



Preliminary Summary of Foster Home Quality and Satisfaction Survey



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Office for Research and Evaluation (DCF ORE)**

and

Office of Children and Youth in Placement (DCF OChYP)

in collaboration with

Regional Foster Care (DCF)

and

Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents

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ABSTRACT

Background: Hearing directly from children in foster care and their caregivers can provide critical feedback on the foster care service delivery and improve our understanding of the impact of placement into out-of-home care. The Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), however, has never conducted a statewide survey to hear directly from these children.

Objectives: To examine the level of quality and satisfaction of foster home placements, as well as associated factors among children in foster care and their caregivers.

Methods: A random sample of children ages 8 years or older, who were placed in a foster home, were invited to participate in a cross-sectional study. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews for 225 children and 221 caregivers (of which 12 secondary caregivers were excluded from the analysis); youth in foster care ages 13 years or older were also asked to complete a supplemental self-administered questionnaire to assess their pro-social and potentially detrimental behaviors. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the level of quality and satisfaction.

Results and Implications: Overall, both foster parents and children placed in their homes demonstrated a relatively high satisfaction rate, (85%) among children in foster care and (79%) among their caregivers, toward the services that they received, suggesting that DCF is successful in providing high quality services to both children in foster homes and their caregivers. In this preliminary report, we did not examine factors associated with quality and satisfaction of foster home placement. Such results will be included in the full report.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Given the pivotal role that foster parents play in successfully fostering the children placed in their care, foster parents' viewpoints regarding quality and satisfaction have been solicited not only by scientific researchers, but also by many child welfare agencies in different states such as Colorado, Nebraska, and Washington. None of the studies conducted by child welfare agencies examined factors associated with quality and satisfaction, and thus important information may have been missed. An assessment of the factors that influence foster parent satisfaction could help child welfare agencies better understand foster parents' needs and also lead to identification of ways to improve satisfaction.

Unlike information about foster parents that usually is obtained directly from them, most information about children in foster care mainly has been acquired indirectly from caregivers, social workers, case records, and administrative data. Children possess unique insights that can contribute to child welfare practice and policy development. Hearing directly from children in foster care can provide critical feedback on foster care service delivery and improve our understanding of the impact of placement into out-of-home care. To the best of our

knowledge, however, DCF has not conducted a statewide quality and satisfaction survey among children in foster care.

DCF, in partnership with the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents (CAFAP), conducted the first statewide face-to-face, cross-sectional survey to examine the level of quality and satisfaction of foster home placements, as well as associated factors among children in foster care and their foster parents. The feedback provided by our youth and their caregivers will allow us to make recommendations not only to improve how we work with youth in foster care and foster families, but also allow us to continue with the positive efforts that are currently underway.

SECTION 2: FINDINGS FROM CHILD VERSION OF THE SURVEY

2.0 Definition of Terms

In Sections 2 and 3, descriptive statistics are presented in the tables that may be unfamiliar or not understood. A brief definition and/or description is provided.

Mean: The average value of a set of numbers; it is calculated by dividing the sum of the numbers by the numbers in the list.

Median: The number separating the higher half of a data sample, a population, or a probability distribution from the lower half.

Range: In statistics, the range is the size of the smallest interval which contains the data and provides an indication of statistical dispersion.

N: Total number of responses to the question that was asked.

n: The number of responses to the sub category of the question that was asked.

2.1 Characteristics of children in foster care in the survey

The mean age of the 225 children in foster care was 13.7 years old, ranging from 8-18 years old (Table 1). About 53% were girls and 47% were boys. Nearly half of the children were either non-Hispanic black (27%) or Hispanic (23%); 40% were non-Hispanic white. The majority of the children in foster care were in non-relative foster care (71%) and 23% were in relative care.

Table 1. Characteristics of children in foster care in the Quality and Satisfaction Survey (N = 225)

Characteristics	n/N or N	Percent or Mean (Median, Range)
Age at interview	225	13.7 (14.0, 8-18)

Sex		
Female	119/225	52.9%
Male	106/225	47.1%
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic White	90/225	40.0%
Non-Hispanic Black	60/225	26.7%
Any Hispanic	51/225	22.7%
Other	24/225	10.7%
Time (months) since most recent removal from home	225	38.5 (25.8, 7.7-163.6)
Type of current placement		
Foster care (non-relative)	159/225	70.7%
Relative care	52/225	23.1%
Special study	14/225	6.2%
Child's permanency plan goal		
Preferred (adoption, reunification, legal guardianship)	166/225	73.8%
Non-preferred (OPPLA, long term relative foster care)	59/225	26.2%

2.2 General education and health among children in foster care

About half of the children were in high school (51%) and the other half were either in elementary (24%) or middle (25%) school (Table 2). The majority (58%) of the children did not miss school or only missed less than 5 days, while about 23% missed 10 or more days of school. About one fourth of children achieved mostly A's grade and half achieved mostly B's grade. Only a small percentage (7%) of children rated their overall health as fair or poor. A very small percentage of children did not have physical examination (5%) and dental cleaning (4%) in the past year. The average level of the ladder for quality of life was 7.5, ranging from 0 - 10.

Table 2. General education and health among children in foster care in the Quality and Satisfaction Survey (N = 225)

Characteristics	n/N or N	Percent or Mean (Median, Range)
Grade		
2 nd – 5 th	53/224	23.7%
6 th – 8 th	55/224	24.6%
9 th – 12 th	114/224	50.9%
Post-secondary education	2/224	0.9%
Days absent from school in the past year		

0-4 days	116/200	58.0%
5-9 days	39/200	19.5%
10 days or more	45/200	22.5%
Academic grades in the past year		
Mostly A's	53/203	26.1%
Mostly B's	103/203	50.7%
Mostly C', D' or F's	47/203	23.2%
Doing well in school is important		
Agree	224/225	99.6%
Disagree	1/225	0.4%
Overall health		
Excellent	77/225	34.2%
Very good	86/225	38.2%
Good	47/225	20.9%
Fair or poor	15/225	6.7%
Physical examination in the past year		
Yes	214/225	95.1%
No	11/225	4.9%
Dental cleaning in the past year		
Yes	215/224	96.0%
No	9/224	4.0%
Level of the ladder for quality of life	221	7.5 (8.0, 0-10)

2.3 Children in foster care's perception of services

Most children (85%) were satisfied with their experience in foster care (Table 3). Children felt safe in their foster home (97%), their basic needs have been taken care of (96%), foster parents understood their background (95%), etc. The survey also identifies, however, several areas where improvement needs to continue, mainly focusing on court hearings, Administrative Case Review (ACR) meetings and visitations. For example, only 65% of children were notified consistently of court hearings. More than a quarter of children thought that the ACR was not beneficial to them. Less than half of the children thought that they visited their dad (44%) and sibling (49%) often enough. Only 61% of children thought they visited their mom often enough.

Table 3. Children in foster care' perception of services received in the past year (N = 225)

Statement	n/N	Percent
Overall satisfaction with foster care experience	189/222	85.1%
Foster parent(s)		

Child feeling safe in foster home	217/224	96.9%
Child's basic needs being taken care of in foster home	214/222	96.4%
Foster parent letting the child help with chores	207/219	94.5%
Foster family going to child's sports	144/156	92.3%
Foster family helping with homework and meeting with teachers	190/204	93.1%
Child going vacation with foster family	151/174	86.8%
Foster parent understanding child's background	209/220	95.0%
Foster parent treating with the child respect	205/221	92.8%
Child feeling close to foster parent	196/221	88.7%
Foster parent treating birth parent with kindness/respect	152/163	93.3%
ACR and other meeting		
ACR being held at a convenient time	98/129	76.0%
ACR beneficial to the child	91/125	72.8%
Child being notified consistently of court hearings	95/146	65.1%
Being included as an important member of child and family team	139/174	79.9%
Child having a say where to live after leaving foster home	165/218	75.7%
SIU		
Treating child fairly and respectfully	30/30	100.0%
Fully explaining the report and investigation process	23/30	76.7%
DCF social worker		
Treating child with respect	206/222	92.8%
Visiting child monthly or more frequently	180/222	81.1%
Returning phone calls timely	109/163	66.9%
Paying attention to child's progress in school	197/217	90.8%
Child feeling comfortable telling him/her problems	186/220	84.6%
TFC social worker		
Treating child with respect	95/97	97.9%
Visiting child weekly	83/93	89.3%
Paying attention to child's progress in school	89/93	95.7%
Returning phone calls timely	66/76	86.8%
Child participating TFC service/case plan	80/89	89.9%
Child feeling comfortable telling him/her problems	90/96	93.8%
Child overall satisfaction with experience in TFC	88/95	92.6%
Visitation		
Visiting mom often enough	102/167	61.1%
Visiting dad often enough	61/139	43.9%
Visiting other family member often enough	143/199	71.9%
Visiting friends often enough	166/215	77.2%
Visiting sibling often enough	86/175	49.1%

2.4 Children in foster care’s perception of specific services

Table 4. Children in foster care’s perception of specific services that were helpful

Specific services	n/N	Percent Reporting Service was Helpful
Afterschool program	118/138	85.5%
Camp	102/118	86.4%
Recreation	107/115	93.0%
Mental health services	145/179	81.0%
Mentoring	81/87	93.1%
Tutoring	55/61	90.2%
Respite care	85/112	75.9%

2.5 Behaviors among children in foster care age 13 years and older

Of the 147 children who completed the supplemental survey, more than 90% reported that they had an adult in their life who they could go to for advice or emotional support, and they will be able to go to that person for help for long term such as 10 years (Table 5). About 62% of children participated in organized after-school activities for at least one day in the past 7 days and 56% spent time helping people without getting paid in the past 30 days.

In the past 30 days, of the children who gave an answer to a specific question, 15% smoked cigarettes, 7% had at least one alcoholic drink, and 11% used marijuana. About 17% purposely hurt themselves without intention to die in the past year. Slightly more than one fifth of youth were insulted, cursed, or threatened by boy/girlfriend in the past year. Nearly 5% of the youth were physically hurt by boy/girlfriend, and a similar percentage of the youth were forced to have sex by boy/girlfriend in the past year. Half of the youth had ever had sexual intercourse; of these youth, 40% had one sexual partner and 16% had multiple sexual partners in the past three months. A quarter of youth did not use an appropriate method to prevent pregnancy (23% using no method and 2% using withdrawal). Of the 15 youth who had a child, only 6 (40%) youth’s children were placed with the youth in foster care. About 37% of the youth seriously thought about running away from a foster home; 26% had actually run away.

Table 5. Behaviors among children in foster care age 13 years and older

Behaviors	n/N	Percent
Positive behaviors		
Participating in organized after-school activities past 7 days	91/147	61.9%
Spending time helping people without getting paid past 30 days	82/147	55.8%
Currently having non-paid adult for advice or emotional support	133/147	90.5%
Long-term connection to adult for support	125/137	91.2%

Smoking		
Ever tried cigarette smoking	55/142	38.7%
Ever smoked in the past 30 days	22/144	15.3%
Drinking		
Ever having a drink	53/143	37.1%
Ever gotten drunk	35/142	24.7%
Ever having at least one drinking in the past 30 days	10/143	7.0%
Drug use		
Ever used marijuana	54/139	38.8%
Ever used marijuana in the past 30 days	15/141	10.6%
Ever taken over-the-counter drugs to get high	12/140	8.6%
Ever taken a prescription drug to get high	12/143	8.4%
Ever sniffed glue, or any paints or sprays to get high	5/144	3.5%
Ever purposely self-hurting no intention to die in the past year	25/144	17.4%
Dating violence		
Insulted, cursed, or threatened by boy/girlfriend past 12 months	24/109	22.0%
Physically hurt by boy/girlfriend past 12 months	5/105	4.8%
Being forced to have sex by boy/girlfriend past 12 months	5/109	4.6%
Sexual activities		
Ever had sexual intercourse	72/138	52.2%
Number of sexual partners (lifetime)		
None	66/139	47.5%
1 person	21/139	15.1%
2-5 people	39/139	28.1%
6 or more people	13/139	9.4%
Number of sexual partners (past 3 months)		
None	100/141	70.9%
1 person	29/141	20.6%
2 or more people	12/141	8.5%
Method used to prevent pregnancy last time intercourse		
No method	19/82	23.2%
Condoms	44/82	53.7%
Birth control pills, injectable birth control, birth control ring, any implant or any IUD	16/82	19.5%
Withdrawal	2/82	2.4%
Other	1/82	1.2%
Ever been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant	12/85	14.1%
If having a child, the child being placed with the youth in foster care	6/15	40.0%

Runaway		
Seriously thought about running away from a foster home	52/142	36.6%
Number of times running away from birth home overnight/longer		
Never	101/144	70.1%
Once	18/144	12.5%
Twice	8/144	5.6%
Three or more	17/144	11.8%
Number of times running away from foster home overnight/longer		
Never	101/136	74.3%
Once	13/136	9.6%
Twice	5/136	3.7%
Three or more	17/136	12.5%

SECTION 3: FINDINGS FROM FOSTER PARENT VERSION OF THE SURVEY

3.1 Foster parents' perception of services received in the past year

Four out of five of foster parents, 80%, were satisfied with the services that they received from DCF (Table 6). Providing foster parents with adequate related information about the child(ren) placed in their home was the most significant concern for foster parents.

Table 6. Foster parents' perception of services received in the past year (N = 209)

Statement	n/N	Percent
Overall satisfaction with services received	163/206	79.1%
Intention to continue as a foster parent over the next three years	178/204	87.3%
DCF staff being courteous and friendly	198/208	95.2%
Trainings providing foster parent with needed knowledge and skills	177/200	88.5%
Trainings being scheduled at convenient time	152/196	77.6%
The child being matched well with the family	176/203	86.7%
DCF adequately assessing foster parents' needs on an ongoing basis	167/206	81.1%
DCF providing appropriate services to address identified needs	148/201	73.6%

Prior to placement, foster parent receiving adequate related information about the child(ren) placed in home		
a. Medical	130/196	66.3%
b. Psychological	116/192	60.4%
c. Educational	136/191	71.2%
d. Behavioral	120/194	61.9%
After the placement, foster parent receiving adequate related information about the child(ren) placed in home		
a. Medical	163/198	82.3%
b. Psychological	144/196	73.5%
c. Educational	158/196	80.6%
d. Behavioral	144/198	72.7%
Foster parent being asked for input regarding decisions for child	167/206	81.1%
Foster parent being considered a member of the child and family team	178/204	87.3%
Foster parent being notified consistently of scheduled court hearings	159/201	79.1%
Foster parent having an opportunity to be heard in review or hearing	182/207	87.9%
Child's ACR being held at a convenient time for foster parent	152/204	74.5%
ACR beneficial for the child	160/198	80.8%
Foster parent's participation in ACR beneficial for the child	178/197	90.4%
Visitation schedule being discussed with foster parent	138/190	72.6%
Respite care available when needed	153/180	85.0%

3.2 Foster parents' perception of worker's competency

Overall, foster parents reported that the DCF social workers did a good job. This is based on the responses of 81%, 88% and 90% of foster parents who indicated that they would recommend the DCF social worker assigned to the child, FASU social worker and TFC worker to other foster families, respectively. Variation in perception of competency, however, existed among different types of workers. More than one quarter of foster parents thought that DCF social worker assigned to the child did not do a good job with coordinating sibling visits.

Table 7. Foster parents' perception of worker's services (N = 209)

Statement	n/N	Percent
DCF social worker assigned to the child		
Returning phone calls, text messages or emails in a timely way	159/208	76.4%
Regularly discussing the case plan with foster parent	167/208	80.3%
Understanding foster parent's background	181/206	87.9%

Doing a good job with coordinating sibling visits	124/167	74.3%
Foster parent recommending this worker to other foster families	167/206	81.1%
FASU social worker		
Returning phone calls, text messages or emails in a timely way	124/137	90.5%
Understanding foster parent's background	126/138	91.3%
Foster parent recommending this worker to other foster families	124/141	87.9%
TFC worker		
Overall satisfaction with the services provided by the TFC agency	93/100	93.0%
TFC staff being courteous and friendly	100/100	100.0%
Returning my phone calls, text messages or emails in a timely way	98/100	98.0%
Regularly discussing the TFC Service/Case plan with foster parent	93/99	93.9%
Understanding foster parent's background	96/98	98.0%
Foster parent recommending the worker to other foster families	91/101	90.1%
SIU		
Being investigated by the SIU in the past year	31/208	14.9%
Fully explaining the report & investigation process to foster parent	28/30	93.3%
Treating foster parent fairly and respectfully	25/29	86.2%

3.3 Foster parents' perception of specific services

Table 8. Foster parents' perception of specific services that were helpful to the child

Specific services	n/N	Percent
Afterschool program	112/124	90.3%
Camp	108/114	94.7%
Recreation	103/116	88.8%
Mental health services	144/163	88.3%
Mentoring	86/102	84.3%
Tutoring	54/63	85.7%
Respite care	96/105	91.4%
In-home service	80/90	88.9%

SECTION 4: SUMMARY

In partnership with the CAFAP, the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) conducted the first statewide survey to examine the level of quality and satisfaction toward services that are provided to children placed in foster homes, as well as to their caregivers. Overall, both foster parents and children placed in their home demonstrated a relatively high

satisfaction rate, (85%) among children in foster care and (79%) among their caregivers, toward services they received, suggesting that DCF is successful in providing high quality services to both children in foster homes and their caregivers. The survey also identified areas for continued improvement to maximize positive outcomes for children in foster care and their caregivers. Based on the findings from the Foster Home Quality and Satisfaction Survey, DCF will be able to explore policy and practice implications.