

FOSTER PARENT SURVEY | 2013



office of
**CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**
safe children | strong families

Highlights of Findings

The foster parent survey was mailed to 1209 licensed foster homes. There were 463 foster parents who returned the survey for a response rate of 38 percent.

Key results of the survey are listed below.

- 74 percent of respondents had a child currently in their homes.
- 25 percent of the foster parents were providing care to a child they were related to.
- 68 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.
- 47 percent of the children in out of home care in the Western Region are placed with relatives.
- 51 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.
- 81 percent of foster parents reported utilizing the Alaska Center for Resource Families as a training resource.

Section I: Introduction

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 may provide care without being licensed, or they may choose to be licensed. 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

A survey instrument was mailed to licensed foster parents throughout the state. The survey was mailed to 1209 homes with responses from 464 homes for a response rate of 38 percent. An initial mailing of the survey was made with two follow up mailings by postcard to non respondents encouraging a response. The foster parents were assured that responses would be compiled with other responses so that no individual respondent could be identified in reports of the survey findings.

The survey asked questions in four areas. The first area asked foster parents about the current placement status of children in their home. The second area inquired about training foster parents had 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 additional information and comments that they believed would be helpful.

The data collected from the survey was analyzed and the findings are presented by question. As each foster parent did not respond to every question, the number of respondents is given for each presentation. The findings are presented in tables 1-29. The narrative comments were reviewed for content and subject area and are summarized.

Table 1

Surveys Sent and Foster Parents Responding By Number and Percent			
Region	Number of Surveys Sent	Number of Surveys Returned	Percent of Foster Homes Responding
Northern	176	83	47%
Southcentral	353	137	39%
Western	81	22	27%
Anchorage	462	180	39%
Southeast	137	38	28%
Total	1209	463	38%

Section III: Findings

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	64	77%	19	23%
Southcentral	102	74%	36	26%
Western	17	77%	5	23%
Anchorage	139	77%	41	23%
Southeast	20	53%	18	47%
Total	342	74%	119	26%

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	64	22	34%
Southcentral	102	20	20%
Western	17	8	47%
Anchorage	139	34	24%
Southeast	20	2	10%
Total	342	86	25%

Foster Parent Length of Service**Table 4**

Length of Time Foster Parent has Provided Services By Number 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	83	35%	18%	27%	8%	12%
Southcentral	137	33%	23%	23%	14%	7%
Western	22	36%	18%	14%	14%	18%
Anchorage	182	31%	30%	15%	13%	11%
Southeast	38	39%	32%	11%	13%	5%
Total	462	33%	25%	19%	12%	10%

Foster Parent Training**Table 5**

Foster Parents' Participation in Training by Alaska Center for Resource Families By Number and Percent						
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	71	86%	9	11%	3	4%
Southcentral	112	82%	20	15%	4	3%
Western	12	55%	7	32%	3	14%
Anchorage	146	81%	27	15%	7	4%
Southeast	33	87%	4	11%	1	3%
Total	374	81%	67	15%	18	4%

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 of respondents
Web-based courses	198	43%
Mailed self-study courses	236	51%
Telephonic courses	29	6%
Classroom courses	207	45%
Regional conferences offered around the state	59	13%
Did not participate in training provided by ACRF	50	11%

N = 374

Training Adequacy**Table 7**

Training Prepared Foster Parents for Challenges of Providing Care Level of Agreement by Number and Percent							
Region	Total Respondents	Yes, Agree	Percent	No, Do Not Agree	Percent	No Training	Percent
Northern	83	72	87%	7	8%	4	5%
Southcentral	133	93	70%	27	20%	13	10%
Western	21	11	52%	1	5%	9	43%
Anchorage	176	133	76%	24	14%	19	11%
Southeast	37	30	81%	3	8%	4	11%
Total	450	339	75%	62	14%	49	11%

Timing of Child Placement after Foster Parent Licensed**Table 8**

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	82	49%	21%	21%	7%	2%
Southcentral	134	33%	22%	23%	19%	2%
Western	20	60%	25%	5%	10%	0%
Anchorage	177	40%	21%	22%	15%	2%
Southeast	37	32%	38%	14%	11%	5%
Total	450	40%	23%	21%	14%	2%

Training Prior to Child Placement**Table 9**

Classes Completed by Foster Parent Prior to Children Being Placed in Their Home By Number and Percent		
Name of Class	Number of Foster Parents	Percent Foster Parents
Foster Parent Orientation	230	50%
Core	206	44%
Pressley Ridge Treatment Foster Care Training	35	8%
Completed Both Foster Parent Orientation and Core	141	30%
Did Not Complete Foster Parent Orientation or Core	126	27%

Table 10

Reason Training Not Completed Prior to Placement of Child By Number and Percent		
Reason	Number of Foster Parents	Percent of respondents
Placement Due to Emergency Need	102	22%
Training Was Not Conveniently Available	3	0.6%
I Did Not Know How to Get Training	6	1.3%

N=111

Foster Parent Retention**Table 11**

Foster Parents' Plans About Continuing to Provide Care By Number and Percent						
Region	Will Continue	Percent	Will Not Continue	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	48	59%	15	19%	18	22%
Southcentral	72	54%	25	19%	37	28%
Western	15	71%	0	0%	6	29%
Anchorage	98	56%	30	17%	46	26%
Southeast	20	56%	6	17%	10	28%
Total	253	57%	76	17%	117	26%

Foster Parent Reasons for Planning to Continue or Not to Continue to Provide Care**Table 12**

Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Continue to Provide Care By Number and Percent	
Reason	Percent of respondents
I believe caring for children is important and rewarding.	68%
Caring for children is my way of contributing to my community.	51%
I am interested in adopting.	26%
It is important to provide care for children.	60%
I enjoy being a member of a service team and working with social workers.	27%

N = 253

Table 13

Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Discontinue Providing Care By Number and Percent	
Reason	Percent of respondents
I would like more time for my family and myself.	7%
Reimbursement does not adequately cover my costs of care.	3%
The demands of foster care conflict with my own family's needs.	7%
I do not receive enough support from the Office of Children's Services.	5%
I am interested in providing care for my related child only.	7%
I plan to adopt my current foster child.	8%

N=76

Foster Parents were provided an opportunity to give suggestions on ways the Office of Children's Services could recruit foster families. Comments received have been summarized.

- Increased use of media to include television advertisements, local radio shows, newspaper advertisements in Alaska Native languages
- Local outreach efforts with vendor booths at local fairs and community events
- Maybe a Facebook group which tells success stories of fostering
- Distribute flyers and articles on the need for care for children
- Outreach with presentations at local churches, community, and volunteer organizations
- Foster parent recruiters spending weekends in villages to visit with residents
- Using foster parents to make presentations and tell their own story
- Hearing stories from individuals who are or were placed in foster care is effective
- Having the application and licensing process streamlined and made simpler
- Having a more supportive system for foster parents would encourage others to become foster parents
- Let villages know there are needs through tribal and ICWA connections
- Be good to the families you have, word of mouth counts
- Praise, reward, and acknowledge the ones you have, if you are retaining then you do not have to recruit as much

Resource Family Advisory Board**Table 14**

Knowledge of Office of Children's Services Resource Family Advisory Board By Number and Percent		
Aware of Board	Number	Percent
Yes	126	29%
No	308	71%

N=434

Reimbursement of Costs**Table 15**

Reimbursement Adequate to Cover Costs Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	75	19%	63%	17%	1%
Southcentral	129	21%	47%	26%	6%
Western	18	28%	44%	17%	11%
Anchorage	171	15%	51%	21%	13%
Southeast	54	13%	24%	26%	37%
Total	429	18%	50%	23%	8%

Table 16

Reimbursement Received Timely Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	76	37%	47%	12%	4%
Southcentral	131	46%	46%	6%	2%
Western	20	15%	40%	20%	25%
Anchorage	173	43%	39%	12%	5%
Southeast	36	42%	53%	6%	0%
Total	436	42%	44%	10%	5%

Children's Clothing**Table 17**

Adequacy of Child's Clothing at Placement Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	78	12%	21%	35%	33%
Southcentral	129	10%	19%	37%	34%
Western	20	20%	5%	40%	35%
Anchorage	167	10%	17%	38%	35%
Southeast	36	14%	14%	28%	44%
Total	430	11%	17%	37%	35%

Table 18

When Needed, Initial Clothing Voucher Provided Timely Level of Agreement by Number and Percent						
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	N/A
Northern	76	26%	26%	18%	12%	17%
South-central	127	27%	23%	19%	17%	15%
Western	18	11%	44%	28%	6%	11%
Anchorage	172	16%	23%	22%	22%	18%
Southeast	36	19%	33%	22%	19%	6%
Total	429	21%	25%	21%	17%	16%

Information to Support Child**Table 19**

Foster Parents Received Information to Meet the Child's Needs Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	73	29%	42%	19%	10%
Southcentral	126	23%	33%	27%	17%
Western	20	25%	25%	25%	25%
Anchorage	162	24%	31%	25%	20%
Southeast	35	26%	20%	34%	20%
Total	416	25%	32%	25%	18%

Placement Planning**Table 20**

At Placement, Foster Parent Given a Placement Packet Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	76	59%	17%	12%	12%
Southcentral	127	40%	23%	13%	24%
Western	19	21%	21%	21%	37%
Anchorage	170	35%	14%	25%	26%
Southeast	36	44%	8%	19%	28%
Total	428	41%	17%	18%	24%

Service Provision**Table 21**

Caseworker Helped Foster Parent Get Needed Services for the Child Level of Agreement by Number and Percent						
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	N/A
Northern	78	40%	26%	21%	6%	8%
South-central	129	36%	22%	25%	12%	5%
Western	21	19%	24%	24%	24%	10%
Anchorage	174	24%	24%	30%	14%	7%
Southeast	35	34%	20%	37%	9%	0%
Total	437	31%	23%	27%	12%	6%

Caseworker Contact**Table 22**

Foster Parent Able to Reach the Caseworkers When Needed Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	78	36%	33%	28%	3%
Southcentral	130	28%	38%	32%	2%
Western	21	19%	33%	43%	5%
Anchorage	173	23%	33%	38%	6%
Southeast	36	31%	33%	36%	0%
Total	438	27%	34%	35%	4%

Home Visits**Table 23**

Frequency of Worker Visits to See Foster Children By Number and Percent						
Region	Total Respondents	Weekly	Monthly	2-3 Months	4-6 Months	No Visits
Northern	78	5%	59%	21%	9%	6%
Southcentral	127	3%	73%	12%	6%	6%
Western	20	0%	70%	20%	5%	5%
Anchorage	171	2%	68%	23%	5%	2%
Southeast	34	6%	56%	21%	12%	6%
Total	430	3%	67%	19%	6%	5%

Court Hearing Notification**Table 24**

Period of Time Prior to Court Hearing Foster Parent Informed of Hearing By Number 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
Northern	75	43%	37%	12%	8%
South-central	108	29%	39%	16%	17%
Western	17	24%	53%	12%	12%
Anchorage	150	23%	47%	8%	21%
Southeast	32	31%	25%	16%	28%
Total	382	29%	41%	12%	18%

Court Hearing Attendance**Table 25**

Foster Parents Attendance at Court Hearings By Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Attended	Percent	Not Attended	Percent
Northern	77	44	57%	33	43%
Southcentral	127	74	58%	53	42%
Western	20	11	55%	9	45%
Anchorage	165	108	65%	57	35%
Southeast	35	14	40%	21	60%
Total	424	251	59%	173	41%

Comments Given in Court Hearings**Table 26**

Foster Parents Able to Make Comments at Court Hearings by Number and Percent				
Region	Comments Provided	Percent	Comments not provided	Percent
Northern	26	60%	17	40%
Southcentral	46	61%	29	39%
Western	11	92%	1	8%
Anchorage	78	71%	32	29%
Southeast	10	71%	4	29%
Total	171	67%	83	33%

Family Contact Process**Table 27**

Provided Information About the Family Contact Plan Facilitating Visitation Between Parents and Children In Out-of-Home Care By Number and Percent					
Region	Total Respondents	Yes, I know about the program	Percent	No, I do not know what family contact process is	Percent
Northern	70	50	71%	20	29%
Southcentral	120	86	72%	34	28%
Western	21	16	76%	5	24%
Anchorage	167	115	69%	52	31%
Southeast	34	23	68%	11	32%
Total	412	290	70%	122	30%

Table 28

Asked to Support or Participate in Family Contact Planning By Number and Percent						
Region	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	35	47%	21	28%	18	24%
South-central	65	51%	41	32%	21	17%
Western	8	38%	5	24%	8	38%
Anchorage	94	56%	52	31%	23	14%
Southeast	21	58%	11	31%	4	11%
Total	223	52%	130	30%	74	17%

Foster parents were asked to share ways they had been asked to participate in supporting visitation between parents and children. Activities listed included arranging visits, assisting with transportation, arranging phone calls, providing supervision of visits, inviting the family to join them at church, and helping with sibling visitation. Foster parents reported supporting contact at community locations. They also reported inviting parents and other family members to birthday parties, holiday dinners, and to accompany them on medical and school appointments.

Table 29

Foster Parent's Support of Cultural and Ethnic Identity of Child By Number and Percent		
Type of Support	Number	Percent of respondents
Cultural planning with youth and case worker	73	16%
Knowing Who You Are Training (KWYA)	36	8%
Cultural activities in the community	235	51%
Traditional activities	147	32%
Foods, music, etc.	244	53%
Spiritual support	174	38%

Section IV: Comments

3.1 Foster Parents' Additional Comments

Strengths

Foster Parents shared experiences where they had good communication with workers. They described workers who were attentive and visited their homes regularly to check on their needs and provide support.

Assistance from secondary workers when children are placed from other regions was described. Coordination of information between regions was helpful in ensuring care of the children.

A long term foster parent described the improvement seen over the years in the processes for working with foster parents. The foster parent handbook was described as very useful. Appreciation was expressed for staff attending foster parent training to encourage the new foster parents. It was expressed that the ability to access needed information has greatly improved over the years.

Positive comments regarding licensing workers were received. Their ability to smooth the process of becoming licensed and learning about the system was expressed. It was noted that the workers were respectful of the foster parent's time and schedule.

A foster parent described feeling very supported by both caseworkers and office staff. They described their questions as being answered promptly and that their comments are seriously considered. They described feeling like a partner in making children's lives better.

Several foster parents who are relative caregivers expressed appreciation for the support given their families. It was noted that their families had been treated in a dignified way and their relative children were well cared for.

Foster parents described the joy of being able to care for children in need. The vulnerability of the children was described and the need for stable and supportive care. The growth and development of the children was celebrated in their comments.

Appreciation was expressed to the Alaska Center for Resource Families. Their staff was described as kind and really taking the time to understand each foster parent and their story with patience and respect. The training was described as providing increased knowledge. The staff was described as being encouraging and supportive.

Resource and Support Needs

Foster parents described the need to have full information regarding children's needs before they are placed in their homes. This allows the foster parents to plan for their own children and to be prepared to provide care for children who may have special needs.

The need to have back up coverage when workers are on vacation or are in the field was described. When coverage by the worker is not available, it causes long delays for foster parents to gain information needed to provide care for the children.

Several foster parents described their concerns that their knowledge of the children they provide care for is not fully considered in decision making about the children. They described that having the children in their homes and providing care 24 hours a day provides knowledge that workers with limited contact with the children do not have. Foster parents also described the need to have timely notification of court hearings so they are able to schedule and attend. It was noted that they feel it is important to provide comments to the court regarding the children in their care.

There was a continuing thread among foster parent comments about the need for increased responsiveness from the case workers. Foster parents described not having their emails and phone calls returned. It was described that even contacting supervisors did not result in a response. They described waiting for months for paperwork for the children to be processed delaying services for the children.

There were concerns expressed about changes of workers on cases. This occurs both due to staff turnover as well as workers being reassigned. It was noted that it makes information flow sporadic as well as cases do not always continue to move forward.

There were several concerns regarding the amount of foster care rates as well as clothing vouchers. It was noted that children frequently were placed with little to no clothing and to outfit children in winter gear far exceeds the clothing allowance. It was noted also, that with children growing so rapidly, clothing often lasts only a few months before being outgrown. Further concerns were that children are often behind academically and tutors are very expensive as well as costs of extracurricular activities. It was noted, that just these costs can absorb the monthly stipend without other needs being addressed. The policy of subtracting 50 miles per week from mileage was described as not helpful. It was noted that if the state wished to pay less per mile, then it should just do so.

Several concerns were received regarding the transitioning of children when they are placed back in their homes or when they become available for adoption. Several examples were provided when foster families were not given sufficient time when children were being moved, so that all children in the home could say goodbye etc.

There was a need described for the differences in support for older children remaining in care who are able to have their costs reimbursed through foster care rates; however for children who are adopted the subsidy ends at age 18 years. This was seen as a deterrent to adopting children who may have needs which result in extended costs.

Section V: 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 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.