

**THE FOSTER PARENT'S ROLE ON A FOSTER CHILD'S CARE TEAM:
DOES A DEFINITIVE ROLE AND INCLUSIVITY INFLUENCE FOSTER PARENT
RETENTION?**

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The Foster Parent's Role on a Foster Child's Care Team: Does a Definitive Role and Inclusivity Influence Foster Parent Retention?

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Abstract

Foster parent retention has been an ongoing issue, with the end results presenting a need for repeated recruitment and training. Through a literature review of peer-reviewed articles based on research from westernized countries and relating to foster parenting satisfaction in the foster care role, this paper examines the roles for foster parents, services they receive, and their participation on a child's care team.

Results from the research indicate that foster parents have identified concerns around training, behavioural challenges of the children, and communication concerns with social workers which have created dissatisfaction and resulted in retention issues. Foster parents do not appear to have a definitive role and this is an issue for sustainability. No conclusion could be made from the existing research as to whether inclusivity on the child's care team would increase retention. Future research would be beneficial in exploring training and support needs, particularly with respect to foster parents managing children with behavioural challenges and identifying whether the paraprofessional role for foster parents would increase the retention rates of foster homes.

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Introduction

Retention of foster parents is an ongoing concern for social service agencies throughout North America and parts of the western world (Adams, Hassett, & Lumsden, 2018; Cooley, Farineau, & Mullis, 2015; Crum, 2010; Holtan, Handergard, Thornblad, & Vis, 2013; Onions, 2018; Perry, Daly, & Kotler, 2011; Rhodes, Orme, & Buehler, 2001; Spielfogel, Leathers, Christian, & McMeel, 2011). Retention is necessary as it provides a stable environment for both short and long term stays for children in care. When foster parents are retained over a longer period, there is a stronger chance that children will experience a healthy, stable family environment. Using a client or person-centered lens together with the theory of roles, this paper will address indicators regarding the satisfaction level and retention of foster parents. A client-centered focus would examine the issues facing foster care retention from the perspective of the foster parents who are the daily and consistent support that a foster child has in their life and, as such, provide important information, insight, and understanding into the life of the child in their care. In following the client-centered approach, there is an expectation that through this lens, there should be a measure of respect by the foster care agency and social workers towards the foster parent to express their perspective about the child and the support they receive to care for the child. The foster parent's thoughts on working together in a team partnership with the social worker(s), community supports, the child, and the child's family would be considered.

This literature review identifies the role for foster parents as part of the child's care team and the implications of the role in improving retention for foster homes. Some literature that was reviewed examines the potential of the foster parent role as a paraprofessional. A paraprofessional provides aspects of a professional role without the licensed qualifications and can provide effective support based on their level of training (Linsk, 2014). Through the

review, current practices for preparing foster parents to care for foster children, the relationships that foster parents have with agency social workers, and the degree to which foster parents are expressing concerns around the lack of team inclusivity as factors in retention, will be examined.

There are several reasons why this research is important to governments, social service agencies, foster children, foster families, and social workers in the field of child protection. Retention of existing homes provides continuity and stability for a foster child in care as there is the potential for longer term placement when the child cannot return home (Randle, Miller, & Dolnicar, 2018; Rhodes, Orme, & McSurdy, 2003; Sonoi, 2015). Long term placements mean ongoing care of children in the developmental stages of their lives. Social services agencies, children, families, and social workers will benefit from increased retention of foster parents. Moreover, this will be of benefit to society in the provision of stable, healthy care, thus creating healthier communities.

Method

References in this review come primarily from peer-reviewed articles sourced from the BC Government Health and Human Services Library, the University of the Fraser Valley Library through online searches for articles in the various data bases provided, predominantly through Ebscohost. A few sources have come from Google Scholar resources online and a couple of web pages were located with a Google search. Keywords used to search include the following, but this list is not an exhaustive list: Foster care(r), foster parent, training, inclusivity, role(s), retention, satisfaction, training, recruitment, child welfare, support, social worker, and foster children.

Data presented comes from research conducted in North America, Europe, Asia, and New Zealand. The research indicates that there are similar concerns being experienced outside of Canada. The articles provide research indicating that support, training, wanting to

leave fostering, and feelings of 'not being heard' are experiences that foster parents in many countries are experiencing. Materials examined have been sourced back to 1982. This history provides insight into ongoing concerns around dissatisfaction which have remained for close to four decades and continue to be noted as reasons that foster parents believe are challenging when in the role of caring for children placed in their care.

The author has contacted a representative for prospective research from the British Columbia (BC) Government to confirm that there are no ethical violations in researching this topic from secondary sources as the author is a current employee of the BC Government. The author identifies as having both insider and outsider viewpoints as a former foster parent for ten years and currently working as a child protection social worker.

Literature Review

The Role of the Foster Parent

A role provides a foundation, a boundary, and a window into the expectations of that role or for that individual in that role (Sonoi, 2015). LeProhn (1994) states that the role concept allows the foster parent to define their role and provides the foster parent with an understanding of the expectations of the role. Sonoi (2015) discusses the theory of roles as having three stages which are role expectations, role performance, and role-taking. In this theory, the expectation by those in society is that an individual will take on certain behaviours according to their status in society (Sonoi, 2015). Role expectations extend to their performance and refers to carrying out specific behaviours for that role (LeProhn, 1994; Sonoi, 2015). Role performance is the completion of the role expectation and finally, role-taking is where the learning about the role is completed (Sonoi, 2015). When looking at this theory of roles from the lens of a foster parent, it is possible that this is how the foster parent learns about their responsibilities in foster care (LeProhn, 1994; Sonoi, 2015). It appears to be a hands-on approach to the learning process with praise as is warranted and correction when

the situation requires it (LeProhn, 1994). Based on the theory of roles, in order for foster parents to adequately understand their specific role in relation to the child's care team and their responsibility to the child, the teaching is not entirely in the hands of the agency that has recruited the foster parent (LeProhn, 1994; Sonoi, 2015).

Foster care is motivated by factors such as past experiences of child welfare and good intentions of helping a child succeed (Sonoi, 2015; Tucker, Hendy, & Barlow, 2015). Sonoi (2015) and Tucker et al. (2015) assert that there is an implied belief that the expectations of the role will be available to the one seeking out that role and role expectations. Foster parents will take on many roles as they are the primary caregivers within the home, the mode of transportation, advocates for the children, and the recorder of daily and life events (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2001).

LeProhn (2014) states that understanding one's role is important, and for foster parents this is the case because they have a variety of duties they undertake in their role, which need to be clearly identified. Foster parents might be viewed as a paraprofessional, a family, a support to the child, a mentor to other foster homes, a care team member, a volunteer, an advocate, and the day to day caregiver for vulnerable children placed into their homes (Colton, Roberts, & Williams, 2008). Marcellus (2010) found that there was a lack of clarity in the role of the foster parent and that the parent struggles with the, "divide between the input they felt they should have into decision making and the lack of input they feel they have as part of the child welfare team" (p. 22). The role is broad and the responsibilities of the foster parent can be quite murky.

For foster parents, roles provide a sense of direction for supporting the child, an understanding of the day to day responsibilities, and how they are connected to the child's care team (LeProhn, 1994; Rhodes et al., 2003; Sonoi, 2015). Foster parents have the day to day care for vulnerable children who might be living with historical trauma, mental health

concerns, cognitive and/or physical disabilities, and the challenge of being removed from their family and placed with strangers (Kobulsky, Cage, & Celeste, 2018; Murray, Tarren-Sweeney, & Frances, 2011). The foster parent will likely perform better in their role, if they have a clear understanding of that role as communicated to them by their support worker (Sono, 2015). However, when there are communication breakdowns, the family is new to fostering or there appears to be a disconnect, a role that is not well defined can create a lot of uncertainty in direction and responsibility (Tucker et al., 2015).

Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity presents another set of issues for the foster parent. Uncertainty around the foster parent's role and the expectations around caring for and supporting the child both in the home, with family, and in the community can provide misunderstandings between the carer, the social worker, and community professionals such as the school and health care personnel (Mietus, & Fimmen, 1987).

In addition, Tucker et al. (2015) report that the satisfaction of foster parenting potentially decreases because ambiguity in the fostering role creates a diminished sense of confidence which in turn creates stress and a lack of ability to perform the role with proficiency. Mietus and Fimmen (1987) state that role ambiguity is a systemic issue connected to economic concerns, more children coming into care and an increase in public awareness which puts additional strain on the support system. Mietus and Fimmen (1987) further state that the changes to personnel, growth, technology, and the professionalization of the child welfare system exacerbates role ambiguity. Marcellus (2010) suggests that parents leave foster parenting due to a lack of understanding of what their role is, insofar as decision making participation and playing a role as a team member. Research regarding foster parent satisfaction has indicated that often foster parents feel challenged by not having a clear understanding of what their role is. When foster parents are made aware of the expectation of

their role as it applies to their contribution in case planning for the child, foster parents do not feel that their place on the child's care team is as valued as other professionals on the team. (Sono, 2015; Spielfogel et al., 2011; Tucker et al. 2015).

Finally, Tucker et al. (2015) state that when an individual is not clear on what the expectation of one's role is supposed to be, a person will tend to gravitate to what they are comfortable with, or they will create a role and determine the responsibilities of that role regardless of whether it is considered acceptable. Individuals who receive instruction as to their roles after they are already invested in fostering, will struggle to change or adapt to a new role. Therefore, Tucker et al. (2015) suggest that roles be created in advance of being filled and that the creators of the roles, must be engaged in guiding and shaping the roles.

Factors Contributing to Roles

Roles are guided by a number of factors. Baril (2016) suggests that roles be considered in terms of normativity, such as the role of a mother, behavioural such as the role of a social worker, and ideals of professionalism. Certain roles will come with specific rights and obligations. A parental role, such as that of a mother, has rights and responsibilities, while the professional role has opportunities such as training and skill development. The latter keeps individuals engaged and goal oriented (Baril, 2016).

Reflection can help in understanding a role and evaluating one's ability to carry out that role. If an individual self-reflects on a role, they are cognizant of either what the expectation is in that role or be able to obtain clarification regarding aspects of the role which are unclear or confusing. Once an individual has a true understanding of their role, they can self-evaluate their performance based on the role expectations needed for success in that role. This, in turn, affects their knowledge and growth (Baril, 2016). Hursthouse, 1999 (as cited in Baril, 2016) suggested that, roles are required for quality and richness in life. Further, Rhodes et al. (2003) state that when roles are not clearly understood between foster parents and social

workers, it can create conflict and the potential loss of foster homes. Rhodes et al. (2003) go on to state that new foster parents are particularly at risk of conflict since their early understanding of roles influences how they take on responsibilities.

Sen and McCormack (2011) discuss the difference between exclusive and inclusive foster parents and how exclusive foster parents take ownership of the foster child and exclude relationships that the child may have outside of the foster family. Inclusive foster parents act as 'foster carers' and are professionals who are involved in keeping the child connected to their family and other important people known by the child prior to coming into care. An inclusive type of foster parent is important because it presents a collaborative and inclusive approach when the plan is to return the child back to the child's family home, or if the child is not returning, but contact is to continue with family (Sen & McCormack, 2011). It is an expectation of the foster parent role which should be considered prior to taking on that role (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2001; Sen & McCormack, 2011).

On the contrary, an exclusive type of foster parent is one who might struggle with the idea of the foster child reunification with their natural family, as a result of information that they might have been made aware of regarding concerns of addiction, abuse and neglect and would find it difficult to work collaboratively with the family of origin (Sen & McCormack, 2011). This, for the most part goes against the objective of child protection services which seeks to have children returned to their homes or be permanently located with family members when safe for the child to do so (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2001). Sen and McCormack (2011) describe the term foster carer as professional caregivers and partners who support the family in caring for their children and are not parents stepping in to take over for the parent. Rhodes et al. (2003) state that conflict can occur when foster parents are unsure of the role that they play, the scope of their responsibilities, and whether the role should be defined as paraprofessional.

Through the literature reviewed, it is clear that roles play an important part in understanding some of the responsibilities that would be undertaken as a foster parent or foster carer. A possible conclusion is that a clarity of roles assists in greater satisfaction in day to day life whether at home or in one's career. In providing the foster parent with an identity as the carer and an understanding of the professional role that goes with it, the foster parent has a definitive role and this would assist in moving forward with goals and objectives in their foster carer responsibilities.

Foster Parent Concerns That Affect Retention

Foster parents have expressed that one of the reasons that they become foster parents is to care for children in need of protection (Murray et al., 2011). Among the most important roles of the foster parent, is the day to day care for the child placed in the foster home. Many foster parents share that they are challenged in the foster parent role for a number of reasons including training support, the complex aspects of care, communication with workers, and resources. Marcellus (2010) reports that foster parents find that a challenge they face is understanding the rules and regulations of the child welfare system. The families in Marcellus' study shared that they felt as if they had a, "powerless responsibility," in spite of being the people with the responsibility of caring for the child (2010, p. 19). Rhodes et al. (2003) state that a risk to placement for foster children can occur as the result of foster parents not having a clear understanding of their responsibilities and not feeling supported by their agency or foster care workers. Therefore, the reasons for becoming a foster parent, the challenges to foster parenting, and their understanding of their role are interconnected elements that can affect retention (Marcellus, 2010; Murray et al., 2011; Rhodes et al., 2003).

Eastman (1982) states that many children who would have been institutionalized are now placed in foster homes and this includes teenagers that are in conflict with their parents. The behaviours exhibited by children coming into care are also a challenge to foster parents.

These behaviours can be the result of historical trauma, mental health concerns, prior foster care placement breakdowns, and engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse (Crum, 2010; Mihalo, Strickler, Triplett, & Trunzo, 2016; Price, Chamberlain, Landsverk, & Reid, 2009; Spielfogel, et al., 2011). Training to manage these behaviours is imperative to support children who have been exposed to trauma and mental health concerns as these issues can create ongoing placement breakdowns if the foster home is not adequately skilled to care for children dealing with these challenges (Price et al., 2009; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Outside of behavioural concerns and training, Esaki, Ahn, and Gregory (2012) state that the overall amount of contact with the social worker or the agency causes dissatisfaction for many foster parents as they deal with lack of services, irregular support, the way they are treated by the staff, and the way the home is treated in the event of an allegation against the foster home. Eastman (1982) states that the occupation of foster parenting needs to attract new parents and that parents should be remunerated appropriately for the work that they do. Eastman (1982) also states that the power that the agency exhibits over the foster homes reminds the foster parents that they are not part of the team, but are more of a service provider, and less of a valued contributor to the child's care team and could potentially affect retention.

Training

Pre-service training provides the opportunity for potential foster parents to consider whether caring for foster children is appropriate for them. Rhodes et al. (2003) state that the Model Approach for Partnership in Parenting (MAPP), designed and implemented in the USA, is designed to provide training that emphasizes the partnership between foster parents, foster care workers and families of children in care. Rhodes et al. (2003) state that MAPP is designed to inform each person's role and that potential foster parents who take the training are more committed and interested in the training. Although, Rhodes et al. (2003) discussed the advantage of MAPP in identifying the role of the foster parents, there was no mention of

whether MAPP supports foster parents in understanding and learning to manage children who come into care with mental health and behavioural challenges.

Price et al. (2009) found that the pre-service training offered very little focus on managing the challenging behaviours of foster children in care. Training and support are required in order for foster parents to manage behaviours such as emotional outbursts, physical aggression, risky behaviours, conduct disorder, and hyperactivity (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Price et al., 2009; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Esaki et al. (2012) state in their research that less than one third of foster homes report that they are well prepared to care for the children coming into their homes after they have had training. Rhodes et al. (2003) suggest that training to help foster parents define their role and responsibilities is important since most parents were not prepared to be advocates and felt that their responsibilities focused primarily on parenting. Nash and Flynn (2009) conducted a study in the United States of America (USA) and in Canada and found that 48 out of 50 states in the USA and in the province of Ontario had implemented pre-service training for individuals considering foster parenting.

The duration and scope of training matters. Nash and Flynn (2009) state that training occurs through a few training opportunities. Christenson and McMurty (2009) provide insight into foster parents who receive a training, originating in the USA entitled Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education or PRIDE. PRIDE focuses on nurturing, supporting children, and working with a team. PRIDE is a system of training that has been endorsed by the Children's Aid Society in Ontario (Nash & Flynn, 2016). On further examination, PRIDE is also used in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and British Columbia as a part of the adoption and/or foster care training. Christenson and McMurty (2009) report that it is offered in 23 states and provinces in the US and Canada (p. 20). This training, however, does not address behaviour or mental health challenges. Nash and Flynn (2009) point out that foster parent training falls short of supporting foster parents in developing the skills to

manage their foster child's challenging behaviour(s). Turner, Macdonald, and Dennis (2007) (as cited in Nash & Flynn, 2009) concluded that the effectiveness of any training foster parents received to manage "behavioural and cognitive-behavioural" concerns, did little to improve the skillsets of the foster parents. Furthermore, the training did not improve the child's mental health, behaviours or ability to get along with others (p.129).

Christenson and McMurty (2009) reported that foster parents who took the PRIDE training to develop their parenting skills were more competent post-training when compared to their pre-training skills. However, Price et al. (2009) state that foster parents note that there is no post training follow up as a measure to reinforce learned skills. Chamberlain et al., 2008 (as cited in Nash & Flynn, 2009) reported on the outcomes of a program created in the USA called, 'Keeping foster Parents Trained and Supported,' (KEEP) which had positive results in reducing the behaviours of foster children. Nash and Flynn (2009) report that there was an improvement for the foster child as a result of the foster parents receiving training in parenting practices, particularly in children noted for at least six behavioural concerns in a day (p. 129).

Price et al. (2009) provided training to foster parents who had foster children in their home with challenging behaviours, through an intervention group wherein foster parents were trained in the KEEP method, and the end results indicated a marked improvement in relation to the control group. A further study was completed using a trained community group as opposed to the intervention group, in an effort to determine if similar results could be obtained through a community-based trainer and the results were similar around the positive changes in behaviours (Price et al., 2009). The study by Price et al. (2009) points to the value of a wrap-around training approach showing the possibility of a model such as KEEP being effective in reducing behaviours in children and increasing the skillset of the

foster parent. The effectiveness is based on weekly support provided to parents to engage in problems as they occur in the home (Greeno et al., 2016).

Murray et al., (2011) also identified categories of concern for foster parents regarding training. Some of the challenges were the availability of support from social workers, professionals, foster parent support groups, and after-hours crisis support when the foster parents were struggling to manage the behaviours of children and required support to parallel the training that the foster homes were receiving. Murray et al. (2011) indicate that KEEP training focuses on adequate training to manage challenging behaviours, maintaining the training, incorporate the skills learned, and support the foster parents after the training has concluded.

Intagliata and Willer, 1983 (as cited in Titterington, 1990) concur with Murray et al. (2011) by suggesting that training needs to be focused on learning skills to manage behavioural challenges and to support the caregiver in being able work with, tolerate, and understand where dysfunctional behaviours that foster children might present are stemming from (p. 159). Training could be more culturally based to support families outside of the Eurocentric culture such as African American culture (Spielfogel et al., 2011). Additionally, in the Spielfogel et al. (2011) study, the participants disclosed that the children coming into their care exhibit very serious behaviours such as, "lying, stealing, sexualized behaviours...fire setting and use of weapons in the foster home" (p. 2369). Parents wanted strategies to manage these behaviours (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Furthermore, Murray et al. (2011) indicated that the ages and relative stages of child development was something that the participants would like to see as part of a training in order to address developmental issues.

Murray et al. (2011) concur that the majority of the respondents to their research indicated that they wanted more training to manage their foster child's behaviour and to

understand more regarding the effects of trauma, attachment, and neglect on the child in terms of their development and behaviours. Pre-service training ranged from six to thirty hours with little focus on behaviours (Price et al., 2009). KEEP has a 16 week duration and involves homework, follow up and the opportunity to re-visit any topics the foster parent requests (Greeno et al., 2016; Nash & Flynn, 2009; Price et al., 2009). Rhodes et al. (2003) state that MAPP training runs for several weeks, however the actual program duration was not provided. Research suggest that foster parents would be interested in other modes of delivery for training such as online from their homes (Murray et al., 2011). If foster parents are provided with the correct tools to support them in managing the day to day care of the children in their care, there is likely to be more satisfaction, retention, and a sense of feeling heard (Esaki et al., 2012).

Sinclair, Gibbs, and Wilson (2004) discuss different levels of care for foster children such as relative (kinship) care, long term foster care, short term foster care, respite care and task care. Placing a traumatized child, a child with cognitive/developmental or emotional concerns in a home with a foster parent who is not trained will likely result in placement breakdown (Cooley et al., 2015). LeProhn (1994) state that kinship foster parents, particularly older ones such as grandparents, are more reluctant to take training and this might have implications for foster care workers as they are challenged with kin care families feeling that they are not general foster care parents. Price et al. (2009) report that children are paired with homes that have the skill to manage challenging behaviours. Due to shortages of available foster homes, inadequate matches may result between home and child and are the result of children in desperate need of placement (Sonoi, 2015). This inadequate matching can result in placement breakdowns or possibly the loss of the home.

Issues in training. The literature states, through numerous studies, that training concerns are an ongoing and unrectified issue over more than three decades (i.e. 1982 to 2018). Numerous sources have repeatedly concluded the training concerns for over 36 years of research dating back to Eastman (1982) to as recent as the data from Randle et al. (2018). Training concerns are not exclusive to North America as the problem exists in other countries such as New Zealand or Japan (Murray et al., 2011; Sonoi, 2015). These articles state that training programs need to be adaptive, accessible, affordable, and relevant to the needs and requests of the foster parents for the benefit of the foster home and their foster children (Murray et al., 2011; Sonoi, 2015). Issues connected to training are the barriers to accessing training, having childcare to support attending training, ability to afford childcare to attend the training, the relevance of the types of training, and the credibility of the trainers (Murray et al. 2011; Sonoi, 2015).

Spielfogel et al. (2011) identified some barriers to training such as availability to training and conflict with employment schedules, transportation, and childcare issues. The training program KEEP, had an expectation for weekly attendance for the 16 weeks of training. This level of training was an issue. Spielfogel et al. (2011) stated that families identified attendance at training once a month would not be easy to achieve. It was also problematic because the program is designed around weekly homework, phone calls to gauge the weekly use of the skills learned, and weekly support which added additional pressure for the family.

Behavioural management techniques taught during training do not always prove effective for foster parents. Foster parents can learn that having the role of a parent to their own children does not necessarily provide the level of skill necessary to support a foster child's behavioural and emotional needs. (Spielfogel et al., 2011). Finally, the parents in the Spielfogel et al. (2011) study stated that they prefer to be trained by and working with social

workers who are themselves, parents, because there is greater credibility with a worker who is a parent and that the social worker will better understand parental challenges with children.

Support Aspects of Care

In two separate studies conducted by Geiger, Hayes Piel, & Julien-Chinn, (2017) and Spielfogel et al. (2011), concerns regarding feeling supported by the foster parent social workers differed significantly based on the ethnic backgrounds of the participants. In Geiger et al (2017), of the 595 participants, 71% were Caucasian earners with 55% of the participants having a college education (pp. 25-27). These participants felt that they were supported and that the social workers or agency were knowledgeable about supports in the community (Geiger et al., 2017). In Spielfogel et al. (2011), the response was much different. Spielfogel et al. (2011) had a small sample size of 38 participants, of which 80% were African American with 26% reporting having an undergrad or higher education and these families reported overall dissatisfaction with the support they were receiving from their social worker or the agency (p. 2368). This report contrasts sharply in the level of support and foster parent needs being met according to ethnic backgrounds, education level, and sample sizes.

Esaki et al. (2012) report that the unmet needs of foster parents planning on stopping care-giving were connected to day care, transportation, and financial concerns. The foster parent might be responsible for transporting foster children to family visits or working with the child's family for the transition of the child returning home. Foster parents are responsible for documenting important aspects of the child's life such as things building the child's life story if they are in permanent care, the documentation of concerns, court appearances, behaviours, and emotional expressions that occur as a result of the family visits (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2001).

Rhodes et al. (2001) states the importance of supporting families with necessary resources. Resources are necessary to overcome the barriers that might be challenging the parents and interfering in their ability to foster. Such resources might include community health services, respite care, youth care workers, drivers to transport children to visits, regular contact with the child's social worker, and case planning meetings (Randle et al., 2018). These resources are provided when there is an understanding of resources required and when they are supported by the agency.

Relative or kinship care placements are often not provided with the same level of resources as general foster care and might have the same behavioural challenges that are found within children in the general system (Perry et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2004). Although some relative placements prefer not to be involved in the 'fostering process' and are not interested in training, funding, and support, many other relative care homes believe that they should be entitled to the same support, funding and training as general foster homes and it is understood that their homes are needed in the foster care system as much as general care homes (LeProhn, 1994; Perry et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2004).

LeProhn (1994) states that younger kinship carers are more inclined to want to complete foster care training than older relative-kinship care givers. Foster placements with relatives can have an additional challenge connected to family visits, particularly if the child's family is in conflict with the relatives who are caring for the child (LeProhn, 1994). Foster parents may be expected to document outcomes of visits with parents which might have some safety issues or parenting challenges involved, creating a power imbalance between the parents and the foster parent. An example of this would be if the foster parent is responsible for the child during a phone visit and the parent is believed to be acting inappropriately and the foster parent corrects or ends the call. A disagreement about the contents of a report regarding parental/child access produced by the foster parent, that is seen

to be inaccurate by the family of origin, could create conflict between the parties, particularly if the social worker accepts the report as factual.

Sen and McCormack (2011) state that at times kinship foster carers and the child's family will work collaboratively to mislead the social worker after family visits with the child have taken place in an effort to have the child returned back to the family of origin. Sen and McCormack (2011) further state that there can be a noticeable deterioration in the relationship between the family of origin and the foster family as the foster family has a level of power over the family of origin by being responsible for providing contact between the child and his family. Sen and McCormack (2011) suggest that social workers should have increased involvement with the foster home to identify risks during difficult and potentially conflictual contact between the foster parents and the family of origin. Sen and McCormack (2011) state that training to manage conflictual situations should be done as a way of helping the foster home build the required skill to deal with contact and conflict with the family of origin. Finally, Sen and McCormack (2011) state that this training is often unavailable and falls short in helping to build that skill.

Communication and Being Heard

Communication between social workers and foster parents is believed to improve the relationship between the social worker(s), the foster home, and reduce instances of after-hours crisis intervention (Mihalo et al, 2016). This communication is a measure of support (Mihalo et al., 2016). Randle, Ernst, Leisch, and Dolnicar (2017) indicated through their research that communication from the agency could be provided by offering a range of support services to the foster family and connecting the foster families to other foster parents in foster parent associations which include online platforms. This communication would help foster parents with their challenges and the agency would be perceived by foster parents, as supportive (Randle et al., 2017). Randle et al. (2017) add that caseworkers that share

information and offer positive feedback when the foster parents have done a good job increases the satisfaction of the foster parents. This works in the favour of the agency as it promotes a positive relationship between the foster parents and the foster home support worker.

Randle et al. (2017) reported that foster parents want to be included in the planning for the children in their care and need to feel that the social worker is available to provide support for the challenges the foster family might have while caring for the child. When decisions are made for the child's future and the foster parents are not consulted, foster parents are dissatisfied because they feel that they know the child better than the social worker and the foster parents have information that should be considered in plans for the child. The foster parent's day to day contact with the child provides an ongoing source of valuable information that should be considered in the child's case planning (p.1183). A lack of communication between the foster parents and the agency is a key determinant in the satisfaction level for foster parents in their role (Randle et al., 2017). Agencies should pay attention to foster home needs and required supports by taking more time to listen and consider the information provided by the foster home during case planning (Adams et al., 2018; Randle et al., 2017; Randle et al., 2018).

Numerous articles reviewed, indicate that foster parents are concerned about feeling heard and being respected for their opinion. Challenges continue for foster parents around feeling included as part of the child's team, and the overall communication between the social workers, the agency, and the foster parents (Christenson & McMurtry, 2009; Esaki et al., 2012; Fisher, Gibbs, Sinclair, & Wilson, 2000; Hayes Piel, Geiger, Julien-Chinn, & Lietz, 2017; Rodger, Cummings, & Leschied, 2006; Serbinski & Brown, 2017). Foster parents struggle in feeling that they are not considered a valued part of the child's care team and that

their opinion is not heard by social workers and is of little importance (Fisher et al., 2000; Randle et al., 2017; Spielfogel et al., 2011).

The families in the Spielfogel et al. (2011) research concurred that they did not feel heard nor respected by their social worker. Furthermore, Spielfogel et al. (2011) stated that the dynamics of the foster home were not understood by the social workers who came to the home. The families reported that social workers would come out to the foster home, “to nitpick...trying to find out what’s going on in your home. They want the child to say something bad. Boom! You got a write up. Or you [sic] investigated” (Spielfogel et al., 2011, p. 2370). Foster parents indicated that there was a disconnect and that they were being targeted by their social workers for the way they run their home (Spielfogel et al., 2011). Spielfogel et al. (2011) state that the disconnection between the foster parents and the social worker is exacerbated when the parents are being challenged by a social worker who is young, not of the same culture, and has no personal parenting experience.

Foster parents repeatedly stated that they struggled to communicate with their foster home social workers and/or the child’s worker (Fisher et al., 2000; Randle et al., 2017; Spielfogel et al., 2011). The literature reviewed states that families struggle because they cannot reach a social worker by phone, email or in person (Fisher et al., 2000; Randle et al., 2017; Spielfogel et al., 2011). When foster parents are trying to get documents signed, make plans for the child, have questions or concerns that need to be addressed, frustration arises when attempting to connect or where there is a lack of support from the agency or social worker(s). Foster parents state that they often feel that their opinion and observations are not valued and that feeling valued is important to them (Fisher et al., 2000; Geiger, Hayes, & Leitz, 2013; Randle et al., 2017; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Rhodes et al. (2001) state that considering the opinions and observations of the foster parents in the planning for the child, supports satisfaction of the foster parent and likely increases the retention potential.

Respite

Numerous articles discuss about the importance of respite care. Respite care provides stress relief from behavioural challenges and therefore contributes to the sustainability of a foster home (Esaki et al., 2012). When the foster home has difficulties communicating with the social worker and accessing respite care is challenging, the family becomes stressed, distraught, possibly angry, and the foster home is at increased risk of backing away from foster care (Mihalo et al., 2016). Mihalo et al. (2016) go on to state that foster home burnout could be alleviated by the child welfare agency if families in need are prioritized for respite care and families are ensured a break from constant care. Respite care can be provided to foster parents in several ways. It can be offered as daytime care, trading children with another foster home, weekend care, or through a scheduled alternate caregiver that either comes into the home or will care for the child in an alternate location (Canadian Health Care Association, 2012). Many children present behavioural challenges and obtaining a respite care provider that has the skill to manage the level of care that a child requires, can be a struggle, particularly if the respite provider is in high demand by several families. Making sure that foster families get the respite they need is essential for the mental and physical well-being of the family that is caring for the child (Canadian Health Care Association, 2012).

Financial Concerns

The literature identified funding shortfalls for foster families (DeMaeyer, Vanderfaeillie, Vanschoonlandt, Robberechts, & VanHolen, 2014; Randle, et al., 2017). Although foster families are provided with monthly funds to cover the cost for the child's care, foster parents find that they do not have sufficient funds to care for the child, cover the expenses related to the child's care, and are using their own money to support the child (DeMaeyer et al., 2014; Esaki et al., 2012; Randle et al., 2017). Randle et al. (2017) revealed a response from a foster parent where it was stated that they were "out of pocket" to support

their foster child's needs beyond the monthly financial support and the monetary shortfall indicated a problem with the system (p.1183). For example, gifts are an important part of normalizing a child's experience in the home and foster parents may bridge funding gaps at their own expense in order to ensure that the child is not left out of the festivities of giving to others (DeMaeyer et al., 2014).

Murray et al. (2011) further state that additional concerns noted by foster parents were related to having sufficient funds required to raise the child in their care. There are additional costs associated with required services of specialists, child care costs for day to day care, extra-curricular activities, and costs around transporting children to appointments and family visits. Many of these costs are not covered by the agency or surpass the remuneration that foster parents receive (Murray et al., 2011).

Inclusivity on the Child's Care Team

Foster parents expressed their thoughts and feelings about being included as part of the child's care team as identified in numerous articles (Fisher et al., 2000; Randle et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2003; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Foster parents are often the advocates for the child in the absence of the parent. When the foster parents are feeling as if no one takes them seriously, this can lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, and possible retention issues (Randle et al., 2017). At the same time, Esaki et al. (2012) report that being more inclusive on the child's care team in terms of planning for the child, places additional burdens on the foster parent's already challenging responsibility because of the time involved. Cooley and Petren (2011) report that many foster parents identify the information that they provide to the social worker from the foster parents' daily interaction with the child is presented with a focus on the best interests of the child. Foster parents often have information that the social worker is not aware of and could provide valuable case planning contributions. The worker may only see the child every 30 to 90 days and is therefore not always aware of changes

going on in the child's life (Cooley & Petren, 2011). Furthermore, the information provided by the foster parent for consideration by the social worker is often disregarded, which suggests that the carers are correct in their assumption that they are not being heard. This can be frustrating as the foster parents want an active role in advocating and planning for the child and this is not in the best interest of the agency or the foster home if the frustration results in the foster home choosing to discontinue. (Cooley & Petren, 2011).

Gresty (2017) reports that in a survey on inclusivity in health and human services, respondents who felt included were more motivated at their jobs and there was an improvement in their work performance. Gresty (2017) explains that inclusivity is about creating a good working environment wherein all members of the team are able to contribute and feel that they are providing a solid representation of their talents for the benefit of the team. Foster parents therefore need to be included as they are part of the human services system and their work with children is likened to a job and a vocation.

Implications for Social Workers

This paper has reviewed the literature which indicates that concerns around foster parent satisfaction and retention has been ongoing for decades (Adams, 2018; Mihalo et al., 2016; Titterington, 1990). The literature has many implications for social work practice and how workers can be clear about roles and be supportive and communicative, in order to retain foster homes. When foster parents decide to stop fostering, social workers in the capacity of supporting foster homes become tasked with recruiting and retraining new parents. Social workers will struggle with the added workload and then have less time to work with the homes for which they are already responsible. This creates a cyclical problem of lack of contact with the home due to the increased workload. Social workers responsible for the child in care have to find a new placement for the child and when the child is uprooted, this can be a catalyst for behavioural problems (Holtan et al., 2013). This too, can be cyclical, as children

with behaviour issues can create dissatisfaction for the foster parents and the child is removed or the family quits (Holtan et al., 2013).

The literature suggests that social workers need to advocate for the foster parents on their caseload when they sense that the family has the potential of burnout. Social workers, in collaboration with foster parents and their support agency, are more knowledgeable of resources and therefore could potentially compile a list of approved respite caregivers. This list of resources would be a reference of homes that would either take children for an agreed upon fee between the agency and the respite parent, or make an agreement to exchange weekends if the respite caregiver is also a foster home. Social workers could consider providing information regarding respite homes at the time of the child being presented to the foster home to assess the potential fit for a family and thus alleviate some of the concerns that foster parents express over getting respite.

Social workers will need to be mindful that ethnic, religious, and cultural differences exist in the various foster homes and it will affect how the foster child will be raised in the home. Having a clear understanding of one's own biases and cultural norms and being able to be open minded to other cultural practices is important and will indicate to the foster home that the social worker is open to different practices and ways of parenting. The literature clearly indicated that African Americans did not feel that their cultural practices for raising children was understood or respected and they felt judged by the social workers that were supporting the home (Spielfogel, 2011).

Social workers and agencies could explore the benefits and deficits of attending training together with the foster parent for cohesion of training and a more thorough understanding of each role. Cultural awareness training could be of benefit as many things are learned in an environment where people are able to share their lived experiences and receive mentoring (Esaki et al., 2012). Training together has the potential of helping to build

a better relationship between the foster parents and the social worker as they spend time together outside of the home or office in an environment with less power inequality.

The literature indicates that most foster parents are concerned around the amount of communication they have with their social workers due to the social workers large workloads (Adams et al., 2018; Mihalo et al., 2016; Randle et al., 2017). Communication lags can result in a failure to appear supportive and available on the part of the social worker and furthermore, might result in more problems and distress for the foster home. This chain reaction can result in the struggling foster homes choosing to shut down (Adams et al., 2018). According to the research, many foster parents want to be included as a member of the child's care team and determining what their role is when they first become foster parents, will provide the family with boundaries for their responsibilities (Mihalo et al., 2016). Social workers can play an important role in assisting by including the foster parents and facilitating role clarity.

Policies around training and supporting foster homes should be reviewed regularly. Currently pre-service training is available, however, ensuring that adequate training for managing behaviours in traumatized children is essential for the success of the foster home and the well-being of the child in care. Under the Standards for Foster Homes, it is expected that the child's safety, physical and emotional needs are to be met as part of the best interest of the child in care (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 1998). Training must meet the needs of the foster home so that they can provide the best care and support for the child in the foster home. In order for the child's safety, physical, and emotional needs to be met, current policies for training should be reviewed regularly. The policies should be the guideline by which both foster homes and agency staff adhere to. Policy reviews for training should include examining the training that is available to ensure that it is adequate to provide the necessary skills needed to care for the challenges that children bring to a foster home.

Policy regarding the amount of refresher training that foster homes are required to complete to maintain their level of expertise should be reviewed with foster homes. If foster parents are to be recognized as paraprofessionals, policies regarding the responsibilities and training requirements should be clearly identified and shared with the foster parents. Policies should be reviewed regularly. Children in care have evolving needs and policies around training of foster parents and the level of support that the agency provides to the foster home, should be reviewed regularly.

Limitations in the Research

Based on the literature reviewed, it is noted that there are a number of limitations in the research. Demographics of families that participated are limited largely to Caucasian and African American families, and therefore lack diversity. The literature reviewed for this paper did not provide any references to concerns from Indigenous foster parents caring for children. This omission is of significance in Canada due to the over representation of Indigenous children in the foster care system (Statistics Canada, 2016). The literature does not account for the cultural element of extended families within Indigenous care. Many of the studies were from the United States and therefore the focus was on African American families, Latino or Caucasian families. Other studies coming from Europe or Asia did not provide data regarding Indigenous Peoples.

Research reviewed indicated that Caucasian foster parents, who are long term foster parents, provided more positive feedback than their counter parts who identified as minorities when asked about their satisfaction with their foster child's social worker (Geiger et al., 2017; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Sample studies were varied and a few articles suggested that larger sample sizes might have affected the results. Some of the material that was included in this literature review was dated, but was included, as it indicates that some of the concerns that affect foster parents date back to almost forty years and continue to be problematic. The

most current literature indicates that little has changed in the types of concerns that are being addressed.

Although there are limitations in the studies, some consistencies remain as overall considerations when examining foster parent retention and what creates dissatisfaction and the ongoing loss of these foster homes. Foster parent historical concerns such as training, communication with social workers, and not being prepared for the level of care the children coming into their homes remain ongoing issues (Colton et al., 2008; Denby, Rindfleisch, & Bean, 1999; Esaki et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2000; Geiger et al., 2013; Geiger et al., 2017; Hayes Piel et al., 2017; Mihalo et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2011; Randle et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rodger et al., 2006; Sen & McCormack, 2011; Serbinski & Brown, 2017; Titterington, 1990).

Conclusion

This paper has examined the question as to whether a definitive foster parent role and inclusivity as part of the foster child's care team would increase foster home retention. There is no doubt, based on the literature, that social workers and agencies become excessively burdened by having to perform ongoing recruitment and training (Esaki et al., 2012; Randle et al., 2017). The literature reviewed indicates, that foster parents struggle with what their role is, the training they receive, and the amount of communication that they have from their social workers or the agency and this dissatisfaction increases the risk of retention of the home (Colton et al., 2008; Denby et al., 1999; Randle et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2006; Titterington, 1990).

Job descriptions provide a sense of what the role and responsibilities are for particular positions in the workplace. The reviewed literature identified that foster parents are for the most part, made aware of their role expectations in their pre-service training. However, once foster parents are actively fostering, they realize that their role and

responsibilities are significantly larger than caring for children in their home (Cooley, Thompson, & Wojciak, 2017; Denlinger & Dorius, 2018; Randle et al., 2018). Unlike other professions, foster parents are performing a multitude of responsibilities beyond the day to day care for a child, particularly if they are connected as part of a team that makes decisions for the child's well-being and long-term care (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2001). Not understanding the scope of responsibilities before committing to foster caring increases the risk of the foster home shutting down early (Cooley et al., 2017; Denlinger & Dorius, 2018). A more definitive role would be important to the foster parent as it would provide them with the 'job description' so that they have a more transparent understanding of the scope of the undertaking prior to deciding to take on the responsibility. Consideration of a role such as paraprofessional and the training and expectations that come with a paraprofessional role could benefit the foster parents and decrease the risk of having to place the child in a different home due to the home breaking down (Colton et al., 2008; Denby et al., 1999; Randle et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2006;).

Training would best be designed to support the professional growth of the foster parent and would make the agency accountable in recognizing the role that the foster home would play in helping to develop care plans for the child (Colton et al., 2008; Denby et al., 1999; Randle et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2006). Social workers could attend training together with the foster parent so that both the professional and paraprofessional are working together for improved education, awareness, relationship building, and the well-being of the child in care. Further research on the potential of identifying foster parents as a paraprofessional and the value of training them as such, should be considered. Policies regarding training should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the foster parents who might have behaviourally challenged children in their homes to care for. It is imperative that

policies are in place to make sure that the foster parent training addresses the safety, emotional and physical needs of the children in care.

Behavioural challenges in children were identified in the literature as being problematic for foster parents (Cooley et al., 2015; Esaki et al., 2012). Being 'a parent' does not necessarily prepare you for the rigorous responsibility of caring for a foster child and foster parents have shared that they were not prepared for the level of care required for the child (Cooley et al., 2015; Cooley & Petren, 2011; Esaki et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2004; Spielfogel et al., 2011). Foster parents expressed that ongoing training provided significant challenges for them when they are asked to participate due to costs associated with it, transportation, regular employment, and childcare considerations (Spielfogel et al., 2011; White et al., 2014). This raises the question as to whether the format for training, is accessible and practical for all families due to specific challenges such as poverty levels which could affect childcare costs. Other concerns that the foster parent might face when trying to accommodate training would be transportation, employment schedules, and finding other skilled carers for high needs foster children throughout the weeks of training (Spielfogel et al., 2011; White et al., 2014.).

Future consideration such as a blended format for ongoing training which could be interactive with other foster parents might help alleviate some of these barriers (White et al., 2014). Input from foster parents regarding helpful post pre-service training suggestions and topics of value for future pre-service trainings might increase knowledge and skill levels for foster parents living with children who have experienced trauma and have ongoing behavioural challenges (Marcellus, 2010). After examining the literature, an emphasis on expectations in the foster parent role, how to obtain ongoing support, and the types of challenges that could be expected as a foster parent, could reduce the number of homes that end their foster caring.

Foster parents need to feel heard and be valued. Not feeling heard and not feeling valued as a part of the child's team leaves foster parents feeling stressed and unsatisfied with their role as a carer (Colton et al., 2008; Denby et al., 1999; Esaki et al., 2012; Fisher et al., 2000; Geiger et al., 2013; Geiger et al., 2017; Mihalo et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2011; Hayes Piel et al., 2017; Randle et al., 2017; Rhodes et al., 2001; Rodger et al., 2006; Sen & McCormack, 2011; Serbinski & Brown, 2017; Titterington, 1990). Foster parents are an integral part of the child's team and many foster parents believe that they should be included in care planning. Having the foster parent identified as an integral member of the child's care team would allow for an important contribution of information throughout the process of the child's time in care and provides the foster parent with an understanding of the value of their role, both with the agency worker(s) and in advocating for the child of concern.

Foster parents state that having access to respite can be extremely challenging and when it is provided, there is often not enough respite available to make a substantial difference to the stressors that the foster family is going through (Mihalo et al., 2016). Providing a built-in plan of respite with the child at the time of placement might help alleviate concerns that the family is having when taking a challenging child into their care and it would help the foster family to understand how much respite care is available to them at the outset.

Determining whether a family will continue to foster or leave the role, appears to be complex. It is unclear if the level of satisfaction in a defined role (including inclusivity in the child's care team) will increase the chances of the foster parents remaining as a service care provider. Another unknown is how much impact retention of foster homes would have on the agency responsible for recruitment and retention? Further research is needed to determine if the costs associated with recruitment and training could be reduced. Research should be considered to examine if increased mentorship for newer foster homes would be available if

retention was less of an issue. Finally, it would be important to understand if a reduction in the recruitment and retention numbers of foster homes would perpetuate positive changes for foster care support staff so that they are better able to support the existing homes and build stronger connections with the foster parents. What *is* known is that the decision to become foster parents require more information: regarding what the potential parents can expect in terms of the possible behaviours of children in their home, how their opinions will be considered in planning, the amount of realistic contact and support from the agency staff they can expect to have, potential respite concerns, and the need for and challenges of training.

Finally, a few issues arise from the literature that would be valuable for future research or consideration. Since the year 1982, there continues to be ongoing training concerns that are not meeting the needs of foster parents, particularly as it pertains to children with high needs behavioural concerns (Murray et al. 2011; Titterington, 1990). Input from foster parents having experience from working and living with high needs children would be valuable to support future training modules. The focus on this should be to provide enough training and support, to potentially reduce the number of foster homes that are leaving the system. Providing more understanding into the requirements of foster parenting, the level of care required for children coming into care and how to obtain support would be beneficial. More research is required to understand if foster parents think that a definitive role would be beneficial to them.

Furthermore, if a definitive role was beneficial to the foster parents, it suggests that defined roles would also benefit social work agencies and their employees. This would be an important issue to explore, particularly if the foster parent were considered a member of the child's team. Research to date leaves the unanswered question as to whether foster parents should be defined as paraprofessionals. If defined as paraprofessionals, research would examine how this might increase recruitment numbers and retention of existing foster homes.

Foster homes remain challenged with a large responsibility of care, limited direction from agencies, and the ability to contribute on a paraprofessional capacity remains questionable. Close to four decades of research and lack of progress in these areas has resulted in children being displaced, living with instability, and receiving an inconsistency of care and support. As we continue to see foster homes continue to leave the system, the question on how to retain foster parents and homes remains. However, the literature does suggest some possible strategies that workers and agencies can take into consideration.

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