



Foster Parent Survey

2015

State of Alaska

Department of Health and Social Services

Office of Children's Services

Highlights of Findings

The foster parent survey was sent to 1290 licensed foster parents. There were 743 foster parents who returned the survey for a response rate of 58 percent.

Key results of the survey are listed below.

- 79 percent of foster parents reported utilizing the Alaska Center for Resource Families as a training resource
- 85 percent of respondents reported that the training prepared them for the challenges of providing care for children
- 76 percent of respondents reported they received training prior to placement of a child
- 76 percent of respondents had a child in care at the time they completed the survey
- 66 percent of respondents indicated they intended to continue to provide foster care
- 65 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
- 84 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
- 59 percent of respondents reported they had attended court hearings and 64% reported they had made comments at court hearings
- 42 percent of respondents reported they had been licensed for three or more years evidencing an experienced group of caregivers for children

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. 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 licensed foster parents who had provided their email address to 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.

Methodology

The information for this survey was collected through an email survey of 1290 licensed foster parents that served children across the state of Alaska in 2015. The survey was sent to foster parents who had provided their email address to the agency. The decision to use email was to enable costs of the survey distribution to be managed.

A survey questionnaire was sent to the foster parents, asking questions in areas including: 1) foster parents participation in training offered by the Alaska Center for Resource Families; 2) fostering experiences; 3) working relations with Office of Children's Services, and 4) foster parents participation in court hearings, family contact plan and cultural activities.

An initial mailing was conducted with three follow up emails to non respondents. There were responses received from 743 foster parents for an overall statewide response rate of 58 percent. There were 57 respondents who did not provide their region; their data is presented in summary in Section IV.

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	196	96	49%
Southcentral	327	145	44%
Anchorage	590	294	50%
Western	40	37	93%
Southeast	137	114	83%
No Region Provided		57	
Total All Regions	1290	743	58%

Findings

To enable foster parents to provide skilled care to children residing in their homes, the Office of Children's Services provides for initial and ongoing training. The Alaska Center for Resource Parents provides training for the agency. The resource center maintains training sites in three regional locations which are able to provide statewide training through a variety of methods. The resource center in addition to providing training on site, has available web based courses, telephonic training, mailed courses, and resource materials. The resource center is also available to answer questions and provide consultation to foster parents through email and telephone. The Office of Children's Services relies on the resource center to prepare foster parents for the challenges of providing care. Tables 2-4 provide findings regarding foster parents who participated in training through the Alaska Center for Resource Families and their experiences in training.

Foster Parent Training

Table 2

Foster Parents Who Reported They Had Participated in Training Provided by the Alaska Center for Resource Families by Number and Percent							
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	96	84	88%	9	9%	3	3%
Southcentral	145	116	80%	25	17%	4	3%
Anchorage	292	231	79%	43	15%	18	6%
Western	37	22	59%	10	27%	5	14%
Southeast	114	87	76%	20	18%	7	6%
Total	684	540	79%	107	16%	37	5%

Methods of Accessing Training through Alaska Center for Resource Families

Foster Parents were able to report their participation in more than one type of training method, thus a foster parent may be reported in more than one category.

Table 3

Foster Parents Using Specific Methods of Training by Number and Percent		
Method of Training	Number of Foster Parents	Percent of respondents
Web-based courses	345	46%
Mailed self-study courses	342	46%
Telephonic courses	75	10%
Classroom courses	320	43%

N = 737

Training Adequacy

Providing care for children, who are not able to remain in their own homes due to maltreatment, requires skill in being able to meet the children's needs. The children have experienced trauma and require a great deal of flexibility in parenting. Foster parents were asked regarding their perceptions of the training program to prepare them for the challenges of providing care.

Table 4

Training Prepared Foster Parents for Challenges of Providing Care Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Agree	Percent	Do Not Agree	Percent
Northern	88	78	89%	10	11%
Southcentral	119	102	86%	17	14%
Anchorage	249	214	86%	35	14%
Western	28	24	86%	4	14%
Southeast	93	74	80%	19	20%
Total	577	492	85%	85	15%

The Office of Children's Services provides support to a foster care advisory board. This board functions to provide consultation and feedback to the agency regarding strengths and needs of the foster parent program. Foster parents were asked if they were aware of the board.

Resource Family Advisory Board

Table 5

Knowledge of Office of Children's Services Resource Family Advisory Board by Number and Percent		
Aware of Board	Number of Foster Parents	Percent
Yes	297	40%
No	440	60%
Total	737	100%

Timing of Child Placement after Foster Parent Licensed

Foster parents were asked regarding the timing of the placement of children into their home based on their licensing process. This gives the Office of Children's Services information on the utilization rate of new foster parents.

Table 6

Length of Time Foster Parent Was Licensed Before A Child Was Placed in Their Home by Number and Percent						
Region	Number of Foster Parents	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	93	43%	25%	16%	11%	5%
Southcentral	141	43%	21%	18%	13%	5%
Anchorage	287	43%	22%	18%	13%	3%
Western	35	49%	14%	14%	11%	11%
Southeast	112	41%	29%	14%	11%	5%
Total	668	43%	23%	17%	12%	5%

Training Prior to Child Placement

Foster parents were asked regarding the classes they had been able to complete before children were placed in their home. It is important that the agency is able to support foster parents by getting training into the home as soon as possible. This information helps the agency to learn if we are able to provide training into the home prior to children being placed.

Table 7

Classes Completed by Foster Parents Prior to Children Being Placed in Their Home by Number and Percent		
Name of Class	Number of Foster Parents	Percent of Foster Parents
Foster Parent Orientation Class only	135	21%
Core Class only	36	6%
Foster Parent Orientation and Core Class	316	50%
Did not Complete Foster Parent Orientation or Core Class	151	24%
Total Foster Parents Receiving Training Prior to Placement	487	76%

N = 638

Table 8

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	241	90%
Training Was Not Conveniently Available	17	6%
I Did Not Know How to Get Training	10	4%

N = 268

Having foster parents gain skills by providing care to children over time provides for a support system for children who must be in out of home care for a time. The children, who have experienced trauma, require a nurturing home which is able to meet their needs. Thus having a sufficient number of foster homes is critical to the agency's mission which includes retaining experienced foster parents. Tables 9-12 provide information on retaining skilled foster parents.

Foster Parent Retention

Table 9

Foster Parents' Plans About Continuing to Provide Care by Number and Percent							
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Will Continue	Percent	Will Not Continue	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	93	60	65%	10	11%	23	25%
Southcentral	141	88	62%	12	9%	41	29%
Anchorage	287	189	66%	32	11%	66	23%
Western	35	25	71%	6	17%	4	11%
Southeast	113	80	71%	7	6%	26	23%
Total	669	442	66%	67	10%	160	24%

Table 10

Foster Parents Reasons for Planning to Continue to Provide Care by Number and Percent		
Reason	Number and Percent of Respondents	
I believe caring for children is important and rewarding	373	84%
Caring for children is my way of contributing to my community	283	64%
I am interested in adopting	201	45%
It is important to provide care for children	322	73%
I enjoy being a member of a service team and working with social workers	153	35%

N = 442

Table 11

Foster Parents Reasons for Planning to Discontinue Providing Care by Number and Percent		
Reason	Number and Percent of respondents	
I would like more time for my family and myself	17	25%
Reimbursement does not adequately cover my costs of care	8	12%
The demands of foster care conflict with my own family's needs	20	30%
I do not receive enough support from the Office of Children's Services	24	36%
I am interested in providing care for my related child only	8	12%
I plan to adopt my current foster child	22	33%

N = 67

Foster Parent Length of Service**Table 12**

Length of Time Foster Parent has Provided Services by Number and Percent						
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Percent Licensed <1 Year	Percent Licensed 1-2 Years	Percent Licensed 3-5 Years	Percent Licensed 6-10 Years	Percent Licensed > 10 years
Northern	87	26%	25%	31%	9%	8%
Southcentral	132	30%	29%	30%	6%	5%
Anchorage	279	28%	30%	23%	11%	8%
Western	31	23%	39%	16%	10%	13%
Southeast	106	29%	30%	25%	7%	9%
Total	635	28%	29%	25%	9%	8%

It is helpful to know the status of the survey respondents to such areas as how many currently have children in their homes, how many respondents are providing care to related children, and how many may be participating in the permanency process for children to adopt the children or provide guardianship. Tables 13-15 provide information in these areas.

Foster Home Placement Status

Table 13

Foster Homes With Children in Placement by Number and Percent							
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Number and Percent of Foster Homes With Children		Number and Percent of Foster Homes Without Children		Number and Percent of Foster Homes Never Had Placement	
Northern	93	72	77%	17	18%	4	4%
Southcentral	140	108	77%	25	18%	7	5%
Anchorage	288	221	77%	60	21%	7	2%
Western	35	26	74%	6	17%	3	9%
Southeast	112	80	71%	27	24%	5	4%
Total	668	507	76%	135	20%	26	4%

Relative Caregivers

Table 14

Foster Homes Providing Care for Related Children by Number and Percent			
Region	Homes With Children in Placement	Number and Percent of Homes With Relative Children	
Northern	88	27	31%
Southcentral	133	39	29%
Anchorage	279	80	29%
Western	31	11	35%
Southeast	107	35	33%
Total	638	192	30%

Table 15

Foster Homes Providing Care With Adoption or Guardianship Plan by Number and Percent				
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Percent Adoption or Guardianship Plan	Percent Without Adoption or Guardianship Plan	Percent Unsure Adoption or Guardianship Plan
Northern	67	63%	12%	25%
Southcentral	107	59%	19%	22%
Anchorage	222	62%	15%	23%
Western	22	68%	0%	32%
Southeast	84	64%	13%	23%
Total	502	62%	15%	23%

Families providing care for children receive an amount of funding each month intended to reimburse them for the cost of care. As families incur costs prior to receiving support, timeliness of payment is very important to family budgets that may be stretched. Children may also receive a clothing allowance when needed and this can be critical to providing adequate care for children. Tables 16-19 provide the respondents experiences in these areas.

Reimbursement of Costs

Table 16

Reimbursement Adequate to Cover Costs Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	87	16%	41%	26%	16%
Southcentral	130	16%	48%	26%	10%
Anchorage	275	16%	39%	31%	14%
Western	30	33%	37%	13%	17%
Southeast	106	17%	37%	30%	16%
Total	628	17%	41%	28%	14%

Table 17

Reimbursement Received Timely Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	87	41%	38%	11%	9%
Southcentral	132	45%	42%	11%	2%
Anchorage	275	43%	41%	13%	3%
Western	31	39%	29%	13%	19%
Southeast	106	40%	41%	14%	6%
Total	631	43%	40%	13%	4%

Children's Clothing**Table 18**

Adequacy of Child's Clothing at Placement Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	86	6%	9%	45%	40%
Southcentral	130	9%	15%	33%	43%
Anchorage	274	12%	16%	34%	38%
Western	31	16%	13%	26%	45%
Southeast	105	12%	16%	33%	38%
Total	626	11%	15%	35%	39%

Table 19

When Needed, Initial Clothing Voucher Was Provided Timely					
Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	77	17%	34%	31%	18%
Southcentral	115	32%	28%	25%	15%
Anchorage	233	29%	25%	28%	19%
Western	27	22%	41%	11%	26%
Southeast	86	33%	23%	21%	23%
Total	538	28%	27%	26%	19%

Foster Parents are a vital link and support in ensuring that children have their needs met while in care. This requires that foster parents have adequate information regarding trauma the child may have experienced, treatment needs that have been identified, and coordination of services with the worker. Tables 20–23 provide the respondents experiences in these areas.

Information to Support Child

Table 20

Foster Parents Received Information					
to Meet the Child's Needs					
Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	85	21%	29%	31%	19%
Southcentral	128	25%	20%	30%	24%
Anchorage	267	24%	24%	33%	19%
Western	28	21%	7%	39%	32%
Southeast	103	26%	29%	27%	17%
Total	611	24%	24%	32%	20%

Placement Planning**Table 21**

At Placement, Foster Parents Given a Placement Packet Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	85	46%	24%	20%	11%
Southcentral	128	46%	28%	12%	14%
Anchorage	269	49%	20%	16%	14%
Western	29	55%	10%	7%	28%
Southeast	105	34%	28%	25%	13%
Total	616	46%	23%	17%	14%

Service Provision**Table 22**

Caseworker Helped Foster Parents Get Needed Services for the Child Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	78	26%	32%	33%	9%
Southcentral	124	40%	18%	28%	14%
Anchorage	261	33%	25%	28%	15%
Western	29	38%	14%	17%	31%
Southeast	97	31%	25%	24%	21%
Total	589	34%	24%	27%	15%

Table 23

Caseworker Spent Time To Help Identify Supports Needed to be Able to Provide Care for the Child					
Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	84	7%	19%	24%	50%
Southcentral	129	18%	17%	19%	46%
Anchorage	266	20%	14%	22%	44%
Western	29	21%	0%	21%	59%
Southeast	103	18%	14%	25%	43%
Total	611	17%	14%	22%	46%

Providing care for children requires ongoing communication with the assigned caseworker as well as the ability to reach the caseworker when a question arises. Ongoing contact with the worker ensures communication regarding the child's needs and their well being in the foster home. Tables 24-25 reflect the foster parents' experiences in these areas.

Caseworker Contact

Table 24

Foster Parent Able to Reach the Caseworkers When Needed					
Level of Agreement by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	86	16%	28%	48%	8%
Southcentral	130	25%	27%	45%	4%
Anchorage	271	28%	24%	42%	6%
Western	29	28%	34%	24%	14%
Southeast	106	24%	33%	40%	4%
Total	622	25%	27%	42%	6%

Home Visits**Table 25**

Frequency of Worker Visits to See Foster Children by Number and Percent						
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Weekly	Monthly	2-3 Months	4-6 Months	No Visits
Northern	85	0%	55%	25%	8%	12%
Southcentral	130	1%	61%	18%	11%	9%
Anchorage	271	1%	64%	24%	7%	3%
Western	30	0%	40%	27%	13%	20%
Southeast	104	4%	56%	27%	8%	6%
Total	620	1%	60%	23%	8%	7%

As primary caretakers for children who must reside outside their own homes, foster parents can provide information on the child's progress and any needs they may have. Foster parents should be notified prior to each court hearing. This enables foster parents to provide valuable feedback to the court system which provides oversight to the out of home placement of children. Tables 26 - 28 describe the notification of foster parents of court hearings and the foster parent's participation in court hearings.

Court Hearing Notification**Table 26**

Period of Time Prior to Court Hearing Foster Parent Informed of Hearing by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Three to four weeks in advance	One to two weeks in advance	Less than one week in advance	Not notified
Northern	83	22%	31%	16%	31%
Southcentral	127	15%	34%	14%	37%
Anchorage	264	20%	31%	9%	39%
Western	30	13%	33%	17%	37%
Southeast	101	18%	30%	15%	38%
Total	605	19%	32%	12%	37%

Court Hearing Attendance**Table 27**

Foster Parents Attendance at Court Hearings by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Attended	Percent	Did Not Attend	Percent
Northern	85	51	60%	34	40%
Southcentral	130	75	58%	55	42%
Anchorage	267	160	60%	107	40%
Western	30	18	60%	12	40%
Southeast	105	61	58%	44	42%
Total	617	365	59%	252	41%

Comments Given in Court Hearings**Table 28**

Foster Parents Able to Make Comments at Court Hearings by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Comments Provided	Percent	Comments not provided	Percent
Northern	49	29	59%	20	41%
Southcentral	75	50	67%	25	33%
Anchorage	159	104	65%	55	35%
Western	18	12	67%	6	33%
Southeast	59	37	63%	22	37%
Total	360	232	64%	128	36%

In order to support the continuity of family relationships while children must be in out of home care, regular visitation with parents and children should be scheduled. Involving foster parents in this planning process is essential to the child's well being as well as providing for needed logistical support for the visits. Tables 29-30 provide the foster parent's experiences in this area.

Family Contact Process

Table 29

Foster Parent Was Provided Information About the Family Contact Plan for Visitation Between Parents and Children by Number and Percent					
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Yes, I know about the program	Percent	No, I do not know what "family contact process" is	Percent
Northern	83	50	60%	33	40%
Southcentral	128	78	61%	50	39%
Anchorage	267	171	64%	96	36%
Western	30	17	57%	13	43%
Southeast	103	68	66%	35	34%
Total	611	384	63%	227	37%

Table 30

Foster Parent's Participation in Family Contact Planning by Number and Percent							
Region	Number of Foster Parents	Yes	Percent	No	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	84	32	38%	33	39%	19	23%
Southcentral	128	59	46%	46	36%	23	18%
Anchorage	269	119	44%	89	33%	61	23%
Western	30	8	27%	17	57%	5	17%
Southeast	104	43	41%	39	38%	22	21%
Total	615	261	42%	224	36%	130	21%

When entering out of home care, it is critical to the child's well being that they are supported and guided in learning and retaining knowledge of their culture and ethnic identity. As primary caregivers, foster parents are active participants in supporting this area of care. Table 31 gives respondents reports of activities they have engaged in for this vital area. Respondents were able to check all activities they had participated in.

Table 31

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	118	23%
Knowing Who You Are Training (KWYA)	68	13%
Cultural activities in the community	369	71%
Foods, music, etc.	381	73%
Spiritual support	245	47%

N = 519

Section IV: Respondents Not Providing Their Region

For those respondents who chose not to provide their region, their responses were generally in accord with all other responses. For example in the areas of training, similar percentages reported participation in training as well as use of the various modalities of training. Numbers of foster parents planning to continue to provide care was similar with 66% of those providing their region compared to 62% of those who opted not to provide their region. There were slight differences in the two groups of respondents who have children currently placed in their homes with 76% of those providing their region currently having children in placement compared to 60% of those who opted not to provide their region. It can be concluded that the responses for both groups are similar and no significant differences were identified.

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. The Foster parents throughout the state are to be commended for sharing their homes and assisting the agency in caring for Alaska's children.

The thoughtful responses 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.