



Foster Parent Survey Report
Department of Health and Social Services
Office of Children's Services

2010

Highlights of Findings

The foster parent survey was mailed to 1227 licensed foster homes. There were 769 foster parents who returned the survey for a response rate of 63 percent.

Key results of the survey are listed below.

- 66 percent of the foster parents were providing care for a foster child at the time of the survey.
- 28 percent of the foster parents were providing care to a child they were related to.
- 65 percent of the foster parents indicated they plan to continue to provide foster care to children after their current foster children leave their home.
- 89 percent of the foster parents who plan to continue providing foster care selected “I believe caring for children is important and rewarding” as a reason for doing so.
- 70 percent of the foster parents who plan to continue providing foster care selected “caring for children is my way of contributing to my community” as a reason for doing so.
- 54 percent of the foster parents plan to adopt or do a guardianship for the children in their care.
- 57 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for two years or less.
- 43 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for three years or more.

Section I: Introduction

The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey of foster parents. The purpose of the foster parent survey is to solicit information from foster parents regarding their experiences with the foster care program. A survey was sent to all foster parents in the state who are licensed and who provide care to children in the custody of the state. Foster parents who had children in care at the time of the survey as well as foster parents who did not have children in care were asked to complete the survey.

A survey instrument was developed which had four areas of inquiry. The first area asked foster parents about the current placement status of their home. The second area inquired about training the foster parents had participated in and their plans for continuing to provide foster care. The third area asked participants for suggestions and comments regarding support they believed were needed to provide care for children. The final area sought comments regarding their experiences in working with the system of foster care and the Office of Children's Services. A final narrative area was provided to allow participants to offer any other comments they believed would be helpful.

The survey instrument was mailed to 1227 licensed foster homes. An initial mailing was conducted with two follow-up mailings to those who had not responded. A cover letter accompanied each of the surveys. The foster parents were assured that responses would be compiled with other responses so that no individual respondent could be identified.

The data collected from the surveys was analyzed and the narrative comments reviewed for content and subject area. The comments were summarized and presented so that individual respondents, field offices, and caseworkers were not identified.

Table 1 presents the number of respondents by region.

Table 1

Surveys Sent and Foster Parents Responses by Number and Percent			
Region	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Surveys Returned	Percent of Foster Homes Response
Northern	189	115	61%
Southcentral	325	204	63%
Western	96	61	64%
Anchorage	469	302	64%
Southeast	148	87	59%
Total	1227	769	63%

Section II: Findings

The following tables present the information gathered from the survey respondents. Each area of inquiry is presented in the table heading with the results presented in the table. **Note: All tables will not reflect the total number of 769 survey respondents, as all respondents did not answer each question.**

Foster Home Placement Status

Table 2

Foster Homes with Children in Placement by Number and Percent				
Region	Number of Foster Homes with Children	Percent of Foster Homes with Children	Number of Foster Homes Without Children	Percent of Foster Homes Without Children
Northern	73	64%	42	37%
Southcentral	140	69%	63	31%
Western	36	59%	25	41%
Anchorage	200	66%	101	34%
Southeast	55	63%	32	37%
Total	504	66%	263	34%

N=767

Relative Caregivers

Table 3

Foster Homes Providing Care for Related Children by Number and Percent			
Region	Foster Homes with Children in Placement	Foster Homes Providing Care to Relative Children	Percent of Foster Homes Caring for Relative Children
Northern	72	25	35%
Southcentral	140	36	26%
Western	36	18	50%
Anchorage	199	46	23%
Southeast	55	14	26%
Total	502	139	28%

Foster Parent Length of Service**Table 4**

Length of Time Foster Home Licensed by Period of Time and Percent						
Region	Number Licensed Homes	Percent Licensed <1 Year	Percent Licensed 1-2 Years	Percent Licensed 3-5 Years	Percent Licensed 6-10 Years	Percent Licensed > 10 years
Northern	114	33%	27%	18%	11%	11%
Southcentral	203	27%	31%	26%	7%	10%
Western	60	23%	42%	20%	3%	12%
Anchorage	298	26%	28%	28%	13%	6%
Southeast	87	29%	32%	23%	12%	5%
Total	762	27%	30%	25%	10%	8%

Foster Parent Training and Retention**Table 5**

Foster Parents Have Participated in Training by the Alaska Center for Resource Families by Number and Percent						
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	94	82%	19	17%	2	2%
Southcentral	170	83%	23	11%	11	5%
Western	30	49%	21	34%	10	16%
Anchorage	256	85%	31	10%	15	5%
Southeast	67	77%	15	17%	5	6%
Total	617	80%	109	14%	43	6%

N=769

Methods of Accessing Training Through Alaska Center for Resource Families**Table 6**

Foster Parents Using Specific Methods of Training by Number and Percent		
Method of Training	Number of Foster Parents	Percent
Web-based courses	286	37%
Mailed self-study courses	400	52%
Telephonic courses	61	8%
Classroom courses	316	41%
Did not participate in training provided by ACRF	114	15%

N=764

Child Placed Prior to Foster Parent Training**Table 7**

Reasons Placement Occurred Before Foster Parents Received Training by Percent	
Type of Training	Percent
Child was an Emergency Placement	74%
Training was not Conveniently Available	9%
Other	24%

N=298

Training Adequacy**Table 8**

Agreement With: Training Prepared Foster Parents for Challenges of Foster Parenting by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Strongly Agree	Percent	No, Do Not Agree	Percent
Northern	89	79	89%	10	11%
Southcentral	167	133	80%	34	20%
Western	39	35	90%	4	10%
Anchorage	265	244	92%	21	8%
Southeast	63	48	76%	15	24%
Total	623	539	87%	84	14%

Placement Duration**Table 9**

Length of Time Foster Parent Licensed Before A Child Was Placed in Their Home by Number and Percent						
Region	Total Respondents	Placed Prior to Licensing	Placed Immediately After Licensed	Placed 1-3 Months After Licensed	Placed Greater than 4 Months after Licensed	Although Licensed, No Child has Been Placed
Northern	114	43%	33%	13%	10%	2%
Southcentral	201	43%	23%	14%	15%	6%
Western	60	58%	22%	7%	12%	2%
Anchorage	299	39%	30%	17%	11%	4%
Southeast	86	48%	22%	11%	12%	8%
Total	760	43%	27%	14%	12%	4%

Retention of Foster Parents**Table 10**

Foster Parents' Plans About Continuing to Provide Care by Number and Percent						
Region	Will Continue	Percent	Will Not Continue	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	77	69%	21	19%	13	12%
Southcentral	114	57%	64	32%	21	11%
Western	37	62%	19	32%	4	7%
Anchorage	204	69%	73	25%	19	6%
Southeast	55	64%	22	26%	9	11%
Total	487	65%	199	27%	66	9%

N=752

Foster Parent Reasons for Planning to Continue or Not to Continue to Provide Care**Table 11**

Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Continue to Provide Care Selections by Percent	
I believe caring for children is important and rewarding.	89%
Caring for children is my way of contributing to my community.	70%
I am interested in adopting.	33%
It is important to provide care for children.	78%
I enjoy being a member of a service team and working with social workers.	37%

N=554

Table 12

Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Discontinue Providing Care Selections by Percent	
I would like more time for my family and myself.	33%
Reimbursement does not adequately cover my costs of care.	11%
The demands of foster care conflict with my own family's needs.	22%
I do not receive enough support from the Office of Children's Services.	20%
I am interested in providing care for my related child only.	21%
I plan to adopt my current foster child.	29%

N=262

Reimbursement of Costs**Table 13**

Reimbursement is Adequate to Cover Costs by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	111	22%	51%	21%	6%
Southcentral	187	21%	42%	29%	8%
Western	59	31%	34%	20%	15%
Anchorage	284	15%	37%	34%	14%
Southeast	77	8%	47%	31%	14%
Total	718	18%	41%	29%	12%

Table 14

Reimbursement is Received in a Timely Manner by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	111	34%	51%	12%	4%
Southcentral	187	37%	46%	14%	4%
Western	58	29%	41%	14%	16%
Anchorage	282	39%	44%	15%	2%
Southeast	75	35%	39%	25%	1%
Total	713	37%	45%	15%	4%

Children's Clothing**Table 15**

Child had Adequate Clothing at Time of Placement Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	110	15%	16%	31%	39%
Southcentral	191	15%	10%	34%	41%
Western	60	10%	22%	32%	37%
Anchorage	273	7%	13%	33%	48%
Southeast	75	15%	19%	28%	39%
Total	709	11%	14%	32%	43%

Table 16

When Needed, an Initial Clothing Voucher was Provided in a Timely Manner Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	80	18%	21%	29%	33%
Southcentral	154	18%	21%	27%	33%
Western	48	19%	19%	27%	35%
Anchorage	219	12%	21%	31%	37%
Southeast	60	30%	17%	20%	33%
Total	561	17%	20%	28%	35%

Working Relationships With OCS**Table 17**

Foster Parents Received Sufficient Information to Meet the Child's Needs by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	109	20%	38%	28%	14%
Southcentral	176	19%	24%	32%	24%
Western	57	21%	28%	19%	32%
Anchorage	259	18%	35%	29%	19%
Southeast	72	29%	24%	33%	14%
Total	673	20%	31%	29%	20%

Placement Planning**Table 18**

When Placed, Were You Able to Participate in Development of the Placement Plan? Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	106	31%	27%	16%	26%
Southcentral	185	27%	23%	14%	37%
Western	58	26%	14%	28%	33%
Anchorage	272	33%	27%	20%	20%
Southeast	75	21%	24%	19%	36%
Total	696	29%	25%	18%	28%

Table 19

When Children Were Placed in Your Home, Were You Given A Placement Plan and Agreement? Level of Agreement and Percent by Region					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	107	35%	25%	15%	25%
Southcentral	183	32%	15%	18%	36%
Western	57	18%	19%	12%	51%
Anchorage	272	34%	20%	15%	32%
Southeast	76	34%	18%	17%	30%
Total	695	32%	19%	16%	33%

Service Provision**Table 20**

Caseworker Helped Foster Parent Get Needed Services for the Child by Level of Agreement and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	101	22%	33%	26%	20%
Southcentral	180	32%	23%	26%	19%
Western	51	20%	26%	22%	33%
Anchorage	262	32%	26%	27%	16%
Southeast	74	43%	23%	23%	11%
Total	668	31%	26%	25%	18%

Caseworker Contact**Table 21**

Foster Parent Able to Reach the Caseworkers When Needed by Level of Agreement and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	113	20%	33%	35%	12%
Southcentral	190	22%	33%	35%	11%
Western	60	37%	17%	38%	8%
Anchorage	279	27%	33%	37%	3%
Southeast	79	29%	37%	32%	3%
Total	721	26%	32%	36%	7%

Home Visits**Table 22**

Frequency of Worker Visits to See Foster Children by Region and Percent					
Region	Weekly	Monthly	2-3 Months	4-6 Months	No Visits
Northern	2%	43%	16%	21%	18%
Southcentral	2%	55%	23%	11%	9%
Western	2%	43%	22%	23%	10%
Anchorage	4%	67%	20%	4%	5%
Southeast	1%	53%	24%	11%	11%
Total	2%	57%	21%	11%	9%

n=711

Court Hearing Notification**Table 23**

Period of Time Prior to Court Hearing Foster Parent Was Informed by Period of Time and Percent							
Region	Total Respondents	Three to four weeks in advance	One to two weeks in advance	Less than one week in advance	Not at all	Varies	NA
Northern	109	16%	47%	15%	13%	6%	5%
Southcentral	184	19%	29%	12%	27%	7%	7%
Western	58	19%	26%	24%	19%	9%	3%
Anchorage	280	21%	29%	14%	16%	11%	8%
Southeast	74	24%	27%	16%	18%	7%	8%
Total	705	20%	31%	15%	19%	9%	7%

Court Hearing Attendance**Table 24**

Foster Parents Attendance at Court Hearings by Number and Percent					
Region	Total	Attended	Percent	Not Attended	Percent
Northern	111	66	60%	45	41%
Southcentral	192	117	61%	75	39%
Western	59	35	59%	24	41%
Anchorage	279	174	62%	105	38%
Southeast	80	44	55%	36	45%
Total	721	436	61%	285	40%

Comments Given in Court Hearings**Table 25**

Foster Parents Able to Made Comments at Court Hearings by Number and Percent						
Region	comments Provided	Percent	Comments not provided	Percent	Sometimes Provided	Percent
Northern	45	70%	19	30%	0	0%
Southcentral	75	65%	40	35%	0	0%
Western	29	85%	5	15%	0	0%
Anchorage	130	74%	42	24%	3	2%
Southeast	32	73%	12	27%	0	0%
Total	311	72%	118	27%	3	1%

N=432

Family Contact Process

Table 26

Have you been provided information regarding the Family Contact process which is designed to facilitate visitation between parents and children who are placed in out-of-home care?					
Number and Percent					
Region	Total	Yes, I know about the program.	Percent	No, I do not know what “family contact process” is.	Percent
Northern	106	62	59%	44	42%
Southcentral	180	99	55%	81	45%
Western	58	29	50%	29	50%
Anchorage	273	174	64%	99	36%
Southeast	75	32	43%	43	57%
Total	692	396	57%	296	43%

Family Contact Process

Table 26

Have you been asked to support or participate in the Family Contact process for children who are placed in your home?						
Number and Percent						
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	45	46%	53	54%	0	0%
Southcentral	80	45%	96	54%	2	1%
Western	22	40%	32	58%	1	2%
Anchorage	130	49%	134	51%	1	0.4%
Southeast	30	40%	45	60%	0	0%
Total	307	46%	360	54%	4	0.6%

N=671

Section III: Comments

3.1 Foster Parents’ Additional Comments

An area was provided for foster parents to give additional comments that were important to them. Foster parents were asked, "If there is any other information you would like us to know, please give us your comments."

Strengths

- Several foster parents spoke of the rewarding nature of providing care for children in need. They spoke of the joy of seeing the children grow and thrive.
- Foster parents described the satisfaction of being considered part of a team effort in their work with children and OCS. They spoke of being needed and feeling able to contribute in important ways to the well-being of families.
- Many comments were received on the positive working relationships with individual workers. They spoke of the dedication, compassion, and caring of the OCS workers.
- Positive comments were received on the responsiveness of many of the case workers. Foster parents reported being able to ask questions and receive timely answers. They reported feeling supported in their efforts and that their opinions are valued.
- Foster parents spoke of their service as an important way of giving back and being a part of their local community.
- Comments were received on the quality of training available to foster parents and the variety of formats in which to receive the training. The spring conference was particularly appreciated.
- A comment was received: "the foster parent trainers and the social workers have been a tremendous help to us."

Resource and Support Needs

- It was suggested that a resource program be maintained for foster parents. This would enable foster parents to obtain items such as car seats, bunk beds, and clothing on an as needed basis. Another suggestion was received for an “emergency used clothing box” which would allow for last minute needs to be met. The cost of outfitting children was noted.
- The importance of efforts to make foster parents feel like part of a team was stressed. The need for workers to advocate for foster parents was identified. Recognizing that foster parents’ opinions matter was noted.
- Several comments were received on the importance of having foster parents phone calls returned in a timely manner. Overall communication was stressed such as getting adequate information when a child is placed to enable good care.
- Concern was expressed that the court processes are sometimes slow and that children are delayed in permanency.
- The importance of workers carrying through and doing what they say they would do was stressed. Foster parents discussed the importance of being able to count on workers and their support. This was noted as especially important when carrying for children with special medical needs.
- Availability of respite was identified as an ongoing need. Foster parents discussed when they have provided care for special needs children that sometimes just having some time to rest and recuperate prepares them to give better care. The need for respite to allow foster parents to travel out of state when needed was also identified.
- Support groups for foster parents were identified as a way that foster parents can learn from their experiences and provide support for each other.

Conclusion

The Office of Children's Services wishes to acknowledge the support given to the families and children of Alaska by foster parents. Foster parents throughout the state are to be commended for sharing their homes and assisting the agency in caring for Alaska's children.

The response and thoughtful comments to this survey by foster parents are deeply appreciated by the Office of Children's Services and will be incorporated by management and staff in our work to continue to improve our ability to assist families and children.