Permanency Planning and Foster Parenting:

Implications for Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Retention

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Literature concerning permanency planning has focused primarily on program design, administrative issues, and improving caseworker skills. However, considering that children in foster care have more contact with foster parents than anyone else, the relationship between permanency planning and foster parenting is a central question that needs attention. This article identifies reasons for the exclusion of foster parents in permanency planning and addresses the issues of foster parent role ambiguity and the changing role of foster parents. The article describes a model to recruit, select, train, and retain foster parents as team members in permanency planning and describes how this model is being implemented. Finally, policy, program, and practice issues that require further clarification and consideration are explored.

Despite the abundance of journal articles, training manuals, and books concerning permanency planning, little attention has been paid to the role of foster parents in achieving permanency plan-

ning goals. The requirements of permanency planning legislation and the changing population of children needing foster care services are rapidly forcing some long overdue decisions regarding foster parent rights, responsibilities, and rewards. These decisions affect the ways in which foster parents should be recruited, selected, prepared, and trained for such diverse tasks as helping children go home again or becoming the adoptive parents of children in their care. This article (a) reviews factors that have contributed to foster parent role ambiguity and the changing role of foster parents in relation to permanency planning; (b) describes a model in which foster parents are viewed as team members in permanency planning and describes related methods that agencies are using to recruit, select, train, and retain foster parents; (c) identifies policy, program, and practice issues that need further clarification.

The Changing Role of Foster Parents

Questions such as, "Are foster parents colleagues, clients, or something halfway in between?" were first raised in 1941 (Hanford, 1941). In 1972, it was noted that "the role of foster parents has been a subject of debate for decades" (Kline & Forbusch-Overstreet, 1972, p. 219). Although three decades of thought and development went into the concepts behind P. L. 96–272 (Emlen, 1981), basic questions about foster parent role definition remain unresolved. Part of the complexity stems from a conflict between what agencies want and fear from foster parents.

Foster parents historically have been expected to perform as professionals, for example, to work with children who have a wide range of emotional and behavioral problems. At the same time, agencies often deny foster parents complete information about the children in their homes, as well as opportunities to participate in making decisions about those children (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982). A foster parent who becomes too professional could mean a foster parent who challenges agency decisions, who does not accept agency limitations, and who views such constraints as a lack of support (Rodriguez, 1982). It also has been argued that if foster parents become too professional, the objectivity that is supposed to be a part of professionalism would interfere with the emotional investment required for good parenting (Charnley, 1955).

Despite the inability of foster parents and agency personnel to develop a consensus about foster parent roles, there has been progression, especially in the 1980's, from their role of basic caretaker, custodian, or agency client to that of a professional parent (Rodri-

guez, 1982). Factors that contribute to this trend include: (a) worker caseload size and worker turnover which prevent case-workers from becoming intensively involved with children (Horo-witz, 1983); (b) many children coming into foster care who require special parenting skills (Stein, 1981); (c) foster parents being in-creasingly recognized for the support they can provide to parents of children in care (Ryan, McFadden, & Warren, 1980; Watson, 1982); (d) legal rights foster parents are gaining through the court (Hardin & Bulkley, 1983); (e) the initial permanency planning proj-ects of the 1970s, which advocated that foster parents should be part of the shared decision-making process (Pike, Downs, Emlen, & Downs, 1977); and (f) a more assertive, knowledgeable group of new foster parents that does not want to be treated as clients of an agency but as partners.

Foster parents often are caught in the challenging and some-times painful process that is part of the changing nature of foster care. In the "old" foster care system, the primary client was a "good" child who needed to be "rescued" or protected from "bad," "sick," or problem-ridden parents (Maluccio, Fein, Hamilton, Klier, & Ward, 1980). In the "new" system, the client is initially defined as both the child and the parents, i.e., the family; and the family is viewed not so much from a good/bad, sick/well perspective as from a strengths/needs perspective.[1] Previously, the goal of foster care often was continued foster care, and foster parents were con-sidered as clients or caretakers. Now, the primary goal is usually either family reunification or an alternate permanent plan for the child. To accomplish that goal, foster parents have to participate in permanency planning.

A Model for Recruiting, Selecting, Training, and Retaining Foster Parents

A 5-year research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health with matching funds from the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services was awarded to the Nova Uni-versity Behavioral Sciences Center to begin The Foster Parent Proj-ect. The project's goal was to develop a model for foster family recruitment, selection, training, and retention that could be repli-cated by large, small, urban, or rural agencies. Over the past 8 years, the model has been disseminated to approximately 5,000

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[1] The strengths/needs approach to assessment is a major feature of the training materials to teach goal planning in permanency planning (Jones & Biesecker, 1980; Scott & Houts, 1978). However, the extent to which this has actually changed the attitudes and actions of social workers in relation to biological parents is not known.

administrators, caseworkers, foster parents, supervisors, and child welfare advocates throughout the United States and in Canada. The model is presented through inservice training and consultation on local and state levels and through regional, state, and national conferences. Dissemination includes a process through which each agency can adapt the model to meet its unique needs, such as to clarify policy on foster parent roles, combine the preparation of prospective foster and adoptive parents, and/or increase recruitment of foster homes for specific populations. This model currently is being used either statewide or in parts of 22 states, as well as in sections of Ontario, Canada. Institute staff have developed a network of agencies using the model, so that innovations can be shared among agencies and staff from agencies with experience in the model can serve as resources for agencies beginning implementation. The Nova model also can be used in conjunction with other foster care education resources. Premises of the model are:

1. Over the years agencies may have inadvertently taught foster parents to be anti-birth parent, anti-teamwork, and so on by relying on recruitment themes appealing to rescue motivations, by using a home study "screening" process that places foster parents in a client role, and by providing little or no training. By changing these processes, foster parents can learn to work in ways that are more compatible with permanency planning goals.

2. To involve foster parents as team members in permanency planning, agencies need to have clearly stated program goals. The lack of congruence between program goals and services delivered has been an issue for some time (Rooney, 1981). Implementation of the Nova model begins with a strengths/needs assessment of agency-staff/foster parent congruence on issues relating to foster care goals, client needs, and foster parent roles, using the Revised Nova Child Welfare Opinion scale (Simon, 1981). Many foster parents identified the goal of foster care as "taking care of children." It appears that a program goal of family reunification, for example, is information that has not been shared with prospective, new, or experienced foster parents. As long as foster parents view the purpose of foster care as "taking care of children," it will be difficult for them to assist agencies in achieving permanency planning outcomes.

3. The role of foster parents should be clearly defined regarding permanency planning responsibilities. Differences exist between agency staff and foster parents regarding foster parent roles; foster parents are defined as clients, staff, volunteers, or some combination of roles.

4. Foster parent retention depends on the degree to which

they are supported by others in the foster care system. Problems arise when foster parents are recruited, selected, and prepared to work as team members, but social service staff continue to operate from a "foster parent as client" model. Foster parent training should be part of an agency's overall training program, and training for both foster parents and staff should be based on the same conceptual framework and be supported by clear definitions of foster parent/caseworker roles and program goals (Glickman, 1980).

   Foster Parent Recruitment. Recruitment strategies are changing considerably to reflect three important factors. First, there is a need for more foster parents who can work collegially with an agency to implement permanency planning outcomes. Second, there is a need for a more positive image of foster care and foster parenting. The "bad press" that foster care has received over the years, combined with recruitment messages that indicate a "desperate" or "urgent" need for foster homes, may scare off potential foster families. Third, changing societal trends are decreasing the supply of potential foster families. An increase in the number of working women, the higher cost of child rearing, and more single-parent and single-person households all have contributed to a decrease in the foster family population from which agencies typically draw (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982).

   Historically, foster parent recruitment efforts were carried out only by the foster homefinder or licensing worker, usually on a part-time or as-needed basis. Recruitment themes usually reflected an "open your home and your heart" message, implying that love is all it takes to be a foster parent. Recruitment posters tended to picture a young female waif with blond hair and sad eyes. The underlying message was that this obviously uncared for child needed someone to replace her uncaring parents and that the children needing homes were primarily very young, white, and female.

   The Nova recruitment model requires an agency commitment to upgrading and clarifying the role of foster parents as team members in permanency planning. It uses the approach of "selling the job," not the child. Recruitment posters and accompanying themes show agency foster parents who are black, white, Hispanic, single, coupled, younger, and older. The message highlights positive role identification and/or family-focused services such as "Foster Parenting—A New Experience in Family Living" (Michigan Human Services, Inc.) or "Foster Parents—People Like Us" (Maryland State Foster Parent Association recruiting for the Maryland Department of Human Resources). Instead of agency recruiters,

local community committees help agency staff develop marketing strategies and year-round community outreach programs. (Meltsner, 1984; Pasztor & Burgess, 1982).

Sarpy County Department of Social Services, in Nebraska, uses the theme "Families Building Families" to reflect the role of foster parents in permanency planning. The agency has developed a network of business leaders who provide support and direction for agency efforts to educate the public about foster care and foster parenting. This theme and model are now being employed on a statewide basis. The New Hampshire Division of Children and Youth Services made a statewide commitment to use a comprehensive foster parent recruitment/preparation program based on the Nova model. Known as The New Hampshire Foster Parent Project, this project has a state office steering committee made up of regional representatives and a monthly newsletter describing region-by region recruitment and training activities. The project obtained financial support and technical assistance from the New Hampshire Advertising Club for its first year of implementation.[2]

Some agencies are involved in multi-state endeavors. For example, staff with recruitment responsibilities from public agencies serving New Jersey, Philadelphia County, Delaware, and New York City joined together to form the Mid-Atlantic Consortium on Finding Families. The consortium functions as a support group, shares recruitment ideas, develops ways to work together to use common media resources, and has expanded the Nova model to include adoptive parent recruitment. Its first aim is to enlist the support of a regional supermarket chain to disseminate consortium information on foster/adoptive parent recruitment.

A collaborative instead of competitive approach to recruitment is also in place in Northern Virginia. Staff from 10 public and private child-placing agencies joined together, with support from the regional office of the Virginia Department of Social Services, to form the Northern Virginia Homefinders Committee. This committee has been concerned about the lack of data regarding effective recruitment strategies, especially for the recruitment of foster homes for special needs children. The committee has applied for funds to explore the efficacy of the Nova recruitment model in relation to specialized foster homes. The project seeks to identify barriers to specialized foster home recruitment, such as

perceived difficulties in parenting special needs children, perception of the roles, responsibilities, and rewards of foster parenting, and agency regulations that may hamper recruitment endeavors.

Foster Parent Selection and Preparation. Foster parent selection and preparation processes are changing. The home study process usually has placed foster parents in a client role; even the terminology sets up adversarial relationships. Staff who "do" home studies are often called investigators, evaluators, licensing workers, or homefinders. Prospective foster parents are "weeded out" or "screened." As one foster parent said, "A screen is what you use to keep out bugs, and after you are screened you feel strained." Based on two or three office or home "interviews," workers are required to make subjective assessments of a family's ability to work with the agency and with the "natural" parents. Even the term *natural* parent implies that there is something unnatural about being a foster parent.

The Nova model of foster parent selection uses a more positive approach based on shared decision-making, problem-solving, and mutual selection, all of which are integral to building mutual trust and teamwork (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982). The model includes an orientation meeting, followed by six sessions (approximately 3 hours each and including up to 30 participants) to combine foster parent preservice training with the home study process.

Session content includes: (a) foster care program goals and agency strengths and limits in achieving those goals; (b) foster parent roles and responsibilities; and (c) the impact of fostering on foster families and on children and parents who need foster care services. The sessions usually are led by a foster parent/caseworker team (the caseworker having home study responsibility). Learner-centered, nondirective teaching methods are used to help prospective foster parents assess their own strengths and limits in working with children and parents who need foster care services. There is considerable use of role playing and guided imagery. Foster parent qualifications are described in behavioral terms relating to specific skills, rather than subjective criteria such as "sincere interest in children," or "good moral character." Prospective foster parents assess themselves, and are assessed by group leaders, for their problem-solving skills in simulated foster care situations. These situations may include how to prevent or resolve conflicts between the children of foster parents and the new child coming into the home, how to support the relationship between children and their birth parents, and how to accept and support children and parents who are angry and/or sad.

Foster parents write most of their own home studies, which are structured to help them assess the impact of fostering on their family and the impact of their family on foster care clients. Through the group sessions, written materials, and home visits (two by the social worker), each family and worker can make an informed assessment about their ability "to do business together."

The model decreases situations in which agency staff must reject applicants. Persons who do not feel comfortable working with parents of children in care, for example, tend to withdraw voluntarily. Other prospective foster parents are able to acquire problem-solving capabilities commensurate with program needs. By combining the home study with the training and having the prospective foster parents do most of the paper work, home-study time can be reduced as much as 50%. A study conducted in collaboration with one district of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services indicated that: (a) licensing rates increased by 21%; (b) in the first year after licensing, Nova-trained foster parents, on the average, accepted twice the number of placements and provided more days of child care than did a control group of untrained foster parents; (c) children in the trained homes were, on the average, considered more difficult to work with than those placed in untrained homes, as indicated by length of time in foster care and number of previous foster care placements; and (d) placement disruptions decreased by almost 50% in the Nova-trained foster homes (Simon & Simon, 1982).[3]

The Texas Department of Human Resources has been using the Nova preparation/mutual selection model statewide for 6 years (Springer & Newman, 1983). Comparing the 12-month periods before and after statewide implementation of the model, foster home closures statewide dropped to 53 from 174. Placement disruptions statewide fell to 169 from 280.[4] The Oklahoma Department of Human Services, with initial support from the Oklahoma Junior League, has trained 80 teams of foster parents and caseworkers to begin statewide implementation of this model.

To use the mutual selection/preparation model, agencies must overcome resistance to: (a) using experienced foster parents as trainers of prospective foster parents, (b) using experiential learning methods, and (c) sharing decision-making with prospective

[3] At the time of this study, HRS District I had 149 licensed homes serving 265 children in foster care. The control group of 36 foster families included all foster homes licensed by the agency between January 1, 1977 and June 30, 1978, when no training was available. The experimental group included all 27 foster homes licensed and trained through the Nova model between July 1, 1978 and June 30, 1979 (Simon & Simon, 1982).
[4] Information provided by the Parent Education Project, University of Houston.

foster parents despite the agency's legal accountability for children in their care.

Foster Parent In-Service Training. Within the last decade, there has been widespread development and use of foster parent training materials and programs. In 1976, a contract from the Children's Bureau, Office of Child Development, United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, to the Child Welfare League of America supported the development and dissemination of foster parent training materials. Since 1977, persons interested in foster parent training have met annually to discuss common concerns and share information. This group, the Foster Parent Education Network, is open to anyone interested in foster care education and meets at the National Foster Parent Association annual conferences. The network also publishes a newsletter, IMPACT.

At the Spring 1983 meeting of the network, an informal survey of 24 foster parent recruitment, preservice, and inservice training programs was conducted. All reported using some kind of foster parent in-service training program, with most agencies using teams of trainers, including caseworkers, foster parents, and community professionals to conduct workshops. The length of training programs ranged from 6 to 24 hours, with Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Michigan mandating a specific amount of training hours for foster parents each year. While standardized curricula (such as materials developed by Eastern Michigan University, CWLA, and Nova University) tended to be used predominantly for preservice training, most agencies reported using their own in-house materials for in-service training, or combinations of their own materials and information from existing resources (Pasztor, 1984.)

Little emphasis has been given to evaluating foster parent in-service training. Two studies have indicated that such programs have had a positive effect on increasing foster parent retention and successful placement outcomes, decreasing placement disruptions and giving foster parents a "new outlook" on working with children in foster care, their parents, and agencies (Boyd & Remy, 1978; Runyan & Fullerton, 1981).

Likewise, little attention has been paid to developing and evaluating foster parent training that emphasizes the unique role of foster parents in permanency planning or the impact of foster parent training as a complementary part of an agency's total training plan. Foster parent/caseworker training usually is separately administered and leaves out information on common goals and complementary roles. Thus, it is not surprising that the ways in which foster

parents and caseworkers work together are haphazard and vary greatly (Glickman, 1980). Foster parents and caseworkers need training in how to work together to achieve permanency planning outcomes, as well as role-specialized training (for example, child management and case management skills respectively).

The Nova model of foster care education is designed to help agencies to: (a) recruit, select, and prepare new foster parents to work as team members in the permanency planning process; (b) train foster parents and caseworkers accustomed to the "old" foster care system to understand and meet the demands of changing program goals and foster parent roles; (c) train agency administrators and supervisors to develop, implement, and support training needs and performance expectations; and (d) evaluate the extent to which the model produces desired outcomes. The Nova model encourages agencies to: (a) access service delivery prior to training; (b) set goals and timetables for what foster parents and agency staff are expected to accomplish as a result of training; (c) provide administrative support for progress in meeting goals; and (d) assess service delivery after training (Pasztor, 1983a; Pasztor, Bayless, & Rodriguez, 1984).

There seems to be considerable resistance to evaluating training programs. Yet the combination of changes in foster care, revised foster parent roles, and shortages of staff development funds requires evaluation of training approaches to determine if and how they provide ~cost effective and measurable results. While some agencies report perceived improvements in foster parent/agency relationships as a result of in-service training, many questions remain. Does training increase permanency planning outcomes? What variables enhance or hamper results? Is it more effective to focus resources on prospective or experienced foster parents?

Service delivery problems will not be solved simply by requiring foster parents to participate in training. The quality of the training is important. Desired outcomes need to be clearly described. Skills learned in training, such as foster parent/caseworker collaboration in supporting parent-child contacts, must be supported by agency policies, procedures, and supervision. Foster parent training has to be part of an agency's ongoing staff development program, with financial and staff resources in place to implement training (including provisions for foster parent travel and child care expenses). Questions regarding cost-effectiveness need to be considered.

Foster Parent Retention. That foster parents are a scarce resource has been documented for more than 25 years (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982). Hence, measures that should be used to evaluate

efforts in foster parent recruitment, selection, preparation, and training should include effects on retention. Both preservice and in-service training increases the probability of retention (Boyd & Remy, 1978; Simon & Simon, 1982). Foster parents are now expected to view placements as short-term rather than long-term. They must make family reunification a priority. This change may require different incentives for foster parents than those provided in the past. A realistic challenge, opportunities for growth and skill development, recognition for quality service, support, and success will probably continue to be important to foster parents (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982).

New foster parents may be less economically willing or able to support the costs of fostering children. In an investigation of foster parent role ambiguity involving 427 foster parents in Massachusetts, it was determined that the more experienced the foster parent, (as defined by years of foster parenting, number of children cared for, number of children currently in their care, and length of time fostering one child), the more likely they were to want payment for their work (Glickman, 1980). Therefore, a salary, along with fringe benefits and a career ladder, may be significant factors in foster parent retention (Glickman 1980; Hampson & Tavormina, 1980; Stein, 1981).

Practice Implications

The foster care population is changing. Children coming into foster care are older, and their needs and those of their parents are more complex (Stein, 1981). To meet requirements of P.L. 96–272, agencies are delegating more responsibilities to foster parents. These include participating in case reviews, monitoring child–parent contacts, supporting families after reunification, and working with adoptive parents to facilitate a child's transition from foster care to adoption. Foster parents are assuming "greater responsibilities for arranging and delivering services to the child and for taking part in decisions affecting the child" (Horowitz, 1983, p. 283). They are more assertive about obtaining rights and privileges that accompany increasing responsibilities. The "Foster Parent Bill of Rights" (which includes being informed about a child's background, being involved in developing case plans and having a written copy, and receiving training and agency support) is now adopted in many jurisdictions (Horowitz, 1983). The role of foster parents as team members and their specific responsibilities must be clearly defined. Additional information is needed about effective teamwork. Who should be included? How will decisions be made

and conflicts be resolved? What indicators of success will be used? What are the most effective ways to collaborate and share decision-making and accountability with foster parents?

One way to clarify expectations of foster parents may be to "professionalize" foster parenting by offering salaries and a career ladder. Sanctions, both positive and negative, could be linked to the degree to which specific expectations are fulfilled. Salarying foster parents might alleviate the shortage of foster homes. One obstacle here is a societal bias that people should not be paid to take care of children. However, school teachers, day care providers, and child care workers have overcome this concern (Glickman, 1980). The biggest obstacle may be the increased cost of salarying foster parents, who comprise one of the largest groups of volunteers in the United States. Today's foster parents are currently subsidizing the child welfare system by $36 million—the amount that foster parents pay out-of-pocket to compensate for the costs of child care not covered by agency allowances, according to American Foster Care Resources, Inc.

Additional research is needed on new methods to help foster families offer support and be better role models for families who become clients in the foster care system. In one model, foster families function as extended families for parents and children who use foster care services (Watson, 1982).

Foster parents increasingly are considered as the best resources for the adoption of children in their care, especially when these children are older, have been in the foster home for some length of time, and/or have special needs. Federal officials estimate that at least 60% to 70% of all subsidized adoptions are by foster parents. If foster parents are expected to be resources both for family reunification and adoption, then new ways have to be explored to prepare them for both roles. A program for the combined preparation and selection of foster and adoptive parents is currently used by the District of Columbia Department of Human Services (Flynn & Pasztor, 1983). This approach, is based on the Nova model of foster family preparation and selection and the TEAM training materials produced by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, Inc.

The special needs of foster children require a range of parenting skills. Foster parents need information on how to foster children who have been sexually abused, who have handicapping conditions or drug-related problems, or who will need help moving into independent living. The teamwork concept may provide a way to develop a new, more clearly defined role for foster parents and to develop the support that will help foster parents fulfill new expectations. Efforts

to achieve permanency planning for children often are fragmented by separate consideration of caseworker skills, administrative issues, and foster parent training. Collaborative efforts are required by teams of persons with expertise in various aspects of foster care services (Ward, Hamilton, Fein, & Maluccio, 1982); foster parents should be included to a much greater extent in implementation and evaluation of permanency planning efforts.

Foster parents have been overlooked in many permanency planning initiatives, and they must share some of the responsibility for their exclusion. Adoptive parents, for example, have organized into 600 member-groups of the North American Council on Adoptable Children. They have worked on a national level to advocate for systems change, such as obtaining funding to write and disseminate training materials to prepare adoptive families and agencies for teamwork. Whereas foster parents have made strides in advocating for their rights, they still seem to fear agency reprisal and must learn to more effectively influence large systems. In the early 1970s, federal funding and technical assistance were provided to help develop the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA). After funding was withdrawn several years later, the NFPA's main contribution has been annual national training conferences.

Efforts again are underway to use foster parent associations to improve foster care services. The 1984–1985 discretionary grants from the United States Department of Health and Human Services included small awards to local or state foster parent associations to develop recruitment projects. The Maryland Department of Human Resources awarded funds to the Maryland State Foster Parent Association to set up an office, provide a hot-line for foster parents, take a leadership role in recruitment, and continue a partnership role in providing training. Such endeavors should be continued and expanded; foster parent associations may provide the resources to help answer many of the questions concerning permanency planning and foster parenting.

"Foster parenting is not a lifetime commitment to a child, but a commitment to be meaningful to a child's lifetime" (Pasztor, 1983b, p. 0.7). Working with foster parents to determine just what this commitment entails, and how foster parents can be encouraged to make and keep this commitment, is an important part of permanency planning.

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