

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

2011

## Highlights of Findings

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The foster parent survey was mailed to 1050 licensed foster homes. There were 570 foster parents who returned the survey for a response rate of 54 percent.

Key results of the survey are listed below.

- 30 percent of the foster parents were providing care to a child they were related to.
- 66 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.
- 69 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.
- 55 percent of the foster parents plan to adopt or do a guardianship for the children in their care.
- 53 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for two years or less.
- 47 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for three years or more.

## **Section I: Introduction**

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The Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Children's Services serves families whose children have been determined to be unsafe or at high risk for maltreatment by their parent or caregiver. The Office of Children's Services provides and coordinates services with parents and caregivers that enable children to remain safely in their own homes whenever possible. When children cannot safely remain in their homes, placement with a relative family is explored. Diligent efforts are made to place children with their relatives, family friends, and those culturally tied to the family. When this is not possible, placement with a foster family is necessary.

When children enter out-of-home care, the Office of Children's Services strives to provide services and support to facilitate the return of the children to their home as quickly as possible. When children are unable to return to their home, a permanency goal to match the individual need of each child is developed. Established goals can include adoption, guardianship, permanent placement with a relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement. Placement of children in out-of-home care with relatives and licensed foster parents allows time for the Office of Children's Services to work with parents and families to achieve children's permanency goals. Relative caregivers and licensed foster parents are vital in ensuring children's needs are met while efforts are made to achieve permanency. These caregivers demonstrate their commitment to Alaska's children by opening their homes, sharing their families, and unselfishly giving of their time.

As part of the Office of Children's Services continuous quality improvement process, the Evaluation Unit conducted a survey of licensed foster parents. A survey was sent to all licensed foster parents in the state. Foster parents who had children in their home at the time of the survey, as well as those who did not have children in their care were asked to complete the survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather information from foster parents regarding their experiences with the foster care program. The feedback provided will be incorporated by staff and management in their ongoing work with families and children.

## Section II: Methodology

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The survey instrument contained four areas of inquiry. The first area asked foster parents about the current placement status of children in their home. The second area inquired about training foster parents have participated in and their future plans for continuing to provide foster care. The third area asked survey participants for suggestions and comments regarding support they believed to be necessary to provide care for children. The final area requested information regarding foster parents' experiences in working with the system of foster care and the Office of Children's Services. The survey concluded with asking participants to provide a narrative of any other additional information and comments that they believed would be helpful.

The survey instrument was mailed to 1050 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**

<b>Surveys Sent and Foster Parents Responding By Number and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Sent</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Returned</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Responding</b>
Northern	177	96	54%
Southcentral	352	212	60%
Western	86	50	58%
Anchorage	340	166	49%
Southeast	95	46	48%
Total	1050	570	54%

## **Section III: Findings**

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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 570 survey respondents, as all respondents did not answer each question.

### **Foster Home Placement Status**

**Table 2**

<b>Foster Homes with Children in Placement By Number and Percent</b>				
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Foster Homes With Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes With Children</b>	<b>Number of Foster Homes Without Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Without Children</b>
Northern	55	57%	41	43%
Southcentral	138	65%	74	35%
Western	30	60%	20	40%
Anchorage	115	69%	51	31%
Southeast	32	70%	14	30%
Total	370	65%	200	35%

### **Relative Caregivers**

**Table 3**

<b>Foster Homes Providing Care for Related Children By Number and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Foster Homes with Children in Placement</b>	<b>Foster Homes Providing Care to Relative Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Caring for Relative Children</b>
Northern	55	14	26%
Southcentral	138	45	33%
Western	30	22	73%
Anchorage	114	19	17%
Southeast	32	9	28%
Total	369	109	30%

**Foster Parent Length of Service****Table 4**

<b>Length of Time Foster Parent has Provided Services By Number and Percent</b>						
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	95	22%	38%	11%	11%	19%
Southcentral	212	24%	33%	25%	7%	11%
Western	50	28%	40%	10%	14%	8%
Anchorage	165	15%	30%	30%	12%	13%
Southeast	46	22%	20%	37%	9%	13%
Total	568	21%	32%	24%	10%	13%

**Foster Parent Training****Table 5**

<b>Foster Parents' Participation in Training by Alaska Center for Resource Families by Number and Percent</b>						
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	88	92%	8	8%	0	0%
Southcentral	165	78%	40	19%	7	3%
Western	19	38%	25	50%	6	12%
Anchorage	148	89%	10	6%	8	5%
Southeast	36	78%	7	15%	3	7%
Total	456	80%	90	16%	24	4%

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

<b>Foster Parents Using Specific Methods of Training By Number and Percent</b>		
Method of Training	Number of Foster Parents	Percent
Web-based courses	214	38%
Mailed self-study courses	322	57%
Telephonic courses	55	10%
Classroom courses	232	41%
Did not participate in training provided by ACRF	89	16%

N=570

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

<b>Placement Occurred Before Foster Parents Received Training by Reason and Percent</b>	
Type of Training	Percent
Child was an Emergency Placement	71%
Training was not Conveniently Available	14%
Other	26%

N=192

**Training Adequacy****Table 8**

<b>Training Prepared Foster Parents for Challenges of Providing Care Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Strongly Agree	Percent	No, Do Not Agree	Percent
Northern	87	70	81%	17	20%
Southcentral	166	137	83%	29	18%
Western	21	21	100%	0	0%
Anchorage	147	129	88%	18	12%
Southeast	37	30	81%	7	19%
Total	458	387	85%	71	16%

**Timing of Child Placement After Foster Parent Licensed****Table 9**

<b>Length of Time Foster Parent Licensed Before A Child Was Placed in Their Home By Number and Percent</b>						
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	96	40%	31%	17%	12%	1%
Southcentral	209	39%	23%	19%	14%	5%
Western	48	60%	19%	8%	13%	0%
Anchorage	162	36%	29%	17%	15%	3%
Southeast	45	38%	22%	24%	13%	2%
Total	560	40%	26%	17%	14%	3%

**Foster Parents' Plans for Future Placements****Table 10**

<b>Foster Parents' Plans About Continuing to Provide Care By Number and Percent</b>						
Region	Will Continue	Percent	Will Not Continue	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	64	67%	25	26%	7	7%
Southcentral	130	61%	56	26%	26	12%
Western	35	70%	10	20%	5	10%
Anchorage	117	72%	36	22%	10	6%
Southeast	30	65%	14	30%	2	4%
Total	376	66%	141	25%	50	9%

N=567

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

<b>Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Continue to Provide Care Selections by Percent</b>	
I believe caring for children is important and rewarding.	89%
Caring for children is my way of contributing to my community.	69%
I am interested in adopting.	32%
It is important to provide care for children.	74%
I enjoy being a member of a service team and working with social workers.	37%

N=426

**Table 12**

<b>Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Discontinue Providing Care Selections by Percent</b>	
I would like more time for my family and myself.	28%
Reimbursement does not adequately cover my costs of care.	18%
The demands of foster care conflict with my own family's needs.	21%
I do not receive enough support from the Office of Children's Services.	23%
I am interested in providing care for my related child only.	20%
I plan to adopt my current foster child.	30%

N=190

**Reimbursement of Costs****Table 13**

<b>Reimbursement Adequate to Cover Costs Level of Agreement By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	90	14%	53%	23%	9%
Southcentral	200	17%	43%	28%	13%
Western	50	20%	48%	28%	4%
Anchorage	157	16%	34%	40%	10%
Southeast	43	14%	42%	37%	7%
Total	540	16%	42%	32%	10%

**Table 14**

<b>Reimbursement Received Timely Level of Agreement By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	90	36%	47%	12%	6%
Southcentral	194	33%	48%	13%	6%
Western	50	30%	40%	26%	4%
Anchorage	156	37%	50%	11%	3%
Southeast	44	46%	36%	16%	2%
Total	534	35%	47%	14%	5%

**Children's Clothing****Table 15**

<b>Adequacy of Child's Clothing at Placement Level of Agreement By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	93	3%	15%	43%	39%
Southcentral	195	10%	17%	33%	41%
Western	50	16%	24%	34%	26%
Anchorage	155	9%	14%	38%	39%
Southeast	44	9%	18%	25%	48%
Total	537	9%	17%	36%	39%

**Table 16**

<b>When Needed, Initial Clothing Voucher Provided Timely Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	81	12%	21%	30%	37%
Southcentral	159	18%	25%	28%	30%
Western	37	14%	32%	30%	24%
Anchorage	126	13%	23%	33%	32%
Southeast	40	33%	28%	18%	23%
Total	443	16%	24%	29%	31%

**Working Relationships With OCS****Table 17**

<b>Foster Parents Received Information to Meet the Child's Needs Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	88	23%	26%	40%	11%
Southcentral	185	22%	26%	32%	20%
Western	45	18%	22%	33%	27%
Anchorage	149	21%	36%	36%	7%
Southeast	43	23%	28%	30%	19%
Total	510	21%	29%	35%	15%

**Placement Planning****Table 18**

<b>At Placement, Foster Parent Able to Participate in Development of the Placement Plan Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	89	30%	21%	20%	28%
Southcentral	186	33%	20%	16%	30%
Western	49	25%	22%	22%	31%
Anchorage	152	30%	38%	17%	15%
Southeast	44	36%	23%	34%	7%
Total	520	31%	26%	19%	23%

**Table 19**

<b>When Children Placed in Home, Foster Parent Given Placement Plan and Agreement Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	88	30%	22%	24%	25%
Southcentral	190	33%	13%	20%	35%
Western	49	14%	22%	16%	47%
Anchorage	148	30%	27%	19%	24%
Southeast	42	36%	26%	29%	10%
Total	517	30%	20%	21%	29%

**Service Provision****Table 20**

<b>Caseworker Helped Foster Parent Get Needed Services for the Child Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	88	33%	15%	39%	14%
Southcentral	181	32%	23%	27%	19%
Western	37	24%	16%	32%	27%
Anchorage	143	29%	37%	25%	10%
Southeast	44	32%	27%	30%	11%
Total	493	30%	25%	29%	15%

**Caseworker Contact****Table 21**

<b>Foster Parent Able to Reach the Caseworkers When Needed Level of Agreement by Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	91	14%	24%	55%	7%
Southcentral	197	23%	29%	39%	10%
Western	50	40%	24%	28%	8%
Anchorage	155	27%	43%	28%	2%
Southeast	44	34%	36%	27%	2%
Total	537	25%	32%	37%	6%

**Home Visits****Table 22**

<b>Frequency of Worker Visits to See Foster Children By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Weekly	Monthly	2-3 Months	4-6 Months	No Visits
Northern	4%	45%	24%	19%	8%
Southcentral	3%	63%	16%	12%	6%
Western	2%	41%	28%	11%	17%
Anchorage	4%	74%	16%	2%	4%
Southeast	5%	67%	19%	2%	7%
Total	4%	61%	19%	9%	7%

N=528

**Court Hearing Notification****Table 23**

<b>Period of Time Prior to Court Hearing Foster Parent Informed of Hearing By Number and Percent</b>							
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	89	26%	37%	11%	12%	7%	7%
Southcentral	193	18%	33%	14%	19%	10%	6%
Western	49	16%	35%	22%	20%	2%	4%
Anchorage	152	19%	37%	15%	15%	9%	6%
Southeast	40	18%	25%	15%	30%	10%	3%
Total	523	19%	34%	15%	18%	8%	6%

**Court Hearing Attendance****Table 24**

<b>Foster Parents Attendance at Court Hearings By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Attended	Percent	Not Attended	Percent
Northern	89	51	57%	38	43%
Southcentral	200	131	66%	69	35%
Western	48	27	56%	21	44%
Anchorage	158	91	58%	67	42%
Southeast	42	26	62%	16	38%
Total	537	326	61%	211	39%

**Comments Given in Court Hearings****Table 25**

<b>Foster Parents Able to Make Comments at Court Hearings by Number and Percent</b>				
Region	Comments Provided	Percent	Comments not provided	Percent
Northern	36	71%	15	29%
Southcentral	88	65%	47	35%
Western	21	75%	7	25%
Anchorage	75	82%	16	18%
Southeast	18	69%	8	31%
Total	238	72%	93	28%

N=331

**Family Contact Process****Table 26**

<b>Provided Information About the Family Contact Process Facilitating Visitation Between Parents and Children In Out-of-Home Care By Number and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Yes, I know about the program.	Percent	No, I do not know what "family contact process" is.	Percent
Northern	89	41	46%	48	54%
Southcentral	191	124	65%	67	35%
Western	48	34	71%	14	29%
Anchorage	149	99	66%	50	33%
Southeast	41	26	63%	15	37%
Total	518	324	63%	194	38%

**Family Contact Process****Table 27**

<b>Asked to Support or Participate in the Family Contact Process By Number and Percent</b>				
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent
Northern	35	42%	49	58%
Southcentral	89	49%	93	51%
Western	17	34%	33	66%
Anchorage	87	60%	57	39%
Southeast	23	55%	19	45%
Total	251	50%	251	50%

## **Section IV: Comments**

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### **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 comments were received regarding the caring that foster parents felt for the children in placement with them. Foster parents described pleasure in helping children in a time of need and building ongoing relationships with them.
- In addition to making a difference in individual lives, many foster parents spoke of feeling rewarded by contributing to their community. Several foster parents expressed they were motivated to provide care for children to help preserve important connections to community, culture, and traditions.
- Many foster parents highlighted that when it is not possible for children to be returned home, being able to change a child's life and provide them a permanent family, was meaningful.
- Comments were made regarding the professional relationships that foster parents had with individual caseworkers. It was noted caseworkers were supportive, helpful, and polite. Foster parents expressed they were always able to rely on these caseworkers to meet their needs and the children's needs.
- Many foster parents indicated that the Office of Children's Services has made great efforts to improve services provided. Statements regarding the agency's move to be more open and transparent were provided.
- The training provided to foster parents was noted to be educational and helpful in addressing the specific needs of foster children. It was also noted that it was beneficial to speak to experienced foster parents who provided guidance and real life experiences.

### **Resource and Support Needs**

- Several foster parents provided comments on the placement process. Some foster parents reported the need for information about the child prior to placement. Foster parents reported not having basic information about children's allergies, ways to make the child feel more comfortable, daily routines, and behaviors.
- The need for additional resources was noted by numerous foster parents. Some foster parents expressed a need for financial support to obtain cribs, car seats, bunk beds, and clothing when children are initially placed in their care. Some foster parents indicated it was a hardship for the family to not be reimbursed for these items or to be reimbursed several months later. Foster parents also reported they are responsible for ensuring that children attend their doctors, therapy, and family visitation and the travel costs associated with this are not always reimbursed. Lastly, it was noted there was a need to promote the child's inclusion in the foster family by providing additional financial support to allow children to travel and attend family events.
- Several issues regarding communication with caseworkers and other agency staff were noted. Foster parents expressed frustration in the length of time it took to receive responses to phone calls and emails regarding answers to their questions or concerns. It was also noted that when there were multiple caseworkers from different regions, there was a need to coordinate services and increase communication between case participants.
- Foster parents expressed a desire to be included in the decision making processes related to the child in their care. Foster parents discussed the importance of regularly being invited to attend court hearings and administrative reviews to provide feedback on the child's needs, biological family's progress, and the permanency plans for the child.
- There were several foster parents who indicated concerns regarding delays in achieving permanency for children.
- Several foster parents commented on systemic issues that impacted services provided. Worker turnover and large caseloads were noted as contributing factors to services not being provided in a timely manner and less responsiveness from the agency.

## **Section V: Conclusion**

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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 responses 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.