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## FOSTER CAREGIVING: HOW INTERACTIONS WITH THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY IMPACT FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2023.196>

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AGENCY IMPACT FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION, RECRUITMENT, AND  
RETENTION

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DISSERTATION

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky

By

Ethan C. Engelhardt

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Chris Flaherty, Professor of Social Work

Lexington, Kentucky

2023

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### FOSTER CAREGIVING: HOW INTERACTIONS WITH THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY IMPACT FOSTER PARENT SATISFACTION, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Professionals of the child welfare system in Kentucky have continuously worked to retain and recruit new foster parents for the foster care system. Foster parents are uniquely placed in a surrogate caring position for children removed from their homes for reasons of abuse or neglect. Foster parents accept this role and step in to provide a safe and loving household for many children. There are more than 9,000 children placed in Out of Home Care (OOHC) on any given day in Kentucky, leaving many children in need of a loving and supportive household. Foster parents hang in the balance between providing care for someone else's child and following the rules and regulations of the child welfare system while having little control over the outcomes for the child or the child's case. Foster parents are more than volunteers but not quite employees who play a crucial role in the child welfare system and the stories of many children placed in foster care.

Using the findings from the Kentucky 2021 Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey (FPSS), this study is designed to identify how overall foster parent satisfaction might be impacted by several facets of the foster parenting process and how these components might impact foster parent recruitment and retention. This dissertation includes a literature review and discussion of role and equity theory as potential frameworks for understanding the findings from the FPSS. The FPSS is analyzed through multiple linear regression and binary logistic regression. The study's conclusions highlight how a foster parent's overall satisfaction with foster care is impacted by satisfaction with communication, caseworkers, and ongoing training. Similarly, findings regarding the retention and recruitment of foster parents showed various associations with satisfaction with caseworkers, communication, and ongoing training. This study shares implications for future practice and research for foster parent satisfaction, retention, and recruitment. Finally, considerations for new reliable scales for analysis of foster parent satisfaction

with ongoing workers, Recruitment and Certification workers, ongoing training, and communication are explored.

**KEYWORDS:** Foster Parent Recruitment, Foster Parent Retention, Foster Parent Satisfaction, Child Welfare, Caseworker

Ethan C. Engelhardt

April 3, 2023

FOSTER CAREGIVING: HOW INTERACTIONS WITH THE CHILD WELFARE  
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RETENTION

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## Acknowledgments

I want to thank my God for the grace and perseverance offered to me during this Ph.D. program, it is from my faith that the desire to care for others stems.

I dedicate this work to my family. To Jordan, my love and wife, for the support, care, and encouragement she has provided me through long nights and early mornings, pushing me to move forward and pursue my passion. To my children, Jonah, Silas, Norah, and M., each of you is part of my story and what drives me to consider new ways to improve the child welfare system and grow as a caring father and person. Seek justice, love mercy, walk humbly, pursue your dreams, and push yourself; it is worth it.

To my fellow Ph.D. students who labored alongside me on Fridays and pursued new ways to expand knowledge through caring for others. To my professors, who challenged me to think creatively and critically to push the boundaries and create new avenues for clients and people everywhere. To Dr. Chris Flaherty, you helped me work diligently to pursue my dreams and have offered countless insights. To Dr. David Royse, your kindness and thoughtful teaching have been both an encouragement and something to aspire to. I truly appreciate all that you have done for me. To my committee, Drs. Karen Badger, and Jay Miller, thank you for providing helpful feedback and pushing me to pursue excellence.

Finally, to Renae Hardin and everyone at the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services. You provided me with an opportunity to learn about and identify the needs of foster parents in Kentucky. I hope that this study helps to create lasting change for foster parents not only in Kentucky but across the nation. Thank you.

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## **Chapter One - Introduction**

Child maltreatment is a significant social problem in the United States and, more specifically, in Kentucky. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2021), at least 1,840 children died nationally from abuse or neglect in 2020. Over 618,000 children were victims of child maltreatment in 2020, with over 16,000 of these victims being children in Kentucky. Kentucky has one of the highest rates of child maltreatment in the nation, with 16.7 out of every 1,000 children in the state of Kentucky being a victim of child maltreatment, the mean average being 8.4 children for every 1,000 children in the U.S. (Children's Bureau, 2021; Williams, 2022). Based upon the Child Maltreatment report with state commentaries as well as Child Trends state summaries (Williams, 2022), there appears to be no reported reason for why one state might have substantially more cases of child maltreatment than others (Children's Bureau, 2021).

In many cases, foster care is deemed an appropriate intervention for children who have been maltreated. Therefore, this study will look at data from a statewide foster parent survey to consider how multiple parts of the foster caring process effects overall satisfaction, recruitment, and, ultimately, retention of foster parents. As this study involves a focus on foster caring and the overarching system that recruits, trains, intervenes, and has oversight of foster parenting, it is critically important that the reader have a good understanding of the process involved in becoming and being maintained as a foster parent.

## **What is Foster care?**

Foster care is about providing temporary housing to a child in emergency need who might be lacking a safe place with a family member. Although the traditional experience of foster care involves a child being removed from their permanent place of dwelling, out of their biological parents' care, and into a total stranger's home, familial placements such as kinship care and fictive care are on the rise. Fictive kin can be defined as an adult who is concerned about the child's well-being, a coach or close friend who is not biologically related but knows the child well. These placements can be less disruptive for the child (Nelson, 2013).

Even less invasive, kinship placements take place when a child is removed from their home and placed in the care of a family member, for example, a grandparent or aunt who lives in the area and has a strong personal relationship. All three methods are considered primary placements for children and offer care to children in Out of Home Care (OOHC) (Osborne et al., 2021).

Another method of foster care would be a group home. Group homes are usually reserved for children who are unable to be safely housed with individuals or paired foster parent, or are used for overflow purposes if there isn't an available foster home available (Chow et al., 2014). The group home method is by no means the most preferred method and provides less support and individualized care when compared to the other options discussed above (Karam & Robert, 2013).

The forms of OOHC described above simply provide examples of different methods of caring for children removed from their biological parent's home. Although

the methods described above are varied the focus of this study will be on foster care in the traditional sense, a child being placed in a non-relative and non-fictive kin placement. This general understanding and overview of foster care should provide the reader with a context for various methods of care in which children might be placed.

### ***Foster parents***

Having some basic understanding of the foster parent certification process will help set the stage not only for later data analysis of the survey but also provides context for the lengthy approval process (Denby et al., 1999; Hebert & Kulkin, 2018). Foster parent pre-approval is a very intentional method to attempt to provide prospective foster parents with the information, resources, and supports needed to feel prepared to open their home for a foster placement (Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System, 2022, November 6). Although this process isn't fully standardized between states or even counties (Cooley, Newquist, et al., 2019), the time commitment and effort put forth by the prospective foster parents should be considered. The foster parent agencies are hoping for long returns on their proverbial investment of good safe and supportive foster homes. Therefore, the reader should consider how these efforts might be in vain if foster parents decide to close their homes shortly after completing the certification process (Geiger et al., 2013).

How does one become a foster parent? Becoming a foster parent takes quite some time and requires many different personal interactions and inquiries from the foster care agency. According to the Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System (KY-FACES), "the training, evaluation and approval process normally take six to nine



months” (Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System, 2022, November 6). The same document describes the eight typical requirements for a foster and adoptive adult certification. The process includes the following: 1. Any family interested in fostering or adopting must attend an information meeting; 2. Applicants must be at least 21 years old; 3. Foster and adoptive parents can be either married or single; 4. Parents should be financially independent and have no need for economic support to meet the family’s needs; 5. Parents should be able to provide a “safe, secure, and healthy home for a child;” 6. Physical and mental examination and verification are required; 7. Housing safety and space requirements must be met in the potential foster home; 8. All adults living in the household should complete training and background checks required by the Cabinet to provide greater safety for children in OOHC (Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System, 2022, November 6). These are the basic requirements and do not include things like the in-service training required to move forward with placement. When a prospective foster parent is ready to move forward with information, an official inquiry form is completed to request further information and allow registration with the foster care agency.

After the initial inquiry, 15 hours of preservice training with additional online training are required (Kentucky Foster Adoptive Caregiver Exchange System, 2022, November 6). Despite lacking much research to support its effectiveness consistently, preservice training provides a starting point for foster parents as they move forward in their journeys toward becoming a certified foster placement (Cooley, Newquist, et al., 2019; Geiger et al., 2013). This preservice training is not standardized and each state, and even various foster care agencies within the state might utilize a number of different

preservice training curricula, some of which fail to fully address the needs of the foster parent prior to their first placement (Cooley, Newquist, et al., 2019; Engelhardt & Royse, 2022; Hebert & Kulkin, 2018).

Preservice training covers topics such as perceptions of children placed in foster care, parent and child attachment, the child welfare process, working together with families, the foster parent's role in helping to reach permanency for the child, and cultural issues in parenting among other various topics depending on the training curriculum used by the certifying agency (Ansley, 2017; Nash & Flynn, 2016; White et al., 2014).

Following the completion of preservice training, a criminal background check is requested, then, upon clearance, several detailed home studies with interviews of all individuals living in the home, including children, are completed. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2018) lists the following as essential for the home study process;

#### Documentation of the Home Study

- A minimum of two home visits for the purpose of conducting personal interviews with each member of the applicant's household
- Documentation of references, including three personal references who are not related to the applicant and two credit references
- A statement from a health professional that verifies that no member of the applicant's household has an illness or condition that would present a health or safety risk to a child

- Verification that the applicant's financial stability has been assessed and approved in accordance with the agency's written policies and procedures
- Proof that the agency performed background checks on the applicant and any member of the applicant's household
- Documentation that the applicant has access to transportation that meets the child's needs, including restraint requirements
- If an applicant or household member will be transporting a foster child, proof that the individual possesses a valid driver's license and has automobile or driver's insurance coverage
- Documentation that the applicant's home meets the minimum standards for a foster family home

Once the preservice training, online training, background check, and home studies have been completed, certification can be fully completed. Then placement preferences are discussed between the foster care agency and the foster parents. These placement preferences allow for the foster parents to provide a list of child-specific preferences for which they might be willing to care. In most circumstances, the parent/s might mention an age range or gender of a particular child, but the foster parents/s are also allowed to mention demographic preferences, like the race of the child or if they would accept a sibling group of children (Rosenwald & Bronstein, 2008). Rosenwald and Bronstein (2008) found that the reasons for preferences varied widely from the foster parents' relationship status to the level of comfort with various age groups and how foster children might impact the biological children or other children in the foster parent's care. This preference sheet is considered when a foster parent opens their home for

placement. A placement call can be made at any time of day or night, and the foster parent typically has only 30 minutes to a few hours to make the decision of whether or not to accept the child into their care. As a foster parent myself, in my wife's and my experience, both instances of foster placement allowed a 30-minute window in which a decision and call back had to be made to accept the placement. If the agency did not hear back in 30 minutes, the worker would begin to call other available foster placements. In the foster parent preservice training, leaders often discuss the idea of knowing preferences and being willing to say "no" to placement to serve best the child's needs (Foster Talk, 2019). The preservice training and pre-approval process highlights the importance of being "ready" at any time of day and knowing how they might answer based on their preferences and circumstances at the time of the placement phone call.

Up to this point in the process, foster parents are well supported and guided, but much of this support appears to wane once a placement is established. Foster parents are given a lot of responsibility with little support or decision-making power (Murray et al., 2011; Samrai et al., 2011). Not only do foster parents feel that they are under-involved in the treatment and care plan of children in their care, but they also feel stress beyond that of a typical biological or adoptive parent (Harding et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2011). Although research on the stress, supports, and lack of agency involvement from the foster parents' perspective is often addressed in the literature (Geiger et al., 2013; Lietz et al., 2016; Piel et al., 2017), still little is known from quantitative research how communication from child welfare agencies affects foster parents retention and recruitment. The pre-approval process will be one of the key factors considered in this study.

The context of this study looks specifically at the state of Kentucky and provide findings specific to foster care and child welfare within the state. Therefore, a greater understanding of the foster parent's overall experience in Kentucky is crucial for the reader to understand the importance of foster parent retention and the avoidance of placement disruptions.

### **Foster Care in the U.S. and K.Y. - Issues**

This portion of chapter 1 will highlight and discuss four main issues and areas of concern; 1. Turnover Among Foster Parents, 2. Case Workers/Social Workers (their training, caseloads, responsiveness, etc), 3. Recruitment of Foster Parents, and 4. Retention and Longevity of Foster Parents. Each of these areas will not only be discussed and explored here but they will be integral to examining contributing factors to findings and dissemination of the data. These four issues, explored below, have also been found to be closely associated with permanency outcomes for children in Out of Home Care (Cleary et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2006).

#### ***Turnover Among Foster Parents***

Foster parent turnover is a significant issue in the United States. The average foster parent's home remains open for current and/ or future placements between 8 and 14 months (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007). Furthermore, on average, foster children remain in care for 20 months, with more extended placements taking place for older children (The Children's Bureau, 2021). Children in OOHHC for a more extended period often have a lack of appropriate attachment skills later in life, become less likely to gain permanency planning, and might eventually age out of the foster care system without having either reunification or adoption (Lockwood et al., 2015; Samuels & Pryce, 2008). As the

number of children in OOHC continues to remain steady, currently having more than 400,000 children in OOHC (The Children's Bureau, 2021), the need for greater foster parents longevity remains a priority.

Furthermore, many foster parent report being frustrated or having issues with the foster care system (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022; Geiger et al., 2013). In fact, in interviews with foster parents, Geiger and colleagues (2013) found that lack of communication and emotional support from caseworkers and the foster care system have a negative impact on foster parents' motivation and longevity. Foster parent longevity remains a problem. A better understanding of how relationships and communication with caseworkers in their respective foster care agencies might impact longevity remains an unanswered research gap.

The foster care crisis has remained steady in recent years, and these concerns hit all 50 states. One recent web publication from a regional foster care agency serving North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky highlighted the increased number of children in OOHC. They reported having to turn away foster care referrals from the Department of Community Based Services because they report not having enough foster homes in which to place those children (Omni Family of Services, 2022).

Similarly, in Kansas a recent lawsuit was filed on behalf of children in foster care who were sleeping in offices due to not having adequate places to stay. Some children stayed and "bounced from offices to different foster homes as many as 100 times" (Mesa, 2022). In total, 79 children slept in offices for a total of 214 nights between January 2021 to May 2022 (Mesa, 2022). These are just two recent instances of both public and private agencies' struggles. The limited number of available homes impacts temporary placement

for these children as they try to grapple with removal from their primary caregiver to a total stranger, the foster parent. The simple fact that children in foster care typically remain in care for close to two years and, in many cases, longer highlights the need to find ways to avoid placement disruption and to provide better outcomes for these children (Leathers et al., 2019; Russell & Macgill, 2015).

While the doors of the foster parent's home continue to revolve and close, there also remains a concern about the high turnover rates of foster care workers (Johnco et al., 2014; Kim & Kao, 2014; Park & Pierce, 2020). For the purposes of this paper, turnover is when a foster care worker quits their job after being employed by an agency for less than two years (Griffiths et al., 2019). In a recent study, Park and Pierce (2020) found that transformational leadership, a way of "influenc[ing] followers to transcend their individual self-interests for the collective good of their organizations..." (p. 2) had an effect, not only on turnover intentions for foster care workers but also on an overall climate and cultural impact in the agency. Children are also impacted by turnover with their child welfare workers. A recent qualitative peer-reviewed article highlighted the impact foster care worker turnover had on children in foster care, with several former foster children expressing feelings of loss when a worker left to work elsewhere (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010).

The foster care crisis has not only been noticed by foster care agencies and foster parents but also by state and national leadership. Recently, the governor of Kentucky, gave all social service workers a 10% pay increase in hopes of attracting and retaining workers (The Associated Press, 2021). Similarly, the state of Texas increased salaries for social workers of all kinds but as much as \$9,000 per year (Korte, 2020). So, as state and

local governments start to catch up with workers' financial needs, there may be a shift in the landscape for the turnover of social workers. Many social workers describe being overworked and underpaid; this situation often leads to turnover, although recent efforts to increase pay might decrease turnover and therefore impact disruption in communication between the worker, foster parents, and foster child (Diaconescu, 2015).

Foster parents work with children who are not their own, who have experienced various forms of trauma, and who likely need more support than a typical biological child (Murray et al., 2011). The child's trauma can be further exacerbated by being removed from their homes and then made worse with placement disruption and movement to a new foster care home (Holtan et al., 2013). As Maslow's Hierarchy of needs highlights, physical and emotional safety are two of the most important factors for child development and stress (Crandall et al., 2020). Without a safe space to practice appropriate boundaries, trust, and experience safety, more pain and further trauma will likely continue (Lefevre et al., 2017).

As children are placed in OOHC, their lives are significantly interrupted, even if for the better; these changes are scary, trepidatious, and filled with questions. Having a supportive and loving foster parent during this time can positively impact the child's life (Chodura et al., 2021). Placement disruptions, as mentioned above, create even more strain and questions for children in OOHC. As foster parents move through the process of certification, home studies, training, and eventually approval, many unknowns are addressed for the parents through the proper foster parents training (Cooley & Petren, 2011; Festinger & Baker, 2013). This support provided by both public and private foster



care agencies is necessary to help with the success of foster parent longevity and retention.

A number of years ago MacGregor et al. (2006) suggested that more support and attention is provided during pre-certification than after a foster parent completes certification and preservice training. Very little is still currently known from a quantitative perspective about the communication, connection, and support to foster parents after children are placed in foster homes and how these relationships might lead to a better connection and care for the child in the foster parent's care.

### ***Caseworker/ Social Worker***

Most caseworkers in child welfare are graduates of bachelor of social work programs (Ryan et al., 2006; Zlotnik, 2018). While many of these workers are professionally trained to go into this field, and some even have taken advanced coursework specific to the field of child welfare, retention rates continue to be a major concern (Griffiths et al., 2019).

Caseworkers provide care to children and families in the child welfare system where reports of abuse or neglect have been substantiated. Typically, the first interaction these families might have with a case worker would be with an investigation worker. These investigation workers take the reported abuse, neglect, and maltreatment information and work with the family and case team to identify if there is cause for concern and legitimacy to the report. Lee et al. (2013), in working with Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation workers, found that many of these professionals feel undertrained and unprepared to address the immediate needs of the situation and, at times, unable to complete a thorough risk assessment due to the high caseload. After the

investigation, workers complete their assessment, and the case planning team works together. If a child is removed from the home, the child and biological family are given an ongoing worker. This worker supports the child's needs in OOHC, provides information, sets goals with the biological parents, and, if possible, supports the reunification process (Edwards & Wildeman, 2018). These workers typically remain with the families on their caseload until cases close or the children age out of the system, which oftentimes leads to large and lengthy caseloads. The third type of caseworker and the first to work with the foster parent are the Recruitment and Certification Caseworkers (R&C Worker). The R&C Worker's primary role is to be assigned to the foster parents to support their concerns, check on recertification requirements, and answer any questions they may have about the child or the fostering process. The R&C workers typically meet with foster families on a regular three-month schedule.

Burnout and stress appear to be two of the most often cited reasons for child welfare workers leaving their jobs and transitioning to another area of practice, or even a completely different field outside of social work (Kim & Kao, 2014; Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Travis et al., 2016). Many of these workers experience threats and even secondary trauma as a result of witnessing child death, maltreatment, abuse, and neglect (Lamothe et al., 2018). Although studies have worked to identify various coping strategies for these workers, many of these studies appear to be shortsighted and lack long-term solutions (Lamothe et al., 2018; Travis et al., 2016). This secondary trauma and work stress leads to foster care workers being “over worked and underpaid” with little time to consider how they might best support foster parents, children in OOHC, and even communicate more effectively (Burns et al., 2023; Razavi & Staab, 2010).

The caseworkers described here provide a basic outline of how child welfare and foster care agency staff interact with the foster parent. Therefore, this is to help provide context for how these interactions and relationships will be considered in the analysis and findings of this study.

The study looks at foster parent recruitment, retention, and satisfaction outcomes as key dependent variables that might be impacted by predictor variables and demographic information. Therefore, a basic foundational introduction to foster parent recruitment, retention, and satisfaction is offered below to provide the reader with a beginning-level knowledge of their importance and impact on children in OOHC.

### ***Foster Parents Recruitment***

The topic of foster parent recruitment and what method is best suited to increase the certification of foster parents continues to be addressed in the literature (Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021). One study found that foster parents who are flexible, loving, and work well with others tend to last longer than other foster parents (Berrick et al., 2011). Although foster parent turnover takes place fairly frequently, with many foster parents closing their homes just one year after being approved (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007), the best recruiters were current foster parents who referred others to provide care (Baer & Diehl, 2019). It is with this information that the foster parent recruitment was considered as a primary factor for this study.

### ***Foster Parent Retention and Longevity***

To best inform the reader, context will be given to understand how foster parent satisfaction with caseworkers impacts longevity. Caseworkers are the primary contact for foster parents in times of struggle, inquiry, or even praise, highlighting the critical role

that communication plays for foster parents (Crum, 2010; Geiger et al., 2017). Foster parents work with multiple systems and case workers during the foster care process. They rely heavily on their foster care workers to inform them of upcoming training, biological visits, court dates, updates on the child's permanency planning, and much more (Brown et al., 2016). This highlights why foster parent longevity connects so closely with this study.

Children in foster care come from many different backgrounds and are often neglected and abused; physically, emotionally, and socially. Foster carers provide safe, supportive, and caring housing for a child in need and play a significant role in offering safety and security for children in their care (Cooley et al., 2017). Foster care retention and longevity have been concerns for many years (Ahn et al., 2017; Geiger et al., 2013; Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007; Randle et al., 2017) as the adverse impacts of providing care for children with complex backgrounds can be a significant strain on the foster families well-being (Griffiths et al., 2021; Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021). Foster parents are uniquely placed as first responders for the child's needs but historically lack adequate support from social workers and support staff (Denlinger & Dorius, 2018; Geiger et al., 2017). Often, foster parents report discontinuing care for reasons related to difficulty addressing the behavioral and emotional concerns and needs of the children in their care (Denlinger & Dorius, 2018; Geiger et al., 2013; Randle et al., 2017). Sometimes foster parents quit because they feel uninvolved and uninformed about the situation and as if they aren't a part of the change process for the children in their care (Geiger et al., 2013; Griffiths et al., 2021; Leffler & Ahn, 2022).

Even still, some foster parents simply close their homes because of lacking space and needing a “break” from the hustle and bustle of fostering (Geiger et al., 2013; Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021). Foster care is stressful and, in and of itself, can be a full-time job filled with once-a-month case visits from workers, potentially monthly, biweekly, or weekly visits with biological parents, doctor appointments, and children’s appointments for concerns related to counseling, speech, occupational therapy, etc. (De Wilde et al., 2019; Lopez et al., 2022).

While attempting to provide the child with a supportive and loving home, many foster parents feel that caseworkers and the foster care agency lack appropriate formal parenting support for foster parents (Leathers et al., 2019; Randle et al., 2017). In a qualitative study of 21 foster parents and five caseworkers, Denlinger and Dorius (2018) found that even with all the training and support offered to the foster parent, caregivers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of the children in their care. Providers of foster care are not adequately prepped for their placements, and many foster parents agree that little information is offered to them before a child is placed in their home (Ahn et al., 2017). Furthermore, Some foster parents report discontinuing care and closing their homes because they feel unprepared to address the behavioral needs of children in their care (Ahn et al., 2017). Similarly, there are more than 30 published studies in the last 10 years alone that consider preservice training’s impact on foster parent retention (Christenson & McMurtry, 2009; Cooley, Newquist, et al., 2019; Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021; Randle et al., 2018) yet, many foster parents are not sure what they need to know before being approved and their needs for both support and information change once a child is placed in their home (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022). These concerns highlight the

need for further research into how better communication practices might address foster parent retention.

As mentioned earlier, the average length of fostering is between 8 and 14 months, with close to half of all foster parents closing their homes within one year of being fully approved and certified (Geiger et al., 2017; Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007). These numbers are concerning given that as of April 2019, in Kentucky, 9,091 children were placed in (OOHC). However, Kentucky only had 5,262 foster homes approved to provide foster care (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services Department for Community Based Services, 2020).

Foster parent retention remains essential, as it not only provides a stable household for children in care, but it can also help to create a smoother and quicker transition for children who have to be removed from the homes of their biological or primary caregivers (Day et al., 2022). This unplanned closure of foster homes leads to placement disruptions. For this paper, placement disruptions or placement instability can be defined as any time a child in OOHC is removed from a foster care placement for reasons other than reunification with the family. Disruptions occur for various reasons, including child externalizing behavior and school difficulties, and appear to occur more often with older-aged children (Rock et al., 2013; Vreeland et al., 2020). This remains a significant factor for children in OOHC as nearly 60% of all children placed in foster care for at least 24 months had three or more placement settings in a single foster care episode (U.S. Department for Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2022).

Furthermore, the placement disruption rate for children placed in OOHC and state custody in Kentucky for less than 12 months, and having at least three different

placements settings remain on par with the national average, 15% and 17% respectively (U.S. Department for Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2022). This highlights just how consistently placement disruptions are taking place both in Kentucky and nationally. These placement disruptions not only mean a new place to live and a new primary caregiver but, often, a new neighborhood, community, and school. Disruptions and instability have been found to increase difficulty in forming an appropriate attachment with trusting adults (Bederian-Gardner et al., 2018). These placement disruptions, which might be reduced with better communication, have also been found to lead to various adverse outcomes for children in foster care as they age out of the system and move into adulthood.

Foster parent longevity deals not only with retention but also with recruitment. Although there is some recent literature highlighting the effects of general and focused, or targeted, recruitment (Ahn et al., 2017; Marcenko et al., 2009), there is a dearth of literature on the foster parent recruitment's connection with retention and longevity (Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021). Foster parent recruitment has yet to be linked with the longevity of being certified as active foster parents and remaining an open home for children in OOHC. Still, one recent meta-analysis by Hanlon and colleagues (2021) found that existing foster parent networks appear to be one of the most effective recruitment methods. So, how can current foster parents stay longer and even recruit other supportive and prospective foster parents?

## **Foster Parent Satisfaction**

For a long time, foster parent satisfaction has been considered an important factor in the retention efforts of child welfare agencies (Cooley, 2015; Cooley et al., 2015; Denby et al., 1999; Whenan et al., 2009). As defined in the literature, foster parent satisfaction typically considers how prepared, understood, valued, and involved foster parents feel (Cleary et al., 2018; Cooley, 2015). Furthermore, Griffiths et al. (2021) highlight that supports and resources for foster parents and emotional care are important factors to foster parent satisfaction. Foster parent satisfaction has also been found to be closely linked with foster parent retention and turnover (Geiger et al., 2017; Mihalo et al., 2016).

It is with this preliminary understanding of foster parent satisfaction, that various facets of the foster care experience were considered in this study. These facets include satisfaction with the child's worker, satisfaction with the R&C worker, satisfaction with the pre-approval process, satisfaction with ongoing trainings, satisfaction with communication, and overall satisfaction with foster caring. This study considered how the experience of foster caring overall is impacted by interactions and experiences with the various parts of the foster care agency.

## **Purpose Statement**

This quantitative study is designed to identify how overall foster parent satisfaction might be impacted by several facets of the foster parenting process and, more specifically, identify if communication between foster parents and foster care workers impacts foster parent satisfaction, recruitment, and retention more than any other factor.



There simply is not a lot of literature that examines communication's impact on overall satisfaction, retention, or recruitment. Nor, do previous authors consider multiple different areas of satisfaction, such as, satisfaction with R&C workers or satisfaction with ongoing training, as collective predictors of overall satisfaction, recruitment, and retention. Although a few researchers discuss targeted recruitment, none are known to have considered how communication has impacted the foster carer's desire or likelihood to refer others to become foster parents. As the literature states, foster care agencies should rely on a strong foster parent to help with word-of-mouth recruitment (Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021). Therefore, this study highlights how this communication might further influence a foster parent to refer or not refer others to become foster carers. Similarly, quantitative data on foster parent retention is scarce in regard to how communication between foster carers and caseworkers might impact recruitment and retention.

First, the study looks at demographic characteristics, such as gender, the age range of children cared for, if the foster parent has adopted a child from foster care, etc., to identify if these differences impact longevity, overall satisfaction, and one's desire to refer others to become a foster parent. Secondly, factors related to foster parents' perceptions and reports of satisfaction overall and with various foster care systems, such as ongoing caseworker, recruitment and certification (R&C) caseworker, and the system overall, are analyzed for a better understanding of trends. Finally, reported satisfaction with the various foster care agency systems, mentioned above, were analyzed for its impact on overall foster parent satisfaction, a foster parent's desire to discontinue in the next six months, and the foster parent's interest in referring others to become foster or

adoptive parents. This researcher looks to provide feedback and researched conclusions to help the children of Kentucky have greater access to safe and supportive foster parents during the confusing, challenging, and demanding circumstances leading to a child being placed in OOHC (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2013). The following research questions were considered for this study.

1. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring while employing Use of Resources as a moderator?
2. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parent's plan to discontinue fostering in the next 12 months?
3. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parents' thoughts about recommending the program?
4. Is the Satisfaction with Communication variable a better predictor of the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring than the component satisfaction variables and sociodemographic variables while employing Use of Resources as a moderator?

Given that the literature is sparse on communication's impact on foster parent satisfaction and therefore limited on its connection to both retention efforts and recruitment, the final two research questions will consider how communication might be more impactful than other areas of the foster parenting experience.

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## **Chapter Two - Review of Literature**

Chapter Two will synthesize and present relevant and vital literature regarding foster parents' satisfaction with foster care agencies on a broad scale. Unfortunately, foster parent retention and recruitment remain an ever-changing issue. Agencies often work to create new ways to recruit foster parents and even add positions specifically for recruiting and retaining good foster parents. With this in mind, Chapter Two will first highlight how foster parent satisfaction has been framed in previous literature. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative literature, which inform the importance of this study and highlight several gaps in the literature, will be explored. Key findings from the literature will be synthesized to understand better how communication satisfaction has been considered in previous studies and how this study might differ from studies completed in recent years. Next, this chapter will highlight how social role theory and equity theory might inform the study's findings and the role that theory plays in selecting relevant independent and dependent variables for this study. Finally, at the conclusion of Chapter Two, a clear direction for how the study will fill any gaps in the literature will be expressed, and therefore suggested solutions for how communication woes affecting foster parents might be addressed for greater foster parent satisfaction, recruitment, and retention will be discussed.

### **Foster Parent Satisfaction and the Foster Care Agency**

Foster parent satisfaction can be defined as the foster parent's expressed contentment with the child welfare system including support and assistance provided to them in their roles as foster carers. There is some literature that addresses foster parent

satisfaction, addressing such aspects as satisfaction with caseworkers (Geiger et al., 2017; Hayes et al., 2015), agency satisfaction (Hayes et al., 2015), training satisfaction (Cooley, Newquist, et al., 2019; Cooley & Petren, 2011), and satisfaction with the foster parenting experience (Griffiths et al., 2021). Each of these areas have received negative feedback from foster care providers. In short, foster parents are dissatisfied with the system and its processes. Their reasons vary greatly, but include: lacking personal involvement in the case planning process, feeling disrespected, feeling helpless to provide adequate care, and simply feeling left out, or underappreciated as the most frequently cited reasons (Cooley, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; Mihalo et al., 2016).

Many adults become foster parents because of their desire to help a child or because of a religious calling, while others look for ways to expand their family (De Maeyer et al., 2014; Gouveia et al., 2021). While these reasons are great motivators for starting, many foster parents do not fully realize the impact that foster parenting will have on their lives and struggle to identify these concerns prior to the foster parenting process (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022). Similarly, foster parents aren't fully aware of the role that the case worker, agency, and training might play in their foster parenting journey and how significant these agency-wide supports might be for their success as foster parent (Geiger et al., 2013). There seems to be a knowledge gap in what foster parents expect when they first become a foster parent and how the agency and its staff might support and connect with them in their times of need, frustrations, supports, etc. This gap in the literature suggests there is a need to explore how communication with the foster care agency and its staff might impact the overall satisfaction, retention, and recruitment of foster parents.

## **Relevant Literature on Foster Parent Satisfaction and Caseworker Communication**

The search for literature on this topic was conducted with a rigorous inclusion and exclusion process. With the help of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) process, several inclusionary and exclusionary considerations were used (Moher et al., 2009). The review aimed to identify and critically appraise articles that informed the significant role of caseworkers' relationships with foster parent on longevity, satisfaction, and overall outcomes for children in OOHC. The inclusionary criteria were any original peer-reviewed and published empirical research from 2007 to the time of the study in 2023. Online Databases; Web of Science, Psycinfo, Medline, Social Work Abstracts, and Sociological Collection were utilized to identify relevant literature. Articles were found using search terms that included either Foster Parent, Foster Carer, or Foster Caregiver. This first term was used in conjunction with Communication, Relationship, Interaction, Correspondence, or Satisfaction, with the original number of articles found totaling 244. The year 2007 was chosen as it was 15 yrs before the completion of this review. The standard for relevant literature is typically 10 yrs but to include a more robust number of articles and provide a buffer for stalled data, 15 years were included. The results of the PRISMA literature review will be split into qualitative and quantitative articles to find themes that might closely connect with this study.

## *Qualitative Literature*

In recent years, the foster parent satisfaction literature has begun to grow, and findings appear to highlight the frustration that foster parents have with the system overall. First highlighted in Evan Jones' (1975) article, interviews of 55 former foster parents revealed that the communication between foster parents and caseworkers was found to be the main reason for closing their homes. The initial findings from Jones' article in 1975 led to several other qualitative studies exploring the communication of foster parents and caseworkers (Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Murray et al., 2011; Samrai et al., 2011). A PRISMA method literature review (Moher et al., 2015), described below, found less than 10 relevant qualitative articles written in the United States, from the previous 15 years, focused on satisfaction or communication between foster parent and caseworkers.

Three articles focused on the foster parent's desire to have more than the typical monthly communication with their respective case worker (Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Metcalfe & Sanders, 2012; Samrai et al., 2011). Furthermore, articles by Cooley et al. (2017) and Schofield et al. (2013) reported that foster parents wanted to be more involved in the child's care plan and better informed of the needs of the child. While retention and recruitment are mentioned slightly, these articles do not fully explore how communication and relationships might impact foster parent longevity, recruitment, or overall satisfaction, as to be highlighted in the current study.

As foster parents begin the process of inquiring, learning about, and eventually becoming licensed to become foster parents, the foster care agency maintains heavy involvement in the process. From foster training to ongoing certification and recruitment from their R+C Worker, foster parents are nearly always in contact with someone from

the agency throughout the process. Informally and formally, social supports appear to significantly impact longevity, retention, and ownership of their role as foster parents (Piel et al., 2017). Furthermore, Lanigan and Burleson (2017) found that foster parents reported needing even greater support from caseworkers when the child transitioned into their care initially. These support needs differ greatly depending on the needs of the child in care but what remains consistent is the need for interaction and support from the foster care agency at many different junctions of the care process (Koren-Karie & Markman-Gefen, 2016; Leffler & Ahn, 2022). Although many interactions occur outside of the placement, Koren-Karie and Markman-Gefen (2016) highlight how foster parents need support and training from their foster care agency regarding the emotional investment involved in fostering children. Furthermore, Blythe et al. found that even those who foster long term and are considered the more tenured of the foster parents felt that within the foster care system, "...[they] felt marginalized, scrutinized, and powerless." (2012, p. 249).

Foster parents are looking for more interactions with foster care workers. One study by Leffler and associates (2022) highlighted that foster parents feel that the regularly scheduled once-a-month interactions were not enough to maintain strong communication with their workers. Furthermore, Samrai and colleagues (2011) found that there was greater success with foster placement in general if the placement process was well supported by the foster care agency. Many individuals become foster parents because of a personal desire to give back to their community and provide safe and secure housing but many foster parents are unaware of the stress that comes with being a foster parent. This is further exacerbated when foster carers experience high stress and strain



and report having substantive unmet needs from their foster care workers (Murray et al., 2011).

### **Summary of Qualitative Literature.**

Although the literature doesn't specifically address overall foster parent satisfaction or the communication's impact on retention and recruitment, the above literature highlights the importance of agency-wide support and care for foster parents throughout the process. Foster parents experience joys, stress, anxiety, fear, and many other emotions as a part of the fostering process and having greater support would likely create a better experience overall for a foster parent. The literature also showed a theme of greater frequency of contact from caseworkers, having a greater involvement in the care plan of the child, and being respected by workers. Although the frequency of contacts is not addressed in the proposed study, several variables will look at how involvement in care planning and being respected by workers impacts retention, recruitment, and overall satisfaction for foster parents in Kentucky.

### ***Quantitative Literature***

A foster parent's overall and communication satisfaction has yet to be widely considered from a quantitative lens. To prepare for this dissertation, a systematic literature review was completed of the most relevant quantitative literature informing the quantitative nature of this study. 12 relevant studies were found based on the exploration of the literature from the previous 15 yrs. The literature surrounding foster parent satisfaction has shown some focus on the involvement in the case and a desire to be more involved in the case planning process (Griffiths et al., 2021; Mihalo et al., 2016) but no

articles focus on how foster parent' communication satisfaction impacts recruitment and retention. The most similar article to the proposed study, completed by Jennifer Geiger and colleagues (2017), focused on how communication satisfaction impacts overall foster parent's satisfaction mentioned retention and recruitment as potential impacts based on an overall satisfaction rating. This is supported by literature which suggests that in many cases overall foster parents satisfaction might lead to greater foster parent retention (Griffiths et al., 2021) and recruitment of other foster parents (Cooley et al., 2020; Mihalo et al., 2016). Still, no known literature looks directly at how communication with the foster care agency impacts retention, recruitment, and overall satisfaction. And even the similar Geiger et al. (2017) study, does not consider the relationship and communication experience with separate parts of the system: from the overall agency, the child's case worker, and the foster parent's worker, which are highlighted in the proposed study. No known researcher has examined and published how satisfaction and communication with various facets of the foster care agency might impact retention, recruitment, and overall satisfaction.

### **Summary of the Quantitative Literature.**

Quantitative literature is scarce on how satisfaction with communication impacts foster parent recruitment and retention. Three major themes emerged but still don't address specifically how communication impacts foster parent outcomes.

1. Involvement in the case and better overall support from the caseworker is more valuable support than foster parent training, which is the most often studied portion of the foster parent and caseworker connection (Cole & Eamon, 2007; Mihalo et al., 2016; Orme et al., 2007; Steen & Smith, 2011; Watson, 2017). Put simply, Cole and Eamon

(2007) found that caseworkers should be so involved and understanding of the foster parent on their caseload that they should be able to “assess the availability of foster caregivers’ social support, assist to enhance social support when indicated, and perhaps provide other types of ongoing support” (2007, p. 668). Foster parents rely on workers to provide “support needed at specific points in the fostering process when foster families are more vulnerable” (Cole & Eamon, 2007, p. 656).

Similarly, Mihalo and colleagues (2016) found that support from staff is a key component of foster parent satisfaction and suggested better communication from foster care workers could be a key component of foster parents success. Steen and Smith (2011) found that greater perceptions of the agencies’ competence and responsiveness to foster parents and child needs resulted in greater satisfaction with overall training and a feeling of involvement in the decision-making process. Autonomy, relatedness, and competence surrounding caseworker support were also found to create better retention for foster parent (Watson, 2017). These findings were similar to that of Orme et al. (2007), who found that better worker/ agency support resulted in better role performance by the foster parents. Overall, greater support and communication are associated with foster parents’ success and satisfaction, which can lead to better outcomes and experiences for children in the foster care system.

**2.** Foster parents are fraught with uncertainty and lack understanding of the system but face potential challenges with the children in their care (Cole & Eamon, 2007; Leathers et al., 2019; Watson, 2017). Foster parents who are well-informed and prepared for the needs of the children in their care tend to feel more fulfilled in their role (Cole &

Eamon, 2007). As mentioned above, foster parents who have a better relationship with caseworkers and understand challenges appear to perform better (Watson, 2017). Lack of understanding and uncertainty about how to address problems has led to worse outcomes for foster children with higher needs (Leathers et al., 2019). To best serve kids in OOHC, more information must be shared with foster parents as they care for these children and are heavily involved in the care and permanency process.

**3.** Satisfaction with caseworkers is a major factor surrounding retention and perceived systematic issues (Mihalo et al., 2016; Steen & Smith, 2011; Watson, 2017). As highlighted above, satisfaction with social workers comes from perceived competence and responsiveness (Cooley, Thompson, et al., 2019; Steen & Smith, 2011). This was further explored by Mihalo et al. (2016) with findings that emotional welfare is important to staff and provides satisfaction to the foster parent. In Katherine Watson's survey of over 500 foster parents in Arizona, she found that 42% of foster parents decided not to retain licensure because of the foster care agency and the system they were a part of (2017). Finally, Morgan Cooley and her colleagues (2019), in their study of 155 licensed foster parents suggested having foster care workers connect foster parents with resources as often as possible helped to increase informal supports for foster parents. It seems that more frequent communications from the child welfare agency can be helpful in reassuring and supporting foster parents. Being a foster parent is hard work, so having a competent, caring, and informative system can make a big difference in foster parents' success.

The literature search found little research on foster parent training and shows a lack of communication support for foster carers (Kaasboll et al., 2019; Randle et al., 2018; Strickler et al., 2018). Although training is needed and required for foster parents, very little is known about ongoing supports offered to foster parents after these initial trainings. The literature search appears to argue that more attention should be paid to creating supportive and ongoing relationships between case workers and foster parents.

Similarly, many foster parents aren't aware of the issues that might arise in their particular cases and therefore aren't knowledgeable of potential needs (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022). New concerns arise as placements and circumstances come into view. But the gap in the literature about the relationship between the agency and foster parents appears to highlight how little is known about these ongoing supports. A major concern is the limited understanding of what problems might arise with foster parents with foster parents reporting that the "system" or foster care agencies are one of the top reasons for closing their homes (Gouveia et al., 2021). If there were better communication, relationships, and connection between the agency and the foster parents, would there be greater retention, satisfaction, and support for the concerns of the foster parent?

Placement disruptions continue to rise as caseworker and foster parent retention remains a struggle. These challenges have a common ground surrounding poor communication, connection, and the relationship between foster care agencies and foster parents. Foster care worker turnover impacts a variety of foster care systems, including the overall system and the clients or children in the foster home (Griffiths et al., 2019). Leading children in foster care to have to deal with more transitions in their

lives, for reasons like the foster parent closing their homes or not having a consistent worker due to high turnover rates.

### ***Overall Summary of the Literature***

As mentioned above, the quantitative literature is lacking in how greater communication might support and influence the experiences of foster parents. Even still, the qualitative literature highlights the personal stories and experiences of many foster parents who have become weary and burdened by their interactions with foster care agencies and caseworkers and social workers at these agencies. Although the specifics are lacking, the connection between foster parents' satisfaction and agency communication breadth and scope is a factor in the foster parents' overall satisfaction, highlighting the need for this study. As foster parents open their homes to provide care, they are wrought with many questions that remain unanswered and need more support than what is often considered commonplace to receive (MacGregor et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2011). Findings have shown that respect and strong communication between caseworkers and foster parents directly impacted overall satisfaction with care (Geiger et al., 2017). Furthermore, the literature clearly shows foster parents lack support and desire a greater network for interacting with caseworkers and the system overall (Griffiths et al., 2021; Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Mallette et al., 2020). Overall, foster parents do not have a full grasp of what is coming their way as they step into the role of fostering, and their concerns will change and evolve based on the circumstances at hand (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022), leading to greater needs for strong communication and support with the foster care agency.

This study better delineates which parts of the foster care agency matter the most to the foster parents. Although the literature does speak about the desire to have better communication and how this communication impacts satisfaction, there is a definite gap in considering which part of the foster care process might matter more and how these relationships and experiences individually and collectively impact retention, recruitment, and overall satisfaction. Considering these issues quantitatively allows for a broader stroke understanding of the experiences of foster parents in Kentucky. This study will provide helpful feedback and information to Kentucky's foster care system and might be a study that can be repeated and completed in other state-administered foster care agencies. Therefore, the study can easily be replicated so that other state-run foster care agencies can explore how their experiences, relationships, and communication with foster parents might lead to longer and stronger foster parents for the children placed in OOHC in their state.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This dissertation considers how two different theories work together to help understand and conceptualize the findings of this study. The first theory, the Social Role theory, will focus on the overall experience of fostering. The second theory, Equity theory, will provide a framework to explain why foster parents might choose to close their homes or prefer not to refer others to the agency. These theories are outlined in greater detail below.

### ***Social Role Theory***

Social Role theory focuses on the impact that one's personal ownership and involvement in their social role might have on their intentions and responses to various situations. First adapted to adults by Bruce Biddle in the 1970s and 1980s (Biddle, 1979, 1986), Social Role theory builds off of early psychologist Piaget, who focused on children and their ability to practice the real world through play. Piaget's work concluded that when children play, they often assimilate with their surroundings rather than waiting for others to accommodate their needs (McGhee, 2018). Biddle's work expanded on this work into adults and highlighted that many adults will act and react based on their chosen and oftentimes assigned roles in society (Biddle, 1986). Biddle's book, *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors* (1979), provided a new way of orienting one's thoughts and reactions to behavior. Role theory highlights that as an individual progresses through various stages of life, the way they interact with their surroundings will change to suit the needs of the role they fit within.

Horrocks (1972) defines roles as social participation stating that behaviors characteristic to specific roles begin to be anticipated and expected. Humans are social beings and require interaction to grow and develop. This interaction often comes with the expectation of roles that are either involuntary or voluntary. For example, being a son or daughter would be an involuntary role, whereas a father or mother would typically be on the voluntary side. The son or daughter doesn't choose to be born to a particular family or adoptive family. Still, the father or mother would typically choose to participate in becoming a parent, whether through sexual intercourse, adoption, foster care, or another circumstance. Each of these roles would be significant, but the role of the parent would



relate to a greater sense of belonging and ownership. The involuntary role, however, would have to be addressed gradually as an individual develops skills to fit into that role rather than the voluntary, who typically would have completed some planning ahead of the new role. Highlighting how foster parents must work to step into the voluntary role of both surrogate parent and advocate for the children in their care, their passions, frustrations, and lack of information might wain on them as they move forward in their role, moving them to become less enamored with fostering and wanting to close their homes.

Further exploring the differentiating fostering roles as voluntary and involuntary, foster parents sign up to become foster parents with good motives and intent. The reasons for becoming a foster parent vary from wanting to provide a good home for a child to wanting to step in so that a child will not be placed in a bad circumstance or institution, like a group home (De Maeyer et al., 2014). While the intent is typically rooted in fostering for child-centric reasons, foster parents are often met with complex, time-consuming, and emotionally taxing experiences. For example, while a foster parent might agree to take a placement for an infant, they might not be aware that several weeks later, some special support needs of the child begin to pile up. These needs could include going to five different doctor appointments over four days or may not realize the stress of taking a child to a visit with the biological parent and potentially getting verbally harassed by the parent. These other parts of the foster parenting experience that are not typically part of the motivating factor and might be viewed as involuntary roles change the experience for foster parents. The involuntary role highlights the significant differences between a typical parenting experience and that of the foster caregiver.

Although the foster parent goes into the process knowing that challenges might arise, they are not aware of or prepared for many things until the events occur. These experiences described above might leave the foster parents looking for more support and information during the foster parenting process compared to their understanding and assumption leading up to the approval of becoming a foster parent (Engelhardt & Royse, 2022).

### **Role Theory and Foster Care.**

Foster caregivers have the unique experience of stepping into the role of parents or caregivers for the children living in their care. Denlinger and Dorius (2018) highlighted four social role theory parts that clearly connect with foster parenting; 1. The number of roles currently committed, 2. Role intensity highlights how stressful and intense the role might be, 3. Time consumption, and 4. The degree of structure that is required to complete the role. To better understand how foster parents play out their social responsibility, the role of being a foster parent and caregiver for someone else's child can be viewed through these four parts. The four parts listed above can deeply impact the unique foster parent's role.

First, foster parents take on many different roles as foster caregivers, from providing parenting to children in OOHC to potentially caring for their own biological children or even older adults in the family, or maybe the foster parent has a full-time job and has to provide extra time with the child and might miss out on their own needs as they move forward in providing care. Next, foster parents have a large amount of stress to handle, and as highlighted by Denlinger and Dorius, "include difficult foster child

behaviors, stressful interactions with biological families, and the emotional burden of caring for needy children such as those with disabilities” (2018, p. 331).

Third, fostering can also be time-consuming. Foster families are required to take the child to appointments, do biological family visits, attend court hearings, attend foster parent training, and complete monthly visits with case workers, amongst other things. Furthermore, as Cherry and colleagues highlighted in their creation and validation of the Available Time Scale, being a foster parent can be a very onerous service and volunteering role (2009). Many foster parents are provided the option to work full-time and be a foster caregiver, but the high burden of care might make this less realistic given the large amount of stress and strain that comes with being a foster caregiver (Murray et al., 2011).

Finally, foster parents are provided with lots of requirements regarding care practices, what is and isn’t allowed under reasonable and prudent parenting practices, and training requirements. This lack of freedom and structure creates a unique experience that is specific to foster caregivers. As highlighted by Schofield et al. (2013), foster caregivers who are able to deal with the conflict that surfaces from the two roles of parent and carer were more able to deal with the conflicting issues that might arise for a foster parent. Each of the previously mentioned parts of the role of fostering should be considered as this study looks at foster parent recruitment and retention. Therefore, this research plans to add to the literature on how role theory might help to explain a foster parent’s decision to refer others or discontinue as a foster parent in the future. In conjunction with the second theory mentioned below, Role theory might explain how foster parents are

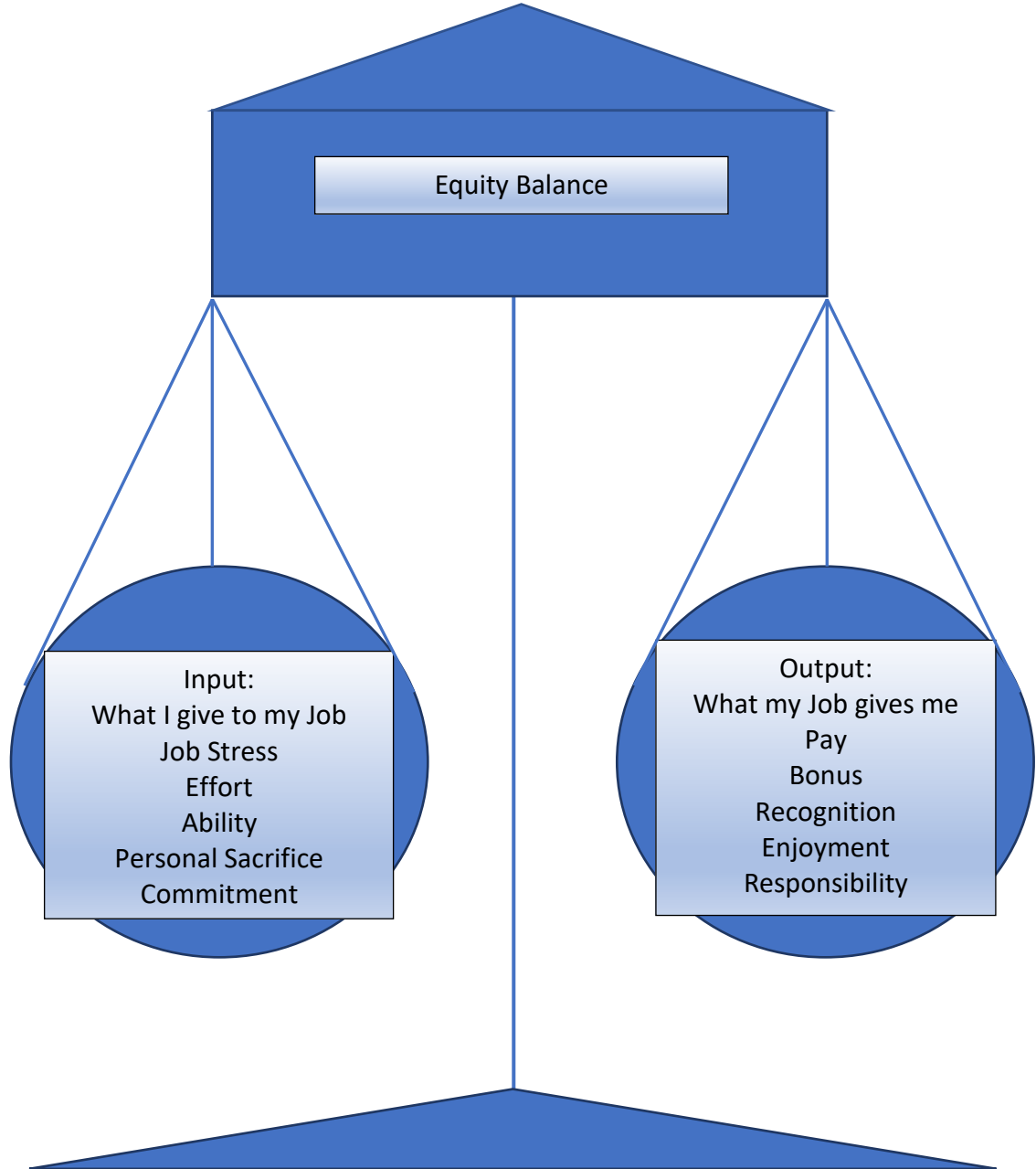
consistently juggling their roles as caregivers, support persons, teachers, transporter, disciplinarian, and much more to the children in their care. In a voluntary role, transparency is key, and lacking adequate support and communication might cause someone to question their reasons for participating and even make them decide to leave their volunteer role (Allen & Mueller, 2013).

Much of the discussion and connection with social role theory comes down to foster parents' expectations when they bring a child into their home. The intent of foster care is to provide a temporary safe and caring home for the child while biological parents are given space to work on their situations to return the child back into their homes. Many foster parents sign up to be foster parents for religious reasons or due to their desire to provide a safe and loving home for the children placed in their care (Davi et al., 2021). While this is the intention, many foster parents expect the foster caring process to be the same if not similar to that of a biological parent. Foster carers step into the role of a foster parent for children in OOHC but lack the knowledge or understanding of all that is involved in fostering. The foster parent might have unrealistic expectations of what is involved with being a foster parent when considering the various issues that might impact taking care of the children in their care. Many situations with child behavior, visits with biological parents, court hearings, or home visits with caseworkers can be much more disruptive to the lives of foster carers than first expected (Lanigan & Burleson, 2017 & Nesmith, et al., 2017). With this perspective, the reader should understand how the experience of being a foster parent differs from biological parents based on the needs of the child and the progression of the case and that each child brings unique needs which might impact the overall experience of the foster parent.

### ***Equity Theory***

The second theory that will be utilized is Equity theory. Equity theory will be explored to identify how equal opportunity and greater inclusion allow for greater satisfaction and outcomes for foster parents. First coined by Social Psychologist Dr. John Stacey Adams (Adams, 1965), Equity theory explores the experience of inequity, the ensuing dissatisfaction with equity, and the eventual response to this dissatisfaction with equity (Pritchard, 1969). The literature will be reflected on to guide the research questions and further connect equity theory to foster parent satisfaction's impact on recruitment and retention (Rodger et al., 2006). While Social Role theory provides a framework for conceptualizing how foster caregivers experience their particular circumstances of being foster parents, equity theory takes into account whether the input of experiences balances with the output factors. See Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1. Typical Equity Theory Framework**



*Note.* Adapted from *Toward a Theory of inequity* (Adams, 1963)

### **Equity Theory Terms.**

John S. Adams's Equity theory falls in the category of one of the many Job motivation theories (Adams, 1963, 1965). Adams theorized that in order for an employee

to remain happy and satisfied with their work, their inputs must be equal to or less than the outputs (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012). Equity theory focuses on a person's balance and the ratio between their inputs and outputs or outcomes. If the inputs outweigh the outputs, there typically is less burnout and greater satisfaction leading to retention and greater outcomes. Equity theory has been considered strongly in burnout literature, particularly with medical professionals and relationships between providers and patients (McKinley et al., 2017; Van Dierendonck et al., 1994). Similarly, the literature surrounding direct care staff's desire to discontinue working with children, older adults, or people with intellectual disabilities in residential settings (Rose et al., 2010). Although this isn't directly related to foster parenting, the above-mentioned direct care appears to be rather similar to foster care. Equity theory also highlights the importance of Reciprocity in caring professions, meaning foster parents will be looking for good to come out of what they might be providing. If they aren't satisfied with what is taking place or their involvement in the foster caring process, they likely won't continue or desire to refer others.

### **Inputs**

Inputs are defined as personal efforts at work or, in our case, efforts in fostering children. These efforts might include things like personal sacrifice, the time needed, effort, prior training, and years of experience. In the case of foster parents, many have years of experience, multiple children in their home, higher needs children in their care, or even potentially higher levels of education that provide them with greater insight or financial support. Another input to consider would be the weight of the load on the individual. For instance, if there is more than one approved foster parent in the home, it

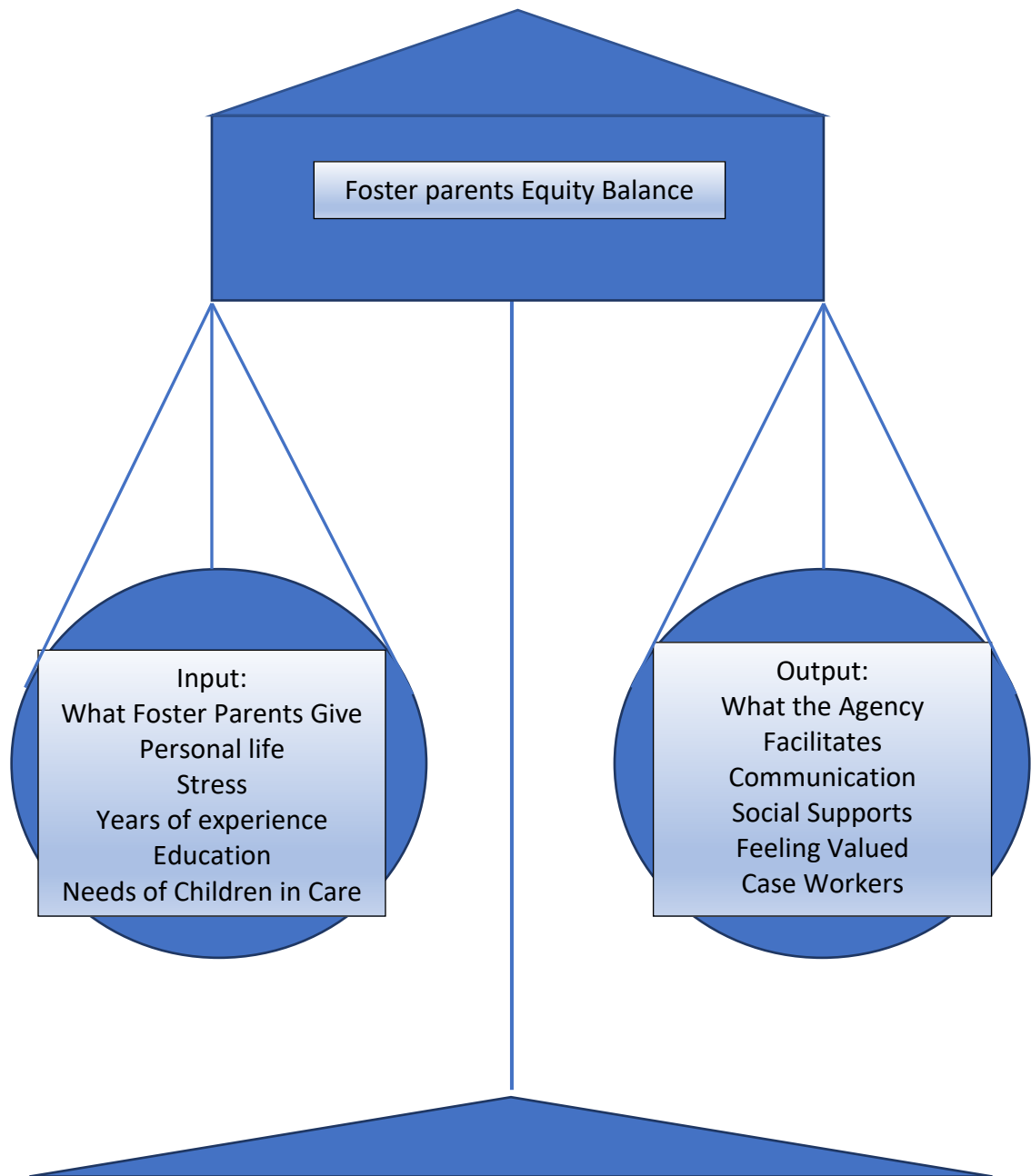
might lead to more input support for success. The 2021 Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey (FPSS) will consider how inputs from interactions with case workers, the pre-approval process, and ongoing training might encourage their experience thus far.

### **Outputs/Outcomes**

Outcomes in Equity theory might be considered the more protective factors. They are the things that might be accomplished or the tangible impacts of the person (Adams, 1963, 1965). Outcomes can also come in the form of salary or overall satisfaction with an organization (Downes & Choi, 2014). Often, social or informal support can be seen as protective factors and improve individual outcomes. As mentioned above, if the relationship and satisfaction is high for foster carers in the areas of communication, relationships with case workers, the pre-approval process, and ongoing training then outputs might provide good reciprocity or equity, leading to longer foster parent retention and desire to refer others. See Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2. Foster parents Social Role Equity Framework**



### ***Theory Summarized***

Through the lens of Biddle's Social Role theory (Bertrand, 1972; Biddle, 1979; Denlinger & Dorius, 2018), foster parents' roles, their role conflicts, and ambiguity will be considered as their interactions with agency staff are examined. As foster parents step into these various roles, their motivation and equity will be framed through the inputs of personal experience, years of service, education, level of care needed for children in their care, and several other variables in relation to the outputs and outcomes that they experience from the support of their agency. Each of these theories will be integrated into the analysis to provide a conceptual model that informs foster parents' decision to discontinue providing care and whether or not they will refer others to the program. The role of fostering provides a variety of different stresses, frustrations, joys, and ambiguity, and the equity that is both given and lacking will be examined to understand better why foster parents might choose to recruit others or even close their homes.

### **Chapter Two Conclusion**

The literature is sparse on quantitative studies that consider the impact of satisfaction with various facets of the foster caring process and more specifically, communication's impact on foster parents' retention and recruitment efforts. As mentioned above, the individual's decision to voluntarily step into the role of foster parent can be a rewarding experience but also brings various stressors and questions. During foster parenting, many questions arise along with the need for support, availability, and validation from their agency. These supports might come through

increased training, direct interactions, relationships with case workers, and overall communication with the agency.

This study sought to identify how the foster parents' input and outputs might impact their desire to remain as foster parents or refer others to their agency. The variables were considered through the lens of the equity theory to understand better if the independent variables of satisfaction with communication might be outcomes that truly impact the balance of the foster parents' role and whether it helps maintain equilibrium and keep parents in care or push them to move away from fostering in the future.

This study uniquely considered five separate parts of the foster care agency; the R+C worker, the child's worker, the agency overall, the preapproval experience, and the ongoing training. It also will be the first study to consider how communication with the various parts of the agency, discussed above, impacts foster parents' retention and recruitment. There is limited literature on how foster parents feel or respond to caseworkers and how their perceptions of involvement or even satisfaction with communication's impact on overall satisfaction with the foster caring experience. The research questions sought to determine whether a greater communication satisfaction score will lead to better retention, recruitment, and overall satisfaction for foster parents. It was expected that many foster parents will be dissatisfied with the communication from the agency resulting in poor retention and recruitment scores. The findings from this study will be reported back to the state of Kentucky for further review and greater understanding of potential problem areas. This will provide the Cabinet for Child and Family Services with a tangible and data-driven report for the next steps. Furthermore, the findings from the study should further expand the literature on how satisfaction with

various facets of the foster caring process collectively impacts retention and recruitment efforts. Also, The research considered if the inputs or supports offered and utilized to and by the foster parents might be considered protective factors for foster parent retention. Finally, this study left room for continued research in communication procedures for foster parents and how these impact the expectations and behavior of both foster parents and child welfare agencies in the future.

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### **Chapter Three - Methodology**

Foster Parent satisfaction remains a major point of interest for child welfare agencies across the country (Cooley, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2021; McKeough et al., 2017; Randle et al., 2018). While satisfaction appears to have clear connections with intent to continue fostering and even recruitment of other foster parents (Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021; Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021), little is known about how the multi-factored system of foster care impacts overall satisfaction, recruitment, and retention. Historically, the literature and researchers have identified satisfaction with the foster care system as an important variable associated with foster parent retention (Geiger et al., 2013; Geiger et al., 2017). The current survey sought to identify how five different parts of the foster care system might impact overall satisfaction of foster parents. The key variables of this study, discussed in more detail below, were considered to better understand if any particular parts of the foster parenting process might be more impactful on foster parent satisfaction, recruitment, or retention.

Additionally, while some literature has shared qualitative findings surrounding foster parents' relationship and communication with caseworkers as a critical factor in retention, few researchers have looked at it through a quantitative lens. Therefore, the current survey tool explored quantitatively how communication impacts foster parent retention and recruitment efforts.

This study had three aims. First, the study looked at the satisfaction of foster parents in Kentucky with different parts of the foster care system including; The R&C worker, the Ongoing worker, Ongoing Trainings, the Pre-approval Process, and

Communication with the various sections of the agency. Second, the study looked at how resources and support might be moderators of these satisfaction scores. Lastly, since the literature is so scarce relative to communication's impact on satisfaction, retention, and recruitment, the study considered how communication impacts foster parent retention, desire to recruit others, and overall satisfaction.

This survey explored how satisfaction variables, communication, and demographic variables, such as years fostered, gender, the age range of children cared for, and if the foster parents had adopted a child from foster care, etc., to identify if these variables predicted retention, overall satisfaction, and one's desire to refer others to become a foster parent. The survey tool was analyzed using SPSS statistical analysis software (IBM Corp., 2016). Variables were examined first as overall univariate data, then considered for bivariate analysis, and eventually through multiple variable analysis.

## **Survey Design**

The survey tool was designed and crafted by the KCHFS. Study was a secondary data analysis of a survey deployed by DCBS. This survey design utilized a simple non-probability convenience sampling method. The survey was sent to DCBS active and open foster homes as of January 1, 2022. These foster homes included mostly public foster parents in the State of Kentucky, certified by the Department of Community-Based Services (DCBS). The survey was sent out via a listserv email list by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (KCHFS) and, more specifically, by the Diligent Recruitment and Retention Committee. The survey, entitled the 2021 Foster Parents

Satisfaction Survey (FPSS), was sent out initially on January 19, 2022, with the advertisement. *“Good afternoon DCBS foster parent! The 2021 Foster Parents Satisfaction Survey is available and ready for your input. Your feedback is very important to us. We were able to create many new trainings and begin work on changes within DCBS based on your feedback from last year. We value your honesty and suggestions, thus, the Survey can be anonymous.”* (Initial Survey solicitation email: Appendix A). A second solicitation took place on February 3, 2022, reminding foster parents to participate, and the third and final solicitation was sent out on February 14, 2022. The FPSS was open and available for submission from January 19, 2022, to February 16, 2022.

The 2021 FPSS was sent out to all foster parents active with DCBS; therefore, in a two-parent household, each foster parents would have received the FPSS via email. The survey participants were not required to have an active placement at the time of the survey, nor did they need to have a previous placement; therefore, anyone who might have been certified at the time of the study but had not yet had a child placed in their home might have responded to the survey. Participants were asked only to complete the survey once, and neither incentives or payments were offered to participants of the study. Due to this being a quality improvement endeavor for DCBS, no initial IRB review was completed prior to the deployment of the survey.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study included active DCBS foster parents in Kentucky and did not include those affiliated with private agencies. As mentioned above, the FPSS

was sent out via KCHFS and the Diligent recruitment office of the DCBS. The data analysis excluded anyone certified and open with a private foster care and/or adoption agency. As of October 2022, 34% of all children in foster care in Kentucky were placed in a DCBS-certified home. Similarly, 36% of children in Out of Home Care are placed with Private Child Placing (PCP) agencies (Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, 2022). In January 2022, there were 4,626 active DCBS foster parents in Kentucky. The FPSS was sent out to 3,758 foster parents in Kentucky, representing around 81.23% of open foster homes in the state at the time of the Survey (R. Hardin, personal communication, November 2, 2022). The sample included any Kentucky DCBS-certified foster parent from January to February 2022 who completed the foster parent survey tool. Around 825 participants submitted the survey, with around 783 respondents fully completing the survey, resulting in an estimated response rate of around 22% of the sample. The overall response rate of the sample represents around 17% of the entire population of DCBS-certified foster parents in Kentucky.

### **Survey Instrument**

The 2021 Foster Parents Satisfaction Survey was sent out as an internet survey. This data collection method was selected as the best way to quickly and efficiently receive feedback from foster parents throughout Kentucky (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Nayak & Narayan, 2019). The online survey tool allows for collaboration between researchers and team members (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). With the 2021 FPSS, the KCHFS and DCBS worked with Eastern Kentucky University to design and disseminate the Survey. Eastern Kentucky University took the curated and selected questions created



by the Diligent Recruitment team at DCBS and organized them into an online survey tool. Qualtrics software was used for the creation of the FPSS (Qualtrics Online Survey Software, 2014). The 2021 FPSS followed the same format for the design and dissemination of the survey as the 2020 FPSS.

The survey tool consisted of a consent process in the first question, which asked that foster parents agree to the terms of the survey before moving forward with the FPSS. The FPSS utilized adaptive questions and skip logic to ask for greater detail of certain respondents based on their previous responses. No item response randomization was used. The survey was accessible for completion via computer, laptop, tablet, or cell phone. Internal IRB approval from the Cabinet was sought, and IRB approval from the Cabinet was received in October 2022. Exempt IRB approval from the University of Kentucky was received on February 3, 2023, prior to data analysis.

As the FPSS was part of an internal evaluation sent out by DCBS, no official reliability and validity testing were completed before the submission of the Survey. As mentioned above, the survey was completed without the researcher's full involvement and the data was not tailored to meet the exact needs of this study.

The survey included eight parts. First, The survey focused on the foster parent's satisfaction with the following topics: 1. The Department for Community Based Services and/or your agency, 2. Recruitment and Certification (R+C) agency caseworkers, 3. The child's worker (ongoing or investigations), 4. Pre-Approval process if approved in the last 12 months, 5. Ongoing training within the past year, and 6. Overall Satisfaction. The seventh part of the survey included questions on supports and resources offered and

utilized by the foster parent. Finally, basic demographic information was collected of the respondents.

At any time during the survey, respondents were able to discontinue taking the FPSS. Participants could also choose to omit an answer to any question they would like, except for the consent question, to encourage a better response rate. The FPSS consisted of 80 questions, with several questions having sub-questions, and five open-ended questions allowing the foster parent to further expand on the six main categories, which include; Satisfaction with Department for Community Based Services and/or your agency, Recruitment and Certification (R&C) Caseworker, the child's workers (ongoing and investigations), Pre-Approval Process, ongoing training experience within the past year (January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021), Supports offered and utilized, and finally a question about overall satisfaction. See Appendix B for the entirety of the FPSS. The survey did not use previously validated measures for the above-mentioned scales.

For this study, the four main categories of interest include the following: Overall and component satisfaction with foster caring, the foster parent's desire to discontinue fostering in the next 12 months, if the foster parent is likely to recommend their foster care agency to others, and the foster parent's communication satisfaction with the foster care agency.

### **Study Variables**

For this study, variables have been separated into outcome and predictor variables. This data analysis considered eight outcome variables at the bivariate level. Some were used as predictor variables in regression models. The outcome variables were: Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring, Satisfaction with the R& C Worker, Satisfaction

with the Ongoing Worker, Satisfaction with the Pre-approval Experience, Satisfaction with the Training Experience, Satisfaction with Communication, a retention variable, and finally, a recruitment variable. The study included multiple predictor variables. The major demographics which were used as predictor variables include the following: the age of children in the foster parent's care, if the foster parent has adopted through foster care, the foster parent's age, the participant's level of education, how long a foster parent has been open, having more than one approved foster parent in the household, and whether the foster parent is approved to care for a relative/fictive kin or a specific child, amongst other things. The study planned to utilize the Use of Resources Variable as a moderator for many of the models. Participants who answered that they were associated with an agency other than DCBS for foster care were omitted from the analysis.

### ***Outcome Variables***

**Overall satisfaction with Foster Caring.** For this paper, overall satisfaction with foster caring pertains to the foster care agency as a whole. This includes questions from two separate matrix tables in the FPSS that can create a scale for overall satisfaction. The first matrix table asked the respondents to answer specific questions about their experience of foster parenting with DCBS, "the following statements about your [Foster parent] experiences with the Department for Community-Based Services."

In the first matrix table, Participants were asked 16 Likert-style questions about their satisfaction a wide range of possible concerns or issues with their foster care agency (Q1.1 through Q1.16). The 16 questions in the matrix table are; "I am familiar with the role that DCBS plays in the foster parenting program"; "DCBS and my foster care agency set clear guidelines about my role and responsibilities as a foster parents", "I was

provided with the information available, regarding the foster child's needs, prior to placement"; "DCBS and/or my agency helps me access services needed for the child, including health and mental health resources"; "DCBS and my agency is sensitive to the cultural environment within my family"; "I receive adequate notification of important meetings, court hearings, staffings, and visitation"; "I am aware of my foster child's permanency plan"; "I am involved as part of the child's team in service planning for the foster children in my care"; "The caseworker(s) encourages interaction between the foster child and their biological family"; "The reimbursement payment process is prompt"; "The reimbursement payment process is uncomplicated"; "The reimbursement payment rate is sufficient for caring for the child's needs"; "The DCBS investigations procedure in cases of foster parent abuse allegations is satisfactory"; "DCBS and/or my agency **publicly** recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parent"; "DCBS and/or my agency **privately** recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parent"; and "I feel valued as a foster parents by DCBS and/or my agency". Each question in the scale asks respondents how much they agree with each statement and includes the following response choices; (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) Neutral N/A, (4) disagree, (5) strongly agree. These 16 questions from the matrix table were examined both individually and calculated in conjunction with a computed Overall Satisfaction scale.

The second matrix table contained items focusing on satisfaction with various components of the foster parenting system such as training, certification, support, etc. , Participants were asked six Likert-type questions about their experience and satisfaction with their foster care agency. The six questions in the matrix table are; "I am satisfied with the Preservice Training and preparation"; "I am satisfied with the ongoing

trainings”; “I am satisfied with my R&C staff”; “I am satisfied with the investigative staff”; “I am satisfied with my ongoing workers/staff”; and “I am satisfied with the supports offered”. Similar to the scale above, each question in the scale asks respondents how much they agree with each statement and includes the following response choices; (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) Neutral N/A, (4) disagree, (5) strongly agree. These six questions from the matrix table were examined individually, and then the items from the two matrix tables were examined for Factor Analysis to see if a unitary satisfaction variable or a factor with multiple subscales emerge with strong reliability to form a composite measure for Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. The items in the two matrices described above do not duplicate the items or computed variables described below:

**Satisfaction with Recruitment and Certification (R&C) Workers.** Recruitment and Certification (R&C) workers are oftentimes called the foster parent’s workers. These are the individuals who provide support and updates for the continuance of certification for the foster parent. In a matrix table, participants are asked seven Likert-style questions about their relationship and communication with their R&C. The seven questions that can be combined for a satisfaction measure of the R & C worker include: “My worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions”; “My worker is knowledgeable and supportive”; “I feel supported by my worker during times of crisis”; “My worker is professional and courteous”; “I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parents by my worker”; “I am satisfied with the communication with my worker”; and “I am satisfied with the communication and support from leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA)”.

Each question in the scale asks respondents how much they agree with each statement and includes the following response choices; (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) Neutral N/A, (4) disagree, (5) strongly agree. The seven questions in the matrix table were analyzed individually and calculated as a scale to search for trends in overall satisfaction with the R+C worker.

**Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker.** For this paper, the investigations workers and ongoing workers were collectively asked about in the survey. The investigations workers are individuals who received the notification that a child maltreatment claim or report has been filed and therefore are oftentimes the first responder to investigate the situation. Also, for this paper, ongoing workers are the child welfare workers who are assigned to the child's case and provide monthly visits with the child, oftentimes supervise biological parent visits with children in OOHC, provide support to the foster caregiver for the needs of the child, and any other concern that might impact the child. Investigative and ongoing workers are oftentimes lumped together in the Kentucky DCBS office as many counties are rural and have limited staff to provide separate employment to each position. Also, of note, in circumstances where there is limited staff available, considering large staff turnover in child welfare work, occasionally ongoing workers will be asked to be on the investigations team and vice versa.

Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker variable was computed from six Likert-style questions about the foster parent's relationship and communication with their child's worker. The questions are; "My child's worker is timely in responding to my

emails, calls, and questions”; “My child’s worker is knowledgeable and supportive”; “My child’s worker is professional and courteous”; “I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parents by my child’s worker”; “I am satisfied with the communication with my child’s worker”; and “I am satisfied with the communication and support from ongoing and investigations leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA)”.

The six questions in the matrix table were analyzed individually and examined as a scale to represent satisfaction with the foster parent’s Ongoing Worker.

**Satisfaction with Pre-approval Experience.** For this paper, the pre-approval process includes questions addressing the foster parent’s experiences before being approved to be foster carers. The 10 questions for this satisfaction variable were only asked of those who were newly approved to foster in 2021. Participants were asked Likert-style questions about their pre-approval experience. They were: “When I first contacted my agency about becoming a foster parent, my questions and phone calls were answered in a timely, effective manner”; “During the approval process, I was informed of the child placement needs in my community.”; “There were opportunities for preservice training in or close to my home community.”; “The preservice classes were effective in preparing me to become a foster/adoptive parent.”; “The preservice classes prepared me to work in partnership with birth families and to support reunification.”; “The home study process supported my preparation to be a foster/adoptive parent.”; “The approval paperwork was manageable and easy to follow.”; “The trainer/worker was able to answer my questions and assist me with the process as needed.”; “I felt prepared to become a

foster parent prior to my first placement.”; and “I fully understood the time commitment prior to taking a placement (additional appointments, family visits, worker visits, etc.)”.

The 10 questions were analyzed individually and examined as a scale to represent satisfaction with the pre-approval process. Although this value was only calculated for newly approved foster parents, it provided a context for the impact of the pre-approval process on other aspects of the foster parenting experience.

**Satisfaction with Training Experience.** This variable refers to questions that address the participant's “ongoing training experience within the past year (January 1, 2012-December 31, 2021)”. This satisfaction variable includes the following eight Likert-type questions; “I am adequately notified of ongoing training opportunities”; “I am satisfied with the availability (time, day, location) of ongoing trainings”; “I am satisfied with the various methods through which ongoing trainings are offered (in-person, online, virtual)”; “The content of the mandatory trainings (Trauma, Sexual Abuse, Behavior Management) helped enhance my skills as a foster parent”; “The content of the additional ongoing trainings helped enhance my skills as a foster parent”; “I am satisfied with the topics of additional ongoing trainings provided by my agency (outside of the mandatory trainings)”; “I am satisfied with the quality of the ongoing training provided by my agency”; and “Trainers were knowledgeable and able to answer my questions”.

The eight questions from this matrix table utilized the same response options as noted in the previous matrices addressed above. The eight questions were examined individually and as a scale representing overall satisfaction with the training experience.



**Satisfaction with Communication.** The final scale involves satisfaction with communication received from the agency and its workers. For this paper, communication questions include any explicit questions that addressed interactions or notifications from the agency to the foster parent. This variable includes nine Likert-type items. These nine questions are; “My worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions (R&C)”;

“I am satisfied with the communication with my worker (R&C)”;

“I am satisfied with the communication and support from (R&C) leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA)”;

“My child’s worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions (Ongoing)”;

“I am satisfied with the communication with my child’s [ongoing] worker”;

“I am satisfied with the communication and support from ongoing and investigations leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA)”;

“When I first contacted my agency about becoming a foster parent, my questions and phone calls were answered in a timely, effective manner (Pre-approval);

“I was provided with the information available, regarding the foster child’s needs, prior to placement.”; and

“I receive adequate notification of important meetings, court hearings, staffings, and visitation”.

Although the nine questions come from various matrix tables, each question in the scale asks respondents how much they agree with each statement and includes the following response choices; (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) Neutral N/A, (4) disagree, (5) strongly agree. The nine questions in the Satisfaction with Communication variable were examined individually and as a composite variable (scale) to serve as a predictor in regression models.

**Considering Discontinuing Fostering in the next 12 months.** This outcome variable was identified and operationalized as a **Retention** outcome variable. In the foster parent literature, foster parent retention and the length of years served are synonymous factors (Eaton & Caltabiano, 2009; Gouveia et al., 2021; Hanlon, Simone, et al., 2021). This dichotomous variable allows for a clear understanding of the intentions of a foster parent who participated in the Survey. This variable does not to completely inform us of reasons why individuals might close their homes, as the survey only was sent to open homes. It did, however, help to know whether Kentucky foster parents are similar to or different from those in other studies showing around 50% of foster parents closing their homes in the first year of being opened (Gibbs, 2005; Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007). Understanding what predictor variables have the most impact on retention efforts will help the Kentucky DCBS office to address areas they can improve.

**Participants Recommending their Foster/Adoptive Program to Others.** This outcome variable was conceptualized and identified as our **Recruitment** variable in the analysis. This dichotomous variable allowed for a simple analysis of the foster parent's thinking about recommending foster parenting to others. Foster parent recruitment is of utmost importance for child welfare and to support the revolving door of children being placed in OOHC (Ahn et al., 2017; Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021). Foster parent recruitment remains a significant issue for every state child welfare system as foster parents cycle in and out of having their homes open. The literature has often highlighted that one of the best ways to recruit strong foster parents is through peer-to-peer interactions (Baer & Diehl, 2019; Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021; Howell-Moroney, 2013).

### ***Predictor Variables***

Demographic predictor variables were used in conjunction with the scales at the bottom to understand better how general demographics and those specific to the foster parenting experience might impact outcomes for recruitment and retention of a foster parent.

**The Age Range of Children Cared For.** The age range of children who have been in a foster parent's home was captured with a categorical variable that describes the various age groups of children who have been in the foster parent's home. Participants were provided with the option to "Select all that apply" and can choose one or multiple options or omit their answer if they haven't cared for anyone prior to the FPSS. The age range of children cared for is operationalized by the following response options for children aged; "0-2 years", "3-5 years", "6-11 years"; "12-18 years"; and "19+ years". Many foster parents care for various age groups throughout their time, so selecting all that apply allowed for better sorting of these respondents.

**Adoption through Foster Care.** This dichotomous variable allowed participants to describe whether or not they have adopted a child from foster care before completing the FPSS. This variable was used as a predictor for all the above-mentioned outcomes variables and as a demographic sorting variable. Participants were asked to answer yes or no to the question, "Have you adopted any children from foster care?" This variable allowed for a better understanding of the demographics and family makeup of the participants of the FPSS.

**New foster parents in 2021.** This dichotomous variable was used to identify if a new foster parent's preferences might differ from those of a more seasoned foster parent. Participants were asked to answer yes or no to the question, “Were you approved within the past year, January 1, 2011-December 31, 2021?” Approximately 1,176 new foster parents were trained from January 2021-December 2021, per (DCBS Report). With the literature highlighting that many foster parents close their homes in the first 12 months (Gibbs & Wildfire, 2007), this population’s experiences was particularly important to consider.

**Foster Parent’s Age.** This categorical variable allows for analysis of the age groups of participants of the FPSS. Participants were asked to select which age group they are in, these groups include; “21-29 years”; “30-39 years”; “40-49 years”; “50-59 years” and; “60+ years”. The minimum age to become licensed foster parent in Kentucky is 21.

**Level of education.** The participants were asked to identify the highest level of education they have completed. The foster parent’s level of education is defined as a categorical variable from one of the following options; “Some High School”; “High School or Equivalent”; “Some College”; “College or University Degree”; “Some Graduate School”; or “Graduate School Degree”.

**Specific Child Placed.** The participants were asked to identify if they were approved to care for a particular child or had a fictive/kin placement. This variable sought to identify if foster parents are approved to care for the general population of foster care or if they became licensed for a particular child or relative.

**Gender.** The 2021 FPSS asked respondents, “What is your Gender?” Participants were offered the options; Male, Female, Other, or Prefer not to answer. This was used to sort if there are differences based on the reported gender of the respondents.

Three more demographic predictors were analyzed. First, having More Than One Approved Foster Parent in the Home is a dichotomous variable that provides a better understanding of how many individuals provide care and support to the children in care. Overall, There were 1,892 DCBS foster homes with 2 parents in the household at the time of the Survey (R. Hardin, personal communication, November 2, 2022). Secondly, Years Approved as a Foster Parent is an open-ended question that was utilized to consider retention rates for participants of the FPSS. Finally, having More Than One Foster Child in the Home at once is a dichotomous variable that allows the survey to be sorted into FPSS participants who have only had one child at a time or those who have had multiple placements either from the same biological family or multiple different families at the same time in their care.

**Use of Resources.** The participants were asked seven questions regarding resources and support offered by the cabinet, other foster care agencies, and allies, e.g., churches or counseling centers. The Use of Resources variable was computed by totaling the number of resources and supports utilized by the participants of the survey. The first

six questions used to compute this variable asked participants to answer yes or no to the following resource questions; “Have you participated in any ASK (Adoption Support Kentucky) support groups?”, “Have you participated in any support groups other than ASK?”, “Did you participate in the Mentor Program upon initial approval as a foster/adoptive parent?”, “Have you ever used the Foster Parent Training Program for support or resources?”, “Have you participated in any Foster Parent Network trainings, supports, or events?”, and “Are you part of a local, state, or national Foster Parent Association?”. Participants were then asked to select if they had utilized any of the 10 listed supports. These supports included; tutoring, daycare, camps/summer programs, counseling, respite, intensive in-home services, material support (e.g., beds, clothing, bicycles), foster parent’s night out, other foster parents, and church support. The number of yes answers to the first six questions were combined with the number of supports utilized for a composite score of the Use of Resources variable. For example, if a participant scores a 6, this means they utilized at least six different resources while fostering. This Use of Resources score was considered to be used as a moderating variable for many of the dependent variables and outcome variables which was considered in the data analysis of this research.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis plan for the study included the following: Data collected via the Qualtrics software (Qualtrics Online Survey Software, 2014) was sent to the author for review. Deidentified data was transferred into SPSS software (IBM Corp., 2016) before

being released to the researcher to de-identify the survey results. The data analysis plan was completed in three stages.

First, univariate analysis of all the items was examined for completion and missing data. Descriptive statistics were calculated, including frequencies and percentages, to better understand the overall responses to the survey. Some of the items may be useful to DCBS at the univariate level. This analysis allowed for a more detailed snapshot of Kentucky's foster parents' experiences.

Next bivariate analysis was conducted. This analysis looked at correlations between potential predictor variables and outcome variables. Chi-Square analysis and t-tests were computed to test various relationships. For instance, it was interesting to use a t-test to examine those who would and would not recommend their foster parenting agency using the Satisfaction with Communication dependent variable. These bivariate analyses were completed to understand better what variables might have been used in the final multivariate models.

G\* Power score requires a sample of 176 for the t-test, which was readily achieved in this analysis. The reported sample size of more than 600 participants provided an ample sample size for Chi-Square analysis according to G\* power.

Finally, multivariate analysis was conducted using multiple predictor variables. Binary logistic regression was computed for the two dichotomous outcome variables to determine how predictor variables contributed to the retention and recruitment outcome variables. The G\* power analysis revealed a minimum sample size of 399 required to run binary logistic regression. This study's sample size exceeded the minimum required

sample size for this type of test. Multiple linear regression was completed to identify how various demographic and predictor variables might impact the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. Using ten predictors for this analysis required a G\* power sample size of 172, which was easily be met with the obtained sample size.

The research study sought to explore the following research questions:

1. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring while employing Use of Resources as a moderator?
2. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parent's plan to discontinue fostering in the next 12 months?
3. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parents' thoughts about recommending the program?
4. Is the Satisfaction with Communication variable a better predictor of the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring than the component satisfaction variables and sociodemographic variables while employing Use of Resources as a moderator?

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## **Chapter Four - Results**

This chapter will provide a thorough description and summary of the findings from the data analysis used to answer the research questions in this dissertation. This chapter will provide the results of explored demographics, predictor variables, and three main outcome variables. The analysis will be provided in a step-by-step fashion, starting with univariate analysis to better understand the variables in the study, then it will move into bivariate analysis focusing on correlations and statistically significant indicators of demographic and predictor variable association with the outcome variables. Finally, three multivariate analyses will be explored and offered to identify demographic and predictor variables impacting the outcome variables of Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring, the Retention variable, and the Recruitment variable. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring?
2. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parent's plan to discontinue fostering in the next 12 months?
3. How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training

Experience), Communication and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parents' thoughts about recommending the program?

4. Is the Satisfaction with Communication variable a better predictor of the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring than the component satisfaction variables and sociodemographic variables?

### **Univariate Statistics**

The study sample was opened and solicited respondents from January 19, 2022 to February 16 of 2022. During this time, 3,758 foster parents in Kentucky received the email solicitation for the survey. The survey was opened by 867 participants with around 783 fully completing the survey. Incomplete or missing data was addressed using pairwise techniques in SPSS. As mentioned in the sampling and survey design sections, the survey was sent out via three email solicitation. This resulted in 23% of the sample population at least opening and beginning the survey, and about one-fifth of the participants (21%) providing usable data.

### ***Sample Demographic Characteristics***

Participants cared for a wide variety of different aged foster children. Many foster parents have cared for at least two different age groups of children. The age range and percentage of participants who cared for the respective aged children are presented in Table 1. Many participants reported having cared for more than one age group, which explains why percentage totals exceed 100%.

**Table 1 Demographics of ages ever cared for by participants**

<b>Ages Cared For</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>0-2 years</b>	463	53.4%
<b>3-4 years</b>	367	42.3%
<b>6-11 years</b>	299	34.5%
<b>12-18 years</b>	205	23.7%
<b>19+ years</b>	21	2.4%
<b>Total</b>	867	100.0%

Respondents who reported having adopted through foster care in the past represented 66.3% of the sample. New foster parents represented 38.8% of participants. The range of foster parents varied greatly from the youngest group to the oldest group, although the vast majority fell in the range of 30-59 years old (83.5%). The minimum age to be a licensed foster parent in the state of Kentucky is 21 therefore, the bottom threshold was 21 years. The vast majority of participants reported having at least a college degree (n=420, 68.74%). While college graduates made up a large percentage of the sample, educational makeup appeared to be diverse, with 11.1% having at least some high school, 53.7% having at least some college experience, and 35.2% having at least some experience in graduate school.

Surprisingly, 27.8% of participants had been approved to care for a specific child- - making this an effective sorting variable for the sample. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of foster parent participants identified as female. This is consistent with many other foster parent surveys that tend to have a greater number of female respondents (Watson, 2017, Mihalo et al., 2016). Participants who had more than one foster parent in the home represented 59.9% of the sample, and over 50% of the sample had been

approved to foster for less than 3 years. A question asking about the number of foster children in the home was fairly evenly split, with 53.5% of the respondents stating that they have, at some time, had more than one foster child in the home. The attributes associated with the demographic items are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 Demographics Table**

		Frequency	Percentage
<b>Have you adopted any children from foster care?</b>	Yes	207	33.7%
	No	408	66.3%
	Total	615	
<b>Were you approved within the past year, January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021?</b>	Yes	264	38.8%
	No	417	61.2%
	Total	681	
<b>Age of Foster Parent</b>	21-29 years	51	8.3%
	30-39 years	208	34.0%
	40-49 years	197	32.2%
	50-59 years	106	17.3%
	60+ years	50	8.2%
	Total	612	
<b>Level of Education</b>	Some High School	5	0.8%
	High School or Equivalent	63	10.3%
	Some College	123	20.1%
	College or University Degree	205	33.6%
	Some Graduate School	36	5.9%
	Graduate School Degree	179	29.3%
	Total	611	
<b>Approved to care for a relative/fictive kin or specific child</b>	Yes	168	27.8%
	No	437	72.2%
	Total	605	
<b>Gender</b>	Female	493	80.3%
	Male	99	16.2%
	Other	2	0.3%
	Prefer not to disclose	20	3.3%

[Table 2 (Cont)]			
	Total	614	
<b>More than one approved foster parent in the household</b>	Yes	519	59.9%
	No	348	40.1%
	Total	867	
<b>Years approved as a foster parent</b>	1	182	31.2%
	2	115	19.7%
	3	86	14.8%
	4	41	7.0%
	5	41	7.0%
	6	19	3.3%
	7	18	3.1%
	8	12	2.1%
	9	12	2.1%
	10	8	1.4%
	11	5	0.9%
	12	3	0.5%
	13	6	1.0%
	14	2	0.3%
	15	7	1.2%
	16	6	1.0%
	17	1	0.2%
	18	1	0.2%
	19	1	0.2%
	20+	17	2.9%
	Total	583	
<b>Ever had more than one foster child in your care at the same time</b>	Yes	464	53.5%
	No	403	46.5%
	Total	867	

One question which will allow for the sorting of participants in the analysis asked how many different resources were reported to have been used by the participants. In total, 609 of the participants reported using at least one resource, either from a specific DCBS partner program or from an array of other available resources. Of those who at least utilized one resource, the mean score was 3.8 resources used. Anyone who utilized

more than seven resources was combined in the 7+ category. Table 3 below provides further details on these findings.

**Table 3 Number of Resources Used**

<b>Number of Resources Used</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>s</b>	88	14.45%
<b>2</b>	91	14.94%
<b>3</b>	107	17.57%
<b>4</b>	104	17.08%
<b>5</b>	82	13.46%
<b>6</b>	52	8.54%
<b>7+</b>	85	13.96%
<b>Total</b>	609	

***Predictor Variables/Scales***

This section explores the univariate analysis findings from the five predictor scales. The five predictor scales, which were created and explained in Chapter 3, these variables are; Satisfaction with R&C Worker, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, Satisfaction with the Pre-Approval Experience, Satisfaction with the Training Experience, and Satisfaction with Communication. Each scale is presented with the mean score of each item included in the scale, the mean score of the entire scale, the standard deviation, and the range. Each of the constructed scales utilized in this study indicate high satisfaction with lower scores. Similar to the game of golf, the lower the score, the better. For example, on a 6-item scale, those who answered that they strongly agree with every satisfaction question would get a score of 6, marking a high deal of satisfaction. In the same way, someone who selected strongly disagree for all the questions would get a score of 30, showing a high deal of dissatisfaction

### Satisfaction with Recruitment and Certification (R&C) Worker

The questions on this scale were first explained by asking participants to state how much they agree with the following questions regarding their recruitment and certification worker and consisted of seven questions. The mean score for the scale was 12.15, with a minimum score of 7 and a maximum score of 35. The standard deviation to the mean was 6.07 for the 705 participants who answered all seven questions. The data for each item as well as the mean for the entire scale can be found in Table 4 below. A reliability test was run in SPSS, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.949.

**Table 4 Univariate Findings for Satisfaction with R&C Worker**

<b>Satisfaction with R&amp;C Worker</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
My worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.	714	1.68	1.00	1	5
My worker is knowledgeable and supportive.	713	1.60	0.91	1	5
I feel supported by my worker during times of crisis.	711	1.81	1.07	1	5
My worker is professional and courteous.	712	1.47	0.78	1	5
I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parent by my worker.	711	1.64	0.96	1	5
I am satisfied with the communication with my worker.	711	1.73	1.04	1	5
I am satisfied with the communication and support from leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA).	710	2.21	1.15	1	5
<b>Total Scale</b>	705	12.15	6.07	7	35

### Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker

The second scale asked participants to state how much they agreed with questions regarding their child's worker and consisted of six questions. The mean score for the scale was 14.42, with a minimum score of 6 and a maximum score of 30. The standard deviation to the mean was 7.15 for the 675 participants who answered all six questions.

The scores for each question as well as the mean for the entire scale can be found in Table 5 below. A reliability test was run in SPSS, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.962

**Table 5 Univariate Findings for Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker**

<b>Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
My child's worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.	681	2.47	1.38	1	5
My child's worker is knowledgeable and supportive.	679	2.38	1.29	1	5
My child's worker is professional and courteous.	679	2.08	1.16	1	5
I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parent by my child's worker.	680	2.31	1.30	1	5
I am satisfied with the communication with my child's worker.	678	2.56	1.42	1	5
I am satisfied with the communication and support from ongoing and investigations leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA).	679	2.62	1.22	1	5
<b>Total Scale</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>14.42</b>	<b>7.15</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>

### **Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience**

The questions on this scale asked participants to state how much they agreed with the questions regarding their Pre-approval experience and consisted of 10 questions which were summed for a satisfaction measure of the pre-approval experience. The mean score for the scale was 20.54, with a minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 50. The standard deviation to the mean was 7.49 for the 252 participants who answered all 10 questions. The scores for each question as well as the mean for the entire scale can be



found in Table 6 below. The reliability test run in SPSS showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.914.

**Table 6 Univariate Findings for Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience**

<b>Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
When I first contacted my agency about becoming a foster parent, my questions and phone calls were answered in a timely, effective manner.	254	2.00	1.04	1	5
During the approval process, I was informed of the child placement needs in my community.	254	2.30	1.15	1	5
There were opportunities for pre-service training in or close to my home community.	254	1.81	0.86	1	5
The pre-service classes were effective in preparing me to become a foster/adoptive parent.	254	2.05	0.95	1	5
The pre-service classes prepared me to work in partnership with birth families and to support reunification.	254	2.21	1.02	1	5
The home study process supported my preparation to be a foster/adoptive parent.	253	1.93	0.91	1	5
The approval paperwork was manageable and easy to follow.	253	2.32	1.16	1	5
The trainer/worker was able to answer my questions and assist me with the process as needed.	254	1.89	0.95	1	5
I felt prepared to become a foster parent prior to my first placement.	254	2.11	0.96	1	5
I fully understood the time commitment prior to taking a placement (additional appointments, family visits, worker visits, etc.).	254	1.96	0.94	1	5
<b>Total Scale</b>	252	20.54	7.49	10	50

## Satisfaction with Training Experience

The questions on this scale asked participants to state how much they agree with the questions regarding their ongoing certification training and consisted of eight questions. The mean score for the scale was 16.17, with a minimum score of 8 and a maximum score of 40. The standard deviation to the mean was 5.96 for the 656 participants who answered all eight questions. The scores for each question as well as the mean for the entire scale can be found in Table 7 below. A reliability test was run in SPSS which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.921.

**Table 7 Univariate Findings for Satisfaction with Training Experience**

<b>Satisfaction with Training Experience</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
I am adequately notified of ongoing training opportunities.	660	1.82	0.92	1	5
I am satisfied with the availability (time, day, location) of ongoing trainings.	658	2.23	1.10	1	5
I am satisfied with the various methods through which ongoing trainings are offered (in-person, online, virtual).	659	1.87	0.88	1	5
The content of the mandatory trainings (Trauma, Sexual Abuse, Behavior Management) helped enhance my skills as a foster parent.	660	2.02	0.92	1	5
The content of the additional ongoing trainings helped enhance my skills as a foster parent.	659	2.10	0.92	1	5
I am satisfied with the topics of additional ongoing trainings provided by my agency (outside of the mandatory trainings).	658	2.11	0.92	1	5
I am satisfied with the quality of the ongoing training provided by my agency.	659	2.08	0.90	1	5
Trainers were knowledgeable and able to answer my questions.	658	1.91	0.82	1	5

[Table 7 (Cont)]					
<b>Total Scale</b>	656	16.17	5.96	8	40

### **Satisfaction with Communication**

The questions for the satisfaction with communication scale come from various different items contained in the FPSS. The final scale involved satisfaction with communication received from the agency and its workers. The original scaled plan included nine questions. Three questions were removed to help address multicollinearity in the planned regression models. Those questions include; “I am satisfied with the communication and support from (R&C) leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA)” “I am satisfied with the communication with my child’s [ongoing] worker”; “I am satisfied with the communication and support from ongoing and investigations leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA).” One more question was also removed because it was only asked of new foster parents, which would have limited the sample size of the final scale and associated analyses. The item which was removed was, “When I first contacted my agency about becoming a foster parent, my questions and phone calls were answered in a timely, effective manner (Pre-approval).”

This final scale consists of five questions which were combined for a satisfaction measure of communication. The mean score for the scale was 10.91, with a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 25. The standard deviation to the mean was 4.43 for the 676 participants who answered all five questions. Scores for each question as well as the mean for the entire scale can be found in Table 8 below. A reliability test run in SPSS revealed a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.788.

**Table 8 Univariate Findings for Satisfaction with Communication**

<b>Satisfaction with Communication</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
R&C – My worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.	714	1.68	1.00	1	5
R&C – I am satisfied with the communication with my worker.	711	1.73	1.04	1	5
Ongoing – My child’s worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.	681	2.47	1.38	1	5
DCBS – I was provided with the information available, regarding the foster child’s needs, prior to placement.	714	2.41	1.22	1	5
DCBS – I received adequate notification of important meetings, court hearings, staffings, and visitation.	712	2.66	1.33	1	5
<b>Total Scale</b>	<b>676</b>	<b>10.91</b>	<b>4.43</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>25</b>

***Outcome Variables***

The three main outcome variables are discussed below. These were considered in conjunction with various predictors both in bivariate and multivariate modeling.

**Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring**

The first outcome variable to be explored is Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. This variable is comprised of 20 different questions from the survey questionnaire. The first 14 focus on the DCBS broadly and asked various questions about the foster caring process. There are six questions on participants’ satisfaction with components of the process of becoming a foster parent. Two questions were removed from the original plan for the scale as these questions were deemed more appropriate for the communication satisfaction variable. The questions removed include the following; “I was provided with the information available, regarding the foster child’s needs, prior to

placement” and “I receive adequate notification of important meetings, court hearings, staffings, and visitation.” These 20 questions can be seen in Table 9.

The mean score for the Overall Satisfaction Scale was 43.26, with a minimum score of 20 and a maximum score of 100. The standard deviation to the mean was 13.85 for the 619 participants who answered all 20 questions. Scores for each question as well as the mean for the entire scale can be found in Table 9 below. A reliability test showed a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.931.

**Table 9 Univariate Findings for Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring**

<b>Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring</b>	<b>N</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
I am familiar with the role that DCBS plays in the foster parenting program.	714	1.48	0.64	1	5
DCBS and my foster care agency set clear guidelines about my role and responsibilities as a foster parent.	716	1.80	0.89	1	5
DCBS and/or my agency helps me access services needed for the child, including health and mental health resources.	716	2.27	1.18	1	5
DCBS and my agency is sensitive to the cultural environment within my family.	712	2.04	0.95	1	5
I am aware of my foster child's permanency plan.	711	2.21	1.18	1	5

**[Table 9 (Cont)]**

I am involved as part of the child's team in service planning for the foster children in my care.	711	2.31	1.23	1	5
The caseworker(s) encourages interaction between the foster child and their biological family.	711	2.12	1.03	1	5
The reimbursement payment process is prompt.	710	1.76	0.94	1	5
The reimbursement payment process is uncomplicated.	710	1.91	0.98	1	5
The reimbursement payment rate is sufficient for caring for the child's needs.	711	2.58	1.18	1	5
The DCBS investigations procedure in cases of foster parent abuse allegations is satisfactory.	710	2.63	0.98	1	5
DCBS and/or my agency publicly recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.	710	2.58	1.114	1	5
DCBS and/or my agency privately recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.	708	2.44	1.15	1	5
I feel valued as a foster parent by DCBS and/or my agency.	708	2.43	1.25	1	5

**[Table 9 (Cont)]**

I am satisfied with the Pre-Service Training and preparation	640	2.03	0.90	1	5
I am satisfied with the ongoing trainings.	636	2.07	0.91	1	5
I am satisfied with my R&C staff.	640	1.65	0.94	1	5
I am satisfied with the investigative staff.	637	2.35	1.09	1	5
I am satisfied with my ongoing workers/staff.	639	2.31	1.25	1	5
I am satisfied with the supports offered.	638	2.25	1.05	1	5
<b>Total Scale</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>43.26</b>	<b>13.85</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

The 20 items of the Satisfaction with Overall Foster Caring Scale were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28. Prior to the PCA or Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. The EFA included an inspection of the correlation matrix with any coefficient of .3 or above. Based on the findings of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) value was .931, exceeding the recommended value of .6 by Kaiser (1970). Similarly, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at .05 ( $p=.000$ ), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix; therefore, factor analysis was appropriate for this scale (Palant, 2020).

As noted as Total Variance Explained in Table 10, three components have an initial Eigenvalue greater than 1 (8.828, 1.691, 1.122), explaining 44.1%, 8.5%, and 5.7%, respectively of the variance for a total of 58.20% of the variance. The Oblimin rotation was performed to aid the interpretation of the three components of the EFA.



**Table 10 Principal Components Analysis of Overall Satisfaction Scale**

Total Variance Explained							
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings <sup>a</sup>
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	8.828	44.142	44.142	8.828	44.142	44.142	8.213
2	1.691	8.454	52.595	1.691	8.454	52.595	4.145
3	1.122	5.609	58.204	1.122	5.609	58.204	3.090
4	.976	4.879	63.083				
5	.867	4.334	67.417				
6	.778	3.891	71.309				
7	.739	3.697	75.005				
8	.727	3.637	78.642				
9	.639	3.196	81.839				
10	.499	2.493	84.332				
11	.445	2.226	86.557				
12	.435	2.176	88.733				
13	.379	1.894	90.627				
14	.341	1.706	92.333				
15	.316	1.579	93.912				
16	.288	1.441	95.353				
17	.261	1.303	96.656				
18	.257	1.284	97.941				
19	.229	1.144	99.085				
20	.183	.915	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

In the PCA, cutoff loadings of .41 were used to determine factors. The three factors, shown in Table 11, offered at least three variables per component. For further research on this variable, the separation and expansion of these factors could elicit a more significant and precise measure of the three factors highlighted here. Because of the vague nature of the questions considered, no further information from the factor analysis was found to be helpful for the purpose of this study. All of the shown items meeting the .41 loading requirement will be used in the composition of the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring variable.

**Table 11 PCA Factor Loadings**

### Pattern Matrix<sup>a</sup>

	Component		
	1	2	3
DCBS – I am involved as part of the child's team in service planning for the foster children in my care.	.883		
DCBS – I am aware of my foster child's permanency plan.	.813		
Overall Satisfaction. I am satisfied with my ongoing workers/staff.	.805		
DCBS – I feel valued as a foster parent by DCBS and/or my agency.	.781		
DCBS and/or my agency helps me access services nee	.768		
DCBS and my agency is sensitive to the cultural environment within my family.	.723		
DCBS. – DCBS and/or my agency privately recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.	.709		
DCBS; DCBS and my foster care agency set clear guidelines about my role and responsibilities as a foster parent.	.666		
DCBS – DCBS and/or my agency publicly recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.	.649		
Overall Sat – I am satisfied with the supports offered.	.641		
DCBS – The caseworker(s) encourages interaction between the foster child and their biological family.	.585		
Overall Satisfaction. I am satisfied with the investigative staff.	.479		
Overall Satisfaction. I am satisfied with my R&C staff.			
DCBS. – The reimbursement payment process is prompt.		.862	
DCBS – The reimbursement payment process is uncomplicated.		.858	
DCBS ; I am familiar with the role that DCBS plays in the foster parenting program.		.491	
DCBS – The reimbursement payment rate is sufficient for caring for the child's needs.		.466	
Overall Satisfaction. I am satisfied with the ongoing trainings.			-.571
Overall Satisfaction.I am satisfied with the Pre-Service Training and preparation			-.559
DCBS. – The DCBS investigations procedure in cases of foster parent abuse allegations is satisfactory.			-.497

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 16 iterations.

### Retention Outcome Variable

The first dichotomous dependent variable is labeled the Retention variable. This variable addressed the question, “Are you considering discontinuing fostering within the next 12 months?” This variable asked participants about maintaining or changing their foster caring status in the next year. The question was answered by 867 participants, with around 22% of the participants responding that they are considering closing their homes. The breakdown of the variables is shown in Table 12.

### Table 12 Univariate Statistics of Retention Outcome

<b>Are you considering discontinuing in the next 12 months?</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	189	21.80%
<b>No</b>	678	78.20%
<b>Total</b>	867	

### **Recruitment Outcome Variable**

The second dichotomous dependent variable is labeled the Recruitment variable. This variable asked the question, “Would you recommend your agency’s foster/adoptive program to others?” This variable may reveal, in a different way, whether foster parents are enjoying or burdened as foster parents. The literature is clear that the best recruiters of foster parents are current foster parents, so this outcome was deemed suitable and appropriate for exploration (Hanlon, Feltner, et al., 2021). The question was answered by 867 participants, with around 38% of the participants responding that they would not recommend their agency to others. The breakdown of the variables are shown in Table 13.

**Table 13 Univariate Statistics of Recruitment Outcome**

<b>Would you recommend your agency’s foster/adoption program?</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	536	61.82%
<b>No</b>	331	38.18%
<b>Total</b>	867	

### **Bivariate Statistical Analysis and Results**

Bivariate analysis was completed to identify statistically significant correlations and impact on the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring outcome for each of the demographic and predictor variables explored above. These analyses were completed

using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Independent Samples t-tests, Chi-Square analysis, and bivariate correlation (Palant, 2020). Multicollinearity was also examined and addressed through the use of a correlation matrix table and, in the case of the scaled predictors, the variance inflation factor (VIF) in the regression models (Palant, 2020). No multicollinearity was found in the categorical predictors, and the multicollinearity of the scaled predictors were explored as discussed further below. Only the variables with statistically significant correlations ( $p < 0.05$ ) with outcome variables will be explored here. The alpha value used for all statistics in this study was  $\alpha = .05$ . In some cases, one possible predictor variable was correlated with one outcome variable but not with the others. Therefore, some variables will be highlighted only under the corresponding outcomes that correlated.

### ***Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring***

This section of the bivariate statistical analysis findings will highlight the demographic and predictor variables that show statistically significant correlations and impact on the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring outcome. The analyses were completed by utilizing a variety of methods, including Pearson correlation ( $r$ ), Spearman Rank Order Correlation ( $\rho$ ), eta-Squared values, Independent Samples  $t$ -tests, One Way ANOVA, and a correlation matrix. The various statistical analyses selected were dependent on the nature of the variable being examined (Palant, 2020).

### ***Scaled Predictor Variables***

Four separate scales showed statistically significant findings when comparing mean scores of the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring variable. The correlation

matrix revealed statistically significant correlation between all four of the scales and the overall satisfaction outcome. Each predictor variable showed a positive correlation with the overall satisfaction variable. Table 14 below shows the findings from the Correlation matrix.

**Table 14 Bivariate Correlation Matrix Table of Scales**

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1 Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring	-				
2 Satisfaction with R&C Worker	.629***	-			
3 Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker	.753***	.407***	-		
4 Satisfaction with Training	.626***	.407***	.341***	-	
5 Satisfaction with Communication	.844***	.762***	.793***	.472***	-

**Note:** \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Dichotomous Variable Examined: Adopted a child through foster care and being certified for a specific child*

The first  $t$ -test considers if adopting any children from foster care in the past might impact participants' overall satisfaction. The results of the  $t$ -test revealed statistically significant overall satisfaction ratings with foster caring. The results show that those who have not adopted through foster care were, on average, less satisfied than those who have adopted through foster care. Eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) tests for a relationship between a categorical variable and continuous variable (Levine & Hullett, 2002) this revealed a weak relationship between the adoption variable and Overall Satisfaction [ $\eta^2 = .015$ ,  $n = 595$ ,  $p = .002$ ].

The second  $t$ -test examined how being certified to care for a specific child might impact overall satisfaction. The  $t$ -test revealed statistically significant Overall Satisfaction

with Foster Caring. The results of the second t-test reveal that someone who was certified to care for the general foster child population was less satisfied than someone who is certified to care for a specific child. The results of the two independent samples t-tests can be found in Table 15. Eta-squared revealed a weak positive relationship between the specific child variable and Overall Satisfaction [ $\eta^2 = .035$ ,  $n = 585$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

**Table 15 T-test Results of Adoption and Being Certified for a Specific Child and Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring**

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>Adopted through Foster Care</b>				3.04	593	.001***
Yes	196	40.87	13.52			
No	399	44.56	14.11			
<b>Being Certified for a Specific Child</b>				4.56	583	.001***
Yes	161	39.12	14.34			
NO	424	44.97	13.68			

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

#### *Age of Foster Parent*

A One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) *F*-test was conducted to compare the effect of the participant's age range on their Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. The descriptives of the ANOVA are displayed in Table 16.

**Table 16 ANOVA Descriptives of Age of Foster Parent and Overall Satisfaction**

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
21-29 years	51	46.53	14.48	20	74
30-39 years	203	45.19	13.44	20	94
40-49 years	192	42.27	13.91	20	80

50-59 years	100	41.39	15.54	20	91
60+ years	46	38.65	10.41	20	62
<b>Total Scale</b>	592	43.99	13.98	20	94

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 17, which indicate significant differences among age groups in reported Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring [ $F(4, 587) = 3.659, p < .01$ ]. Eta-squared revealed a weak positive relationship between the age of the foster parent and Overall Satisfaction [ $\eta^2 = .024, n = 592, p < .006$ ].

**Table 17 ANOVA results: Age of Foster Parent and Overall Satisfaction**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	2811.710	4	702.928	3.659	.006
Within Groups	112757.734	587	192.092		
<b>Total</b>	115569.444	491			

The results from the ANOVA show that as individuals increase in age, their scores on the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring scale go down-- meaning older individuals tend to have greater satisfaction when compared to younger foster parents. As displayed in Table 18 and Figure 3, post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value for overall satisfaction between those participants who are 60+ years old and those who are 21-29 and 30-39 years old were significantly different. Figure 3 provides a plot of the means.

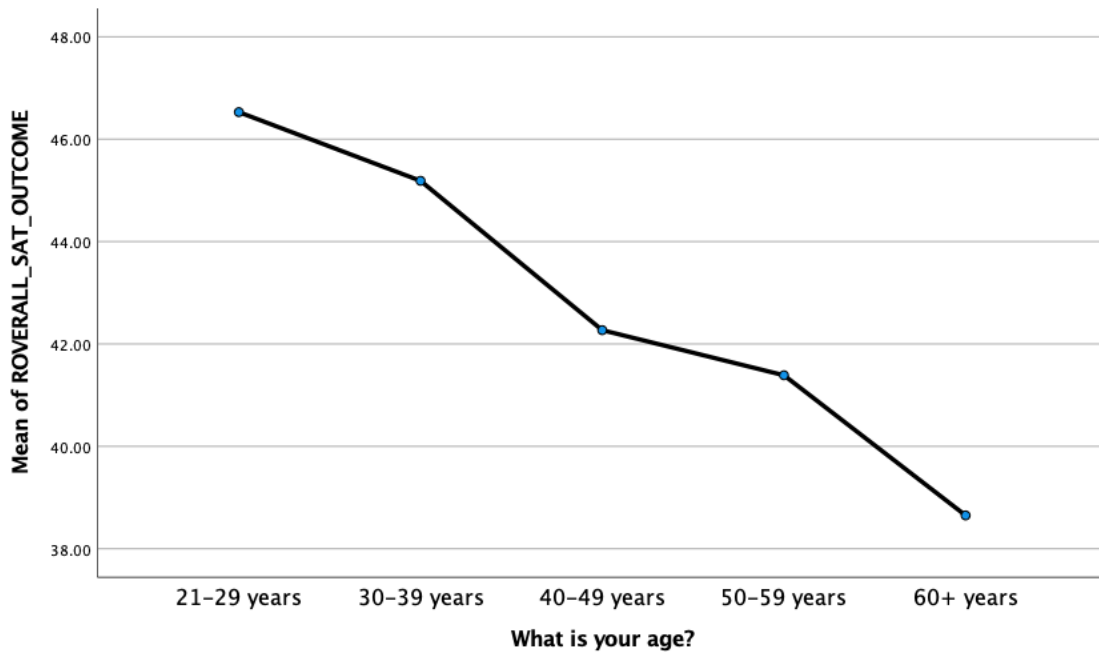
**Table 18 Tukey's HSD Output: Age of Foster Parent and Overall Satisfaction**

		<b>95% C.I.</b>			
		<b>Mean Dif</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Lower Bound</b>	<b>Upper Bound</b>
<b>60+ years</b>	21-29 years	-7.88	.043*	-15.59	-0.17

30-39 years	-6.54	.033*	-12.73	-0.34
40-49 years	-3.62	.504	-9.84	2.61
50-59 years	-2.74	.802	-9.49	4.02

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

**Figure 3 Means Plot of Age of Foster Parent**



### *Level of Education*

A similar second One-way ANOVA  $F$ -test was performed to consider how the level of education might impact Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. For this bivariate analysis, it was deemed appropriate to consolidate the “some high school” and “high school or equivalent groups” into a Some High School or Equivalent category. Therefore, the ANOVA and ensuing multiple regressions included the updated education variable. The descriptives of the ANOVA are displayed in Table 19.

**Table 19 ANOVA descriptives of Education and Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring**



	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Some High School or Equivalent	66	37.05	10.19	20	60
Some College	118	41.12	12.81	20	74
College or University Degree	198	44.46	14.41	20	91
Some Graduate School	35	47.89	16.60	20	94
Graduate School Degree	174	44.75	14.27	20	81
<b>Total Scale</b>	591	43.25	14.02	20	94

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 20, which indicate significant differences in reported Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring and the participant's level of education [ $F(4, 586) = 5.927, p < .001$ ]. Eta-squared revealed a weak positive relationship between the education of foster parents and Overall Satisfaction [ $\eta^2 = .039, n = 591, p < .001$ ].

**Table 20 ANOVA results: Education and Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	4508.639	4	1127.160	5.927	<.001
Within Groups	111434.796	586	190.162		
<b>Total</b>	115943.435	590			

The results from the ANOVA show that as foster parents' level of education increased their Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring tends to go down. Those who are less educated typically are more satisfied with the foster caring process. As displayed in Table 21 and Figure 3, post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean score for the group with high school or equivalent education was significantly different from that of participants who had a college or university degree, some graduate school, or graduate school degree. There was no

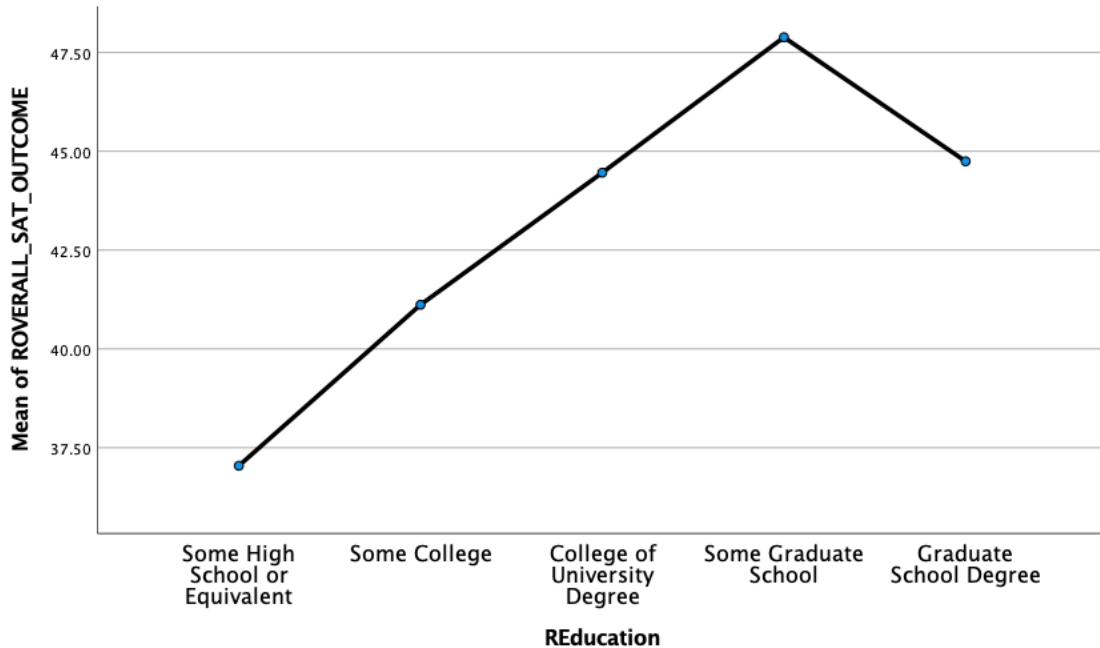
statistically significant difference in means between college and high school. Figure 4 provides a plot of the means.

**Table 21 Tukey's HSD Output: Age of Foster Parent and Overall Satisfaction**

		95% C.I.			
		Mean Dif	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Some High School or Equivalent	Some College	-4.07	.307	-9.87	1.73
	College of University Degree	-7.41	.002**	-12.78	-2.05
	Some Graduate School	-10.84	.002**	-18.73	-2.95
	Graduate School Degree	-7.70	.001**	-13.16	-2.25

\*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

**Figure 4 Means Plot of Education**



### Retention Outcome

This section of the bivariate statistical analysis findings will highlight the demographic and predictor variables that show statistically significant correlation and impact on the binary Retention outcome (continuing or not continuing in foster care). These analyses were completed by utilizing a variety of methods, including Chi-Square Analysis and Binary Logistic Regression.

#### *Adopted a Child Through Foster care*

The responses of those who have adopted a child through foster care were compared with those who have not adopted. Of those who have adopted, 38.6% consider discontinuing in the next 12 months while 26.2% of those who have not adopted are considering discontinuing, showing a near 12 percent increase for those who have adopted in the past. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .128$ ). A Chi-Square was computed on the two types of foster parents to determine if

there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between groups and that those who had adopted were more likely to report considering discontinuing fostering in the next 12 months,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 615) = 10.014, p = .002$ .

#### *New Foster Parent in 2021*

The responses of those who were new foster parents in 2021 were compared with those who were not. New foster parents reported considering discontinuing in the next 12 months 23.1% of the time compared to 30.5% of more seasoned foster parents, showing over a 7% increase for those who began fostering before 2021. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .080$ ). A Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the groups and found that those who were new in 2021 were less likely to report considering discontinuing fostering in the next 12 months,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 681) = 4.269, p = .037$ .

#### *Foster Parent's Age*

The responses of the sample were sorted by age categories. The score of the age categories are listed below in Table 22, but the two groups that have a higher percentage of respondents who are considering discontinuing than the average are 40-49 year old with 37.6% and 50-59 years olds with 32.1%. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .127$ ). A Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the five groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the groups, and it found that individuals

who were 40-59 were more likely to consider discontinuing than average and those who were 21-39 and 60+ were less likely than average,  $X^2(4, N = 612) = 9.802, p = .044$ .

#### *More Than One Approved FP in the Home*

The responses of those who had more than one foster parent in the home were compared with those who did not. Of those who had two or more foster parents in the home, 29.9% are considering discontinuing in the next 12 months compared to 9.8% of single foster parents, showing over a 20% increase for those who have more than one foster parent in the home. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .239$ ). A Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the groups and found that those who had more than one foster parent in the home were more likely to report considering discontinuing fostering in the next 12 months,  $X^2(1, N = 867) = 49.346, p < .001$ .

#### *Ever Having More Than One FC in the Home at Once*

The responses of those who have ever had more than one foster child in the home are compared with those who did not. Foster parents who have ever fostered more than one child at once reported considering discontinuing in the next 12 months 31.9% of the time, compared to 10.2% of those who have not, showing over a 21% increase for those who have ever had more than one foster child in the home at once. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .262$ ). A Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the groups, and it found that

those who had more than one foster child in the home were more likely to report considering discontinuing fostering in the next 12 months,  $X^2(1, N = 867) = 59.701, p < .001$ .

### *Use of Resources*

The responses of the sample were sorted by the number of resources utilized by the participant. The results of the use of resources variable are listed below in Table 22, but the three groups that have a higher percentage of respondents considering discontinuing are individuals who utilized 3 resources (33.6%), 4 resources (32.7%), 5 resources (35.4%,) and 7 or more resources (41.2%). Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = .182$ ). A Chi-Square was computed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the seven groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between the groups, and it found that individuals who utilized one, two, or six resources appeared to be less likely to consider discontinuing care than the average respondent,  $X^2(6, N = 609) = 20.090, p = .003$ . This finding will be utilized in the multiple regression model but appears to be unhelpful at the bivariate level.

The findings from each of the Chi-Square Analyses can be found in Table 22.

**Table 22 Chi-Square Results: Consider Discontinuing in the Next 12 months**

**Percentage**

		Yes (N)	No (N)	Total	( <i>p</i> )
Adopted Through FC	Yes	38.6 (80)	61.4 (127)	207	.002
	No	26.2 (107)	73.8 (301)	408	
New FP in 2021	Yes	23.1 (61)	76.9 (203)	264	.037
	No	30.5 (127)	69.5 (290)	417	
Foster Parent's Age	21-29	23.5 (12)	76.5 (39)	51	.044
	30-39	26.9 (56)	73.1 (152)	208	
	40-49	38.1 (74)	62.4 (123)	197	
	50-59	32.1 (34)	67.9 (72)	106	
	60+	20.0 (10)	80.0 (40)	50	
More than one FP in the h	Yes	29.9 (155)	70.1 (364)	519	<.001
	No	9.8 (34)	90.2 (314)	348	
Ever More than one FC in the home	Yes	31.9 (148)	68.1 (316)	464	<.001
	No	10.2 (41)	89.8 (362)	403	
Use of Resources	1	17.0 (15)	83.0 (73)	88	.003
	2	19.8 (18)	80.2 (73)	91	

**[Table 22 (Cont)]**

3	33.6 (36)	66.4 (71)	107
4	32.7 (34)	67.3 (70)	104
5	35.4 (29)	64.6 (53)	82
6	23.1 (12)	76.9 (40)	52
7+	41.2 (35)	58.8 (50)	85

#### *Satisfaction with the R&C Worker*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with R&C Worker and the Retention variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering discontinuing care increased by 9.8% (95% CI [1.069, 1.129]) for every one unit increase in Satisfaction with the R&C Worker. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .096.

#### *Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker and the Retention variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering discontinuing care increased by 9.2% (95% CI [1.066, 1.119]) for every one unit increase in Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .109.

#### *Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience and the Retention variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering discontinuing care increased by 6.8% (95% CI [1.026, 1.112]) for every one unit increase in Satisfaction with the Pre-Approval Experience. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .064.



### *Satisfaction with Training Experience*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Training Experience and Retention. It was found that the odds of someone considering discontinuing care increased by 6.7% (95% CI [1.037, 1.098]) for every one unit increase in Satisfaction with the Training Experience. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .043.

### *Satisfaction with Communication*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Communication and Retention. It was found that the odds of someone considering discontinuing care increased by 18.0% (95% CI [1.132, 1.230]) for every one unit increase in satisfaction with the Communication. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .141. Based on the Nagelkerke R-Square value, the Satisfaction with Communication variable appears to have the greatest association with the Retention variable.

## **Recruitment**

This section of the bivariate statistical analysis findings will highlight the demographic and predictor variables that show statistically significant correlation and impact on the Recruitment outcome variable. These were completed by utilizing a variety of methods, including Chi-Square Analysis and Binary Logistic Regression.

### *Adopted a Child Through Foster Care*

The responses of those who have adopted a child through foster care were compared with those who have not adopted. Those who have adopted reported wanting to recommend their agency to others 89.9% of the time while 79.9% of those who have not adopted would recommend their agency, showing a 10 percent increase for those who have adopted in the past. Cramer's V revealed a weak association between the two variables ( $V = -0.126$ ). A Chi-Square was computed on the two types of foster parents to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between groups and those who had adopted were more likely to recommend their agency to others,  $X^2 (1, N = 615) = 9.757$ ,  $p = .002$ .

#### *More than One Approved FP in the Home*

The responses of those who have more than one approved foster parent in the home were compared with those who do not. Of those who have more than one foster parent in the home, 83.6% would recommend their agency to others while 29.3% of single foster parents would recommend their agency, showing over a 54 percent increase for two or more foster parent households. Cramer's V revealed a medium to strong association between the two variables ( $V = 0.548$ ). A Chi-Square was computed on the two types of foster parents to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between groups and those who have two or more foster parents in the home were more likely to recommend their agency to others,  $X^2 (1, N = 867) = 260.354$ ,  $p < .001$ .

#### *Ever Having More than One FC in the Home at Once*

The responses of those who have ever had more than one foster child in the home at once were compared with those who have not. For those who have had more than one foster child in the home, 83.6% reported wanting to recommend their agency to others, while 36.7% of those who have only had one child at a time would recommend their agency, showing over a 46 percent increase for those who have had more than one child in their care at once. Cramer's V revealed a moderate association between the two variables ( $V = 0.481$ ). A Chi-Square was computed on the two types of foster parents to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. A statistically significant difference was indicated between groups and those who have had more than one foster child in the home at once were more likely to recommend their agency to others,  $X^2 (1, N = 867) = 200.966, p < .001$ .

The results of the three chi-square analysis are further expressed in Table 23.

**Table 23 Chi-Square Results: Would you recommend your agency to others**

		Percentage			
		Yes (N)	No (N)	Total	(p)
Adopted Through FC	Yes	89.9 (186)	10.1 (21)	207	.002
	No	79.9 (326)	20.1 (82)	408	
More than one FP in the home	Yes	83.6 (434)	16.4 (85)	519	<.001
	No	29.3 (102)	70.7 (246)	348	

**[Table 23 (Cont)]**

Ever More than one FC in the home	Yes	83.6 (388)	16.4 (76)	464	<.001
	No	36.7 (148)	63.3 (255)	403	

#### *Satisfaction with the R&C Worker*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with R&C Worker and the Recruitment variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering recommending the agency to someone else decreased by 13.0% (95% CI [0.843, 0.896]) for every one unit decrease in satisfaction with the R&C Worker. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .197.

#### *Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker and the Recruitment variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering recommending the agency to someone else decreased by 13.0% (95% CI [0.841, 0.891]) for every one unit decrease in satisfaction with the ongoing worker. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .236.

#### *Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Pre-Approval Experience and the Recruitment variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering recommending the agency to someone else decreased by 12.0% (95% CI [0.824, 0.911]) for every one unit decrease in satisfaction with the pre-approval experience. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .230.

### *Satisfaction with Training Experience*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Training Experience and the Recruitment variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering recommending the agency to someone else decreased by 11.0% (95% CI [0.856, 0.917]) for every one unit decrease in satisfaction with the training experience. The model revealed a Nagelkerke  $R^2$  of .123.

### *Satisfaction with Communication*

Logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between Satisfaction with Communication and the Recruitment variable. It was found that the odds of someone considering recommending the agency to someone else decreased by 25.0% (95% CI [0.708, 0.790]) for every one unit decrease in Satisfaction with Communication. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .317. Based on the Nagelkerke R-Square value, the Satisfaction with Communication variable appears to have the greatest association with the Recruitment variable.

## **Multivariate Analysis and Results**

This section will include simple multiple linear regression and binary logistic regression models. For the final model utilized in this study, the variable Satisfaction with Pre-Approval was removed. This is because this scale was only asked of the new foster parents in 2021, which lowered the sample size to 224 and greatly impacted the G\*power score. This variable was included and considered in bivariate analysis but was omitted from all three of the multiple regression models. Similarly, the variable new foster parents in the past 12 months were removed from the multivariate analysis.

Finally, the decision was made to omit the use of resources variable because it showed minimal interaction with the outcome variables in the bivariate analyses. As with the other variables, the use of resources was included only in the multivariate models based on statistically significant findings at the bivariate level.

## **Results of Regression Models with Research Questions**

### ***Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring***

This section of the multivariate analysis will address and seek to answer the first research question. Research question 1 is as follows; How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication, and sociodemographic variables predict the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring?

Standard multiple linear regression analysis was utilized to identify correlations and relationships with one continuous dependent variable (Palant, 2020). Note, however, the scale Satisfaction with the Pre-Approval Process was asked only of new foster parents lowering the sample size significantly. Therefore, it was removed from the final model in order to calculate a more full picture of the study population.

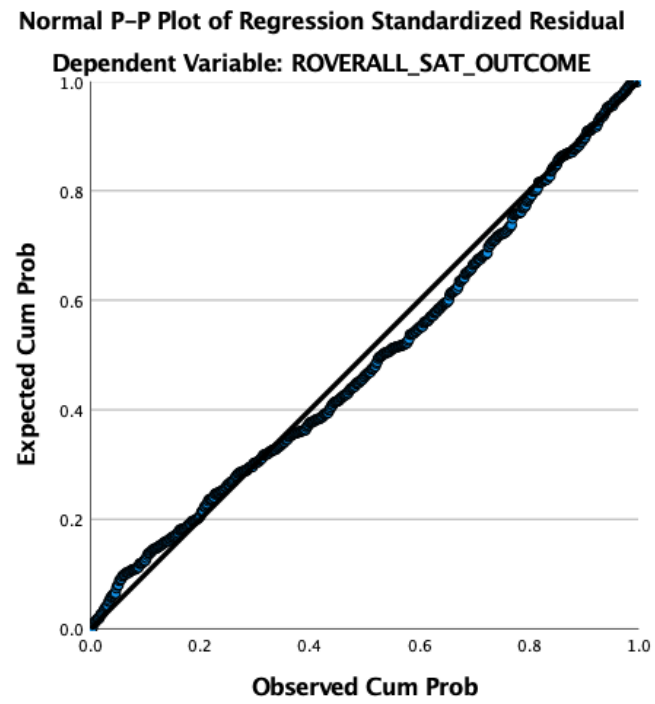
Research question 1 asks; Is the Satisfaction with Communication variable a better predictor of the Foster Parent's Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring than the component satisfaction variables and sociodemographic variables? In order to identify a better answer to research question 1, the semi-partial correlation coefficients will be considered to show "how much the total variance in the dependent variable is uniquely explained by that variable and how much *R* square would drop if it wasn't included"

(Palant, 2020, p. 167). Combined with the bivariate analysis and multiple regression, a conclusion for research question 4 will be drawn at the end of this section.

The model calculated the relationships between the outcome variable, Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring, and eight predictor variables; adopted through foster care, approved for a specific child, age (21-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+), highest level of education, Satisfaction with R&C Worker, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, Satisfaction with Training, and Satisfaction with Communication.

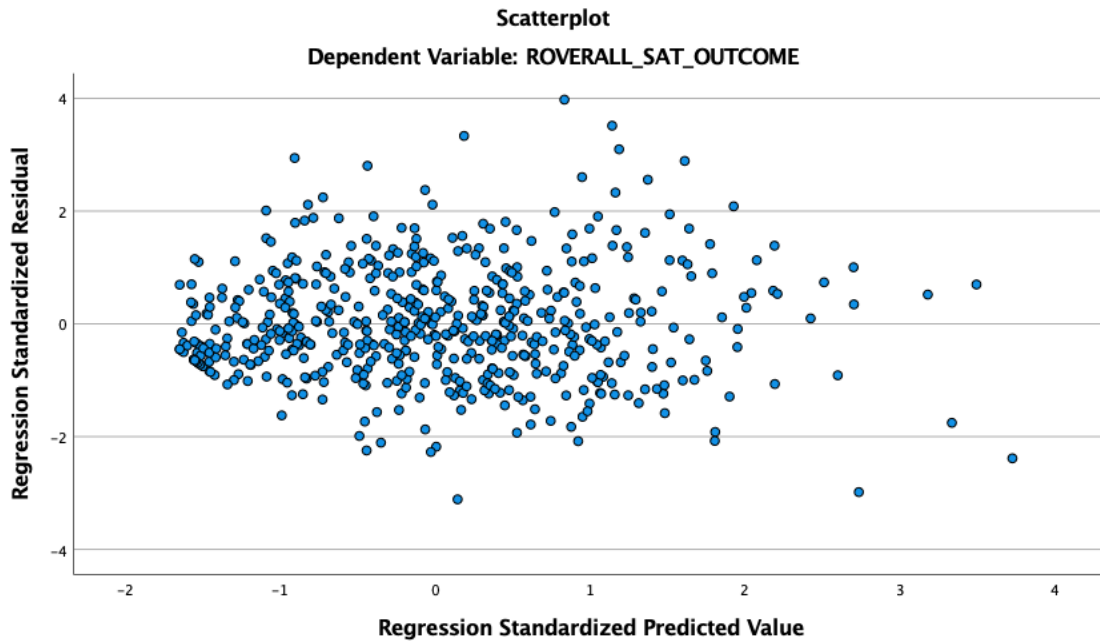
First, multicollinearity was checked by considering the variance inflation factor (VIF) scores. The VIF scores all fall well below the threshold of 10, as suggested by Pallant (2020), in the linear regression model. Next, an analysis of the standard residuals found no outliers in the data (Std. Residual Min = -3.111, Std. Residual Max = 3.978), The Normal P-P plot of standardized residuals indicated a fairly normal distribution (Figure 5). The scatter plot offered a visual of standardized residuals below highlighting that the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity. (Figure 6)

**Figure 5 Normal P-P Plot of Standard Residuals in Regression Model Overall Satisfaction**



**Figure 6 Scatterplot of the Standard Residuals in Regression Model Overall Satisfaction**





The results of the multiple regression model show that the model was significant at  $p < .001$ . The Model accounted for .807 or 80.7% of the variance in Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring scores,  $F(8,576) = 301.342$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .807$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .804$ . The output of the regression model can be found below in Table 24 and Table 25.

**Table 24 Multiple Regression Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring Model Summary**

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.898	.807	.804	6.125

**Table 25 Multiple Regression Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring ANOVA Output**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	90450.097	8	11306.262	301.342	<.001***
<b>Residual</b>	21611.378	576	37.520		
<b>Total</b>	112061.476	584			

\*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 26 below shows the output of the coefficients.

**Table 26. Linear Regression Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring Coefficients.**

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients					
	B	S.E.	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.	<i>sr</i>	VIF
<b>Constant</b>	7.932	1.638		4.842	<.001***		
<b>Adopted from foster care</b>	-1.209	.552	-.041	-2.190	.029*	-.040	1.061
<b>Age</b>	-.217	.257	-.017	-.846	.398	-.015	1.176
<b>Level of Education</b>	-.040	.193	-.004	-.210	.834	-.004	1.071
<b>Approved for Specific Child</b>	.733	.614	.024	1.193	.233	.022	1.179
<b>R&amp;C Worker Sat</b>	.178	.076	.078	2.338	.020*	.043	3.307
<b>Ongoing Worker Sat</b>	.567	.068	.293	8.374	<.001***	.153	3.651
<b>Training Sat</b>	.684	.049	.294	13.908	<.001***	.254	1.336
<b>Communication Sat</b>	1.267	.158	.405	8.017	<.001***	.147	7.624

Note: *sr* – semipartial correlation coefficient

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \* $P < .05$

The regression model highlights that five of the independent variables predicted the overall satisfaction of foster caring score at a statistically significant level. First, adoption of a foster child appeared to be a significant predictor of overall satisfaction [ $\beta = -.041$ ] when controlling for all other variables in the model. This means someone who has adopted through foster care in the past is, on average, 1.209 points more satisfied with overall foster caring than someone who had not adopted through foster care.

Next, Satisfaction with the R&C Worker scale appeared to be a good predictor of overall satisfaction [ $\beta = .078$ ] when controlling for all other variables in the model. This can be interpreted as on average a one point increase in satisfaction with the R&C Worker scale would result in a 0.178 point increase in overall satisfaction.

The third identified statistically significant predictor was Ongoing Worker Satisfaction. Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker appeared to be a positive predictor of overall satisfaction [ $\beta = .293$ ] when controlling for all other variables in the model. Thus, a one point increase in satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker scale would result in a 0.567 point increase in overall satisfaction.

The fourth identified predictor was Satisfaction with Training Experience [ $\beta = .294$ ]. A one-point increase in satisfaction with the Training Experience scale would result in a 0.684 point increase in overall satisfaction, when controlling for all other variables in the model. The final predictor variable was Satisfaction with Communication when controlling for all other variables in the model. The Satisfaction with communication scale proved to be significant at  $p < .001$  [ $\beta = .405$ ]. Meaning on average a one-point increase in the communication satisfaction scale would result in a 1.267 point increase in overall satisfaction.

The semipartial correlations section of the coefficients table allows for a better understanding of the contribution of each variable to the total *R* Square (Palant, 2020; (Tabachnick et al., 2013). This means Satisfaction with Training ( $sr = .25$ ) contributed the greatest amount to the total *R* Square, followed by Satisfaction with the Worker ( $sr = .15$ ), and Satisfaction with Communication ( $sr = .15$ ) at the  $p < .001$  value.

### ***Retention Outcome Variable***

This section of the multivariate analysis will address and seek to answer the second research question. Research question 2 is as follows; How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-

approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication, and sociodemographic variables predict the retention variable (foster parent's plan to discontinue fostering in the next 12 months)? A binary logistic regression procedure was selected as the best statistical analysis tool based on the use of a dichotomous, dependent variable (Palant, 2020).

Binary logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between the following eight predictor or independent variables; adopted from foster care, more than one foster parent in the home, ever having more than one foster child in the home at once, Satisfaction with R&C Worker, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, Satisfaction with Training Experience, Satisfaction with Communication, and the number of resources used with the Retention dependent variable.

#### *Screening the Data*

The logistic regression was first screened for inclusion and appeared to all meet assumptions for inclusion in the first binary logistic regression model. First, multicollinearity was checked by considering the variance inflation factor (VIF) scores. Similar to the first outcome, the VIF scores are all below the threshold of 10 suggested by Pallant (2020). Next, using the mahalanobis distance test, an analysis of the standard residuals found very few outliers in the data set (n=15) (McLachlan, 1999). Therefore, the binary logistic regression model passed tests for both multicollinearity and variance of the residuals and can be used as a model for the retention outcome.

#### *Findings from the Logistic Regression*

The logistic regression was performed to assess the impact this set of predictor variables has on the odds that respondents would report that they are considering discontinuing fostering in the next 12 months. The model containing all predictors was

statistically significant, [Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .179$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .252$   $\chi^2(8, N = 551) = 105.54, p < .001$ ] indicating that the model was able to distinguish between those who reported wanting to discontinue in the next 12 months and those who did not. The model as a whole was able to correctly classify 75.8% of the cases.

In Table 27, only three of the independent variables appeared to make a statistically significant impact in the model (adopted from foster care, Satisfaction with R& C Worker, and Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker). The strongest predictor of someone considering discontinuing in the next 12 months was someone having adopted from foster care in the past, recording an odds ratio of 2.01. Interestingly, This indicated that the odds are 2.01 times greater that respondents who have adopted previously from foster care would report wanting to discontinue in the next 12 months, when controlling for the other predictor variables.

The second strongest predictor, Satisfaction with R&C Worker, revealed an odds ratio of 1.08. Indicating that for every one point decrease in Satisfaction with R&C Worker, the odds are 1.08 times greater that the respondent will consider discontinuing fostering. Finally, the weakest predictor, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, revealed an odds ratio of 1.06. Indicating that for every one point decrease in Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker the odds are 1.06 times greater that the respondent will consider discontinuing fostering.

**Table 27 Logistic Regression Retention Outcome Variable**

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp( <i>B</i> )	95% CI for Exp( <i>B</i> )		VIF
							LL	UL	
Adopted from Foster Care	.697	.229	9.301	1	.002**	2.008	1.283	3.144	1.113
More than one FP	-.034	.294	.014	1	.907	.966	.543	1.719	1.060
Ever had more than one FC	.063	.258	.059	1	.808	1.065	.642	1.766	1.088
R&C Worker Sat	.073	.030	6.174	1	.013*	1.076	1.016	1.140	3.160
Ongoing Worker Sat	.061	.027	5.029	1	.025*	1.063	1.008	1.121	3.883
Training Sat	.033	.020	2.673	1	.102	1.034	.993	1.076	1.294
Communication Sat	.047	.063	.561	1	.454	1.048	.927	1.186	7.661
Resources Used	.075	.057	1.731	1	.188	1.078	.964	1.206	1.130
Constant	-4.309	.554	60.396	1	<.001***	.013			

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### ***Recruitment Outcome Variable***

This section of the multivariate analysis will address and seek to answer the third research question. Research question 3 is as follows; How well do the component satisfaction variables (Satisfaction with the R&C Worker, the Ongoing Worker, the Pre-approval Process, and the Training Experience), Communication, and sociodemographic variables predict the foster parents' thoughts about recommending the program? Similar to research question 2 above, this question will be explored with a binary logistic regression procedure to address the dichotomous, dependent variable (Palant, 2020).

Binary logistic regression was computed to analyze the relationship between the following seven predictor or independent variables; adopted from foster care, more than one foster parent in the home, ever having more than one foster child in the home at once, Satisfaction with R&C Worker, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, Satisfaction with Training Experience, and Satisfaction with Communication with the Recruitment outcome variable.

#### *Screening the Data*

The logistic regression was screened and appeared to all meet assumptions for inclusion in the second binary logistic regression model. Multicollinearity was assessed by considering the variance inflation factor (VIF) scores. Similar to the first two outcomes, the VIF scores for all predictors were well below the threshold of 10 suggested by Pallant (2020). Next, using the mahalanobis distance test, an analysis of the standard residuals found very few outliers in the data set ( $n=18$ ) (McLachlan, 1999). These findings passed the test for both multicollinearity and variance of the residuals and can be used as a model for the recruitment outcome.

#### *Findings from the Logistic Regression*

The logistic regression was performed to assess the impact this set of predictor variables has on the odds that respondents would recommend their agency to others. The model containing all predictors was statistically significant, [Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .302$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .511$   $\chi^2(7, N = 595) = 214.22, p < .001$ ] indicating that the model was able to distinguish between those who would recommend their agency and those who would not. The model as a whole was able to correctly classify 88.7% of the cases.

In Table 28, only four of the independent variables made a statistically significant impact in the model (adopted from foster care, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, and



Satisfaction with Training Experience, and Satisfaction with Communication). The strongest predictor of someone referring others was someone having adopted from foster care in the past, recording an odds ratio of 3.02. Indicating the odds are 3.02 times greater that respondents who have adopted previously from foster care would report recommending the agency to others.

The second strongest predictor, Satisfaction with Communication, revealed an odds ratio of 0.818. Indicating that each additional one point decrease in Satisfaction with Communication is associated with an 18.4% decrease in the odds of the respondent recommending the agency to others.

The third best predictor, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, revealed an odds ratio of .890. Indicating that each additional one point decrease in Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker was associated with a 11% decrease in the odds of the respondent recommending the agency to others. The fourth strongest predictor, Satisfaction with Training Experience, revealed an odds ratio of 0.926. Indicating that each additional one point decrease in Satisfaction with Training Experience was associated with a 7.4% decrease in the odds of the respondent recommending the agency to others.

**Table 28 Logistic Regression Recruitment Outcome Variable**

Variable	B	SE	Wald	d f	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)		VIF
							LL	UL	
Adopted from Foster Care	1.104	.367	9.051	1	.003**	3.015	1.469	6.188	1.059
More than one FP	-.132	.421	.098	1	.754	.876	.384	2.001	1.039
Ever had more than one FC	-.329	.348	.890	1	.345	.720	.364	1.425	1.055
R&C Worker Sat	-.059	.037	2.533	1	.111	.942	.876	1.014	3.322
Ongoing Worker Sat	-.116	.037	9.634	1	.002**	.890	.827	.958	3.951
Training Sat	-.077	.027	8.290	1	.004**	.926	.879	.976	1.309
Communication Sat	-.201	.085	5.609	1	.018*	.818	.693	.966	8.013
Constant	8.569	.903	90.058	1	<.001***	5265.15			

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Although Research question 4 doesn't directly ask if communication satisfaction is a better indicator of foster parent recruitment, the Logistic Regression model revealed that the Satisfaction with Communication scale is a better predictor of foster parent recruitment than any of the other component satisfaction scales.

### Summary of Findings of the Models

Overall, the various component satisfaction scores appear to have a significant impact on all three of the outcome variables, but only the independent variable, Ongoing Worker Satisfaction, shows a statistically significant relationship with all three outcome variables. The only other predictor that proved to have a statistically significant impact on all three outcomes is having more than one foster parent in the home. Ultimately, a few of the predictors that showed impact on the outcome in a bivariate model failed to be predictors when controlling for other variables in the model. The statistically significant

independent variables will be highlighted in Table 29 below with their corresponding outcome variables.

Finally, the predictors do a fairly good job of highlighting their impact on the outcome variables. While communication satisfaction was revealed to only impact the overall foster caring and recruitment outcomes, this variable appeared to be the strongest predictor of the foster parent recruitment outcome.

**Table 29 Best Scaled Predictors of the Three Outcome Variables**

<b>Outcome Variable</b>	<b>Dependent Variables with statistically significant impact</b>	<b><i>p-value</i></b>
<b>Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring</b>	Adopted from Foster Care	.029
	R&C Worker Satisfaction	.020
	Ongoing Worker Satisfaction	<.001
	Training Satisfaction	<.001
	Communication Satisfaction	<.001
<b>Retention</b>	Adopted from Foster Care	.002
	R&C Worker Satisfaction	.013
	Ongoing Worker Satisfaction	.025
<b>Recruitment</b>	Adopted from Foster Care	.003
	Ongoing Worker Satisfaction	.003
	Training Satisfaction	.004
	Communication Satisfaction	.018

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## **Chapter Five - Discussion**

This chapter will discuss and further expand on the results and implications which come from the findings and results of Chapter Four. First, the findings will be compared with previous literature. Next, each of the three outcomes will be discussed in detail based on their findings and past literature. Third, the limitations of the study will be addressed and explored for further understanding of the findings. Then, implications for both future practice and research will be explored to further expand on the findings of this study. And finally, a summary of the findings will be collectively discussed.

### **Interpretation of the Results**

Guided by the first three research questions, the study considered how demographics and satisfaction with various components of the foster care process impact Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring, the Retention variable, and the Recruitment variable. These questions were explored through various analyses and highlight how they were influenced by various predictor variables. Finally, the fourth research question inquired about whether Satisfaction with Communication was a better predictor of the outcome variables.

### ***Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring***

As mentioned in Chapter Three, A scale comprised of 20 different questions focused on the overall satisfaction with foster care experience was calculated to compute this variable. As stated, the lower the score, the greater the satisfaction. The mean score for the scale was  $M = 43.26$ , and the standard deviation from the mean was  $SD = 13.85$ , with a range from 20-94. Based on a reliability analysis, the scale has a reliability coefficient alpha of .931.

These findings are consistent with several previous studies showing that while the majority of foster parents might share that they are satisfied, they tend to fall somewhere in the middle of the satisfaction spectrum and therefore appear to lack strong satisfaction rates and are heading toward dissatisfaction overall. This is consistent with findings from many different studies focused on foster parent satisfaction. Danby et al. (1999) found that 16% of the study population reported being dissatisfied and similarly found that receiving some form of information from the caseworker when needed led to greater overall satisfaction. Overall, foster parent satisfaction appears to continue to be an issue and appears consistent with previous literature on the subject (Griffiths et al., 2021; Randle et al., 2018; Whenan et al., 2009). These studies highlight the legitimacy of this study and the important role this study might play in providing a better outcome for foster parents and caseworkers alike.

The multiple linear regression model found five predictor variables to show a statistically significant impact on overall satisfaction with foster caring at the 95% confidence level ( $p < .05$ ). These predictors include the following: participants reported previously adopting a child from foster care, Satisfaction with the R&C Worker scale, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker scale, the Satisfaction with Training scale, and the total score of the Satisfaction with Communication scale.

The best predictor of Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring in the model was the Satisfaction with Communication scale. This scale revealed a *Beta* score of 1.267. This means that, on average, for every 1-point increase in satisfaction with communication, there will be a 1.267 point increase in Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring. As mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, very little is known about communication's

impact on the foster parent's satisfaction with foster caring. This showcases a unique finding when considering recent literature and highlights the need to address communication concerns further both in practice and research.

The second strongest predictor of Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring was the adoption from foster care variable. This variable revealed a *Beta* score of -1.209, meaning that, on average, someone who has adopted a child through foster care in the past is 1.209 points more satisfied than someone who answered no to this question. These findings make sense given recent literature that highlights that satisfaction with parenting is higher for individuals who have adopted when compared to those who have only fostered (Cleary et al, 2018).

The final three predictors for this outcome all fall well below the top two predictors discussed above. Satisfaction with Training (*Beta* = .684), Ongoing Worker (*Beta* = .567), and R&C Worker (*Beta* = .178), all show some impact, but the beta score fell well below 1. Suggesting a much weaker impact on overall satisfaction from these predictors than that of the adoption variable. These findings reveal that a one-point increase in each of the respective satisfaction scales results in a decrease in the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring score. No known literature considers multiple facets of the foster care system in this way, although some articles have highlighted how limited support from the system has impacted overall satisfaction (Griffiths et al., 2021; Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Samrai et al., 2011). These four facets appear to provide a new way of viewing the foster care experience through three different formal agency supports and operations. As mentioned in Chapter Two, satisfaction with various individual facets of the agency has been explored (Cooley et al., 2019; Cooley & Petren, 2011) but no known

literature has looked simultaneously at the specific facets of the agency process explored in this study.

The findings regarding satisfaction with communication are consistent with the concerns expressed in previous literature surrounding the foster parent's desire to be respected and heard (Geiger et al., 2017). That is foster parent's prefer a well informed and supportive connection with their case workers. (Cooley, 2015; Cooley et al., 2015) Foster Parent's desire to be more involved in the case planning process and to be valued for their service and input in providing for the children in their care (Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Samrai et al., 2011). The findings from all four of the satisfaction scales also make sense given previous literature's findings that foster parents feel that the support from caseworkers is lacking, and they desire a better interaction with the system and caseworkers alike (Griffiths et al., 2021; Leffler & Ahn, 2022; Mallette et al., 2020). These findings are also consistent with Social Equity theory, highlighting that as foster parents lose support and feel frustrated with the system, they begin to become dissatisfied with the overall caring process.

This reveals the need to consider various facets in the understanding of overall satisfaction and that leaving out any of these composite satisfaction variables would cause the model to be missing something. Having a more full picture of what the overall experience is like for foster carers is better understood by considering the three component factors representing the agency discussed above, as well as the addition of the satisfaction with communication variable.

## ***Retention***

The second outcome explored was identified as the Retention outcome. This outcome asks the participants if they are considering discontinuing foster caring in the next 12 months. This variable was examined as the dependent variable in a binary logistic regression. As mentioned in Chapter Four, 21.8% of the entire sample reported considering closing their home in the next 12 months. In a similar study of treatment foster parents by Mihalo and colleagues (2016), the researchers utilized a three point likert scale to examine their retention variable; it was similarly coded into likely to continue and not likely to continue and found that 22% of their sample were not likely to continue in the next 12 months. Another similar study looked at a foster parent's desire to close their home in the next 18 months and sorted the scale into three categories; likely, unsure, or unlikely (Geiger et al., 2013). Although this study offered an unsure option which differs from the current study and that of Jennifer Mihalo and Colleagues in 2016, the study found that 24.6% of the sample reported being likely to close their home in the next 18 months. This shows that the percentage of respondents is very consistent with the findings of both Mihalo et al. (2016) and Geiger et al. (2013).

The model revealed three different predictors to be statistically significant at a 95% confidence level ( $p < .05$ ). These predictors are whether someone has a child adopted through foster care, their Satisfaction with the R&C worker, and Satisfaction with the Ongoing Worker. The best predictor with an odd ratio of 2.008 was the variable adopted from foster care. This finding revealed that someone who has adopted through foster care in the past is greater than two times more likely to report wanting to discontinue in the next 12 months than someone who has not adopted. This is contradictory to the findings



above, which highlight that those who have adopted are more satisfied. Yet, in this logistic model, they report wanting to discontinue more often than those who have not adopted. This could be a result of foster parents taking a child into their home and realizing they either do not have any more room or that they do not have the emotional capacity to care for and love another foster child in their home.

The other two predictors will be lumped together here. The odds ratios for satisfaction with R&C workers and ongoing workers were each found to be statistically significant. For each one-point increase in dissatisfaction on the R&C Worker Satisfaction scale resulted in, on average, the odds of a foster parent in Kentucky being 1.08 times more likely to respond that they desire to discontinue in the next 12 months. Similarly, every one-point increase in dissatisfaction with the ongoing worker resulted in a Kentucky foster parent being 1.06 times more likely to respond that they will discontinue fostering in the next 12 months. These variables and findings might be considered similar to the findings of Jennifer Mihalo and colleagues (2016), who found that support from staff was also a statically significant predictor of foster parent retention overall. Although, Mihalo et al. (2016) did find training satisfaction to be an indicator of retention dissimilar from this study. In another similar study by Geiger et al. (2013) there were no similar statistically significant predictors of this study, even though agency workers were a presumed predictor in their logistic regression model.

Many articles have highlighted how overall foster parent satisfaction is directly correlated with retention (Cooley, 2015; Cooley et al., 2015; Denby et al., 1999; Whenan et al., 2009), yet, only three of the five predictors have a statistically significant impact on both the Overall Satisfaction with Foster Caring score and the Retention outcome

variable. These differences reveal a need to dig deeper into the impacts of satisfaction with ongoing training and satisfaction with communication, as these did not appear to impact the retention variable. This finding could be due to the foster care agency overall being so closely linked with the foster care workers, both R&C and Ongoing workers, that the overall satisfaction might seem synonymous with the agency overall. Also, of note, foster parents most often interact with their caseworkers and, therefore might have consistent frustration leading to greater dissatisfaction and a desire to discontinue.

Findings from Research question 2, provide a window into what might be causing foster parents to discontinue and allow foster care agencies to focus on addressing these needs and concerns that result in dissatisfaction with the agency workers overall, both R&C and ongoing workers. It is concerning that according to the findings of the logistic regression, many foster parents are more likely to consider quitting fostering and close their homes to children in foster care if they are dissatisfied with the R&C and/or Ongoing caseworkers. These findings are consistent with two qualitative studies that highlight the foster parent's direct association between dissatisfaction with case workers and a desire to discontinue being a foster parent. (Denlinger & Dorius, 2018; MacGregor et al., 2006). Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on providing foster parents with a voice to express what these concerns might be and ultimately work to provide solutions to their concerns about caseworker dissatisfaction.

### ***Recruitment***

The third outcome in Research Question 3 examined the Recruitment variable. The recruitment variable asked participants if they would recommend their foster care agency to others. As mentioned in Chapter Three, about 38% of the participants reported

that they would not recommend their foster care agency to others. Mihalo and associates (2016) also explored a similar recruitment variable and found that nearly 28% of treatment foster parents who responded to the survey would not refer others to their agency.

This variable was explored through a binary logistic regression which revealed four of the seven predictors to have a statically significant impact on the recruitment variable. The variables that were associated with a 95% confidence ( $p < .05$ ) are reported having adopted a child from foster care in the past, Satisfaction with the Ongoing worker, Satisfaction with the Training, and Satisfaction with Communication.

The strongest predictor of the recruitment variable appears to be the adoption from foster care variable. This variable was found to have an odds ratio of 3.02. Meaning having adopted a child from foster care, on average, makes a person 3.02 times more likely to refer others to the agency. Three of the four scaled predictors showed a statistically significant impact on the recruitment variable. Satisfaction with Communication, Satisfaction with Ongoing Worker, and Satisfaction with Training Experience was associated with an 18%, 11%, and 7.4% decrease in the odds of recommending the agency for every one-point increase in dissatisfaction, respectively. These findings suggest that while the R&C worker's role may be very important in the process if someone wants to be a better proponent of foster parent recruitment from peer foster parents, a greater emphasis should be had on ongoing workers, training, and satisfaction with communication. Furthermore, Many foster parents reported lacking a desire to refer others. Finally, as reported earlier, another similar study which looked at a recruitment variable found that general support from agency staff was a statistically

significant predictor of recruitment (Mihalo et al., 2016). This study dives a bit deeper than the Mihalo text and highlights how interactions and satisfaction with the ongoing worker might be more important to retention than interactions and satisfaction with the R&C worker.

These findings are also consistent with that of other previous research in a few ways. First, Baer and Diehl (2019) highlight how current foster parents appear to be the best recruiters of other foster parents. Although this article does not reveal if they follow through on recommending the agency, it does offer some insight into which factors most influence the participant's desire to refer others. This is one of the first studies that investigate what might make foster parents recruit others and highlights the need to create better communication channels, better training, and better interactions with ongoing workers. Interestingly enough, the “R” in R&C worker stands for Recruitment, but this variable only showed a slight impact on the variable when compared to other variables in the model. The frustration and dissatisfaction with the ongoing worker, training, and communication overall leading to a foster parent wanting to discontinue care are consistent with Equity theory. As found in much of the literature (Griffeth & Gaertner, 2001; Ngo-Henha, 2018), dissatisfaction with support and feeling less buy-in and connection with the agency lead to the participant deciding to quit, causing turnover for the foster parent agency.

These findings highlight the need to connect with and provide foster parents with greater support and connection, not only with ongoing workers but also with R&C Workers. The lack of impact that the R&C Worker has should be highly inquired about if the role of this worker is to help maintain certification and encourage others to become

foster parents in the future. While the R&C Worker does focus more heavily on providing direct support to the foster parent, other portions of the agency should also be addressed if foster care agencies want to see more of their current foster parents become recruiters and champions for the growth of the number of active foster parents in their agency.

These greater supports could mean adding financial incentives to caseworkers' salaries for meeting quotas based on the number of contacts per month between caseworkers and foster parents. This could allow for more consistent oversight while also providing the caseworker with something to work toward. Pay is typically very low for public foster care workers, so a financial incentive might come as a welcome gesture. Similarly, potentially creating a space for foster parents to anonymously voice frustrations without fear of repercussions could be a welcome gesture for foster parents. Some foster parents might be afraid of mentioning something that frustrates them about their child, caseworker, or even training because they assume it might not be taken with the best of intentions and would be held against them as they continue to foster. This would allow for a better place for parents to vent and get feedback based on their needs.

To address the concerns of satisfaction with communication, potentially providing an automated and shared log that could track communication which updates each time a caseworker makes a note in the child's case plan. This could provide quicker and more efficient access to information for foster parents. Foster parents can communicate with caseworkers via email, text, phone call, or even zoom, and information is shared in multiple different ways. Some of these conversations take place in front of the child and they can take place in the car, office, or home, so sometimes information might get lost.

Creating a consistent place that provides a shared log of the communication might offer better satisfaction with communication.

Finally, to impact training, foster care agencies might consider utilizing a similar model to other helping professions, like social work, in which a certain number of continuing education units are required but they can come from a larger pool. Each child brings their own unique needs and therefore the trainings cannot always address each of these needs. This might allow a foster parent to do something different from the norm like attend a weekend retreat to refresh and learn about ways to cope with difficult situations or how to create supports to best care for themselves and the children in their care, a new system might make this opportunity easier to utilize and lead to greater satisfaction with foster caring.

## **Limitations**

### ***Sample***

The sample population was comprised of all foster parents with an open home in Kentucky. As was mentioned earlier, anyone who received the survey would be able to access and complete the survey. Some foster parents might not have received it because they do not have access to the internet or because the agency has an incorrect email. Foster parents are busy individuals as they balance many different responsibilities associated with caring for children in OOHC, and therefore their time is limited. The survey did not offer incentives of any kind to participants and was sent via email for completion. The addition of a financial incentive or even having the survey completed at a continuing education training might have increased the sample size and the number of

participants who completed the survey. Put simply, those who failed to receive the survey because of internet issues, being busy, incorrect emails, or lacking incentives likely have communication issues overall but might not have responded to the survey.

Many families that have more than one foster parent in the home might have agreed to have only one foster parent answer the survey, therefore leading to a decrease in the response rate. Not surprisingly, over 80% of the sample is female, with 16% reported as male, 3% preferred not to disclose, and less than 1% responding as other. This might skew the data simply based on the demographics of the sample respondents. While this study included a large sample of the foster parent population in Kentucky (over 20%), this cannot necessarily guarantee that the findings are representative of all public foster parents in Kentucky and should be understood as such.

### ***Potential Bias***

Although this survey was sent out to all active, publicly trained foster parents in Kentucky, there is potential for negative bias in those who responded. In many cases, those who are most often frustrated might be more willing to respond to a survey or questionnaire based on their experiences. This might lead to more negative feedback than expected but still provides a window into why certain individuals are disgruntled. However, the goal of this dissertation is to better understand why people might be dissatisfied. Therefore, this survey data might allow for a greater sample of those who are dissatisfied. This should be considered in the understanding of the findings of the study.

### ***Methodological***

Some foster parents have had multiple case workers and multiple placements over many years. For this simple fact, it might have been difficult for them to provide an

“average” score for the satisfaction scales as workers' roles and expectations have changed. Also to be considered is the fact that foster parents might have multiple placements, which can result in multiple different case workers for their children. In some cases, foster parents might report more readily a negative experience rather than a positive and even more recent experience. They simply could have enjoyed and been satisfied with one caseworker while simultaneously being frustrated and disgruntled with another. This left a bit of the satisfaction to chance based on what foster parents have experienced in the past rather than based on the current moment.

Next, the survey was sent out as a quality improvement survey, and therefore, the initial design was not to focus solely on these questions. Although the questions were easily scaled and connected to the different variables, the original intent of the data collection was for quality improvement at the state level. While this does not impact the overall findings of the study, it did, however, impact which variables might have been left out of the model. These limitations by no means change the meaning of the data but should be considered for future studies.

Finally, the survey was statewide and sent out to anyone publicly trained in Kentucky. It is important to note, to best generalize the findings, some counties might have different structures for support and leadership in the child welfare system. Because of IRB approval, privacy, and confidentiality issues, this data does not allow for access or sorting of the data based on county or city of residents but could be analyzed further by someone at the state level who might have access to this demographic information.



## **Implications for Future Practice**

The findings from Research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 provide an excellent place to start for the public child welfare agency in Kentucky. While many of these issues might be obvious or even implied, the findings of this study allow for a better understanding of what parts of the foster care agency impact the various outcomes for foster parents. If previous research shows that overall satisfaction might be the most consistent predictor of foster parent retention, then the findings from both Research questions 1 and 2 should be highly considered. The results provide a better understanding of what might push foster parents toward discontinuing and also create space for identifying what might influence foster parents to refer others.

Better outcomes in the recruitment and overall satisfaction of foster parents might be addressed by offering new and innovative training methodologies. All foster parents have to complete ongoing training, and this study highlighted how training satisfaction directly correlated with overall satisfaction and recruitment. Agencies might consider creating adaptive training and more flexible approaches to training in order to best suit the needs of foster parents in various stages of life and levels of experience. If foster parents can feel a sense of ownership over the training and see the value in the training, they might be more committed to retaining and applying the material to their case. This survey did take place during the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore, a continuous updating of training methods might improve overall satisfaction with training. Allowing foster parents to select trainings that matter to them the most might create better ownership over the process and lead to greater satisfaction. For example, If the number of required continuing education credits is 30, potentially 8-10 of those can be prescribed,

and the remaining 20-22 could be elective, chosen, and utilized at the discretion of the foster parent. The trainings could be selected not only from a list offered by the cabinet but also trainings that are self-identified by the foster parent themselves.

Foster parent agencies must also address the concerns that foster parents have for caseworkers. Being a caseworker is often a tiresome and overwhelming job (Griffiths et al., 2019; Stalker et al., 2007). Knowing that, in many cases, outcomes can be less than ideal as many workers have ever-increasing caseloads and experience vicarious trauma, caseworker turnover continues to be an issue (Middleton & Potter, 2015). As found from the survey, many foster parents want to feel appreciated and understood by their caseworkers and are dissatisfied with caseworkers. Considerations for practice might include allowing ongoing workers to be consistently assigned based on the foster parent rather than the child. In many cases, the investigations worker is someone different than the child's ongoing worker, so it might be helpful to offer the same caseworker consistently for each set of foster parents. Many caseworkers have to travel for home visits, court dates, etc., and creating a more streamlined system of care might provide a network of consistency. It might also be possible that foster parents have a poor understanding of what to expect from caseworkers as well as preservice and ongoing training. As mentioned earlier, a shared log system might allow for easier case planning meetings and avoid repeating information to foster parents who can utilize the system to check in on progress and what has taken place thus far.

In order to best care for and support foster parents, consideration should be paid to how communication with foster parents is handled. This is one of the leading factors in both overall satisfaction and recruitment and, therefore, should be strongly considered.

By creating an innovative and possibly more effective way of communicating with foster parents, new avenues of care might be provided. Many foster parents report feeling left out of the care process, and increased communication might provide a better sense of involvement in the case planning process. While foster parents are often involved in multiple systems, from doctor appointments to court appointments to biological family visits and much more, better communication might ease the frustrations and nerves of foster parents overall.

Finally, overall communication appears to be a large component of the outcomes addressed in this study. As mentioned above, nearly 20% of the participants felt left out of the case planning process, and over 30% of participants reported lacking both notification and awareness of important dates, information, and available support. The foster care agency could work to identify automated systems that send out consistent time-stamped updates on the child's case via email or another secure message system. This might also be addressed by a shared calendar with the foster parent and caseworker, specific to the child's case, or a website that provides an updated list of supports available in the area for both the foster parent and the child in their care, or as mentioned, the shared log system.

Child welfare agencies should explore the implications and suggestions explored above to provide better outcomes for foster parents and caseworkers. Being a caseworker in child welfare can be taxing and frustrating, so considering these findings may allow for better results and support for caseworkers. Foster parents are more than volunteers but are not quite employees. Therefore, agencies should emphasize support through better communication and interaction with caseworkers. Foster care agencies would be prudent

to consider how to improve interactions and support between foster parents and R&C workers. Although part of the R&C worker's role is to support the recruitment of foster parents, the findings showed a lack of interaction between R&C worker satisfaction and the recruitment outcome. The R&C worker is typically the most frequented agency support for foster parents; therefore, their communication and interactions are vital to the foster caring process.

### **Implications for Future Research**

In future studies, the three component satisfaction variables should all be considered as they all were revealed to impact the overall satisfaction score, and each, in various ways, impacted the retention and recruitment variables. These formal supports provided by the agency could be considered both individually and in an ongoing manner. Although the literature is filled with studies focusing on the impact of preservice foster parent training, more could be explored surrounding the ongoing training of foster parents. Because foster parent training is consistently the most utilized and offered support by agencies, this topic should be explored to better identify preferences, needs, and knowledge limitations of foster parents as they continue in their care process. Offering a better array of options for training would give more ownership to the foster parents and create a new feeling of autonomy to learn about what matters to the foster parent.

Research question 4 should be addressed more thoroughly through future research. While the scale provided a broad stroke of questions that focused on communication, more detailed and specific studies should consider how communication impacts outcomes for foster parents. Furthermore, considerations for new and innovative

communication approaches would be helpful. Building upon research from the communication sciences and media strategies, creating new methods for quickly and efficiently communicating with foster parents might provide foster parents will better interactions and reported satisfaction with the various facets of the foster care system explored in this study. Also to consider for future research, The Implementation a new shared log system and considering if this new method impacts communication satisfaction and even streamline the process for both foster parents and caseworkers.

Furthermore, a survey that considered the communication preferences of foster parents might offer a better understanding of what foster parents want and need. This survey could consider the frequency of communication, information needs, and method of communication preferred by foster parents. Then these findings could inform new and innovative ways to streamline the communication process for foster parents and caseworkers alike.

## **Summary**

While many foster parent satisfaction surveys are sent for quality improvement by both public and private agencies, this study identified areas that might be addressed to get improved outcomes in both foster parent retention and recruitment. Foster parent retention remains an issue, and findings from this study provide a framework for areas to focus on. While this study focuses more on the exploration of satisfaction with foster care, it also impacts retention and recruitment. A contribution it makes to the literature can be found in the provision of reliable scales for measuring satisfaction with components of the foster care experience. Specially, reliable scales were created for determining satisfaction with the R&C Worker, Ongoing Worker, Training Experience,

and Communication. It is hoped that the use of these scales in future research will lead to better outcomes for both foster parents and caseworkers alike. This study can be used as a guide for areas to focus on to create better experiences and outcomes for foster parents both in Kentucky and elsewhere in the US.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Initial FPSS Solicitation Email

**From:** Cabinet for Health and Family Services kchfs@subscriptions.kentucky.gov

**Subject:** 2021 Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey

**Date:** January 19, 2022 at 12:27 PM

Good afternoon DCBS foster parents! The 2021 Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey is available and ready for your input. Your feedback is very important to us. We were able to create many new trainings and begin work on changes within DCBS based on your feedback from last year. We value your honesty and suggestions, thus the survey can be anonymous.

Please follow the link below to complete the survey prior to **February 16, 2022**.

[https://ekusseml.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bHIUbBRhRFEQyt8](https://ekusseml.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bHIUbBRhRFEQyt8)

Update your subscriptions, modify your password or email address, or stop subscriptions at any time on your [Subscriber Preferences Page](#). You will need to use your email address to log in. If you have questions or problems with the subscription service, please contact [support@subscriptions.ky.gov](mailto:support@subscriptions.ky.gov).

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## **Appendix B: 2021 Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey**

Q1: The following statements are about your experience with the Department for Community-Based Services and/or your agency. Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

1.1: I am familiar with the role that DCBS plays in the foster parenting program.

1.2: DCBS and my foster care agency set clear guidelines about my role and responsibilities as a foster parent.

1.3: I was provided with the information available, regarding the foster child's needs, prior to placement.

1.4: DCBS and/or my agency helps me access services needed for the child, including health and mental health resources.

1.5: DCBS and my agency is sensitive to the cultural environment within my family.

1.6: I receive adequate notification of important meetings, court hearings, staffings, and visitation.

1.7: I am aware of my foster child's permanency plan.

1.8: I am involved as part of the child's team in service planning for the foster children in my care.

1.9: The caseworker(s) encourages interaction between the foster child and their biological family.

1.10: The reimbursement payment process is prompt.

1.11: The reimbursement payment process is uncomplicated.

1.12: The reimbursement payment rate is sufficient for caring for the child's needs.

1.13: The DCBS investigations procedure in cases of foster parent abuse allegations is satisfactory.

1.14: DCBS and/or my agency publicly recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.

1.15: DCBS and/or my agency privately recognizes the contributions and achievements of foster parents.

1.16: I feel valued as a foster parent by DCBS and/or my agency.



Q2: The following statements are about your experience with Recruitment and Certification staff. Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

2.1: My worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.

2.2: My worker is knowledgeable and supportive.

2.3: I feel supported by my worker during times of crisis.

2.4: My worker is professional and courteous.

2.5: I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parent by my worker.

2.6: I am satisfied with the communication with my worker.

2.7: I am satisfied with the communication and support from leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA).

Q3: The following statements are about your experience with the child's workers (Ongoing and Investigations). Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

3.1: My child's worker is timely in responding to my emails, calls, and questions.

3.2: My child's worker is knowledgeable and supportive.

3.3: My child's worker is professional and courteous.

3.4: I feel valued and appreciated as a foster parent by my child's worker.

3.5: I am satisfied with the communication with my child's worker.

3.6: I am satisfied with the communication and support from ongoing and investigations leadership (FSOS, SRAA, SRCA, SRA).

Q4: Were you approved within the past year, January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021?

Yes (If yes, the respondents were asked Questions Q4b)

No (If no, the respondents were moved to Q5)

Q4b: The following statements ask about your pre-approval experience. Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

4b1: When I first contacted my agency about becoming a foster parent, my questions and phone calls were answered in a timely, effective manner.

4b2: During the approval process, I was informed of the child placement needs in my community.

4b3: There were opportunities for preservice training in or close to my home community.

4b4: The pre-service classes were effective in preparing me to become a foster/adoptive parent.

4b5: The preservice classes prepared me to work in partnership with birth families and to support reunification.

4b6: The home study process supported my preparation to be a foster/adoptive parent.

4b7: The approval paperwork was manageable and easy to follow.

4b8: The trainer/worker was able to answer my questions and assist me with the process as needed.

4b9: I felt prepared to become a foster parent prior to my first placement.

4b10: I fully understood the time commitment prior to taking a placement (additional appointments, family visits, worker visits, etc.).

4b11: What are some ways we can improve the preservice classes and home study process?

Open-ended response

Q5: The following statements are about your ongoing training experience within the past year (January 1, 2021-December 31, 2021). Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Q5.1: I am adequately notified of ongoing training opportunities.

Q5.2: I am satisfied with the availability (time, day, location) of ongoing trainings.

Q5.3: I am satisfied with the various methods through which ongoing trainings are offered (in-person, online, virtual).

Q5.4: The content of the mandatory trainings (Trauma, Sexual Abuse, Behavior Management) helped enhance my skills as a foster parent.

Q5.5: The content of the additional ongoing trainings helped enhance my skills as a foster parent.

Q5.6: I am satisfied with the topics of additional ongoing trainings provided by my agency (outside of the mandatory trainings).

Q5.7: I am satisfied with the quality of the ongoing training provided by my agency.

Q5.8: Trainers were knowledgeable and able to answer my questions.

Q6: Adoption Support Kentucky (ASK) support groups meet across the state and provide an opportunity for foster and adoptive families to receive training and support. Did you know there were support group meetings available to you for support, connections with other families, and training?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Q6b was asked)

No (If Answered No, Q6b was skipped)

Q6b: Have you participated in any ASK support groups?

Yes

No

Q7: Have you participated in any support groups other than ASK?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Q7b was asked)

No (If Answered No, Q7b was skipped)

Q7b: Please list the support groups other than ASK, in which you have participated.

Open-ended response

Q8: The Mentor Program pairs new foster/adoptive parents with experienced foster/adoptive parents to coach and encourage you through the first 6 months. Did you participate in the Mentor Program upon initial approval as a foster/adoptive parent?

Yes

No

Unsure

Q9: The Foster Parent Training Program provides support, resources, and information to foster parent through the Foster and Adoptive Support and Training (FAST) hotline and FAST help website. Have you ever used the Foster Parent Training Program for support or resources?

Yes

No

Unsure

Q10: The Network provides training and confidential peer support to foster parents. Have you participated in any Foster Parent Network trainings, supports, or events?

Yes

No

Unsure

Q11: Foster Care Associations provide advocacy and support on a local, state, or national level. Are you part of a local, state, or national Foster Parent Association?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Q11b was asked)

No (If Answered No, Q11b was skipped)

Q11b: Please list the Foster Care Association(s) of which you are a part.

Open-ended response

Q12: What other supports have you used as a foster parent? (Rank from most important to least important)

Tutoring

Daycare

Camps/Summer Programs

Counseling

Respite

Intensive in-home services

Material Support (e.g. beds, clothing, bicycles)

Foster Parent's Night Out

Other Foster Parents

Church Support

Other

Q13: The following statements are about Overall Satisfaction. Please choose the response that indicates how much you agree with each statement. – Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral N/A, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Q13.1: I am satisfied with the Preservice Training and preparation.

Q13.2: I am satisfied with the ongoing trainings.

Q13.3: I am satisfied with my R&C staff.

Q13.4: I am satisfied with the investigative staff.

Q13.5: I am satisfied with my ongoing workers/staff.

Q13.6: I am satisfied with the supports offered.

Q14: Would you recommend your agency's foster/adoption program to others?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Q14b was asked)

No (If Answered No, Q14c was asked)

Q14b: Why would you recommend the DCBS foster/adoption program to others?

Open-ended response

Q14c: Why would you not recommend the DCBS foster/adoption program to others?

Open-ended response

Q15: What improvements do you think DCBS and/or your agency could make?

Open-ended response

Q16: Are you considering discontinuing fostering within the next 12 months?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Q16b was asked)

No (If Answered No, Q16b was skipped)

Q16b: Why are you considering discontinuing fostering?

Q17: What factors were important in your decision to foster? (Rank from most important to least important)

Spiritual Calling

To help children in need

To care for a specific child

To adopt

To have children in my home

For financial compensation

Other

Q18: What is the most REWARDING aspect of foster parenting? (Select all that apply)

The feeling of helping a child in need

Relationships with the child in foster care

Adoption of a child in foster care

Training, speakers, and/or attending other events

Other

Q19: How many years have you been approved as a foster parent?

1-20+ years

Q20: Have you ever had more than one foster child in your care at the same time?

Yes (If Answered Yes, Asked Q20b)

No (If Answered No, Q20b Skipped)

Q20b: How many foster children have you had in your care at the same time?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

Q21: What age range of children have you cared for in your home? (Select all that apply)

- 0-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-11 years
- 12-18 years
- 19+ years

Q22: I have fostered children who \_\_\_\_\_ (Select all that apply)

- Are part of a sibling group
- Are a minority
- Are involved in the mental health system
- Have disabilities
- Are deemed care plus
- Are deemed medically complex
- Have been involved in the juvenile justice system
- Have been identified as a juvenile sex offender

Q23: Have you adopted any children from foster care?

- Yes
- No

Q24: Are you approved to for relative/fictive kin or specific child?

Yes

No

Q25: What is your current approval type?

Basic

Child Specific (with waivers)

Advanced

Medically Complex

Care Plus

Therapeutic

Q26: Through what agency are you approved to foster?

DCBS

Private Child Placing (PCP) \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of agency)

Q27: What is your age?

21-29 years

30-29 years

40-49 years

50-59 years

60+ years

Q28: What is your Gender?

Male

Female

Other

Prefer not to disclose



Q29: What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School or Equivalent

Some College

College or University Degree

Some Graduate School

Graduate School Degree

Some High School

Q30: What is your ethnicity?

White

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Other

Prefer not to disclose

Q31: Is there more than one approved foster parent in your household?

Yes

No

## Appendix C: IRB-Approval: Cabinet for Health and Family Services



**CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES**  
**Office of the Ombudsman and Administrative Review**  
**Office of the Executive Director**

**Andy Beshear**  
Governor

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**Eric C. Friedlander**  
Secretary

September 21, 2022

CHFS- IRB- DRS-FY22-28

Ethan Engelhardt  
Ph.D. Student, University of Kentucky  
2575 Millbrook Drive  
Lexington, KY 40503

Dear Mr. Engelhardt,

The Cabinet for Health and Family Services Institutional Review Board (CHFS IRB) has determined that the research project titled "Foster Parent and Case Worker Communication: A Dissertation on How Communication and Satisfaction Impact Foster Parent Longevity and Retention," meets the criteria for exemption pursuant to 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Therefore, no further review by the CHFS IRB is required. However, any significant amendment or modification to the protocol must be reported to the CHFS IRB and reviewed prior to implementation to ensure that the protocol still meets the exemption criteria.

The above exempt determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:  
45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place subjects at the risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

If you have any questions about any of the above or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Respectfully,



Imelda Pastriano  
CHFS IRB Administrator

Kentucky.gov

**TEAM**  
**KENTUCKY**

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## **Vita**

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Student Development, *Resident Director*

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## **PUBLICATIONS**

Pope, N.D., Gibson, A., **Engelhardt, E.C.**, Ratliff, S.H., Lewinson, T., & Loeffler, D.N.

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