules, terminology, reporting, procedures, taxes. The researcher believes that the participants were eager to engage in the focus group discussion. The data suggested that foster parents know what medical content is difficult for foster parents to access, and what information the wiki needs to include. One foster parent stated: "There is a lot of confusion around medical records and what [foster parents] are allowed to have… some people believe that they aren't supposed to have any of their child's medical records, which is incorrect… they can access the things that directly impact their ability to care for the child…. they'll be the one who's going to the doctors with them, and if they don't know any of the background history they can't tell if the situation fits the normal pattern of the child's life or if something more serious is going on."

2: "W*hat medical topics will draw foster parents to visit the wiki?"*

The researcher then asked the participants what would draw them to use the wiki. In addition to the results from Question 1, the participants noted key information that would draw them to use the wiki. Foster parents said that they would use the wiki if they could find medical supplies, learn about consent for medical services, learn about reporting requirements, learn about crossing state lines for medical procedures, learn about obtaining what is needed without aggravating the caseworker, learn about who to call if they cannot locate their caseworker or GAL (guardian ad litem), learn foster care terminology, obtain forms, and obtain tax paperwork.

Foster parents also said that they would be drawn to use the wiki to obtain information anonymously. During focus group 1, questions 1 and 2, resulted in "services" mentioned 21 times, "resources" mentioned 18 times, and "regulations" mentioned 9 times.

3: "W*hat medical topics will draw foster parents to edit the wiki?"*

During focus group 1, the third question requested the participants to discuss what would draw them to the wiki as an "editor". Only 1 foster parent showed interest in being an editor. Overwhelmingly, foster parents did not show interest in learning how to edit the wiki. Later in the study, as seen below, the researcher discussed "barriers to using the wiki". Here, editing challenges were mentioned by the foster parents several times. This result showed that it is likely that the majority of foster parents will not want to be an editor of the wiki.

4: "What topics outside the category of Medical should be on the wiki?

Foster parents mentioned numerous topics outside the category of "medical information" that they would want to see on the wiki. Here is a list of the topics mentioned by foster parents: general laws, general policies, terminology and glossary, tax filings, system forms, foster parent licensing standards, specialized care financial reimbursements, caseworker communication, guardian ad litem, court system, court laws, adjudication, foster parent autonomy, allegations against foster parents, biological parental visitation, child abuse and neglect, neo-natal drug exposure, education system, HIPAA laws, and foster care case related topics (goals of case, length of case, reason for case). Foster parents mentioned the court system more than any other category, a total of 16 times during the first focus group session.

For Focus Group 2 the researcher asked 4 questions:

1: "*Discuss your experiences using the wiki.*"

Generally, foster parents found the wiki user friendly. Foster parents mentioned that the wiki was "very easy to navigate", that it had "lots of information", and that "the best parts of the wiki are the pages that look like cheat sheets". Overall, the foster parent participants did not express any concerns or problems with using the wiki and did not have complaints, suggestions, or questions about the topics. The researcher believes that occurred because the wiki is easy to use and therefore the foster parents had minimal perspectives to share or subsequent topics to discuss.

2: *"How can foster parent experiences using the wiki be more effective?"*

The data here shows the importance of accuracy of information. "Accuracy" was mentioned 5 times by foster parents as to how using the wiki can be effective. One foster parent stated: "If the information is not going to be accurate there is no point in having a wiki. The most accurate information comes from foster parents, this should be where we share doctor's names that DCFS doesn't know about…. there are doctors that will take Youthcare that are not on the DCFS portals. That is the information we should be prioritizing. That, and medical forms to get things done." Another foster parent noted: "When I started navigating [the foster care system] I didn't know what an IOP was, a PHP was, what wrap around services were...so it would be really effective to have something to explain what this all means so that parents aren't just thrown into the deep end".

3: *"How can foster parent experiences using the wiki be more efficient?"*

Results show here that there are several considerations regarding wiki efficiency. Foster parents reported wanting; clear and concise groupings of topics, thorough trainings about how to use and edit the wiki, and efficient language on the wiki, not "fluff that I can find on any website...all unnecessary language should be eliminated". The participants also stated that the

wiki should be structured by foster care processes, that it should be easy to access HIPAA laws, and that the most efficient way to search for some topics would be by county. Foster parents expressed that the most confusing topics for foster parents should be on the home page, and that basic foster parent tips that are not "sensitive" should be on the main wiki, not in the password protected space. They said that the "home page" should have a section for user and editor definitions with "how to" instructions. One parent stated: "If a foster parent wants to add information, but doesn't want to edit, there should be a way to send information they want inputted, this would be quick and efficient."

4: "*What are the barriers you have experienced using the wiki, and how can these barriers be removed?*"

The data here suggests that there are two main barriers foster parents experienced when using the wiki; issues with editing, and issues with wiki software. Participants having various problems while editing the wiki was mentioned 14 times. Challenges editing the wiki, and the time needed to learn to edit, and to execute an edit, were the barriers that foster parents discussed the most. The necessity to have extensive training to learn how to edit was mentioned 4 times, and 3 foster parents stated being apprehensive about using the wiki at all if they are going to be expected to edit. One foster parent stated: "I will never take a training to learn a software I am not familiar with, I would think foster parents are too busy, it will never happen…. I'd rather just continue using Facebook."

While not all the foster parents in the focus groups attempted to edit the wiki, those that did had trouble with the experience. Mainly the troubles mentioned were how to edit, and the fear that information would be lost or deleted while editing the wiki. Empirically, the foster parents appeared either nervous or apathetic when wiki editing was discussed. The researcher

concludes that foster parents are referring to both adding information to the wiki and editing already published information on the wiki. During this time the researcher realized that an untrained editor may put the wiki at risk of damage and deterioration. It is important to understand that a crowd sourced platform can easily be manipulated, and therefore editor identification and management should be scrutinized and taken on with great care.

The barrier that the participants experienced in relation to the wiki software was related to information retrieval. Four (4) foster parents mentioned the search engine not being able to locate basic medical topics typed into the search bar. When one foster parent typed "I need a dentist" into the search bar, no results showed on the wiki. When the same foster parent searched for "dentist" several results showed, and that foster parent was able to access the wiki page for dentists.

This demonstrates that the two main barriers foster parents report when using the wiki are related to editing the wiki, and the wiki search bar capabilities. The data shows that foster parents are not inclined to want to edit the wiki. This is not due to poor training or difficulty but to foster parent time restraints and interest. Therefore, rather than encourage foster parents to edit the wiki, the researcher minimized the editing barrier by continually informing foster parents that they do not need to become an editor to benefit from every wiki feature, and that foster parents, if they so choose, can still contribute information, or make edits to published text. When the researcher began collecting data, she learned of foster parent apprehension and disinterest in learning to edit the wiki, so alternate possibilities were identified and implemented. This system enabled foster parents to contribute information using a messaging system. The data also shows that foster parents need an enhanced search engine that can decipher incorrect wording and

phrases yet still produce valid answers. The reach these results, the researcher upgrading the wiki software to SemanticMediaWiki.

Discussion

Overall, it is concluded that foster parents were knowledgeable and active participants in the foster parent wiki content creation. Foster parents were eager to answer the focus group questions, and some connected with the researcher to provide additional information for the wiki via email and video-telecommunications. It should be noted that, in general, focus group dynamics spark conversation and agreement with other participants which can make it challenging for researchers to discern data. For example, while 4 participants mentioned the search engine barrier, other foster parents chimed in by nodding their heads or saying "uh-huh". This kind of communication can be difficult to account for, especially when taking place on video-telecommunications.

The researcher feels that as parents worked toward hope for their foster children, there was a sense of wiki ownership among the participants. By mid-session of the second focus group, foster parents appeared to be identifying and discussing amongst themselves when and how this tool could be useful. The researcher believes that the time the participants spent together working on the content incited personal bonds and community action. During the building of the wiki the foster parents showed signs of participant empowerment and qualities of self-efficacy. The researcher is hopeful that growth of foster parent empowerment, self-efficacy, and community will continue to flourish because the wiki is an evolving work; the nature of a wiki is one where it may never reach completion.

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study that should be noted. The data was collected from 11 participants. This is a small group of foster parents, therefore, limiting the potential for additional information that could have been useful in creating the wiki. Another limitation is that the foster parents have no training in editing a wiki. Had some of the foster parents been familiar with wiki editing the editing process may have seemed less threatening, encouraging foster parent wiki editing. A third limitation is that the foster parents stated that they do not have time to edit information on the wiki. A final limitation was the study's restricted timeframe which didn't allow for foster parent long-term or in-depth usage of the wiki.

Study 1 and Study 2 Implications

This study filled a gap in existing research about foster parents and the child welfare system information they have access to. The data identified what information foster parents need and propelled the construction of an information-sharing tool using participatory action research for foster parents. This research is significant because the data shows that marginalized communities that rely on government systems may need improved access to information. This study implies that child welfare system actors: case workers, biological parents, foster parents, guardian ad litems, teachers, and pediatric medical professionals, are significantly impacted by the information that is shared or concealed by the government. These findings show that by creating an information-sharing platform, community members can share knowledge that may be critical to their wellbeing, and the wellbeing of their families, primarily their foster children. This platform is a viable tool for legislators, policy makers and analysts, and other parties in policy and government. The researcher believes that the information-sharing wiki can be used for the

child welfare system in its entirety, as well as other systems in which communities are reliant on

government assistance and information. A further benefit of this research is the ability to identify

gaps in information, services, and resources that will appear in the wiki content. As a wiki

collects information inputted by users, categories that need more attention can be flagged for

further investigation. The researcher believes that the potential is great for enhancing the

capabilities of marginalized communities that are searching for information through the creation

of an information-sharing platform.

Click here see presentation slides of *Foster Parent Knowledge and the Need for Information-Sharing Technology*

References

Briggs, E. C., Greeson, J. K., Layne, C. M., Fairbank, J. A., Knoverek, A. M., & Pynoos, R. S. (2012). Trauma exposure, psychosocial functioning, and treatment needs of youth in residential care: Preliminary findings from the NCTSN Core Data Set. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, *5*(1), 1-15.

Brown, J.D. & Campbell, M. (2007). Foster parent perceptions of placement success, *Children and Youth Services Review, 29* (8),1010-1020.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). Essentials for childhood: steps to create safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. *Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

Chan, V., Derenne, J., (Eds.). (2021). *Transition-age youth mental health care: bridging the gap between pediatric and adult psychiatric care*. Springer International Publishing.

Children Bureau. (2017). *Outcome 6: Placement Stability.* https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/sixOneLessThan12/index.

Collin-Vézina, D., Coleman, K., Milne, L., Sell, J., & Daigneault, I. (2011). Trauma experiences, maltreatment-related impairments, and resilience among child welfare youth in residential care. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *9*(5), 577-589.

Congressional Research Service. (2021, 6 30). *Child Welfare: Purposes, Federal Programs, and Funding.* https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10590.

Cooley, M. E., Farineau, H. M., & Mullis, A. K. (2015). Child behaviors as a moderator: Examining the relationship between foster parent supports, satisfaction, and intent to continue fostering. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *45*, 46-56.

Cooley, M.E., Thompson, H. M., Wojciak, A. S. (2017). Risk, resilience, and complexity: Experiences of foster parents. Children and Youth Services Review, 76 (35-41).

Courtney, M. E., & Heuring, D. H. (2005). The Transition to Adulthood for Youth "Aging Out" of the Foster Care System. In D. W. Osgood, E. M. Foster, C. Flanagan, & G. R. Ruth (Eds.), *On your own without a net: The transition to adulthood for vulnerable populations* (pp. 27–67). The University of Chicago Press.

Dworsky, A. (2015). Child welfare services involvement among the children of young parents in foster care, *Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 45* (68-79).

Executive Office of the President. (2020, 6 29). *The Daily Journal of the United States Government. Strengthening the Child Welfare System for America's Children*. Federal Register. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-06-29/pdf/2020-14077.pdf.

Font, S. A., Sattler, K. M., & Gershoff, E. T. (2018). Measurement and correlates of foster care placement moves. *Children and youth services review*, *91*, 248-258.

Garvin, D. A., Edmondson, A. C., & Gino, F. (2008). Is yours a learning organization? *Harvard business review*, *86*(3), 109.

Geen, R., Fender, L., Leos-Urbel, J., & Markowitz, T. (2001). Welfare Reform's Effect on Child Welfare Caseloads. Discussion Papers 01-04. Assessing the New Federalism: An Urban Institute to Assess Changing Social Policies.

Geiger, J.M., Julien-Chinn, F.J., Lietz, C.A. (2014) Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey. Arizona State University: Phoenix, AZ.

Geiger, J.M., Hayes, M. J., Lietz, C. A. (2013). 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. *Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 35* (9), 1356-1365.

Gibbs, D., & Wildfire, J. (2007). Length of service for foster parents: Using administrative data to understand retention. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *29*(5), 588-599.

Governor's Office of Management and Budget. (2020). *Health and Social Service Programs. Department of Children and Family Services Protecting the Most Vulnerable.*

https://www2.illinois.gov/sites/budget/Documents/Budget%20Book/FY2021-Budget-Book/Fiscal-Year-2021-Budget-in-Brief.pdf

Harden, B. J. (2004). Safety and stability for foster children: A developmental perspective. *The future of children*, 31-47.

Hassan, Muhammad (2022). Grounded Theory: Methods, Examples, and Guide. https://researchmethod.net/grounded-theory/.

Hussey, D., & Guo, S. (2002). Profile characteristics and behavioral change trajectories of young residential children. *Journal of child and Family Studies, 11*(4), 401–410.

James, S., Leslie, L. K., Hurlburt, M. S., Slymen, D. J., Landsverk, J., Davis, I., … Zhang, J. (2006). Children in out-of-home care: Entry into intensive or restrictive mental health and residential care placements. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 14*(4), 196–208.

MacGregor TE, Rodger S, Cummings AL, Leschied AW. The Needs of Foster Parents: A Qualitative Study of Motivation, Support, and Retention. *Qualitative Social Work*. 2006;5(3), 351-368.

Nordberg, A., Praetorius, R. T., McCoy, M. K., Mitschke, D. B., & Henderson, J. (2017). The Impact of a Death Row Exoneration Testimonial on Social Work Students: A Teaching Note. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 1-13.

Pecora, P., J., Kessler,R., C., O'Brien, K., White, C. R., Williams, J., Hiripi, E., English, D., White, J., Herrick, M.A. (2006). Educational and employment outcomes of adults formerly placed in foster care: Results from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, *Children and Youth Services Review, Vol. 28*(12),1459-1481.

Pesavento, I. M. (2021). How Misaligned Incentives Hinder Foster Care Adoption. *Cato Journal*, *41*(1), 139-158.

Petrowski, N., Cappa, C., & Gross, P. (2017). Estimating the number of children in formal alternative care: Challenges and results. *Child abuse & neglect*, *70*, 388-398.

Rubin, D. M., O'Reilly, A. L., Luan, X., & Localio, A. R. (2007). The impact of placement stability on behavioral well-being for children in foster care. Pediatrics, 119(2), 336–344.

Stone, N. M., & Stone, S. F. (1983). The prediction of successful foster placement. *The Journal of Contemporary Social Work*, 1, 11–17.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Sullivan, Melissa J. & Jones, Loring & Mathiesen, Sally, 2010. "School change, academic progress, and behavior problems in a sample of foster youth," *Children and Youth Services Review, Elsevier, vol. 3*2(2), pages 164-170.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2019). Children in Foster Care by Placement Type. https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6247-children-in-foster-care-by-placement-type.

Triseliotis, J. (2002). Long-term foster care or adoption? The evidence examined. *Child & Family Social Work*, *7*(1), 23-33.

U.S.Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children,Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2019). *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY¹ 2018 Estimates as of August 22, 2019 - No. 26.* https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb.

Weiner, D., & Cull, M. (2019). Systematic Review of Critical Incidents in Intact Family Services.

Wylie, L. (2014). Closing the crossover gap: Amending fostering connections to provide independent living services for foster youth who crossover to the justice system. *Family Court Review, 52*(2), 298-315.

[aa1]**Waiting children are identified as children who have a goal of adoption and / or whose parents' parental rights have been terminated. Children 16 years old and older whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and who have a goal of emancipation have been excluded from the estimate.**

Appendix 1

Disclaimer

"Foster Parent Information Network is an information-sharing platform. We strive to provide accurate information, yet the child welfare system is continually changing, therefore this platform should be used as a reference".

Appendix 2

Mediawiki Block and Ban Policy

THE FPIN WIKI

Foster Parent Information Network

The FPIN wiki is a public, information-sharing platform for foster parents containing medical laws, policies, procedures, services, and resources, using text and documents on the site internally and as external links. Additionally, a private space for foster parents on the site allows for the sharing of sensitive information. As a child welfare tool, it is the hope of the creator that caseworkers, biological parents, foster parents, guardians ad litem, teachers, medical professionals, legislators, and other child welfare actors will visit and contribute information to fosterparentinfo.com. On the site, users can search for specific information or scroll through different sections of medical content. As a crowd-sourced site, anyone can add information to the wiki by messaging the content to the administration team using the wiki messaging system. That information will then be fact-checked and either added to the wiki or sent back to the user with suggestions for corrections. If they choose, the user can make corrections and resend the information to the administrator for publishing. A user can also suggest corrections for already published material. If a user would like to become an editor as part of the administration team, training is provided.