

# **A supervision programme for social workers responsible for monitoring foster care placements**

by

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Campus  
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## PREFACE

This dissertation is presented in article format in accordance with the guidelines, as set out in the Manual for Postgraduate Studies 2010. The articles in the document comply with the requirements set by the *Journal for Social work/Tydskrif vir Maatskaplike Werk*.

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## EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Journal* publishes articles, book reviews and commentary on articles already published from any field of social work. Contributions may be written in English or Afrikaans. All articles should include an abstract in English of not more than 100 words. All contributions will be critically reviewed by at least two referees on whose advice contributions will be accepted or rejected by the editorial committee. All refereeing is strictly confidential. Manuscripts may be returned to the authors if extensive revision is required or if the style or presentation does not conform to the Journal practice. Articles of fewer than 2 000 words or more than 10 000 words are normally not considered for publication. Submit the manuscripts as a Microsoft Word document, in 12 pt Times Roman double-spaced on one side of A4 paper only. Use font Arial in charts and diagrams. The manuscript should be sent electronically to [hsu@sun.ac.za](mailto:hsu@sun.ac.za). Use the Harvard system for references. Short references in the text: When word-for-word quotations, facts or arguments from other sources are cited, the surname(s) of the author(s), year of publication and page number(s) must appear in parenthesis in the text, e.g. "... (Berger, 1967:12). More details about sources referred to in the text should appear at the end of the manuscript under the caption "References". The sources must be arranged alphabetically according to the surnames of the authors.

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## ABSTRACT

A large number of children find themselves in foster care situations in South Africa with placements that have to be monitored by social workers. This is a demanding task, given the nature of foster placements and the heavy caseloads of social workers responsible for monitoring of foster placements.

Although a wealth of information on social work supervision is to be found in the prevailing literature, no comparative volume of information is to be found on supervision in child welfare in particular. A model for supervision in this field must still be developed.

In view of this and considering the supervisory role occupied by the researcher in Child Welfare South Africa, Free State, it was decided to embark on a research project investigating supervision in the field of child welfare, specifically with foster care social workers.

Supervision in the field of child welfare is under researched and that a supervision model for this purpose should still be developed.

The research results indicated that social workers monitoring foster care placements have large caseloads and that some of them receive supervision for too long. The supervision that they receive fulfils most of their needs, and that they found their supervisors very accessible.

The most important learning needs were related to the Children's Act no.38 of 2005 as it applies to foster placements, and the submission of section 159 reports in time.

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## OPSOMMING

Groot getalle kinders bevind hulle in pleegsorgsituasies in Suid-Afrika met plasings wat deur maatskaplike werkers gemoniteer moet word. Dit is 'n veeleisende taak, gegee die aard van pleegplasings en die hoë gevalleladings van maatskaplike werkers wat oor die plasings toesig moet hou.

Alhoewel voldoende inligting oor maatskaplike werk-supervisie in die literatuur gevind kan word, is geen vergelykbare volume literatuur oor supervisie in die Kindersorgveld in die besonder beskikbaar nie.

In die lig hiervan en met oorweging van die rol van die navorser in Kindersorg Suid-Afrika, Bloemfontein, is besluit op 'n navorsingsprojek wat supervisie in die Kindersorgveld, en in die besonder met maatskaplike werkers wat pleegsorgtoesigdienste lewer, van stapel te laat loop.

Dit is gevind dat daar 'n gebrek aan navorsing oor supervisie binne die veld van Kindersorg is, en dat 'n model vir hierdie doeleindes ontwikkel moet word.

Die bevindinge het getoon dat maatskaplike werkers wat pleegplasings moniteer, hoë gevalleladings het, en dat sommige van hulle vir te lank supervisie ontvang. Die supervisie wat hulle wel ontvang, vervul die meeste van hulle leerbehoefte, en hulle ervaar hulle supervisors as baie toeganklik.

Die grootste leerbehoefte hou verband met die bepalinge van die Kinderwet ten opsigte van pleegsorg en die tydigse voorlegging van artikel 159-verslae.

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# **SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

An increasing number of children in foster care with a decreasing number of alternative placements face the Child Welfare System (Coleman, 2000:1). According to SASSA (2008), statistical data reveal that during May 2008, more than 446 831 children were placed in the foster care of an estimated 270 000 families, compared with the previous year, where the number was less than the present figures. In conclusion, from these statistics it transpires that an increasing number of children are placed in foster care and who need special services.

Services aimed at the protection of children in need of care as well as protection from abuse and neglect currently fall within the framework of the Children's Act, 38 of 2005. Section 156 (2) of the Children's Act states that before the child is brought before the children's court, a designated social worker must investigate the matter and within 90 days compile a report in the prescribed manner on whether the child is in need of care and protection. Section 156 (1) further states that if a children's court finds that a child is in need of care and protection, the court may make any order which is in the best interest of the child. This clearly shows how crucial the intervention of a designated social worker is in a child's life. The report submitted to the court is what the court relies on to decide what is in the best interest of the child.

Foster care forms a vital part of the total child welfare programme for children found to be in need of care and protection. A foster care placement should be preceded by a thorough assessment from a holistic perspective to ensure the child's immediate safety, but also should take into account the long-term consequences (South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare, 1987:1). Children needing foster care are extremely vulnerable, and cannot be subjected to sub-standard protection services; thus foster care services should be of a high quality. Once a child has been placed, all efforts should be made to ensure that the placement is successful (Department of Social Development, 2008:4).

The researcher, working for a Child Protection Organisation and through scrutinising a literature review, has seen how foster care placements fail, with children running away from placements or being moved from one placement to another (Botes, 2008: 6). Following are some of the factors that lead to the failure of placement:

- The foster parents cannot deal with the foster child's behaviour;
- The abilities of the foster parents are overestimated or too many demands are put on them by the welfare institution; and
- The foster family can no longer care for the foster child because of personal changes within the family. (South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare, 1987:77-78).

Lack of training programmes, assessment methods, high caseloads, lack of supervision, as well as a high turnover of social workers, are some of the contributing factors to problems experienced by foster care services.

The researcher believes that if social workers are guided, trained and supervised on quality foster care services, fewer children would be lost in the system, as foster care is an important intervention process for children in need of care and protection; thus the initiative for this study.

Since foster care is a service for child protection purposes, the concept of supervision becomes paramount to the success of this practice. Corey and Callanan (1993:94) define supervision as an integral part of training to help social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:21) see supervision as being a three-way process: administrative, educational, as well as supportive. They state that the short-range objective of educational supervision is to improve the worker's capacity to do her job more effectively, grow and develop professionally and maximise her clinical knowledge and skills to the point where she can perform autonomously and independently of supervision. On the other hand, administrative supervision aims at providing the worker with a work context that permits her to do her job effectively, while supportive supervision helps the worker feel good about doing her job. These processes all aim at providing clients with effective and efficient social work services.

Designated Child Protection Organisations (CPOs), have an obligation to supervise foster care placements by social workers, thus the need to develop a programme for supervisors that will ensure that those placing children in foster care are informed and guided. Section 105 (5) (a) of the Children's Act states that designated child protection services include:

- (I) The proceedings of children's courts; and
- (II) The implementation of court orders.

The Texas Department of Human Resources (1982), as quoted by SR QIC Literature Review on Social Work Supervision (2001:4), emphasises the importance of supervision as a critical aspect of effective service delivery to children and families. This programme should therefore ensure that foster care supervision is designed to make the success of placements possible and to empower social workers employed by CPOs in the practice of foster care placements. As employers can be held liable for their employees' failing to guarantee sound enough practices and duty of care obligations for children, it becomes imperative for an organisation to develop programmes that will empower its workers to render effective services (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008:106). The purpose of this study therefore, is to explore the learning needs of social workers responsible for monitoring foster placements in

child welfare organisations in the Free State Province. In view of this, the following research question will serve as a guideline for this research project:

*What are the learning needs of social workers responsible for supervision of foster care placements in child welfare agencies in the Free State Province?*

## **2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 Aim**

The aim of this study is to explore the learning needs of social workers responsible for the supervision of foster care placements in child welfare agencies in the Free State Province.

### **2.2 Objectives**

Arkava and Lane (1983:11-13), as cited by Fouché and De Vos (2007:105), state that any fully scientific endeavour in social work should have at least one of the following three primary objectives: to explore; to describe; or to explain. Based on the abovementioned, this study aspires to achieve the following:

- To conduct a literature review on supervision in child welfare;
- To establish the learning needs of social workers responsible for the monitoring

## **3 RESEARCH METHODS**

Research on the topic was conducted by means of a literature review and an exploratory/descriptive research design.

### **3.1 Literature study**

According to Fouché and Delport (2007:123), a literature review is aimed at contributing to a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified. On the other hand, Rubin and Babbie (2001:120), as cited by the above authors, state that a thorough literature review lays the foundation for good research.

There is so much information in terms of literature on social work supervision, but it is sparse on the supervision of social workers rendering foster care services.

The following databases were consulted: Social work journals; government documents; social science indices; the internet; and Ferdikat.

### 3.2 Research Design

According to Grinnell (2001:547), a research design is a plan, which includes every aspect of a proposed research study, from the conceptualisation of the problem, through to the dissemination of the findings. Mouton, cited by Fouché and De Vos (2007:132), defines a research design as a plan or blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research. The purpose of the research is explorative/ descriptive with a quantitative research approach. The research method used is one that develops a supervision programme that can guide supervisors in the supervision process of foster care social workers to ensure more effective foster placement supervision. Consequently, this would thus limit the number of failed placements within CPOs to a minimum. Fouché and De Vos (2007:106), state that descriptive research can have a basic or applied research goal and can be qualitative or quantitative in nature.

### 3.3 Data collection

Mailed questionnaires were utilised to gather information from social workers who are responsible for foster care within Child Welfare South Africa member organisations in the Free State province. Delpont (2007:166) states that the aim of a questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on the particular issue. As these social workers render foster care services in their organisations, the researcher felt that they were more knowledgeable on the subject matter; therefore, they were deemed the right people to participate in this study.

### 3.4 Research participants

CWSA social workers in Free State participated in this study. According to Greeff (2007:304), the right group composition will generate free-flowing discussion that contains useful data. Seventeen (17) social workers providing foster care placement within child welfare organisations in the Free State were used for the research purpose. The universe of social workers working for CWSA in the Free State was included in the study. "Universe refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested" (Arkava *et al.*, 1983:27, as mentioned by Strydom, 2007:193). It thus means that no use was made of sampling procedures.

### 3.5 Measuring instrument

Neuman (1997:30) states that data for research are divided into two categories, namely qualitative and quantitative data. After the literature study, questionnaires with both open- and closed-ended questions were compiled and were pre-tested and revisited before final use. According to Delpont (2007:166), the basic objective

of a questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are informed on a particular issue. The questionnaires were mailed to the social workers employed by Child Welfare South Africa in the Free State province. Twenty-one (21) questionnaires were mailed to social workers for their response, with a return date to send them to the researcher. Of these twenty-one questionnaires, seventeen (17) were returned. The researcher also made telephonic follow-ups to those who did not meet the return date.

### **3.6 Data analysis and interpretation**

A key principle in data analysis is that its depth and intensity is determined by the purpose of the study (Krueger and Casey, 2000:127). According to Kruger, De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2007:218), citing Kerlinger, “analysis means the categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising of data to obtain answers to research questions. Its purpose is to reduce data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relations of research problems can be studied tested and conclusions drawn.” For the purpose of this research, the researcher developed the questionnaire within the parameters of the data analysis software for easy capturing and processing. Use of a computerised data analysis program, MS Excel to do the initial data processing was utilised. Kruger *et al.* (2007:218) state that one can also compute most statistics with a spread-sheet programme such as MS Excel or Corel Quattro Point.

### **3.7 Ethical aspects**

Gravetter and Forzano, as quoted by Strydom (2007:56), allude that researchers have two basic categories of ethical responsibility, responsibility to those, both human and nonhuman participants, who participate in the project and responsibility to the discipline of science, to be accurate and honest in the reporting of their research. Based on this, the following ethical considerations were taken into account while conducting the research:

- Strydom (2007:68), citing Reamer, states that the utilisation of an ethics committee that considers research proposals is increasingly becoming accepted practice. Such a committee thoroughly studies all proposals, accepts or rejects them, or proposes certain modifications. To fulfil the ethical requirements, ethical approval was obtained from North-West University’s Ethics Committee (Ethics number NWU 000 11 10 SI).
- Confidentiality – respondents were assured of their privacy; thus, their information would not be revealed to third parties. Sieber, as mentioned by Strydom (2007:61), views confidentiality as a continuation of privacy, “ which refers to agreements between persons that limit others’ access to private information.”

- The researcher informed the participants before the study commenced, that it was voluntary, thus they were not coerced into participating. The purpose of the research was also shared with them so that they could make an informed decision. "Emphasis must be placed on accurate and complete information, so that subjects will fully comprehend the investigation and consequently be able to make a voluntary, thoroughly reasoned decision about their possible participation" (Strydom, 2007:59).

## 4 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLES

Two articles were written:

**Article 1:** The nature of supervision with social workers supervising foster placements: a literature overview

**Article 2:** A supervision programme for social workers supervising foster care placements: empirical findings

2.1 Goals of the study and research design

2.2 Presentation of data

2.3 Discussion of findings, conclusions and recommendations

## 5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- There is a considerable body of literature on social work supervision, but there seems to be a challenge in terms of information specifically for the supervision of foster care social workers. The researcher attempted to utilise whatever information was available, adjusted it, and made it relevant to the study.
- It was also the intention of the researcher to conduct a focus group discussion with the supervisors responsible for these social workers, but due to problems with resources, it was not possible to hold those discussions.

## 6 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

- **Supervisor**

According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002:18-19), "a supervisor is an overseer, one who watches over the work of another with responsibility for its quality."

- **Supervision**

Supervision is an integral part of training to help social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities (Corey and Callanan, 1993:94).

Davies (2000:340) defines social work supervision as “a relationship based activity which enables practitioners to reflect upon the connection between tasks and processes within their work.”

- **Foster Care**

Section 180 (1) of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, states that a child is in foster care if the child has been placed in the care of a person who is not the parent or guardian of the child as a result of:

(a) An order of a children’s court.

- **Foster child**

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995:26) defines a foster child as a child who, in accordance with the legislation of the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, is placed in the care of a foster parent.

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## **SECTION B: THE JOURNAL ARTICLES**

# ARTICLE 1 THE NATURE OF SUPERVISION WITH SOCIAL WORKERS SUPERVISING FOSTER PLACEMENTS: A LITERATURE OVERVIEW

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## SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION WITH FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKERS

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of supervision of foster care social workers, being the social workers who manage and oversee the entire foster placement process.

A literature review showed that material on supervision in child welfare is relatively scarce, with publications on supervision of social workers monitoring foster placements virtually non-existent. The reason for the latter is that supervision of foster care social workers are seen as part of the general rubric of child welfare supervision. Hess, Kanak and Edkins (2009:7), however, observe that while "... there are several models of supervision available, one specific to supervision in child welfare has not yet been developed. Such a model would incorporate the supervisory function and responsibilities distinctive to child welfare as well as address the unique, fluid context of child welfare practice and policy." The Colorado Department of Human Services (1994), however, describes the value of supervision in child welfare, in the introduction of a booklet, when they state "... the supervisors play a key role in the provision of child welfare services. They are responsible for assuring that effective and efficient child welfare services are provided to children and families." This is further confirmed by the Children's Services Practice Notes for North Carolina's Child Welfare Social Workers (2003), stressing the key role that child welfare supervisors play in the recruitment, retention and professional development of social workers. "They are coaches, mentors, and evaluators responsible for the quality of services children and families receive. The powerful

influence of supervisors on families and on a child welfare agency's ability to achieve the safety, permanence, and well-being of children are emphasized."

The broader context of supervision, with reference to child welfare supervision forms the basis of this article. At the same time, the article will serve as background for the interpretation of empirical data presented in the second article.

According to the South African Social Security Agency SOCPEN database (2009), statistical data revealed that during October 2009, of an estimated 362 019 families, more than 549 827 children were placed in foster care, compared to 506 556 children from 329 709 families placed during the same period in 2008 (Department of Social Development 2009:9). This shows that there are a growing number of children found to be in need of care and protection, while at the same time giving an indication of the staff needed to manage services related to the care and protection of children. The foster care programme aims at providing alternative care to children who require care and protection out of their parental home. Due to the nature of problems these children experience, it is crucial that services offered to them should be holistic to address their needs. Social workers who need supervision render large segments of these services.

In order to render effective and efficient social work services to the beneficiaries according to the organisation's policies, frontline social workers need to be guided, supported, trained and monitored on the services rendered to ensure that they meet the needs of the service users. Supervision is an integral part of training to help social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities (Corey & Callanan, 1993:94). According to Diwan, Berger and Ivy (1996:41), supervision can provide quality assurance in case management by monitoring timeliness, completeness and appropriateness of services, and by building skills and shaping attitudes of workers. Supervisors are responsible for their supervisees, and are held accountable for their actions; hence, they need to ensure that service delivery to recipients is in line with policies and guidelines. Section 5.4.1(a) of the Policy Guideline for Course of Conduct, Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers (SACSSP) states that the supervisor could be held liable in an instance where a complaint of alleged unprofessional conduct is lodged against the supervisee/social worker. A supervisor is responsible for facilitating learning and creating space for the social worker to learn from his/her practice.

## 1.2 A CONCEPTUALISATION OF SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION

Various definitions of social work supervision are found on the topic, but when viewing these definitions, Kadushin and Harkness (2002: 23-24) observe that a review of the literature shows that "... supervision has been defined primarily in terms of the administrative and educational function". They then add: "... an additional responsibility of the supervisor that needs to be included is the expressive-supportive leadership function of supervision". The authors state that the supervisors have the responsibility of sustaining worker morale; helping with job-related discouragement and discontent discouragement; and giving supervisees a sense of worth as professionals, a sense of belonging in the agency, and a sense of security in their performance."

The frequently quoted, comprehensive definition of Kadushin and Harkness (2002:25) reads as follows:

"... a social work supervisor is an administrative staff member to whom authority is delegated to direct, coordinate, enhance, and evaluate the on-the-job performance for whose work he or she is held accountable. In implementing this responsibility, the supervisor performs administrative, educational and supportive functions, in interaction with the supervisee in the context of a positive relationship. The supervisor's ultimate objective is rendering the best possible service to agency clients, both quantitatively and qualitatively in accordance with agency policies and procedures."

Brittain's (2009:25) interpretation of the views of Kadushin and Harkness about the primary goal of supervision is that it should ensure adherence to agency policy and procedure to achieve agency goals and vision. Corey and Callanan (1993:95) describe supervision as an integral part of training to help the social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities, while Dill (2007:88) conceives supervision as a method to ensure that the organisation's mandate is achieved through effective service delivery. Social workers responsible for foster care services need to understand the nature of work they are involved in, the implications of their decisions and the effect on the child. It therefore becomes crucial for these frontline social workers to be guided, supported, trained, and monitored on service delivery to ensure effective and efficient social work services.

### 1.2.1 Administrative supervision

Brittain (2009:26) deals with the first of the three functions of supervision and summarises the administrative tasks of the supervisor as described by Kadushin and Harkness:

- Recruiting and selecting staff
- Operationalizing the unit

- Leading the unit
- Managing the workload
- Assessing work performance
- Analysing data and other forms of information
- Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating work
- Communicating with other staff and upper management
- Advocating with the community and other areas of the agency
- Managing change.

The administrative function of social work supervision, according to Kadushin and Harkness (2002:19), is a process for getting the work done and maintaining organisational control and accountability. Its priorities are on adherence to the agency policies and procedures and to implementing these effectively. Skidmore (1995:24) indicates that the administrative function of supervision focuses on provision of effective social work services to the clients. It prepares social workers to undertake their tasks, allocation and delegation of work, monitoring, reviewing and evaluating.

The following statement on administrative supervision in child welfare encapsulates the situation very clearly: “An often overlooked but major task of child welfare supervisors is administrative, which includes assessing worker and client needs, planning, tracking worker and client activity, ensuring compliance with business processes and information systems, managing work flow, and staffing.” (Child Welfare Information Gateway) This is therefore in line with the statement made right at the start that child welfare supervision operates within the broader context of supervision in general, considering the fact that a model should still be developed. The challenge to the child welfare supervisor will be to apply the general rules of supervision to foster care social workers.

Cearly (2004:317) summarises the situation with the following statement: “A child welfare worker interacts daily with children, care workers, foster parents, colleagues, agency managers, the courts, law enforcement, other agencies, families and supervisors. The child welfare worker needs the knowledge, attitudes and skills to work with each of these systems. Within the administrative function, the supervisor-worker relationship can be the bridge between many of these systems and the worker.” This stresses the importance of both administrative supervision in child welfare and the value of the supervisory relationship.

### **1.2.2 Educational supervision**

Kadushin and Harkness (2002:129), view educational supervision as concerned with teaching the worker what he or she needs to know to do the job and helping

him to do it. It includes activities such as "... teaching, facilitating learning, training, sharing experience and knowledge, informing, clarifying, guiding, helping workers to find solutions, enhancing professional growth, advising, suggesting, and helping workers solve problems". Kadushin and Harkness (2002:129) highlight the fact that educational supervision is "concerned with teaching the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performance of clinical social work tasks through the detailed analysis of the worker's interaction with the client". Mbau (2005:20), adds that educational supervision is directed towards benefiting the social worker, the agency clients and the agency in which the social worker is employed.

Corey and Callanan (1993:94) define educational supervision as an integral part of training to help social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities. This can be achieved through organising training sessions, as well as transferring skills through sharing of knowledge and expertise. Mbau (2005:38) states that educational supervision is concerned with imparting the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for performance of social work tasks through the detailed analysis of worker's interaction with the client. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002:131), through educational supervision, supervisees can:

- Understand the client better;
- Become more aware of their reactions and responses to the client;
- Understand the dynamics of how they and their clients interact; and
- Look at their interventions and the consequences of their interventions.

Educational supervision addresses the staff's level of professional knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aims to improve their competence in professional practice. It aims to equip workers with the necessary values, knowledge and skills to complete the job. During educational supervision, the social worker's caseload is discussed. The worker is assisted in case assessment, including identifying strengths, needs and safety issues, and strategies for intervention and development of the plan with the family (Maine Department of Health and Human Services, 2005:41). With the implementation of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, designated social workers have a responsibility to familiarise themselves with it, in order to ensure that services to children are protective by nature. Supervisors need to guide and assist supervisees to be able to understand, implement, interpret and cross-reference sections of the Act.

Lietz (2008:31) states, "... educational supervision prompting discussion and critical thinking can enhance the analytic skills needed to consider the complexity commonly found in child welfare practice".

### 1.2.3 Supportive supervision

The third and often neglected function is the supportive function of supervision. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:20) refer to this function of supervision as the expressive-supportive leadership function of supervision. This involves the responsibility of the supervisor of sustaining worker morale; helping with job-related discouragement and discontent; giving supervisees a sense of worth as professionals, a sense of belonging in the agency, and a sense of security in their performance. Citing Kadushin and Harkness, Brittain (2009:27) lists the following provided by the supervisor:

- Reassurance
- Encouragement
- Recognition of achievement
- Expression of confidence
- Approval
- Attentive listening
- Stress and tension strategies for the individual and unit.

Lietz (2010:69) holds the following view on the importance of supportive supervision for child welfare workers, “Considering that child welfare workers address difficult problems including child maltreatment, domestic violence, substance abuse, poverty, and mental health problems, it is essential that supervisors assess burnout and provide support and encouragement as a part of their supervision.”

Hoffman (1990:220) refers to supportive supervision as the major function of social work supervision. Mbau (2005:33) believes that it aims at promoting the psychological well-being of the workers by preventing the development of stress and tension, as well as to help the worker cope with emotionally demanding situations. There is a high possibility of job satisfaction regardless of the challenges at work if supervisors are supportive. The supportive function of supervision provides clear boundaries and directions for supervisees, and there is a set of tasks to complete, easy to understand and implement (Hess *et al*, 2009:18).

In their abstract on the influence of job satisfaction on child welfare workers’ desire to stay, Chen and Scannapieco (2010) establish the following contributions from the literature on supportive supervision:

- It was found that the effect of supportive supervision outweighed the effect of pre-service or in-service training on child welfare worker retention.
- Supportive supervision was found relating to the improvement of worker's job satisfaction, lower levels of worker's burnout and the reduction of stress.

- Studies also showed a positive relationship with the supervisor was an important rationale influencing child welfare workers' decisions to remain in the job.

Kadushin and Harkness (2002:217) observe that supervisees and supervisors face a variety of job-related stresses and if help is not available, their work may be seriously impaired, to the detriment of agency effectiveness. The authors list the following sources of job-related stress for the social worker:

- Administrative supervision
- Educational supervision
- The supervisor-supervisee relationship
- The client
- The nature and context of the task
- The organisation

Lietz (2010:70) encapsulates the core issue with the stated awareness that "... many argue that working in child welfare is one of the most complex and challenging social work settings. The task of child welfare workers is clear: to protect children from abuse and neglect. Yet, workers assess child maltreatment in the context of conflicting reports and in limited periods. Child welfare workers manage large caseloads and feel pressured to make quick assessments often with insufficient information." Jacquet, Clark, Morazes and Withers (2007:27) emphasise that some "... of the main qualities that caseworkers stated that they valued in a supervisor were accessibility, knowledge of the system and of casework practice, management and leadership skills, and mainly, support".

Turner (2000:231) stresses that child and family social workers require high quality supervision if they are to practise competently and that there is evidence to suggest that in extreme cases, inadequate supervision has resulted in serious consequences for vulnerable children.

Social work supervision is a continuous learning process for both the supervisors and the frontline social workers to maintain the quality of services to the clients (Tsui, 2005:10). Social workers responsible for overseeing foster care placements deal with children who are already traumatised; thus their intervention should be one that will promote, protect, and care for the well-being of the child. It is the researcher's opinion that these social workers need guidance to respond to the needs of the service recipients, especially children, and to address these effectively.

The Children's Act (no. 38 of 2005), which gives effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution, also emphasizes the fact that when children are placed in foster care, the designated social worker should ensure that the child will

be provided with a safe, healthy environment with positive support. This Act was fully implemented from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2010; thus, social workers need to be conversant about it and be able to implement it effectively. In order to do that supervisors should engage the supervisee in training sessions, be it in-service training, individual and group supervision and workshops, to discuss the interpretation and practical implementation of the Act, as well as to understand what they as frontline workers are expected to do. CPOs should assist their supervisors to have programmes in place that will guide them to meet the supervisee's professional objectives, as well as quality services to children, that will lead to placements that are more successful.

Supervisors should guide and assist the supervisee to interpret, and implement policies effectively and meet deadlines as prescribed in the regulations. Section 155(2) of the Children's Act makes it obligatory for a designated social worker to complete the investigation of a child in need of care and protection and report within 90 days (Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010:177). Failure to do this will definitely affect the child negatively. If the designated social worker does not have the necessary support, overloaded, does not get supervision, has no resources to do his/her work properly, it might be difficult to adhere to these procedures. CPOs should therefore, provide an environment and resources conducive to the workers to implement policies effectively. These baskets of activities, which include planning, executing, monitoring and evaluation, should meet the organisation's objectives.

### **1.3 DESIGNING THE PROGRAMME OF SUPERVISION WITH FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKERS**

The supervision programme for foster care workers should be guided by the general purposes and aims of social work supervision. The goals and purposes of supervision of foster care workers are the same as the goals and purposes of social work supervision in general. The content of the supervision programme will be shaped by the nature of foster care social work.

The basis of the supervision programme for foster care workers should be the educational assessment of each social worker in the unit dealing with foster placements. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:188) define an educational assessment as follows: "Educational diagnosis involves a precise definition of the knowledge and skills a particular worker needs to do the specific tasks required at a level of proficiency that meets agency standards and how he or she might best learn this." They elaborate by explaining that the educational diagnosis includes a statement regarding what the supervisees already know well, what they need to learn, what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. The authors explain that to individualise teaching we need to know not only where the worker is, but also where he or she wants to go. The educational diagnosis helps to fit the learning situation to the learner and vice versa. In the case of foster care workers, the educational

assessment focuses on what the social workers know about foster care and the foster placement process.

Brittain (2009:272) also stresses the importance of the assessment of training needs. Brittain (2009:273) expresses the view that the "... assessment process is a collaborative approach usually conducted during one-to-one supervision to mutually agree on training needs." After this has been done, available training or other professional development opportunities are surveyed to find ways in which the training-needs areas can be addressed. This will result in careful analysis of training needs and worker competence based on the particular issues and strengths of the job and the worker. In the on-going contact with the social worker, the supervisor "... observes the supervisee's use of supervision, the level of motivation manifested, the balance of rigidity and flexibility in learning, the level of preparation for and participation in conferences, and the general attitude towards the content to be learned and towards the learning situation" (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002:192). Csiernik, Smith, Dewar, Dromgole, and O'Neill (2010:219) express the interesting and significant opinion that it takes approximately two years for new child welfare employees to learn what needs to be done in their frontline positions and to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions to work independently.

In decisions on what should be taught, Kadushin and Harkness (2002:136) suggest the 4 Ps of Perlman as a framework for supervision which is the person, the place, the process and the problem. They then add a 5<sup>th</sup> P, which they refer to as personnel, who is the social worker herself. They rephrase it slightly by stating, "the nuclear situation for all of social work is that of a client (individual, family, group or community – people) with a problem in social functioning coming, or referred to, a social agency (place) for help (process) by a social worker (personnel)". They point out that, however diverse the specifics of people, place, process, problems and personnel, these will be matters for the agenda of educational supervision (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002:136). If applied to foster care, the person will be the parents and the foster parents and the problem will be to find alternative care for the child needing care. The place will in this case be CWSA: Free State with the purpose of helping with the process of placing the child in foster care and the person will be the foster care worker.

An assessment of a child found to be in need of care and protection needs a person who understands what the child's developmental needs are, as well as how to use a multi-professional team to execute this professional task. The supervisor should guide the supervisee in understanding the child in his/her situation and planning strategies for intervention. According to the Department of Social Development (2009:30) in its Guidelines for the Effective Management of Foster Care in South Africa, an assessment is:

- The first activity that a designated social worker undertakes after a case has been reported.
- It is performed to determine the nature and extent of risk that the child may be exposed to and developmental needs of the child including his/her family.
- It informs the designated social worker of the status of the child, his /her family, and their home circumstances.
- On completion of the assessment, the designated social worker will be in a position to make an informed decision as to whether the child should remain in that current situation or that the child is at risk and is need of care and protection, warranting a removal to a secure environment.

The purpose of this assessment is to enable the designated social worker to obtain basic and essential information in order to make an informed decision about the child's current situation, as well as to assist in the identification of a relevant intervention plan that would be in the best interest of the child. From this discussion, it becomes clear how crucial the intervention of a social worker is into a child's life and how this can affect the child in the short and long run. A social worker without experience cannot fulfil this task; hence, a supervisor needs to guide the worker in order to make informed decisions that will be in the best interests of the child. The worker needs to be assisted to identify strengths, needs and safety issues, and the strategies for intervention and development of the plan with the family.

The multi-professional team that is part of the assessment should be professionals that also appreciate the child's developmental needs, and who will add value to the decision taken (Department of Social Development, 2009:31). The supervision process helps to improve the worker's capacity to do his job more effectively, helping him to grow and develop professionally, to provide the worker with a work context that permits him to do his job effectively and to help him feel good about doing his job (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002:21). There is nothing more satisfactory to a worker than knowing that his intervention into a child's life definitely brought some change to that child's life. Most of the time children in foster care are confused sometimes angry as to why they cannot be with their biological parents. A supportive social worker will assist the child to understand the whole situation while also building resilience within the child to be a better person.

Supervision for foster care social workers should be viewed with the context of the total foster care process. The nature of this process determines largely what these social workers should know and be able to do. Although the generic knowledge of social work forms the basis of foster care work, particular knowledge, attitudes and skills are necessary to cope with the demands set by foster care work.

For supervision to be effective and meaningful there should be a mutual understanding as to why it is done, for both the supervisor and the supervisee. It

should be effective, structural, regular, consistent, case oriented and evaluated (Munson, 2002:41). Both the supervisor and supervisee should know what activities need exploration to ensure quality services within a child welfare organisation.

Below is a proposed foster care process that supervision programme rests on. Supervisors must ensure that social workers implement this process for effective management of foster care.

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>TIME FRAME</b>
Preparation for effective foster care management to ensure availability of qualified prospective foster parents.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strategy for foster parents is in place.</li> <li>2. Screening. Foster care training programme in place</li> </ol>	Annually
Recruitment, screening and training of prospective foster parents to ensure suitability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recruitment of prospective foster parents</li> <li>2. Screening of foster parents – ensuring compliance with National Child Protection Register</li> <li>3. Training of prospective foster parents, before placing children. Even if its kinship foster care, foster parents still need to go through this process. Individual learning plans for foster parents</li> </ol>	Quarterly  Quarterly  Quarterly
On-going support and capacity building for foster parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support groups and in-service training for foster parents</li> </ol>	4-6 sessions every 6 months
Comprehensive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investigation of the child's family of origin.</li> </ol>	Investigation to be

investigation, reviewing casework documentation and management of caseloads	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Investigation of the child's prospective foster parents.</li> <li>3. Finalisation of investigation within 90 days of reporting</li> </ol>	conducted within 90 days after the case has been reported. Children's Act 38 of 2008, Sec 155(2)
Provide case reviews and address issues of professional ethics.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Assessment to determine risk factors a child may be involved in, using assessment framework as stipulated by Regulation 35 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.</li> </ol>	
On-going professional development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explore intervention strategies and protective measures to best suit the child and family.</li> <li>2. Finalisation report with permanency plan recommendation.</li> <li>3. Developing a foster care plan.</li> <li>4. Submission of the finalisation report to designated social work manager to ensure compliance with the Regulations.</li> <li>5. Preparation of the child for court proceedings.</li> <li>6. Involvement of biological and prospective foster parents in court preparation and placement.</li> </ol>	<p>One session</p> <p>One session</p>

<p>Development of a foster care plan for each child in foster care</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual Development Plan (IDP), leading to a care plan and permanency plan for each child to be developed, to inform the foster care plan.</li> <li>2. Involvement of biological, foster parents and foster child in the formulation of a foster care plan, IDP, care plan and permanency plan.</li> <li>3. Rights and responsibilities of foster parent(s), biological parent(s), child, family members or other persons who have interest in the well-being of the foster child to be included in the foster care plan.</li> <li>4. Roles and responsibilities of a designated social worker to form part of the foster care plan.</li> </ol>	
<p>Provide comprehensive after care services</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Foster care groups to be conducted by designated social worker or registered social service professional.</li> <li>2. Individual counselling with a foster child by the designated social worker</li> <li>3. Monitor implementation</li> </ol>	<p>4-6 sessions per year</p> <p>When need arises or quarterly.</p> <p>Every six months</p>

	<p>of care plan.</p> <p>4. Progress report by the designated social worker on the implementation of the care plan.</p> <p>5. Review of the care plan.</p> <p>6. Monitoring of foster placement to ensure children's basic needs are met.</p> <p>7. Process note to be compiled for every contact.</p> <p>8. Contact the child's school and do a home visit to monitor adjustment of a child in a foster care placement.</p> <p>9. Write a review report and make recommendations 3 months before the court order expires-whether reunification or extension of the foster care placement.</p> <p>10. The review report must be discussed with the foster parents, the child, and if appropriate the biological parents.</p> <p>11. If a child is to remain in foster care after turning 18 years, a request for permission to be submitted to DSD.</p> <p>12. After a child has</p>	<p>After every six months</p> <p>After every six months</p> <p>After every contact</p> <p>Three months after placement</p> <p>Before the two-year court order expires</p> <p>Three months before the child turns 18 years</p> <p>Three months before the end of the year</p>
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	<p>turned 18 years, a request for permission to remain in foster care must be submitted until the foster youth turns 21.</p> <p>13. Designated social worker to provide reunification services.</p> <p>14. Supervise social worker to see the reunification report.</p> <p>15. There is disagreement, panel discussions need to be arranged to ensure best interest of the child. A statutory service officer to facilitate the discussion.</p> <p>16. Foster children from the age of 15 must be involved in independent living programmes.</p>	
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This proposed programme may also form the basis of an in-service programme for foster care workers. According to Kadushin and Harkness (2002:130), in-service training refers to planned, formal training provided to a delimited group of agency personnel who have the same job classification or the same job responsibility. The generic teaching content is applicable to all members of the group, but is not specifically relevant one in particular. In practice, this will be the social workers responsible for foster care supervision. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:130) distinguish between educational supervision and in-service training by explaining that it supplements in-service training by individualising general learning in application to the specific performance of the individual worker. Training is directed to the needs of a particular worker carrying a particular caseload, encountering particular problems, and needing some individualised programme of education. In practice, it means that it must be acknowledged that, apart from the uniqueness of the individual social worker, each foster care situation will be unique. Each social worker dealing with foster placements will have an individualised supervision

programme. In this regard, Lietz (2010:73), states that while "... training can provide new information and present models of practice, supervision provides a place where workers learn to apply knowledge to the specific cases they see. While training may be the more efficient way of teaching a group of workers policies and procedures of the agency, supervision brings about an understanding of how to put policies and procedures into actual practice along with a way to monitor such practice". The author elaborates by stressing that while "... child welfare agencies offer training regarding policy, procedure, and practice, supervisors have the task of educating workers by taking this curricula and applying it within the context of actual cases". Lietz and Rounds (2009:124) in an earlier publication stresses that "... in addition to training, supervision remains critical when implementing new models of practice."

On closer examination of the above framework, it is possible to identify topics specifically for educational and administrative supervision. It is, however, not possible to make a clear distinction between topics to be dealt with through administrative supervision, and those suitable for educational supervision.

Understanding a child in need of care and protection and his developmental stages paves the way in planning a strategy for intervention. Children in foster care come from complex family backgrounds, and may have experienced trauma in their lives. It becomes critical, therefore, for the designated social worker to understand the child's emotional background, and consider this when placing the child. Careful screening and training of prospective foster parents will therefore ensure that the child's needs are met through the foster parent's abilities. Foster parent's training will empower a foster parent to be able to understand and deal with a foster child in his/ her condition. It is through educational supervision that the worker understands how to match foster parents abilities and child's needs, as this is a skill on its own. The intervention strategy that the worker chooses should be well informed and guided, as this has an impact in the child's stability in life (Department of Social Development, 2009:31).

Following are some critical roles a supervisor plays in achieving positive outcomes for long-term safety, well-being, and permanency for children:

- Helping supervisee in creating family teams to develop and implement creative, individualised solutions that build on the strengths of families to meet their needs. For example, a family that experiences challenges with the grant, can be assisted on how to budget.
- Guiding supervisee to identify problematic areas in work with the family or the child and the anticipated course of intervention.
- Assist supervisee in assessing progress towards case goals.
- Support and guide supervisee in making critical case decisions such as regarding safety, placement and permanency planning of the child.

- Accompanying the supervisee in the field once every quarter and providing structured feedback.

The supervisor can also communicate with the caseworker in terms of work expectations, as these will be the performance expectations and standards:

- To record information obtained from the reporter in a clear, concise, thorough, and understandable manner.
- Gather information to determine whether the report meets the statutory and agency guidelines for child maltreatment.
- Evaluate the credibility of the report.
- Assess the level of risk of harm to the child.
- Developing an initial assessment or investigation plan, including whom to interview and in what order, which records and documents to obtain, which examinations to conduct.
- Completing all investigative reports within the required period.
- Develop a case plan with the family that builds on its strengths and provides clear direction and guidance (Salus, 2004:29).

According to the Children's Bureau, child welfare practices should be:

- Child focused
- Family centred
- Individualised to meet the specific needs of children and families
- Collaborative
- Enhanced to strengthen parental capacity
- Community based
- Culturally responsive, and
- Outcomes oriented (Bordeaux 2008:2)

Due to high caseload and staff turnover, the number of children in need of care and protection, social workers sometimes neglect administrative work in foster care, as social workers placing children are sometimes overwhelmed. This is even worse where a social worker is rendering generic services on his/her own. Proper investigation into the child's best interests is sometimes compromised, which is unethical professional conduct (Boning, 2010:26).

Guidelines and policies on effective management of foster care should be in place to assist and guide designated social workers to render services effectively. Supervisors should also ensure that there is a balance between the completion of

documents and actual client care and intervention. Supervisors as well as CPOs should develop these guidelines to ensure that workers render professional services and children are protected from secondary abuse. Both the CPOs and the supervisor can be held accountable for the workers conduct; hence, it is crucial to guide her/him. Section 2(b) (iv) of the Children's Act states that the best interests of a child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. This simply means that in every decision that needs to be taken regarding a child, his best interests take precedence.

Following are some guidelines for effective management of foster care that need to be followed by the designated social worker when placing a child to ensure that the placement is suitable for the child (Department of Social Development, 2010:21)

- Awareness of foster care;
- Recruitment of foster parents;
- Screening and compliance with the National Child Protection Register and Sexual Offences Register (Children's Act, Section 118-119); and
- Training of foster parents.

Raising foster care awareness and recruitment is to mobilise the community and make them aware of the need for people to get involved in taking care of children. Supervisors should make sure that a recruitment strategy is in place to assist designated social workers to recruit the right people as prospective foster parents. Training of foster parents will ensure that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities and understand the developmental stages of children.

Designated social workers are often faced with high caseloads, lack of resources and limited, or no supervision. This can lead to unethical conduct, stress and high turnover of staff. The supportive function is fulfilled by taking care of workload, stress and morale, in order to improve the job satisfaction and motivation of the social workers, (Kadushin & Harkness, 2002; Shulman 1995). Different intervention skills and guidance might enable the social worker to deal with difficult placements and high caseloads. Case discussions, coaching and directing the worker into how she can manage her work as well as how these could lead to stress if not attended can help in managing stress and difficult case loads.

Feedback from the supervisor on how the supervisee performs is communicated through facilitating supervisee's ability to undertake a self-reflection and analysis of her work. Constructive criticism, positive feedback and evaluation should be tools used to build the supervisee's confidence and professional growth rather than to demoralise her. Supervisors therefore should be able to develop an open-door policy type of communication, for the supervisee to know that she is there for her. Mutual trust between the two should also be there; however, this should not create

some dependency from the supervisee; rather, a platform to assist her in achieving the organisation's goals. A supervisee who is guided, coached and encouraged experiences job satisfaction and is able to deal with job related challenges. This impact's positively on her supervision role in the foster care placement, as she has to empower and support the foster family, foster child and biological family. Through supervision, the designated social worker will be able to deal with challenges in placement before they become too serious.

Designated CPOs should have programmes in place that will assist social workers to refer children in foster care to programmes that can meet their needs, as this availability of resources can lessen the stress and anxiety of the worker who deals with a child with behavioural challenges. As organisations are accountable for the actions of their employees, they should ensure that their policies address the needs of the communities and employees render effective services. Mbau (2005:20) states that supervision is directed towards benefiting the social worker, the agency clients and the agency in which the social worker is employed.

#### **1.4 THE SUPERVISOR-SOCIAL WORKER RELATIONSHIP IN SUPERVISION**

Supervision is regarded as a teaching-learning process with the supervisor teaching and the social worker learning. For this process to be successful, the supervisor should create a climate conducive to learning. The equivalent of this is the casework relationship where the social worker creates a climate conducive to intervention.

Many of the conventional skills and mechanisms used in especially social casework may also be utilised in supervision. An example is the relationship used for the same reasons as in casework and that is to create an atmosphere conducive to the attainment of the goals and purposes of supervision. In supervision, the relationship is used for teaching and learning to take place. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:193) argue, "... a positive relationship intensifies the impact of the supervisor's educational efforts", while Brittain and Potter (2009:280), hold the view that the "... interaction between supervisor and worker is one of the most powerful settings for developing worker competence". According to Bennett (2008:102), several social work authors agree that the saliency of supervisory relationship has long been recognised in social work. He further points out that social work research "... suggests that the supervisory relationship is the most influential feature of successful supervision and ultimately the strongest predictor of student satisfaction". Mbau (2005:19) also points out that effective supervision is based on the ability of the supervisor to establish constructive and meaningful relationships with his/her subordinates.

Weatherstone and Qsofsky (2009:573) emphasise that the collaborative process that occurs within the supervisory relationship between a supervisor and clinician, a

trainee, a home visitor, a childcare provider, a child welfare worker, or others who work with infants, young children and families is often as important, or more so, than what is actually communicated and discussed.

From the above it is thus clear that the supervisor-supervisee relationship can be regarded as the conduit through which the supervision process flows.

## **1.5 CONCLUSION**

From the discussion above, it is clear that supervision of foster care social workers is crucial to ensuring that children placed in foster care are not subjected to secondary abuse. The supervisor and the employing organisation, which in this instance is Child Welfare South Africa's member organisations in Free State, have a responsibility to have guidelines and policies in place that will assist social workers to render effective services to the community. Supervision programmes will also give directives to supervisors on how to meet the needs of supervisees. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to monitor caseworker-client relationship by supervising the supervisee to review, coordinate and/or modify case and work activity plans. With a supervision programme in place, it will be easy for an organisation to guide newly employed/inexperienced supervisors to guide their foster care social workers.

Educational supportive and administrative functions of supervision enhance the functioning of the social worker differently, attempting to address the worker's needs to fulfil her professional role. Through supervision, the service recipient's rights are protected and the organisation's goals are achieved. Through educational supervision, a foster care social worker is aware of her role in the organisation and the organisation's role in the community. It also leads to a reduction in anxiety of workers and the promotion of a sense of belonging to the agency. It promotes the development of staff competence. There is increased staff performance and a greater sense of achievement and motivation, which result in better services for families.

A supervision programme for foster care social workers will ensure that they are capacitated and guided to fulfil their responsibilities and meet ethical obligations, as well as to render quality services to children and families within relevant policies. It measures what social workers are supposed to do, as well as evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of foster care services. It will also assist and guide the workers to be aware of what they are expected to do. This tool might also assist both parties during performance management, as they both know what is expected from the foster care social workers.

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## **ARTICLE 2: THE NEEDS OF FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKERS REGARDING SUPERVISION**

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This is a report on research done on the learning needs of social workers responsible for the monitoring of foster care placements employed by Child Welfare South Africa in the Free State province and who are responsible for the monitoring of foster placements. The underlying assumption of the research is that knowledge about the learning needs of child welfare social workers responsible for the monitoring of foster placements would improve the supervision of these social workers. There is a scarcity of literature on the supervision of child welfare workers, especially on the supervision of social workers responsible for overseeing foster care placements.

### **2.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION**

An increasing number of children in foster care with a decreasing number of alternative placements are facing Child Welfare System (Coleman, 2000:1). According to SASSA (2008), statistical data revealed that during May 2008, more than 446 831 children were placed in the foster care of an estimated 270 000 families, compared with the previous year, where the number was fewer than the present figures. Statistics show an increasing number of children are placed in foster care and who need special services.

Services aimed at the protection of children in need of care, as well as protection from abuse and neglect, currently fall within the framework of the Children's Act, 38 of 2005. Section 156 (2) of the Children's Act states that before a child is brought before the children's court, a designated social worker must investigate the matter and within 90 days compile a report in the prescribed manner on whether the child is in need of care and protection. Section 156 (1) further states that if a children's court finds that a child is in need of care and protection, the court may make any order which is in the best interest of the child. This clearly shows how crucial the intervention of a designated social worker is in a child's life. The report submitted to the court is what the court relies on to decide what is in the best interest of the child.

Foster care forms a vital part of the total child welfare programme to children that are found to be in need of care and protection. A thorough assessment should precede a foster care placement and a holistic perspective used to ensure the child's immediate safety, but also taking into account the long-term consequences (South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare, 1987:1). Children needing foster care are extremely vulnerable, and cannot be subjected to sub-standard protection services; thus, foster care services should be of a high quality. Once placement is effected, all efforts should be made to ensure that the placement is successful (Department of Social Development, 2009:4).

The researcher, working for a Child Protection Organisation (CPO) and through the literature review, has seen how foster care placements are failing, with children running away from placements or being moved from one placement to another (Botes, 2008:6). The South African National Council for Child and Family Welfare (1987:77-78), cite the following factors leading to the failure of placement:

- The foster parents cannot deal with the foster child's behaviour;
- The abilities of the foster parents were overestimated or too many demands were put on them by the welfare institution; and
- The foster family can no longer care for the foster child because of personal changes within the family.

Lack of training programmes, assessment methods, high caseloads, lack of supervision, as well as a high turnover of social workers, are some of the contributing factors to challenges experienced with foster care services.

The researcher believes that if social workers are guided, trained and supervised on quality foster care services, fewer children will fall deeper into the system, as foster care is an important intervention process for children in need of care and protection; thus, the initiative for this study.

Since foster care is a service for the purpose of child protection, the concept of supervision becomes paramount to the success of this practice. Corey and Callanan (1993:94) define supervision as an integral part of training to help social workers to acquire the competency needed to fulfil their professional responsibilities. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:21) see supervision as being a three-way process of being administrative, educational, as well as supportive. They state that the short-range objectives of educational supervision is to improve the worker's capacity to do her job more effectively, grow and develop professionally and maximise her clinical knowledge and skills to the point where she can perform autonomously and independently of supervision. On the other hand, administrative supervision aims at providing the worker with a work context that permits her to do her job effectively, while supportive supervision helps the worker feel good about doing her job. These

processes all aim at providing clients with effective and efficient social work services.

Designated CPOs have an obligation to supervise foster care placements by social workers; thus there is a need to develop a programme for supervisors that will ensure that those placing children in foster care are informed and guided. Section 105 (5) (a) of the Children's Act states that designated child protection services include:

- (III) The proceedings of children's courts, and
- (IV) The implementation of court orders.

The Texas Department of Human Resources (1982) as quoted by SR QIC Literature Review on Social Work Supervision (2001:4) emphasises the importance of supervision as a critical aspect of effective service delivery to children and families. This programme should therefore ensure that foster care supervision is designed to make the success of placements possible and to empower social workers employed by CPOs in the practice of foster care placements. Employers can be held liable for their employees' failing to guarantee sound enough practices and the duty of care obligations to children. Therefore, it becomes imperative for an organisation to develop programmes that will empower its workers to render effective services (Fulcher & Garfat, 2008:106).

The purpose of this study therefore is to explore the learning needs of social workers responsible for monitoring foster placements in child welfare organisations in the Free State province. In view of this, the following research question will serve as a guideline for this research project:

*What are the learning needs of social workers responsible for the supervision of foster care placements in child welfare agencies in the Free State province?*

## **2.3 AIM OF THE STUDY**

### **2.3.1 Aim**

The aim of this study is to explore the learning needs of social workers responsible for supervision of foster care placements in child welfare agencies in the Free State province.

## **2.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT**

In order to provide effective social work supervision to social workers in child welfare agencies, it is necessary to have first-hand knowledge of the learning needs of these social workers.

## **2.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.5.1 Research Design**

The purposes of the project is a combination of exploration and description because the learning needs of social workers in a foster placement context had to be explored and described to achieve the goal of the research (Rubin & Babbie, 2010:43). The research approach adopted is of a quantitative nature, requiring questionnaires as a data collection method (Fouché & De Vos 2007:137).

### **2.5.2 Data collection instruments**

Mailed questionnaires consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions were used with the purposes of collecting factual data, as well as acquiring the personal views of respondents on certain issues. The questionnaire was tested on colleagues and one respondent before it was finalised. It is acknowledged that mailed questionnaires are not very effective for the purposes of data collection because of a possible low response rate. To ensure that this problem was not experienced, telephonic follow-up calls were done, especially to those respondents who did not meet the return date. Within the context of the research project, it was regarded as the most appropriate choice, mainly because of the relatively limited numbers of respondents, who were easily accessible to the researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 2010:114).

Twenty-one (21) questionnaires were mailed to the respondents and seventeen (17) were returned. The researcher encouraged the respondents to complete and return the questionnaires by making follow-up telephone calls, especially to those who did not meet the return date.

### **2.5.3 Research participants**

The total universe of CWSA social workers in Free State was included in the study and there was no need for sampling, thus making the process of the identification of respondents uncomplicated. According to Arkava and Lane (cited by Strydom (2007:193), the universe refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested.

### **2.5.4 Data analysis and interpretation**

A key principle in data analysis is that its depth and intensity is determined by the purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2000:127). Kerlinger, as mentioned by Kruger, De Vos, Fouché and Venter (2007:218), describes analysis as categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising of data to obtain answers to research questions. Its purpose is to reduce data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relations of research problems can be studied and tested and conclusions drawn". For the purpose of this research, the researcher developed the

questionnaire within the parameters of the data analysis software for easy capturing and processing. Use of a computerised data analysis programme, MS Excel to do the initial data processing was utilised. Kruger *et al.* (2007:218) state that one can also compute most statistics with a spreadsheet programme such as MS Excel or Corel Quattro Point.

### 2.5.5 Ethical aspects

According to Gravetter and Forzano (cited by Strydom 2007:56), “Researchers have two basic categories of ethical responsibility: a responsibility to those, both human and nonhuman participants, who participate in the project; and a responsibility to the discipline of science, to be accurate and honest in the reporting of their research”. Based on this, the following ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting the research:

- Strydom (2007:68), mentioning Reamer states that the utilisation of an ethics committee that considers research proposals is increasingly becoming accepted practice. Such a committee thoroughly studies all proposals, accepts or rejects them, or proposes certain modifications. To fulfil the ethical requirement, ethical approval was obtained from North-West University’s Ethics Committee (Ethics number NWU 000 11 10 SI).
- Confidentiality is a continuation of privacy, which refers to agreements between persons that limit others’ access to private information. (Strydom, 2007:61).

The researcher informed the participants before the study commenced, that it was voluntary; thus, they were not coerced into participating. The purpose of the research was explained with them so that they could make an informed decision. "Emphasis must be placed on accurate and complete information, so that subjects will fully comprehend the investigation and consequently be able to make a voluntary, thoroughly reasoned decision about their possible participation" (Strydom, 2007:59).

## 2.6 THE EMPIRICAL DATA

### 2.6.1 Demographic particulars

**Table 2.1 Gender of respondents**

	Numbers	%
Male	2	12
Female	15	88
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>
Black	12	71
White	5	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of foster care social workers are female which corresponds with the demographic profile of social workers in South Africa. It also corresponds with the male-female ratio of social workers in South Africa, with the majority being female social workers. Being descriptive statistics, it was not possible to determine to what extent gender has an influence of the attitudes and experiences of social workers employed in a child welfare context.

**Table 2.2: Age of respondents**

20 to 25	6
26 to 35	6
36 to 45	3
46 to 60	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>

A sizeable percentage of social workers are still relatively young, but those in the 26-35 age bracket should not receive further supervision. Even some social workers in the age bracket 20 -25 should also be on a consultation basis. However, it all depends how long they have been working in a child welfare setting. Their length of experience in a child welfare context will determine the type of supervision they need. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to make an educational assessment of the learning needs of social workers to determine the supervision programme. The needs of the social workers regarding supervision emerge from this data set and will be extrapolated.

**Table 2.3: Qualifications of respondents**

BSW	14
Honours	2
Masters	1
PhD	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

All the respondents were well qualified, with the majority in the possession of the basic generic qualification in social work, with three of them having a post-graduate qualification. Whatever their qualification was, 'socialising' them into the child welfare context would be an important task of the supervisor.

## 2.7 SERVICE PARTICULARS

**Table 2.4: Position held by respondents**

Social Worker	<b>15</b>
Chief Social Worker	<b>1</b>
Site Manager	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

The majority of respondents are 'frontline' social workers who still have the responsibility of doing fieldwork. This does not mean, however, that they should still receive supervision. If they are on a consultation basis, they should be practising independently, and be in a position to identify their own needs and decide who to use for expert opinions regarding particular problems. Regular assessment of the work performance of frontline social workers will help supervisors to decide when a social worker can move to the consultation level. Shulman (1993) citing Caplan expresses the view that consultation is an interaction between two or more people in which the consultant's special competence in a particular area is used to help the consultee with a current work problem.

**Table 2.5: Length of service of respondents**

<b>Length of Service</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
0 to 1 year	0	1
1 to 2 years	0	3
3 to 4 years	2	9

5 to 6 years	0	0
7 to 9 years	0	1
10 to 12 years	0	0
13 to 15 years	0	0
16 to 18 years	0	0
19 to 25 years	0	0
26 to 40 years	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>

Most social workers have fewer than four years' experience, but 11 of the 15 in this category have 3-4 years' experience, which means that they are in a position to provide peer supervision to their younger colleagues on an informal basis. At this stage, they should already be on a consultation level. Lakeman and Glasgow (2009) explain that, "peer-group supervision is a variation of group supervision, in which the group is assumed to have the resources to help themselves and to make sense of practice". The possibility of peer group supervision can be regarded as a strength amongst colleagues in a child welfare organisation, especially considering the particular specialised context.

## 2.8. SUPERVISION

**Table 2.6: Length of time of receiving supervision**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Total</b>
0 to 1 year	<b>2</b>
1 to 2 years	<b>3</b>
3 to 4 years	<b>11</b>
5 to 6 years	<b>0</b>
7 to 9 years	<b>1</b>
10 to 12 years	<b>0</b>
13 to 15 years	<b>0</b>
16 to 18 years	<b>0</b>
19 to 25 years	<b>0</b>
26 to 40 years	<b>1</b>

What is surprising is that all the respondents reported that they are still receiving supervision, while some of them should have already been on a consultation basis, unless they started working in a child welfare setting only recently and had to be

oriented to their new setting. This reveals the importance of proper educational assessments into sharper focus. Csierik, Smith, Dewar, Dromgole and O'Neill (2010:219) state that it takes approximately two years for new child welfare employees to learn what needs to be done in their frontline positions and to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities and disposition to work independently. Even more crucial in this respect is the task of evaluation by the supervisor. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:331) explain that a period set aside for formal evaluation gives a supervisee a perspective on change and achievement.

**Table 2.7: Caseloads of respondents**

	<b>Total number of caseloads</b>	<b>Number of foster care supervision cases</b>	<b>Total</b>
10 to 100	1	3	4
101 to 200	6	6	12
201 to 300	5	4	9
301 to 400	3	2	5
401 to 500	0	0	0
501 to 600	1	1	2

Figures contained in the table above are a reflection of a situation placing high demands on social workers in the sample. Twelve of them carry a foster care supervision caseload of 100-400, which furthermore, makes it demanding for the supervisor. Moreover, it has implications for the ability of social workers to submit the regular two-yearly reports on children in foster care. Guidelines for effective management of foster care developed by Social Development (2009:13) identifies "high caseloads, lack of supervision, etc. as some of the contributing factors to challenges experienced with foster care services". Thus, these social workers will need to have well-developed planning skills in order to manage their caseloads. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:47) describe planning as one of the administrative functions of the supervisor.

### **2.8.1 Educational supervision**

**The respondents were asked what they regard as the goals of the supervision they receive in connection with their foster care work**

Regarding the question posed above, respondents noted the guidance from supervisors during the process of placement and reunification services as highly important to them. A considerable number of respondents furthermore, mentioned that meeting deadlines for reviews /return dates and assistance with difficult cases as important aspects that need the supervisor's attention. In this regard, Diwan,

Berger and Ivy (1996:41) explain that supervision can provide quality assurance in case management by monitoring timelines; completeness and appropriateness of service; and by building skills and shaping the attitudes of workers. Supervisors are of great help in managing caseloads and in the promotion of professional growth, whilst other respondents stressed the importance of assistance with guidance when making decisions in the workplace, especially concerning difficult cases. The point of the supervisor's role in imparting knowledge to better the performance of social workers was prevalent in the answers from the participants; they noted that this would help them to become successful case managers who can provide quality services; manage caseloads; and are able to make decisions in the best interest of the child. Mbau (2005:38) states that educational supervision is concerned with affecting the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the performance of social work tasks through a detailed analysis of a worker's interaction with a client.

**The respondents were asked what they expect from the supervision they receive regarding foster care work**

Participants overwhelmingly gave the response that they wish to feel more in control of their caseloads and know how to achieve maximum results with minimum input. A substantial number said they would like more guidance when dealing with difficult cases, support and advice where it is needed. Also recorded was the expectation of assistance when writing reports. Another important factor was empowerment and mentoring by the supervisor. The respondents put the sharing of information and to be informed on matters concerning new policies and legislation forward as an expectation. Leitz and Rounds (2009:124) stress that, "in addition to training, supervision remains critical when implementing new models of practice". Some respondents cited assistance concerning ways to develop a strategy for dealing with complicated issues, as this would go a long way in terms of offering a structured and scientifically informed intervention should such a case come up.

From the expectations listed above, the importance of the functions of supervision in an integrated way becomes clear.

**Table 2.8: Extent of the fulfilment of supervision needs**

Totally fulfilled	Largely fulfilled	Moderately fulfilled	Minimally fulfilled
<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>

The extent of the fulfilment of supervision needs varied, with a small minority stating that their needs are only minimally fulfilled. The reasons for this could be manifold, and the research did not make provision for the uncovering of reasons why social workers' supervision needs are not fulfilled. It is important that social workers are afforded the opportunity of expressing their professional needs to the supervisor and that the supervisor is accessible at reasonable times. This stresses the importance

of regular supervision at pre-arranged times, as well as a trustworthy relationship with the supervisor. In this regard, Kadushin and Harkness (2002:143) hold the view that weekly individual supervision of new workers is required to balance the supervisor's duty to the organisation, the staff, and its clients. Munson (2002:41) also shares the view that supervision should be effective, structured, regular, consistent, case oriented and evaluated.

**Table 2.9: Impact of supervision on foster care work**

The quality of my work has deteriorated	The quality of my work has stayed the same	The quality of my work has improved moderately	The quality of my work has improved exceptionally
<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

Fifteen of the respondents indicated that their work has improved as the result of supervision. This number of respondents corresponds with the number in Table 8, whose needs are to various extents fulfilled. It is encouraging to note that most of the respondents felt that supervision had a positive effect on their work.

**Table 2.10: Frequency of the fulfilment of needs through supervision**

Never	Some of the time	Most of the time	Always
<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>

Two very small minorities stated that their needs were either never met or always. A sizeable majority felt that their needs were met either some of the time or most of the time. This implies that their supervisor reads and interprets their needs correctly and responds appropriately. However, there seems to be room for improvement.

**Table 2.11: Methods of conveying needs regarding foster placement to the supervisor**

During formal supervision	In written form	During group supervision	During ad hoc supervision	By a combination
<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>

The majority of respondents conveyed their learning needs during formal supervision. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (2005:41), expresses the following view in this regard: "During educational supervision, the social worker's caseload is discussed and the worker is assisted in case assessment and strategies for intervention, and in the development of the plan with

the family”. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:146) stress the importance of regularly scheduled individual conferences, but also include informal conferences, which has its own disadvantages.

**Table 2.12: Accessibility of supervisor**

Very accessible	Moderately accessible	Not accessible
12	2	3

The majority of social workers in the sample felt that they have adequate access to their supervisors, which is an indication of the quality of the relationship with the supervisor. Jacquet, Clark, Morazes and Withers (2007:27) emphasise that some “of the main qualities that caseworkers stated that they valued in a supervisor were accessibility, knowledge of the system and of casework practice, management and leadership skills, and mainly support.”

## 2.8.2 Administrative supervision

**Table 2.13: Learning Needs**

Learning Needs	Total
Improving my writing of children’s court reports	3
Improving my writing of reports on prospective foster parents	5
Meeting deadlines for section 159 reports	1
Improving my knowledge of the requirements of the new Children’s Act regarding foster placements	9
Dealing with foster care grant issues	4
Dealing with Children’s Court officials	2
The administrative process of the extension of the foster placement order	3
The requirements of the new Children’s Act regarding the implementation of the regulations	6
Other	2

The most salient learning needs of the largest number of respondents revolve around the Children’s Act and the writing of reports on prospective foster parents. Skidmore (1995:24) indicates that the administrative function of supervision focuses on the provision of effective social work services to the clients. Another important need expressed was the need to deal with foster care grants. Needs in these categories can be dealt with by means of in-service training, but within the supervision process, they can be dealt with by means of the administrative function

of supervision within individual or group supervision sessions. A group conference is regarded as a suitable method. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:390) aver that the fact that members of the group share the same concern about the same social problems and the same group of services, suggest that they may have high interactional potential.

### 2.8.3 Supportive Supervision

**Table 2.14: Experience of stress in connection with foster care work**

Regularly	Infrequently	Rarely	Never
4	9	4	0

All the social workers in the sample feel that they experience stress in connection with foster care work, which should serve as an indication that supportive supervision is a vital need amongst social workers. Kadushin and Harkness (2002:236) mention the nature and context of the task as a source of stress, which in this case, would be the nature of foster care social work.

**Table 2.15: Sharing of the experience of stress with the supervisor**

Regularly	Infrequently	Rarely	Never
9	7	1	0

Most of the social workers in the sample indicate that they do share their experience of stress with their supervisor. This gives the supervisor the opportunity to assist the social workers in dealing with their stress.

#### **The respondents were asked how their supervisors deal with the stress they experience in connection with their foster care work**

Respondents stated that through supervision, there is a sharing of workload with other workers; thus, prioritising urgent work relieves them from stress. Debriefing, just being there and listening, giving moral support and affirmation are some stress relievers that assist social workers to cope. To support this need, Lietz (2010:69) has the following view on the importance of supportive supervision "Considering that child welfare workers address difficult problems including child maltreatment, it is essential that supervisors assess burnout and provide support and encouragement as a part of their supervision."

However, there were some respondents who felt that their supervisors were insensitive, especially when the respondents were under pressure. This, however, is reasonably to be expected.

**The researcher welcomes any additional comments about the supervision you receive in connection with foster care work.**

Respondents on this issue shared no additional comments.

## 2.9 CONCLUSION

Looking at the data it is clear that social workers employed for more than two years are still receiving supervision, while some of them should have been on a consultation level already. Various factors could contribute to this effect; for example, their years of experience within a child welfare setting. There is a lack of supervision programmes and guidelines that inform organisations on how long a social worker should be supervised, and on what the supervision should be. High caseloads handled by these social workers might also contribute to their need for supervision, as they feel overwhelmed by the high numbers of cases, whilst also being expected to render high quality service to the children. There is a need for explicit and manageable standards for caseload size and supervisor-supervisee ratios. This will ensure that supervisors are familiar with the cases handled by the social workers, thus ensuring quality. Unreasonably high caseloads compromise quality, which result in problems with certain foster care placements.

In terms of supervisory functions, the social workers rendering foster care services are satisfied with the support and guidance they receive. They also see supervisors as helping them to deal with difficult cases, which, is a positive contribution. This said, it could be abused as well, if the supervisor is not careful.

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# SECTION C:

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 CONCLUSIONS

- A large number of children, who are in foster care in South Africa, require well-trained social workers to manage the monitoring of these foster care situations.
- There is a need for specialised supervision to do administrative, supportive, and educational supervision with social workers' monitoring of foster placements.
- A scarcity of literature and research abounds on supervision in the general field of child welfare, if compared with material on supervision in general.
- There are insufficient literature and research results on the supervision of social workers' monitoring of foster care.
- As yet, no model for the supervision of social workers in the child welfare field exists, specifically for social workers' monitoring of foster placements.
- The majority of social workers in the sample is still relatively young, but old enough to share experiences with new social workers.
- Only a small number of social workers in the sample are in the 'experienced' bracket where they still receive supervision. There are, however, social workers who, in terms of experience, should not be receiving supervision any longer and should be on a consultation level.
- Most of the social workers in the sample have a basic social work qualification.
- The social workers in the sample have large caseloads, which place heavy demands on them regarding the rendering of foster care supervision.
- There are social workers who feel that their supervision needs are only partly fulfilled; this is an indication that evaluation is not done properly. The majority of social workers however, feel that supervision has improved the quality of their work.
- Some of the social workers in the sample feel that the fulfilment of their needs through supervision does not happen every time.
- The supervision needs of the social workers are conveyed to the supervisor through a combination of methods, but mostly during formal supervision.
- Most of the social workers experience their supervisors as very accessible, which, in turn, promote their relationship with the supervisor.

- The greatest need for most of the social workers regarding their learning needs relate to the Children's Act regarding foster care placement. Secondly, there is the need for assistance in writing reports and submitting them timeously, according to section 159.
- Stress regarding foster care work is experienced to varying degrees by the social workers, thus indicating the need for supportive supervision. The majority of social workers share this regularly with their supervisor.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- More research on supervision in child welfare should be done.
- A model for supervision in the child welfare field, also providing for supervision to social workers monitoring foster placements, should be developed.
- Peer group supervision should be used as a supervision approach in the child welfare field.
- Regular evaluation of the progress of social workers responsible for the monitoring of foster placements will prevent social workers from staying in supervision for too long.
- It should clearly be established which of the learning needs related to the monitoring of foster placements can be dealt with by means of group supervision.
- Supervisors should be alerted to the value of supportive supervision.
- Supervisors should evaluate every supervision session to determine the extent to which the needs of the social worker have been fulfilled.
- A more extensive project, preferably on a national basis, should follow up this research project.