

# **The availability of foster care resources in the Free State Province: a social work assessment**

by  
**M Kok**

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Study Leader:

Prof P Rankin

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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 Social Work/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 high caseloads of social workers responsible for monitoring of foster placements.

Although a wealth of information on resource management is to be found in the prevailing literature, no comparative volume of information is to be found on foster care resources in child welfare in particular. A model for resource management in this field must still be developed.

In view of this and considering the role occupied by the researcher in the Kerklike Maatskaplike Diens: Bloemfontein, Free State, South Africa, it was decided to embark on a research project investigating the use of resources in the field of child welfare, specifically with foster care social workers. The aim of the study is to assess whether adequate resources are available.

The availability and utilisation of resources in the field of child welfare is under-researched and a resource management system for this purpose should still be developed.

The research results indicated that social workers monitoring foster care placements have high caseloads and that resources, even though they are utilised to a certain extent, are not always accessible or effective.

The most important learning needs were related to organisational, community and professional resources that could be considered unrealistic, ineffective, inaccessible and not feasible in most circumstances. Further main challenges are a lack of resources and time, a lack of co-operation from the foster parents and the biological parents respectively and the shortage of foster care social workers in South Africa.

**Key concepts:** foster care, foster care supervision, foster care resources, foster care social worker, Free State Province.

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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, gegewe die aard van pleegplasings en die hoë gevalleladings van maatskaplike werkers wat oor die plasings toesig moet hou.

Alhoewel voldoende inligting oor hulpbronbestuur in die literatuur gevind kan word, is geen vergelykbare volume literatuur oor pleegsorghulpbronne in die Kindersorgveld in die besonder beskikbaar nie.

In die lig hiervan en met oorweging van die rol van die navorser in Kerklike Maatskaplike Diens: Bloemfontein, Vrystaat, Suid-Afrika is besluit op 'n navorsingsprojek wat die gebruik van hulpbronne in die Kindersorgveld, en in die besonder met maatskaplike werkers wat pleegsorgtoesigdienste lewer, van stapel te laat loop. Die doel van die studie is om te assesser of voldoende hulpbronne beskikbaar is.

Daar is 'n gebrek aan navorsing oor die benutting van hulpbronne binne die veld van Kindersorg en 'n sisteem vir hierdie doeleindes moet ontwikkel word.

Die bevindinge het getoon dat maatskaplike werkers wat pleegplasings moniteer, hoë gevalleladings het en dat hulpbronne, alhoewel dit tot 'n mate benut word, nie altyd toeganklik of doeltreffend is nie.

Die grootste leemtes ten opsigte van die bogenoemde hou verband met organisasie, gemeenskaps- en professionele hulpbronne wat onrealisties, ondoeltreffend, ontoeganklik en onuitvoerbaar is in meeste omstandighede. Ander uitdagings is die gebrek aan hulpbronne en tyd, gebrek aan samewerking van die pleegouer en biologiese ouers afsonderlik en die tekort aan pleegsorg maatskaplike werkers in Suid-Afrika.

**Sleuteltermes:** pleegsorg, pleegsorgtoesig, pleegsorgbronne, pleegsorgwerker, Vrystaat Provinsie.

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I would like to thank everyone who contributed to make this research possible:

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# **SECTION 1: ORIENTATION AND METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW**

## **1 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Historically, in South Africa, care for all children in need of alternative parenting has been provided by adoption, foster care, and kinship care within the extended family. In South Africa, formal or statutory foster care is an established practice that involves the legal transfer of care of the child to a foster parent (or foster parents), as well as financial assistance from the government in the form of a foster-care grant (Children's Act, 38/2005). However, this form of foster care has a historical legacy of not being available or having been provided to a large number of children in need of alternative family care. In these circumstances, relatives customarily have incorporated children in need of alternative family care (including orphans) into their families (Böning, 2009:140). In this form of kinship care or social parenting, arrangements for the care and upbringing of children are the concern of both the biological parents and an extensive network of relatives. Recent steep increases in the number of foster-care placements reported by the child welfare movement have suggested that formal, statutory foster care is becoming more accessible. It is also likely that kinship caregivers are now accessing foster-care grants to assist them in caring for their kin (Townsend & Dawes, 2007:822-824).

The researcher is employed as a social worker by Child Welfare South Africa, Bloemfontein. In this position it has been her experience that a considerable number of children have to be removed from their parental homes for various reasons, and arrangements made for placements in alternative care. According to News 24, minister Zola Skweyiya reported that in 2008 there were more than 1.5 million orphaned children in South Africa (News24, 2011). Some of these children will be taken in by family members, but substantial numbers require placement using more conventional forms of substitute care (UNICEF, 2006: 15). In this case, the formal child protection system in terms of the Children's Act is activated through the Children's Courts (Children's Act, 38/2005).

Although governments are committed to assist vulnerable children, they need the additional support of Non-Government Organisations (NGO's), the private sector, and international donors to help all children access the resources and services to which they are entitled (Rosenberg, Hartwig & Merson, 2008: 52).

The actual placement of children in foster care is the end result of a process of investigation and careful assessment in which the social worker plays a crucial role. After the order of the Children's Court has been made and the children are formally placed, it is expected that the foster placement situation be supervised in order to facilitate the adjustment of both the

foster child(ren) and the foster parents to the foster placement situation (Children's Act, 2005).

Foster placement is a unique situation requiring a variety of resources such as people in the community willing to take care of a child, volunteers and services from other professionals to name only a few, to make it a successful system. The foster care worker does not command all these resources, but needs to co-ordinate it in the interest of the foster child and the foster parent. The practice of foster placement is a way to serve the best interest of the child. Through foster placement and the monitoring of the placement situation, effect is also given to the rights of the child enshrined in the South African Constitution. According to the Yale Law School (2005) South Africa also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] on July 16, 1995, effectively making the Convention binding domestically.

The development of the foster care process dictates the kinds of resources needed and the time at which they are needed. The quality of foster care services is dependent on the availability and quality of relevant resources. The skilled and experienced social worker is the most important resource because he/she manages the process from the removal of the child until the placement of the child in foster care has been finalised and the monitoring process starts. This requires skills, knowledge and the correct attitude regarding foster care services. In this regard Sellick, Thoburn and Philpot (2004:53) remark that..."the role of the social worker – for the child, the family and the foster cares – remains pivotal". This means that the social worker is of crucial importance in relation to the success of a foster care placement. Foster placement supervision is a rather specialised function requiring the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude. Sellick et al. (2004:18) emphasises that... "the success or otherwise of the child placement worker depends in part on the quality of the interventions in the life of the child and parents before and after placement." Hubbel, as quoted by Crosson-Tower (2004:324) summarises the role of foster care social workers aptly with the following statement:

"Being a foster care caseworker demands intelligence, fairness, good judgment, empathy and determination. The job entails being responsible for the safety of foster children, being the target of angry or bewildered biological parents, consoling confused or anxious children, and handling the demands and irritation of foster parents.....Endless reams of paperwork accompany all tasks."

The second but equally important resource is the welfare organization rendering foster care services. Perlman (1957:43) already expressed herself in 1957 in this connection as follows: "the social agency is an organization fashioned to express the will of a society or of

some group in that society as to social welfare". The welfare organization is the support structure for the social worker from which they get their authority. It provides the resources the social worker needs for rendering foster care services. An important source from within the welfare organisation is supervision, the vehicle to professional independence. Regarding resources to meet programme goals, Lewis, Packard and Lewis (2007:173) list facilities, equipment, and training needed in a welfare organisation. Amongst human resource needs, Coulshed and Mullender (2006:123) list staff development and staff care as resources to be provided in support of staff of the welfare agency.

An essential resource are Children's Courts chaired by a trained and sensitive presiding officer who understands the needs of the child and are familiar with relevant legislation, in this case the Children's Act (38/2005). Indicators for child protection recommended by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2006:13) are percentage of presiding officers who have attended any form of training on child care and development and family matters and length of experience in years as presiding officers in children's courts. The assumption in this regard is that presiding officers of children's courts should have some specialised knowledge and qualities.

An important financial foster care resource is foster care grants provided by die South African Social Security Agency. Although foster parents need foster care grants, problems are reported in this connection mainly as the result of the limitation that foster care orders could only be extended by an order of the court, and not administratively. The root of the problem seems to be a backlog caused by a shortage of social workers and a lack of capacity to process extension orders (News24, 2011).

A very important community resource which forms the basis of a well-functioning foster care system is prospective foster families (Böning, 2009:254). In this regard, the HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa, which developed into a problem of crisis proportions over the last two decades, had a drastic effect on foster care resources and practices (Gerrard & Ross, 2009:5). Placements had to be found for large numbers of children infected or affected by HIV or AIDS, placing a huge burden on family welfare organisations and the Department of Social Development. Kinship foster placements, although done in the past, rapidly became a dominant pattern (Delpont, 2007:37). Many children had to be placed with families of the parents of these children, increasing the foster placement situations to be supervised multifold. Recruitment of suitable foster parents thus became a major issue. This placed a huge demand on especially the time and skills of foster care workers. This situation prompted the researcher to establish the status quo regarding resources for foster placement in the Free State Province.

From the above-mentioned the following research question can be asked:

To what extent are needed resources available for foster care work in the Free State Province?

## **2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The study has been done with the following goal and objectives in mind.

### **2.1 Goal**

The primary goal of the study is to determine what needed resources are available to the foster care workers in the Free State Province.

### **2.2 Objectives**

In order to reach the abovementioned goal, the following objectives will be pursued:

- The resources required in a foster care system will be described
- The needs of foster care workers in the Free State Province regarding resources necessary for foster care work will be determined.
- Recommendations regarding the needs of foster care workers in connection with foster care work in the Free State Province will be made.

## **3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION**

In order to practice foster care social work, resources of a certain variety must be available and accessible to the foster care worker in the Free State Province.

## **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research was done by means of a literature and empirical study.

### **4.1 Review of the relevant literature**

The literature search (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006:461) covered the following topics: foster placements, resource requirements for foster care, the role of foster care social workers, the demands of foster care social work. Textbooks, journal articles and reliable sources on the internet were used.

The following databases were consulted:

Social work abstracts, SSI – Social Sciences Index, Ebscohost, Ferdikat.

## **4.2 Empirical study**

### **4.2.1 Research purposes**

The project will have a combination of exploration and description as purposes (Rubin & Babbie, 2010: 133). The topic of resources in the field of foster care will be described and the status quo regarding the availability of resources for foster care practice in the Free State Province will be explored.

### **4.2.2 Research approach**

The research approach will be a mixed methods approach in view of the goals and objectives of the study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). It will focus on the experience of foster care workers in the Free State Province of existing and needed resources for carrying out their work.

### **4.2.3 Participants**

The participants in this study will consist of the total population of foster care workers in the Free State (Babbie, 2011:91). This includes specifically non-profit organisation in the Free State region, but excludes Department of Social Development because the candidate wanted to place the focus on organisations who are spending a substantial amount of their time on child welfare and specifically foster care services.

### **4.2.4 Data-gathering instruments**

The initial plan was to compile three focus groups consisting of 10 members from 3 different areas of the Free State province, choosing the members of the group on an availability basis (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008:150) at a time convenient for all the members of the groups (Greeff, 2011:360). Due to some complications that set in during the time of data collection, the final sample consisted of 22 respondents from 10 NGO's in the Free State. Complications included that most respondents could not attend focus groups after office hours as most have families to care for, and a time that suited everybody could not be found within office hours. Crises that came up prevented some respondents to attend. The data was collected by means of questionnaires and focus groups (Greeff, 2011: 360). The purpose of the questionnaire in Appendix 2 was, due to time constraint which each of the respondents faced in service rendering, to save time in gathering demographic information like age, gender, amount of years working as social worker and number of foster care

cases. These are close-ended questions which need no extra explanation or exploration and the researcher found it time consuming to discuss these in the group. All respondents who attended the focus groups completed the questionnaires. The focus groups were still compiled on an availability basis (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008: 150) in 3 areas of the Free State as planned where it was convenient for social workers to attend (Greeff, 2011: 360). Focus groups discussions were structured according to a discussion guideline as found in Appendix 1.

#### **4.2.5 Procedure**

- Ethical approval for the project has already been secured (NWU-0001-10 SU).
- A questionnaire to be used in the research were designed and tested as well as an Interview schedule drawn up with regards to the focus groups.
- The members of the focus groups were identified and arrangements made for the conduct of the focus groups were made
- The data was processed and analysed and the results interpreted.
- The information received was verified
- The research report was written.

#### **4.2.6 Ethical Aspects**

- The rights of the respondents will be taken into consideration and respected at all times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:37-38). The respondents will have the right to withdraw from the research at any time and all information gathered will be handled confidentially.
- Ethical approval for the research project was obtained from the Ethical committee of the School for Psycho-Social Behavioural Sciences of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus).
- Consent from the participants was voluntary and informed, without any implied deprivation or penalty for refusal to participate. They were informed that their participation could be terminated at any time (Strydom, 2005: 67).
- All information obtained about participants were treated confidentially (Babbie, 2011:482)
- Participation will remain anonymous in that no names will be made known (Strydom, 2005:61-63).

#### **4.2.7 Data analysis and interpretation**

The qualitative responses contained in the questionnaire and those which emerged from the focus groups were done by the researcher herself making use of a thematic analysis. The

process involves noting regularities in the setting or people chosen for the study. As categories of meaning emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence. That is, the categories should be internally consistent but distinct from one another. This means taking the qualitative information apart and looking for categories, themes or dimensions of information (De Vos et al., 2005: 338).

## **5 CHOICE AND STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT**

### **Article Format**

#### **Section A**

Methodological orientation

#### **Section B**

Literature Review: Resources in foster care

Empirical Study: Resources available in the foster care system of the Free State Province

- Purpose of the research
- Methodology
- Presentation and interpretation of data
- Discussion of data

#### **Section C**

Conclusion and recommendations

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# **SECTION 2: THE JOURNAL ARTICLES**

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# ARTICLE 1

*Kok, M. & Rankin, P.*

## **RESOURCES NEEDED TO RENDER EFFECTIVE SERVICE IN FOSTER CARE: A LITERATURE OVERVIEW**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of resources relevant to foster care and the foster care placement process. At the same time it serves as a background for an assessment of the results presented in the next article. In addition to social work literature available and as the result of a scarcity of sources on the topic specifically within the social work context, use had to be made of sources outside social work, notably those from business and industry.

The relevance of resources in foster care can be seen when children are placed in alternative care and in particular foster care. Children are placed in alternative care due to incompetent parents who abuse and neglect them or due to parents abandoning their children or parents dying (Children's Act, 150/2005). The nature of foster care requires the availability of and access to proper resources not always in abundance. In order to achieve the aims of foster care, certain resources must be readily available in certain qualities and quantities to agencies affecting foster placements. An organization rendering foster care services need to be in possession of and have access to resources in order to function properly as an organization. Only then it would be able to render such services and provide foster families and foster children with the appropriate services and resources needed in order to make the foster care placement successful.

Resources are essential in the life and functioning of any organization, including welfare organisations. Corporate strategy is concerned with an organization's basic direction for the future: its purpose, its ambitions, its resources and how it interacts with the world in which it operates. Every aspect of the organization plays a role in this strategy such as people, finances, production methods and the environment (including customers) (Lynch, 2000: 5). In any organization there are always three main resource fields, namely human resources, financial resources and operations resources (Lynch, 2000: 304 – 392). Welfare organisations are not-for-profit service-rendering organisations, but have many characteristics in common with business and industrial organisations, especially regarding

its management. It should be noted that success in profit-organisations are measured by what happens on the bottom line. With not-for-profit organisations, this is not possible because it is not so easy to measure accurately the successes of organisations like child welfare organisations. In order for the organisation to survive and achieve its goals, the organisation needs the type of resources relevant to its goals, which in this case is to promote the welfare of children.

For the purposes of this article, a distinction will be made between organisational resources, community resources and professional resources. The researcher acknowledges that there might be overlapping between these categories as far as classification of resources are concerned, but accepts that no clear-cut system will be found.

Analyzing the resources of an organization involves not only exploring the role nature and contribution of the main resources, but also developing an understanding of two main issues. Firstly, it is important to explore how resources deliver profits in private companies and provide services in public owned organizations. Secondly, it is essential to identify those resources that enable an organization to survive. The most important and vital resource for any organization, is people, whether they are part of the human resources pool of the organization or whether they are part of people using its products or consuming its services.

The development of effective social work practice and service delivery is a collective responsibility of all qualified social workers. It needs constantly to be examined critically and practice and service delivery need to be reviewed. Social workers need to identify what are the ingredients of 'good practice' and how it can be applied elsewhere. We need to identify areas for improvement and gaps in service delivery and responses to user need, in order to begin to change services and provide new ones. This is, of course, within a context of lack of resources. Most social workers had to refuse services that clients needed because of a lack of resources (Lishman, 2002: 105). Lack of resources is more often than not the result of financial shortages.

In order to understand how resources are utilized within welfare organisations we need to know how child welfare organisations are managed.

## **2 THE MANAGEMENT OF CHILD WELFARE ORGANISATIONS**

There will be a resemblance between the management of welfare organisations in general and that of child welfare organisations. The uniqueness of the management of child welfare

organisations are perhaps the focus of the organisations on the child specifically and not welfare in general. This focus is to a large extent due to the special needs of children and certain policy matters regarding children. This will also determine intervention and service models used by the professional staff of the organisation, and the type of resources needed by the organisation. With foster care practice, it should be the resources supporting the foster placement process and the professional actions associated with the process. The Child Welfare Information Gateway of the US Department of Health and Human Services comments as follows on the administration and management of child welfare organisations:

“A child welfare agency's administrative structure, combined with effective leadership and competent management, provides the framework for ensuring the delivery of quality services to children and families.”

The management of foster care resources must fit in with the total management system of child welfare organisations because it is such an important service of child welfare organisations. Essential resources should be dealt with and care and scarce resources should be protected. There should also be a plan to sustain needed resources, and replenish ones that are lost. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012)

In order to understand what foster care resources are required, one should firstly have a clear understanding of foster care as intervention method.

### **3 FOSTER CARE AS INTERVENTION METHOD**

The foster care process is regarded by the author as a practical context for presentation of the contents of this article and will serve as a theoretical background for the rest of the article. In the following paragraphs, a holistic overview of foster care as intervention method will be given followed by a brief description of the foster care process as a framework for the remainder of the article.

Foster care is one of the forms of alternative care for children. According to De Jager (2011: 41) the purpose of foster care is to “...provide substitute care within a family setting to children who cannot be cared for by their own parents. In many families, a sudden crisis, or a gradual family breakdown, causes parents to be unable to look after their children for longer or shorter periods. The ideal is that foster parents act as substitute parents to foster children, while a social worker renders services to the biological family in order to help them grow to a place where they can resume care of their own children”.

Once considered the private responsibility of their parents, children are now almost public property. Many are now of the opinion that “it takes a village” to raise a child and, that parents should not be expected to shoulder the responsibilities alone (Barusch, 2006: 319). Children have probably been victimized by adults since the dawn of humankind, and non-perpetrating adults have ignored or been appalled by the neglect and abuse of children. Children have been victims of both poverty and violence (Barusch, 2006: 335). The implication of poverty for children is far-reaching. Children in low-income families face higher health risks because of the substandard quality of their housing and their limited access to health care. Their education opportunities are also severely truncated. Also, children in households with poverty-level incomes experience significantly higher rates of violence than those living in more affluent settings (Barusch, 2006: 337). As the child welfare system matured over the years, the practice of removing children from abusive and neglectful homes brought more children into foster care. Social scientists suggested that separating children from their parents and placing them in foster care was not always in the best interest of the child. They documented an alarming phenomenon called “foster care drift,” observing that children often languished for years in foster care, with little stability or planning of their future (Barusch, 2006: 338-339). It is for this very reason that the principle of permanency planning is of the utmost importance for the child’s interests.

Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) face increased economic, medical, nutritional, and psychosocial deprivation. They often drop out of school or attend irregularly; lose their inheritance rights; and suffer from stigma within the community. Some form of public assistance is required to provide these children with adequate food, health care, clothing, education and psychosocial support (Stover, Bollinger, Walker & Monasch, 2007: 21). New funding initiatives have recently scaled up the global response to the problems facing orphans and vulnerable children, largely through community-based responses. This scale-up occurs within a current international aid culture that often polarizes non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local governments, and assumes civil society has a comparative advantage to affect change and reach vulnerable populations. While this has contributed to a proliferation of NGOs worldwide, it has also pitted governments against NGOs as they compete for donor funds. This theoretical positioning of the state versus the NGO often neglects to take into account that many NGOs are funded in part through the state and/or must work collaboratively with the state to perform their missions successfully. Evaluators lack the attention to the inter-organizational relationships important to capacity building and sustainability. Specifically, there has been a lack of attention in the literature to partnerships that include government agencies in relation to NGO project sustainability (Rosenberg, Hartwig & Merson, 2008: 51-52).

In child welfare, social workers are the arms of the state, and as such they reach out to remove children from dangerous settings. The broader challenge now is to convert those settings to communities and homes capable of nurturing healthy human beings – to go from removing children from impoverished and neglectful settings to enrich those homes and communities for children and their families (Barusch, 2006: 349-450). Foster care as a method of intervention in protecting the child is an important mechanism to achieve this aim. It is a demanding and challenging task requiring professional inputs from the welfare organisation offering foster care services as well as a variety of resources to be secured and managed by the organization.

In order to understand what resources are required during each stage of the foster care process, it should first be understood what the foster care process is.

The process of foster care can be summarized as follows:

**New Intake** - The very first step in the foster care process starts when a case of a child in need of care is reported to the organization (Mackay, M.B. Personal interview. 2011)

**Investigation** - As soon as a possible case of child abuse or neglect is reported, it is the duty of the social worker at that organization to investigate the reported case. This is done in terms of section 150(1) of the Children's Act. A child in need of care is described in section 150 of the Children's Act (38/2005) and serves as a clear guide to the social worker.

**Place of temporary safe care-** After a thorough investigation was done with regards to the reported child abuse or neglect, and the investigating social worker deems it in the best interest of the child to be removed from his or her environment, the social worker should remove the child and place him or her in temporary safe care (Children's Act, 38/2005). Section 156(3)(a)(i), (ii) and (iii) of the Children's Act states that removal of a child from parental or family care through intervention by the State must be seen as a last resort.

**Family reunification or foster care** - According to section 155 of the Children's Act (38/2005), a children's court must decide on the question of whether a child who was the subject of proceedings in terms of section 47, 151, 152 or 154 is in need of care and protection. 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. If after an investigation, the designated social worker finds the child to be in need of care and protection, that child must be brought before the children's court. If the court finds that the child is in need of care and protection, the court may make an order in terms of section 156(e)(i) that the child be

placed in foster care. If the court finds that the child is not in need of care and protection, the court must make an order that the child, if the child is in temporary safe care, be returned to the person in whose care the child was before the child was put in temporary safe care and may also make an order for early intervention services in terms of this act.

**Extension or a court order** - An order made by a children's court in terms of section 156 lapses on expiry of two years from the date the order was made or such shorter period for which the order was made and may be extended by a children's court for a period of not more than two years at a time.

Children are placed in practice when they are removed from their parent's home, from temporary safe care to foster care or a children's home, and restored from foster care to the care of the parents (Schultz, 2002: 70). A child that has been placed in foster care by order of the children's court, may also be reunited with his biological parents if it is possible and in the best interest of the child, according to section 187 (1). This should also be done by an order of the court.

**Financial assistance** - Even though the main purpose and aim of foster care is to provide a stable home for children, MacKay (2011) explains that it cannot be assumed that foster parents will be in the financial position to successfully meet the above mentioned needs of the foster children to the fullest extent. Therefore the foster families and foster children are in need of and also have the right to some additional public assistance in the form of foster care grants and cheaper or even free healthcare, education and psychosocial support. In this regard, the departments of Health and Education can play significant roles. It can be expected of social workers to provide the psychosocial support to foster families and foster children.

Regarding financial support, the approval of foster care grants may have been affected by a decision by the Johannesburg High Court that grandparents are legally obliged to care for their grandchildren, and will thus not have access to foster care grants (Ferreira, 2012).

The need for public assistance varies by country depending on the number of orphans, the socio-economic conditions and local decisions about the type of support to provide and the best way to provide this support. Resources needed are estimated as the number of children needing support multiplied by the coverage (the percentage receiving support) and multiplied by the unit cost of providing the service. Estimates are prepared for different types of support including education, nutrition, health care, family/home, economic stability, community support and organizational costs. Children also need shelter but we have

assumed that most households can most easily provide basic shelter. Children need various types of support ranging from those things necessary for survival, such as food and health care, to those interventions that will provide a better quality of life in the future such as education, psychosocial support and economic self-sufficiency. In an ideal world all children would have access to all types of high quality services. In the real world many children, orphaned and not, are malnourished, sick and without shelter. Some argue that a comprehensive program to support children should include all essential elements including food, health care, education, clothes, shoes, bedding, psychosocial support, economic self-sufficiency, etc. Others hold that some of these elements are not 'essential' or far exceed the situation of most children living in poor households with both their parents. Each country will make its own decisions about what types of support to provide in light of the availability of funding, level of need and socio-economic situation (Stover et al., 2007: 21-23).

In 2010/11, the South-African government spent R89 billion on social grants in the face of increasing unemployment and the impact of 2009's recession. Expenditure on grants increased from 3,2% of the gross domestic product to 3,5%. Government's most successful strategy in combating abject poverty and hunger is its Social Assistance Programme. The majority of the beneficiaries are children who receive the child support grant (CSG). Eligibility for this grant is restricted to poor people, with most recipients being single female parents (South African Government Info, 2012).

## **4 RESOURCES IN FOSTER CARE**

According to the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995: 54) a resource can be defined as a means or service that can be mobilised and applied instrumentally to satisfy a need, combat a social problem or promote social functioning.

For the purpose of this study, resources will be divided also into three groups, namely organisational resources, community resources and professional resources

### **4.1 Organisational resources**

Examples of organisational resources are human, financial, physical, technological, equipment, time, information and knowledge. Human resources are the employees of the organisation, finances are the money available to render the services of the organisation and physical resources will be buildings, offices and cars. Examples of technological resources are computers, fax machines, scanners and photocopiers. Examples of equipment include tables, chairs, filing cabinets and telephones. Information and knowledge

are the data needed by the staff of the organisation to do the work. The author does not intend to go into detail about the above list of resources, but suffice to say that observation and experience showed that most NGO's to varying degrees, are equipped with most of the resources listed. Resources more applicable to foster care will be elaborated on in greater detail. The types of organizational resources that will be discussed here are human resources, financial resources and operations resources.

An organization is a consciously coordinated entity, with a relatively identifiable boundary, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or goals. Organisations encompass or involve workforce and structures of staffing, systems of working and markets of demand for goods or services, as well as less tangible facets such as culture, ethos and patterns of power and influence. Organisations are also places where identities can be formed, social lives and careers established and political aspirations realized (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 74). Analysing the resources of an organisation involves not only exploring the role and contribution of the main resources, but also developing an understanding of two main issues. First, it is important to explore how resources deliver profits in private companies and provide services in public owned organizations. Second, it is essential to identify those resources that enable an organization to complete and survive against competition (Lynch, 2000: 247). From a strategic perspective, it follows that resource analysis needs to move beyond factors that apply to the industry as a whole. Each organization needs to analyze and develop the individual resources that will allow it to survive and compete in the environment. As a starting point in identifying the strategic role of individual resources, it is useful to explore the reason for an organization to possess and use any resources beyond the minimum amount needed to stay in existence. It is essential to begin by analyzing the complete range of resources of the organization. This is not easy because some resources are difficult to measure or even define in an unambiguous way. Essentially, the resources of the organization are those assets that contribute to the generation of value added (Lynch, 2000: 262 – 265).

A fundamental role of resources in an organisation is to add value. Added value can be defined as the difference between the market value of output and the cost of input. The concept is basically an economic one. For non-profit organisations, the concept of adding value can still be applied. The inputs of the organization may be similar to those of commercial organizations – electricity, telephones, photocopying, transport, and so forth – and may be very different, particularly voluntary labour which has zero cost. Equally, the outputs may be difficult to define and measure such as service to the community or help for

sick people among others. It may be difficult to put a value on the services delivered, for example the outputs of the organization. Yet no one would deny their value to the community. The value added is real enough just difficult to quantify. Most of the literature and studies on value added concentrate on commercial organization, primarily because it was originally developed as a commercial concept. But, in principle, value added can also be applied to not-for profit organizations. In general terms, the added value of a non-profit organization is the difference between the services provided and the cost of the inputs, some of which may be voluntary and have zero cost. Because of the difficulty in valuing these elements, some might argue that it is inappropriate to explore the concept of value added in non-profit organizations. However, others would suggest that some concept of value, defined to include broader social goals, is relevant to every organization including those that do not generate profits (Lynch, 2000: 262 – 265).

Wilson & Lau (2011: 324 – 327) is of the opinion that non-profit social work agency effectiveness often depends upon the success of individuals who serve in leadership and management roles. However, in the 21st century, there is a growing lack of well-trained and prepared leaders in non-profit organizations. Many non-profits today struggle to attract and retain qualified social service professionals to lead their organizations. In addition more and more experienced leaders of non-profit social service organizations are leaving the field. Ironically, there is also a declining interest in social work administration courses among social work students in administration concentrations and by schools of social work thus, non-profits may have even more difficulty finding leaders and administrators in the future. It has been argued that social service agencies should be managed by social workers however administrators from fields other than social work are running an increasing number of social service agencies. Many social workers do serve as leaders of non-profit organizations. Despite the presence or absence of their formal education in agency administration, social workers often rise into administrative positions through a direct-service path. Experience can be a valuable teacher; however, the importance of professional preparation is vital for these new supervisors and managers in order to provide them with at least some theoretical and administrative practice foundation for this type of career move. Social work managers must possess skills unique to the social services, including the ability to navigate moral and ethical challenges. The tasks facing non-profit leaders are complex and multifaceted, and facing these challenges effectively requires special administration skills and competencies. Leadership and management are closely related, yet have very different functions. Leadership can be defined as a process of influencing a group of individuals to achieve a common goal that is influenced by the leader's core values. In contrast, management is discussed as a process of organizing,

planning, leading, and controlling the use of resources to reach agency-based performance goals. The concepts of leadership and management are interdependent, overlapping, and obviously complementary. Further, both concepts are vital to organizational success. Over the past decade, various studies have suggested competencies required for effective social work administration. Most prominent were the 10 competencies needed to run a well-functioning, high-quality organization. Social work managers need to have competencies in both external and internal relations. External relations are comprised of (1) knowledge of current social and public policy issues and how those issues affect the agencies and the consumers; (2) advocacy skills; (3) the ability to market the agencies' programs and services; (4) the ability to establish relationships with the community and the public; and (5) governance skills. Internal relations are comprised of (6) sound budgeting skills; (7) proven skills for planning and management; (8) knowledge of human resource management; (9) knowledge of staff development; and (10) knowledge of financial development. Social workers might lack these critical competencies, which can inhibit success in leading social service agencies.

Increasingly, child welfare researchers and reformers focus on the importance of leadership in building and maintaining an effective workforce. Capacity building refers to activities that contribute to an agency's effectiveness as it works to achieve its mission. These activities include developing and strengthening organizational infrastructure, training and developing staff, team building, strategic planning, evaluation, and securing and sustaining program funding. Agencies and community members can work together to monitor and improve child welfare agency services and outcomes for children and families involved with the child welfare system. An agency's philosophy, mission, and policy set the tone for workplace culture and interactions between agency staff and community members. Agency administrators and judicial officers provide vision and inspiration and ensure successful implementation of program and practice improvements. Without such leadership, reform efforts are less likely to be successful or sustained (Lynch, 2000: 262 – 265).

According to Mackay (2011) the following can be seen as examples of organisational resources in foster care:

**The time available to the foster care worker and the skills of the foster care worker to address psychosocial needs of foster children** - Due to the increase in foster care cases over the past years, the workload of foster care workers also grew exponentially. This causes the foster care worker to not have adequate time available to address certain emotional issues as they are too busy trying to keep up with all the administrative work that needs to be done in order to place children in foster care or to renew these placements for a

further two years. Even though foster care workers are trained to do counseling and to address emotional issues, the reality is that through the administrative tasks that need to be done, they do not have the time to do counseling with foster children or foster parents. As society grows and changes constantly, so also does the problems and issues a foster child faces on a daily basis. Apart from time constraints that the foster care worker faces, they also face the fact that they may not have the necessary skills to address certain issues and are then in need of other resources such as doctors, teachers, occupational therapists or psychologists outside of the social welfare system which can be utilized to address these issues. Staying registered at the South African Council for Social Service Professions requires the foster care worker to ensure that they receive a certain amount of training each year. However the organizations in which they work will not always be able to provide such training and will also not necessarily be able to contribute financially to this training. This puts the foster care worker in the position of having to pay large amounts of money for accredited training, having to use their annual leave to attend this training and again having a back-log of work as they were not at the office for a number of days.

The two issues emerging from the above report are firstly time constraints, especially as far as counseling to the foster child is concerned and secondly specialised knowledge. These observations are significant, considering the observed trend in current South Africa to deal with foster placements as mainly an administrative process. This is closely related to the second issue which is a lack of skills to do counseling regarding the foster care situation. The management of foster placements qualifies as a specialist area in child welfare, needing specialist practitioners. Cost of training however, is inhibitive.

**The number of foster care workers working in NGO's** – According to De Jager (2011: 55), it has been estimated that 66 000 social workers, and R44 billion, are needed to implement the new Children's Act successfully. The reality is that there are currently only 16 504 social workers registered at the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) in South Africa. This shortage of social workers poses a huge challenge for the South African foster care system. Due to this shortage of workers, social workers are overburdened with high caseloads. South Africa has also lost many social workers to other countries and other sectors offering better work conditions and highly competitive salary packages. In response to this, the Department of Social Development has launched its "Retention and Recruitment Strategy" with the aim of recruiting students to the social work profession by offering them bursaries, and of improving the working conditions and remuneration of social workers. R210 million in the 2009/2010 financial year have been allocated to the social work bursary scheme and there are currently 3 529 students on the

scholarship program (De Jager, 2011: 55 - 56). A general shortage of social workers will also be reflected in the number of social workers in the child welfare field and in particular in the foster care section of child welfare.

**Facilities available to foster care workers which can either enable or hinder them to provide a quality service** - According to Mackay (2011) the organisation's facilities can play a large role in how effective foster care workers can render services. If there is a lack in sound structure, telephones, computers, vehicles, desks, etc., it will make the work of the foster care worker extremely difficult. Available office equipment and technologies are essential and will enhance the work capacity of the foster care worker. Other factors like the fuel price can also complicate service rendering as many clients may live far from the organisation's offices. Having to do home visits on a regular basis will cause an increase in costing for the organization. Foster parents and foster children may also not have the funds available to come to the offices to meet with the foster care worker. Economic conditions in the country should thus also be considered as a factor within the child welfare environment.

As already mentioned, human resources is an example of an organisational resource. The next section will focus on what human resources encompass.

#### **4.1.1 Human Resources**

For many organisations, people are a vital resource. Their strategic significance extends beyond the resource context, however, because strategy development often involves change and some people may resist change to such an extent that it becomes impossible to implement the planned strategy. Human resource analysis is therefore essential during the development of corporate strategy and cannot simply be left as a task to be undertaken after the strategy has been agreed on. One possible starting point for the analysis is an audit of the human resources of the organisation – the people, their skills, backgrounds and relationships with each other. An assessment of the culture of the organisation is also required - the style and learned ways that govern and shape the organisation's people relationships. Finally, power and politics may guide and direct the organisation in its strategy development and therefore need careful assessment. The relationship between these subjects is circular – that is, no single area is dominant and all are interrelated (Lynch, 2000:304).

Human-resource-based analysis emphasizes the emergent approach to corporate strategy. People are not machines: they respond to leadership, enthusiasm and shared decision making (Lynch, 2000: 308).

The current major challenge for social work is the recruitment and retention of sufficiently high-caliber staff and support for those now working with high workloads under considerable pressure (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 76 – 78). There is therefore the need to balance increased demand and higher expectations with a shortfall in resources (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 81). In a press release of the South African Institute for Race Relations, Lerato Mloi (14 August 2012), quoting the Department of Social Development, observes that the 16 504 social workers needed to provide the welfare needs of children in terms of the Children's Act of 2005 represents 99% of all registered social workers in South Africa. This is a clear indication of the critical position regarding social work manpower in South Africa which naturally will also reflect the situation regarding foster care social workers.

Viljoen (2009) reports on high staff turnover in NGO's as the result of the lack of adequate subsidies paid by the state and the great disparity between salaries paid by the state and those paid by the NGO's. This has been a common complaint from NGO's over the last couple of years in South Africa, and, as stated "...high turnover has a very negative impact on an NGO's service delivery as communities do not benefit when there is no continuity." This is especially true of welfare agencies dealing with such vulnerable human beings as children.

#### **4.1.2 Financial Resources**

Many corporate strategies involve the organisation's financial resources: investment in the organisation's activities now will be rewarded by profits or other benefits later. This explores the relationship between the financial resources that are available for corporate strategy – the sources, costs and risks involved – and the returns that may be achieved. Financial analysis deals primarily with the precision of numbers, and therefore tends to be prescriptive rather than emergent in its approach. However, leading financiers are well aware that in practice there is a judgmental element to the subject (Lynch, 2000: 348). Without adequate financial performance, the survival of all commercial organisations would be put to risk. The same is also at least partially true of the many not-for-profit organisations that need to survive, if only to provide the service they offer (Lynch, 2000: 374).

Next to the human resources and the operational infrastructure, the budget of a non-governmental organization is one of the most important aspects in terms of management. The NGOs are confronted, worldwide, with major difficulties which presume several structural adjustments at the organizational level and in the way in which the activities are developed and the services specific to the third sector are delivered (Cace *et al.*, 2012: 48).

The prospect of having to generate income in-house to fund the provision of critical, socially beneficial services is causing deep concern for many NGOs. Similarly, the expectation that non-profits be run along business lines is being greeted with protest and accusations of unrealistic expectations. Yet, the reality is that in a changing competitive world, those who adjust to the needs and expectations of the customer (in this case the funder) are those who survive and thrive. This transition to 'sustainability' is largely being viewed by NGOs as the creation of additional self-generated income to supplement funding and grants. In truth, with few exceptions income-generation is not something that non-profits do very well, which is understandable given their non-commercial origins in social support. NGO systems are seldom set up for profit-making applications, some struggle with the concept of charging for services that they would prefer to offer for free. Sustainability runs deeper than income generation alone and we would argue that there is merit in a more business-like approach in the non-profit sector, for all stakeholders. The truth is that the NGO space is competitive, with ever-increasing numbers of non-profit organisations competing for a slice of the diminishing pie. More and more of donors and funders are choosing to support projects and organisations that can offer them a return on their investment, not necessarily in financial terms but certainly in terms of measured and visible impact, positive public relations and the opportunity for project growth, replication and sustainability. Just as commercial businesses sell products or services, in a competitive world so too must NGOs increasingly be equipped to 'sell' their offering to prospective donors and stakeholders. Simply having a worthy cause and doing good and necessary work is no longer sufficient to secure donor support. NGOs need to market themselves as the best organisation to deliver long-term value from the social investment that funders are making. In the above context, increased self-sustainability and a business-like approach does not mean that a non-profit must generate its own income by selling products or services to fund the good work it is doing. It is primarily about adopting a more professional, measured and holistic operating philosophy, one that recognises that increased competition for funding requires one to stand out from the crowd in order to flourish (Wijnberg, 2012).

There is a relationship between the financial resources that are available – the sources, costs and the risks involved - and the returns that may be achieved. Operations management covers all manufacturing processes in an organization – in other words, the contribution of the production function to the organization's ability to add value to its goods or services (Lynch, 2000: 247-390). Child welfare organisations do not produce any products for sale for profit. Its services are free and it survives financially on subsidies from government, donations from the public or from own fundraising efforts, allocations from

Lotto and its own fund-raising efforts. It often happens that professional staff must assist with fundraising, which distracts them from their professional work. Welfare organisations, by nature of their philosophy, are not supposed to make any profits. They must use their funds to improve and maintain services. This is why they are called not-for-profit-organisations (NPO's), and that is why their finances must be planned meticulously (Lynch, 2000: 247-390).

It often happens that professional staff must assist with fundraising, which distracts them from their professional work.

### **4.1.3 Operational Resources**

According to Lynch (2000: 390–392) operations management covers all manufacturing processes in an organisation and includes raw material sourcing, purchasing, production and manufacturing, distribution and logistics – in other words, the contribution of the production function to the organisation's ability to add value to its goods or services. Importantly, human resource aspects of the function are just as significant as machinery. In many corporate strategy texts, operations management barely rates a mention, and yet it has delivered real benefits to organisations in both the commercial and public sector over the last 25 years. There are four main topics: the environmental forces that have been a powerful influence on operations development; the contribution of operations to value and sustainable competitive advantage; operations activities and corporate strategy; and the application of operations concepts to the service industry. Operation management is an important element of corporate strategy for three reasons:

- The reward from the successful implementation of such strategies can be very high.
- Major investment in physical and human resources is necessary to achieve the identified results.
- Fundamental changes in both people and machines need to be addressed by every company.

Operations strategy has two major contributions to make to corporate strategy: firstly it aims to provide manufacturing and related process that will give the organisation competitive advantage over competition, and secondly it supplies coordinated support for products so that they will win sales orders in a competitive market place (Lynch, 2000: 390 – 392).

If you manage your resources in an effective way you can benefit your organisation by:

- Reducing the cost of producing products and services.
- Increasing revenue by increasing customer satisfaction through good quality and service.

- Reducing the amount of capital investment needed, by the use of innovation and increased efficiency.
- Building a solid base of operations skills and knowledge within the organisation (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2007: 21).

Operations are activities that are ongoing, perhaps even repetitive, and might be considered part of the day-to-day functioning of an organisation. Examples might include ongoing delivery of care services, the assessment and review of support services provided to service users and carers or undertaking financial assessments and the processing of the administration linked to this (Spolander and Martin, 2012:16).

## **4.2 Community Resources/Assets**

Community resources or assets are used as interchangeable items and thus refers to the same thing. Definitions of both community resources and assets will be given to demonstrate the similarity and a combined definition will thus be constructed.

Berkowitz and Wadud (2012) are of the view that “...the broadest definition of a community resource or community asset is that it is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. It may include a person, physical structure, community service, a business or anybody else providing a service”.

Another definition regards a resource as “...an organization that serves a particular geographical area or group of people by providing tools to help that community grow in positive ways and improve the quality of life for the people of that community. As such, community resources can be run or funded by the government, businesses, non-profit groups, or even individuals and serve the community in a variety of ways” (eHow, 2012).

It can be concluded that a community resource is thus anything available to all community members who help the community to improve and develop its members and maintain their human rights and well-being. For the purposes of this article, community resources must be viewed and considered within the context of foster care. If applied to foster care services, it is focused on the community of children in need of alternative care in order to provide them with opportunities to assist them to develop and grow into mature and well-adjusted adults. It also focuses on the natural or biological parents of foster children because the aim of family reunification services is to develop the child care abilities of the families of origin of the foster children. At the same time, the services rendered to the foster families are geared to assist them to nurture and support the foster children in their care to heal the wounds

which lead them to be removed from their parental home, or to recover from the shock of losing one or both parents.

The Community Toolbox (2012) provides the following broad definition “A community asset (or community resource, a very similar term) is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. And this means:

- It can be a person -- The stay-at-home mom or dad who organizes a playgroup. The church member who starts a discussion group on spirituality. The fire fighter who's willing to risk his life to keep the community safe. These are all community assets.
- It can be a physical structure or place -- a school, hospital, church, library, recreation centre, social club. It could be a town landmark or symbol. It might also be an unused building that could house a community hospice, or a second floor room ideal for community meetings. Or it might be a public place that already belongs to the community -- a park, a wetland, or other open space.
- It can be a community service that makes life better for some or all community members - good public transportation, early childhood education centre, community recycling facilities.
- It can be a business that provides jobs and supports the local economy.
- Anybody in the community are potential community assets. Everyone has some skills or talents, and everyone can provide knowledge about the community, connections to the people they know, and the kind of support that every effort needs - making phone calls, stuffing envelopes, giving people information, moving equipment or supplies - whatever needs doing. This suggests that **everyone in the community can be a force for community improvement if only we knew what their assets were, and could put them to use.”**

Within the context of foster care relevant examples would be places of temporary safe care, child and youth care centres, potential foster care homes, volunteers and the child welfare organisation itself.

A very important community resource is the South African Social Security Agency which is the national agency of the South African Government. It was created in April 2005. SASSA was established in terms of the South African Social Security Agency Act [No. 9 of 2004] to administer the application, approval and payment of social grants in South Africa, on behalf of the Department of Social Development.

SASSA is responsible for providing foster care grants to foster parents. A Foster Care Grant is a grant intended to provide for the basic needs of foster children who have been placed in the care of foster parents by a Children's Court. The Foster Care Grant is paid to foster parents for children between the ages of birth and 18 years. An extension order for foster care can be given until the age of 21 years if the child is still at secondary school. In order to apply for a Foster Care Grant, the foster parent and the foster child must:

- be resident in South Africa at the time of making the application (but they do not have to be South African citizens);
- be in possession of a court order that makes the foster care status legal;
- qualify in terms of the means test for a Foster Care Grant;
- a child from any country that finds themselves in need of care and protection in South Africa, can be fostered - this will include a child who is undocumented, or a child who is a refugee; and
- only a foreign national who is a refugee can qualify to be a foster parent (Social Welfare, 2012).

Foster care grants are indispensable for the care of the foster child. It cannot be expected of the foster parents to foot the bill from their own pockets because that may imply that the care of the child may suffer. Mackay (2011) considers the foster care grant as an important community resource in foster care as these grants aim to support the foster parents in caring for the foster children placed in their care. She confirms that without this grant some foster parents would not have been able to fully provide in only the basic physical needs of the foster children, let alone any specialized services they might require.

According to De Jager (2011:58) more and more families are beginning to rely on grants for financial support and the foster care grant is particularly appealing, since it is almost three times the amount of the child support grant. The danger here is for foster care to become a poverty alleviating measure, instead of a strategy for child protection. Some are of the opinion that impoverished parents could see in the foster care grant an incentive to place their children in the care of others. These author also argue that "...it is inequitable for the state to provide greater financial support to poor relatives or other adults to care for children, without providing adequate and equal support to biological parents living in poverty to care for their own children" (De Jager, 2011: 58-59).

Care, according to the Children's Act (38/2005), in relation to a child, includes, where appropriate within available means:

- providing the child with a suitable place to live, living conditions that are conducive to the child's health, well-being and development, and the necessary financial support;
- safeguarding and promoting the well-being of the child;
- protecting the child from maltreatment, abuse, neglect, degradation, discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional or moral harm or hazards;
- respecting, protecting, promoting and securing the fulfillment of, and guarding against any infringement of, the child's rights set out in the Bill of Rights and the principles set out in Chapter 2 of this Act;
- guiding, directing and securing the child's education and upbringing, including religious and cultural education and upbringing, in a manner appropriate to the child's age, maturity and stage of development;
- guiding, advising and assisting the child in decisions to be taken by the child in a manner appropriate to the child's age, maturity and stage of development;
- guiding the behaviour of the child in a humane manner;
- maintaining a sound relationship with the child;
- accommodating any special needs that the child may have; and
- generally, ensuring that the best interests of the child is the paramount concern in all matters affecting the child.

In all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child, according to the Children's Act (38/2005), the standard that the child's best interest is of paramount importance, must be applied. The Children's Act provides a guideline for the foster care worker with regards to service rendering. The Children's Act itself can be seen as a community resource as the provisions it makes are in line with basic community values. Also, the foster care worker is dependent on the community to ensure that these guidelines as stipulated in the Act are followed.

A big challenge is the deluge in foster care cases. According to De Jager (2011: 58) the Annual Report of the Department of Social Development 2000-2001 stated that foster care grants were received for 49843 foster children by foster parents in 2000. In 2009, there were 500 000 children in foster care in South Africa. This disproportionate increase is to a large extent due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and to a greater awareness of foster care among the general population. Orphans and abandoned children automatically qualify as "children in need of care" and are eligible for foster placements. The Department of Social Development is pushing foster care as a means to care for the increasing numbers of AIDS orphans (De Jager, 2011: 58). The issue arising from this is whether adequate numbers of foster parents can be found at the same rate as the increase in children needing foster

placements. If foster parents cannot be found before temporary safe care orders lapse, placement in a Child and Youth Care Centre may be the only other best option without the child being a suitable candidate for such a centre.

### **4.2.1 Policy and Legislation**

Strictly speaking, the Children's Act cannot be regarded as a community resource for foster care, but it defines how families in the community, other than the child's natural/biological parents can be used as an alternative family who can take over the care of a child in need of care. It therefore does serve as a guideline for the foster care worker. More examples of policies and legislations that can serve as guidelines and therefore can act as community resources are Social Policy in general, the White Paper for Social Welfare, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the best interest of the child, the Code of Ethics for social workers and the Social Security Act to name a few.

Mackay (2011) confirms that the Children's Act can be a useful resource in foster care as it provides clear guidelines for and makes certain provisions with regard to foster care. It clearly sets the stage as to what foster care is and how to go about when placing a child in foster care. It also enables the foster care worker to ensure that all relevant parties do their part in the service rendering.

### **4.2.2 Foster Parents**

As stated above, foster parents may be considered a family in the community, who may or may not be related to children in need of care, who are able and willing to care for a child or children related or unrelated to them.

Foster parents should however be recruited and trained by social workers into their role as foster parents. According to De Jager (2011:47-48), the two main needs of foster parents that have been identified internationally, is the need for training and the need for support. Foster parents are expected to be able to deal with any medical, emotional, developmental and behavioural issues that might surface while caring for their foster children. For this expectation to be fair, foster parents need to be sufficiently trained and supported. According to De Jager (2011: 47 – 48) a study was conducted by Brown and Calder in which foster parents were asked to identify their needs, by answering the question, "What do you need to be a good foster parent?" Five themes emerged from their answers:

- Good working relationships with social workers and foster parents;
- Support from social services;
- Harmonious and stable family relationships;

- Cultural sensitivity; and
- A range of personality characteristics and parenting skills

These themes and the domains complement one another and all of them can be enhanced through training and support. Foster parents are thus vital resources in the community, for the purposes of foster care. The lack of foster parents willing to open their homes and to care for foster children already poses a serious concern for foster care workers, and in current South Africa, most foster care placements are kinship placements.

An alternative to conventional foster care provided for by the Children's Act is cluster foster care, which is a valuable additional community resource for foster care in response to the many child-headed households which is the direct result of HIV and AIDS. Botha (2010:10) quotes the Department of Social Development explaining that cluster foster care "... refers to the reception of children in foster care in accordance with a cluster foster care scheme registered by the provincial head of social development. Cluster foster care is set up in a family-orientated environment where a group of foster children is cared for by an active member." The Children's Act determines that only non-profit organisations registered as such in terms of the Non-profit Organisations' Act (Act No 71 of 1997) may operate cluster foster parent schemes. This implies that an NGO registered as an NPO may also operate a cluster foster parent scheme that has to be supervised by a social worker.

The researcher was unable to determine whether facilities such as cluster foster care are available to the organisations, however cluster foster care can be a meaningful resources to compensate for the lack of enough foster parents.

### **4.2.3 Volunteers**

According to the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995: 66) a volunteer is a person who offers his services or who is recruited to render a service at a welfare agency, usually without remuneration.

Poverty of children, violence against the children in families, homeless children, crime of teenagers, children avoiding to attend school, increasing number of pedagogically abandoned children and other social problems are still relevant even in twenty first century. An issue of the social security comes out due to such social situation. Non-governmental organizations (NGO) represent civil society and their activities are based on voluntary work, and play a particular role by solving the mentioned problems. A lot of volunteers take part in programs of non-governmental organizations, that are related to the protection of welfare of socially and pedagogically abandoned children. The definition of a volunteer emphasizes

voluntary support, solicitation between a socially frustrated child and specialist, so a volunteer takes a great part of responsibility while working with children from the risk groups. It is especially important to select volunteers and to train them. Selection of volunteers is important as not every person is able to do a voluntary work with children from the risk groups. A volunteer can cause some damage to the client, organization and himself if he does not know what can help and what can harm (Godelyte, Kavolius & Litvinas, 2012: 48-49).

In general terms, volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. Volunteering is generally considered an altruistic activity, intended to promote good or improve human quality of life, but people also volunteer for their own skill development, to meet others, to make contacts for possible employment, to have fun, and a variety of other reasons that could be considered self-serving. Volunteering takes many forms and is performed by a wide range of people. Many volunteers are specifically trained in the areas they work in, such as medicine, education, or emergency rescue. Other volunteers serve on an as-needed basis, such as in response to a natural disaster or for a beach-cleanup. Community volunteering refers to volunteers who work to improve community enhancement efforts in the area in which they live. Neighborhood, church, and community groups play a key role in building strong cities from the neighborhoods up. Supporting these understaffed groups can enable them to succeed in a variety of areas, which connect social, environmental, and economic boundaries. Volunteers can conduct a wide range of activities (Wikipedia, 2009). According to Mackay (2011) volunteers are not utilized as much within the foster care system, the reason being that most foster care workers are of the opinion that foster care is a too specialized field within social work. Court reports must be written and signed by trained, registered foster care workers which would also imply that the information gathering for these reports should also be done by foster care workers. Volunteers also cannot be used to render therapeutic services to foster children. However volunteers can be utilized in other areas for instance organising and running foster parent and foster child forums, collecting forms for reports or even just to provide transport for the clients to the foster care worker or making phone calls to confirm appointments. This may already ease some of the burdens the foster care worker faces. Professionally trained persons for instance psychologists can also render a voluntary service. It is indeed true that many children on foster homes are vulnerable because of abuse and neglect, resulting in a host of emotional and physical needs, which might make social workers cautious to make use of volunteers, but, as stated in a document by the Corporation for National and Community Service "Children in foster care are among our nation's most vulnerable young people. Many have

been abused or neglected, resulting in a host of emotional and developmental needs. Because they may experience frequent transitions and instability, foster children can benefit tremendously from the attention of mature, caring adults who serve as mentors. Senior volunteers may be particularly well-suited to mentor foster children.” It is however important that volunteers be trained.

### **4.3 Professional Resources**

Like all other human beings, children face complex issues made more complex through circumstances that lead to them needing protection. The key professionals in this process are the social worker and the presiding officer of the children’s court which will be a trained legal expert, preferably with experience in foster care placements. However, other professionals may also be called upon to assist, depending on the needs of the child. Mackay (2011) confirms that the foster care worker is not always able to address the issues with which some foster children represent. This is partly because of time constraints due to large caseloads and in part due to the lack of skills to address certain issues like for instance depression or a learning disability. There is the need for other professionals, outside the scope of social work to help address certain issues. Even though foster care workers are sufficiently trained, they are not in a position to make a diagnosis and prescribe medication. They may not be trained in how to help a child read or write or learn. Certain issues do require the help of other professionals who are specifically trained and qualified within a certain field of expertise. These other professionals are however not always available or in a position to help. They are also in certain instances extremely expensive and / or situated far from the homes of the foster families. The foster parents and the foster care worker’s organization may not be in a position to pay such high fees for specialized services and again the foster care worker must figure out a way to address these issues themselves.

#### **4.3.1 Foster care workers in the same or other organisations**

The current major challenge for social work is the recruitment and retention of sufficiently high-caliber staff and support for those now working with high workloads under considerable pressure (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 76 – 78). South Africa lacks the resources to adequately carry out the stipulations of the Children’s Act (2005). As mentioned earlier, a lot more social workers and a large amount of funds are needed to implement the new Children’s Act successfully and this shortage in social workers poses a huge challenge for the foster care system. There are 500 000 children in foster care in South Africa, with a further 157 000 awaiting placement finalisation. South Africa has lost many social workers

to other countries and other sectors offering better work conditions and highly competitive salary packages (De Jager, 2011: 55-56). According to Mackay (2011) the shortage of foster care workers cause higher caseloads, which in turn causes the foster care workers not be able to address all foster care related issues as they might have been able to do if they had smaller caseloads. Even though there is no clear indication of what a reasonable smaller case load is, anything smaller than the current size of caseloads will already make a remarkable difference. Currently some workers have caseloads of over 100 or even 200 foster care cases. Foster care workers within the same organization or within another organization serve as resources for each other as some render foster care services and others render reunification services to the biological parents. They can provide each other with valuable information concerning the different parties. They can also assist each other in sharing prospective foster parents or just sharing information which could ease another foster care worker's high caseload.

### **4.3.2 Multidisciplinary Teams**

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995: 34) defines an interprofessional team, also known as a multidisciplinary team as a group comprising members trained in different professional disciplines that work together to resolve a common problem or achieve a common goal through continuous intercommunication, re-examination and evaluation of individual efforts toward team objectives and taking group responsibility for the final outcome.

Multidisciplinary team working is described by the Mental Health Commission (2006: 10-19) as: "the main mechanism to ensure truly holistic care for patients (or client in the social work context) and a seamless service for patients (or clients)". Multidisciplinary team working is known to "maximize clinical effectiveness". It is not just a matter of getting different professionals together and magically multidisciplinary team working happens. Teams need to have shared goals and values, need to understand and respect the competencies of other team members, need to learn from other disciplines and respect their different views and perspectives. Individual team members may need to reassess exclusive claims to specialist knowledge and authority in order to form effective multidisciplinary teams which can provide the best possible care to the individual client. Multidisciplinary teams convey many benefits to both service users and the professionals working on the team, such as continuity of care, the ability to take a comprehensive, holistic view of the service user's needs, the availability of a range of skills, and mutual support and education. In addition, multidisciplinary team working provides the skill range to meet the increasingly complex needs of service users who require the different skills of different professionals,

enables the provision of a wide range of services and resources for service users and provides a seamless service to users which enhance continuity of care. The advantages to professionals of multidisciplinary working include:

- close-knit peer support for all professionals and consideration for the complex and sometimes distressing clinical work to be done;
- division of labour to ensure multidisciplinary service delivery;
- ensuring that all members of the multidisciplinary team are used in a way that is maximally effective; and
- cross-fertilisation of skills between professionals.

This ensures that other team members:

- see and know each other's work;
- can give advice and provide informed cover when people are away;
- staff acquire new skills, participate in decision making and take on more responsibility leading to increased job satisfaction;
- delivering services that are planned and co-ordinated;
- delivering services that are cost effective; and
- enhancing information sharing and streamlining work practices.

Working in teams also presents challenges to the professionals involved and the services, particularly around management, leadership, confidentiality, and conflict management and resolution (Mental Health Commission, 2006: 10-19).

Social workers are increasingly working within multidisciplinary teams, such as youth offending, community mental health and community learning difficulty teams (Drinkwater, 2010). A multidisciplinary team requires the core skills of nursing, medicine, social work, psychology and occupational therapy. Once the core disciplines are in place, there can be flexibility in the skills of additional members of the team according to local needs. For example, family therapists or speech and language therapists may have skills required by the population the team is serving. The possession of the competencies required to deliver effective care in a multidisciplinary team environment should be the key determinant of team membership. There should also be flexibility in terms of 'sub-teams' that may be a part of the larger team, for example, a home care team. The range of skills on the team should also be responsive to the ethnic profile of the local population. One of the fundamental advantages of team working is the different perspectives brought in by the different disciplines regardless of the special skills they may have. For this reason it is essential that the core disciplines are represented on multidisciplinary teams. It is important to note that the different training of the disciplines means they look at the individual in different ways –

each valid but each only part of the picture of a whole person (Mental Health Commission, 2006: 28). The skills required by the core members of the multidisciplinary team are variously described as “capabilities” and “competencies”. Each individual on a multidisciplinary team brings to their work the skills associated with their particular profession or discipline. These are the skills that are in evidence in their work on the team and with individual service users. Their competence in these skills will vary according to their experience, their qualifications and the work involved in obtaining their qualifications (i.e. the amount of practical, hands-on training they had). Each individual on a multidisciplinary team also brings with them their own attitudes and values which can have a significant bearing on their knowledge, behaviour and skills (Mental Health Commission, 2006: 22).

Even though the above mentioned is mainly focused on the health care system, it also applies to social work and specifically foster care. The same principles apply when working in a multidisciplinary team within the social work setting.

As a multidisciplinary team consists of many different professionals and sometimes other relevant parties, this can be seen as a useful resource in foster care according to Mackay (2011). The different professionals would be able to provide valuable and skilled input with regards to the issues that presents itself through the foster child’s behaviour and provide possible solutions to resolve it. These inputs may not have been given if the foster care worker did not make use of such a team which would then again cause the foster care worker more work as he or she would have to go and search for possible solutions. This can be both time consuming and expensive. The inputs given can lighten the workload for the foster care worker as the professionals on the team may be able to bring the foster child in contact with other professionals or other resources that the foster care worker might not have been aware of. It could speed up the process of getting issues addressed. The use of these teams also ensures co-responsibility in service rendering. For foster care workers to be a resource within the team, they would need to be familiar with the process of foster care and all relevant judicial processes and requirements. They would also need to be aware of the issues that foster children might face when placed in foster care and the possible causes thereof.

This can be a valuable resource as it includes other professionals in the foster care process. The social worker can rely on other professional opinions when making decisions and they share responsibility with others which can lighten the burden the social worker has to carry. This also builds relationships between the social worker and the other

professionals which in turn could provide the social worker with resources to whom they can refer their clients.

## 5 RESOURCES WITHIN THE FOSTER CARE PROCESS

In the following section the process of foster care, as per the Children's Act and also as discussed with Mackay (2011), will be discussed as well as the resources she regards as needed for each part of the process. The description of the resources necessary in the foster placement process will be based on the assumption of a child actually placed in foster care and not placed back with his parents after the investigation into complaints of either neglect or child abuse.

All three groups as mentioned earlier, organisation resources, community resources and professional resources are needed in each part of the foster care process as no one process uses only one resource at a time. The needed resources are listed as applicable to each phase of the foster care process in table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: RESOURCES NEEDED FOR EACH PHASE OF THE FOSTER CARE PROCESS**

Phases in foster care	Resources needed
New Intake	<p>An organization is needed where qualified, registered social workers work, especially in the field with statutory cases. These social workers should maintain an appropriate sense of values and ethics towards the community they are serving.</p> <p>The organisation and social workers working there should be accessible to the community -this would imply that there should be a building in which the organisation is run.</p> <p>Telephone, fax and email services should be available as well as the physical availability of the social workers or intake officers of the organisation.</p> <p>The mentioned organisation also depends on the responsibility of the community to report cases of child neglect and child abuse. Therefore, the community can also be seen as a resource.</p>

Other professionals can also be considered a resource if they are the ones who reported the case.

The Children's Act can also be regarded as a resource. According to section 110 of the Children's Act (38/2005):

- any correctional official, dentist, homeopath, immigration official, labour inspector, legal practitioner, medical practitioner, midwife, minister of religion, nurse, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, religious leader, social service professional, social worker, speech therapist, teacher, traditional health practitioner, traditional leader or member of staff or volunteer worker at a partial care facility, drop-in centre or child and youth care centre who on reasonable grounds concludes that a child has been abused in a manner causing physical injury, sexual abuse or deliberately neglected, must report that conclusion in the prescribed form to a designated child protection organisation, the provincial department of social development or a police official;
- any person who on reasonable grounds believes that a child is in need of care and protection may report that belief to the provincial department of social development, a designated child protection organisation or a police official;
- a person referred to in subsection (1) or (2) must substantiate that conclusion or belief to the provincial department of social development, a designated child protection organisation or police official and who makes a report in good faith is not liable to civil action on the basis of the report; and
- a police official to whom a report has been made in terms of subsection (1) and (2) or who becomes aware of a child in need of care and protection must ensure the safety and well-being of the child concerned if the child's safety or well-being is at risk and within 24 hours notify the provincial department of social development or a designated child protection organisation of the report and

	any steps that have been taken with regard to the child.
Investigation	<p>An accessible organisation is needed where qualified, registered social workers work.</p> <p>The social worker will be in need of a telephone, fax or email on which to contact possible witnesses or any person which could provide further detail with regards to the case. They will also be in need of transport if they need to do home visits.</p> <p>The community, especially those in direct contact with the child will again be regarded as a main resource during this phase as the social worker needs to gain as much information possible on this case.</p> <p>According to section 110 of the Children’s Act (38/2005):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provincial department of social development or designated child protection organisation to whom a report has been made in terms of subsection (1), (2) or (4), must ensure the safety and well-being of the child concerned, if the child’s safety or well-being is at risk, make an initial assessment of the report, unless the report is frivolous or obviously unfounded, investigate the truthfulness of the report or cause it to be investigated, if the report is substantiated by such investigation, without delay initiate proceedings in terms of this Act for the protection of the child and submit such particulars as may be prescribed to the Director-General for inclusion in Part A of the National Child Protection Register;</li> <li>• A designated child protection organisation to whom a report has been made in terms of subsection (1), (2) or (4) must report the matter to the relevant provincial department of social development;</li> <li>• The provincial department of social development or</li> </ul>

	<p>designated child protection organisation which has conducted an investigation as contemplated in subsection (5) may take measures to assist the child, including counselling, mediation, prevention and early intervention services, family reconstruction and rehabilitation, behaviour modification, problem solving and referral to another suitably qualified person or organisation, if he or she is satisfied that it is in the best interest of the child not to be removed from his or her home or place where he or she resides, but that the removal of the alleged offender from such home or place would secure the safety and well-being of the child request a police official in the prescribed manner to take the steps referred to in section 153, or deal with the child in the manner contemplated in sections 151, 152 or 155;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provincial department of social development or designated child protection organisation which has conducted an investigation as contemplated in subsection (5) must report the possible commission of an offence to a police official.</li> </ul>
<p>Removal and place of safety placement</p>	<p>Once again, the organisation with qualified and registered social workers is essential in this process.</p> <p>According to section 151 and 152 of the Children's Act (38/2005), a child may be removed to temporary safe care with or without a court order if a child is in need of care and protection as contemplated in section 150 of the Children's Act. This may be done by any person authorized by a court order or by a designated social worker or a police official. Therefore the law is a main resource with regards to this.</p> <p>The community will be an important resource in which places of temporary safe care are to be found.</p> <p>The court will also play a role as the system that will issue the</p>

	<p>order to have this child remain in the place of temporary safe care.</p> <p>A family in the community who acts as a place of temporary safe care is also entitled to a payment for acting as a place of temporary safe care.</p>
<p>Family reunification or foster care placement</p>	<p>The law and the children's court will be the main resources.</p> <p>The organisation and the designated social worker will be responsible for the investigation and providing the court with the necessary reports in order for the court to make an informed decision.</p> <p>Other community resources will include the place of safety parents as well as the prospective foster parents (if these differ from each other).</p> <p>The community closely involved with the specific child will be used as a resource for the social worker to gain all the necessary information and proof needed to prove the child to be in need of care and protection.</p> <p>The Department for Social Development and the South African Social Security Act will be resources towards the foster parents with regards to the foster care grant.</p> <p>Professional resources may be useful while doing mediation as well as drawing up parenting plans. If the child has any special needs, professional resources may also be needed in order to provide the optimal service to the child. A multidisciplinary team can also be involved in this process.</p>
<p>Foster care placement extension or family reunification</p>	<p>As in all the stages before this one, it is imperative that there is an accessible organisation with qualified and registered social workers which can render these services to the foster care family, the child and the biological parents.</p> <p>These social workers will again be in need of communication</p>

	<p>methods (telephone, fax and email) as well as transport in order to render the necessary supervision services.</p> <p>They will again need the help of the community to gather information for the report.</p> <p>They might also need social auxiliary workers, other professionals or even volunteers where appropriate to render services to the foster family, as they have a large caseload and might make use of a multi-disciplinary team when making recommendations to the Department of Social Development or the court.</p>
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## 6 CONCLUSION

As mentioned before, social work has changed beyond recognition, and is still changing. The jobs which social work students trained for twenty years ago have all but gone; even though many basic principles of social work still remain, the agencies which employ social workers have been transformed. Widespread regional differences have emerged in policy and practice in social work. In this article, attention was given to what current Foster Care Services entail and the process of Foster Care was discussed in order to get a holistic picture of what might be needed by the foster care worker to render a successful service to the foster child and foster parents.

Analyzing the resources of an organization involves not only exploring the role and contribution of the main resources, but also developing an understanding of two main issues. First, it is important to explore how resources provide services in public owned organizations. Second, it is essential to identify those resources that enable an organization to survive. The main resource types were described and examples of each was given to provide an understanding of why resources play not only an integral part in an organisation as a whole, but also how it plays a role in the quality of services rendered by the foster care worker to the foster child, biological parents and foster parents.

Foster placement is a very significant event in the life of the child and the management and monitoring of the foster placement process requires specific skills from the social worker responsible for overseeing this process. However, without the necessary resources, foster placement will not be possible, and a variety of resources are needed to support this process. These resources are neither not always in abundance, nor fully accessible. It

remains the responsibility of the child welfare organisation and the relevant social workers to do an assessment of available resources on a continuous basis in order to plan for the procurement of needed resources.

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## ARTICLE 2

*Kok, M. & Rankin, P.*

### **FOSTER CARE RESOURCES IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

#### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this article is to report on the research done with regards to the availability of foster care resources in the Free State Province which either enable or hinder social workers from rendering successful foster care services.

#### **2 BACKGROUND**

Historically, in South Africa, parenting for all children in need of alternative parenting has been provided by adoption, foster care, and kinship care within the extended family. In South Africa, formal or statutory foster care is an established practice that involves the legal transfer of care of the child to a foster parent (or foster parents), as well as financial assistance from the government in the form of a foster-care grant (Children's Act, 38/2005). However, this form of foster care has a historical legacy of not being available or having been provided for a large number of children in need of alternative family care. In these circumstances, relatives customarily have incorporated children in need of alternative family care (including orphans) into their families (Boning, 2009:140). In this form of kinship care or social parenting, arrangements for the care and upbringing of children are the concern of both the biological parents and an extensive network of relatives. Recent steep increases in the number of foster-care placements reported by the child welfare movement have suggested that formal, statutory foster care is becoming more accessible. It is also likely that kinship caregivers are now accessing foster-care grants to assist them in caring for their kin (Townsend & Dawes, 2007:822-824).

The researcher is employed as a social worker by the Kerklike Maatskaplike Diens,(KMD) Bloemfontein. In this position it has been her experience that a considerable number of children have to be removed from their parental homes for various reasons, and arrangements made for placements in alternative care. According to News 24 (News24, 2011), Minister Zola Skweyiya reported that in 2008 there were more than 1.5 million

orphaned children in South Africa. Some of these children will be taken in by family members, but substantial numbers require placement using more conventional forms of substitute care (UNICEF, 2006;15) In this case, the formal child protection system in terms of the Children's Act is activated through the Children's Courts (Children's Act, 2005).

Although governments are committed to helping vulnerable children, they need the additional support of NGO's, the private sector, and international donors to help all children access the resources and services to which they are entitled (Rosenberg, Hartwig & Merson, 2008: 52).

The actual placement of children in foster care is the end result of a process of investigation and careful assessment in which the social worker plays a crucial role. After the order of the Children's Court has been made and the children are formally placed, it is expected that the foster placement situation be supervised in order to facilitate the adjustment of both the foster child / children and the foster parents to the foster placement situation (Children's Act, 2005).

Foster placement is a unique situation requiring a variety of resources to make it a successful system. The foster care worker does not command all these resources, but needs to co-ordinate them in the interest of the foster child and the foster parent. The practice of foster placement is a way to serve the best interest of the child. Through foster placement and the monitoring of the placement situation, effect is also given to the rights of the child enshrined in the South African Constitution. South Africa also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] on July 16, 1995, effectively making the Convention binding domestically.

The development of the foster care process dictates the kinds of resources needed and the time at which they are needed. The quality of foster care services is dependent upon the availability and quality of relevant resources. The skilled and experienced social worker is the most important resource because he/she manages the process from the removal of the child until the placement of the child in foster care has been effected and the monitoring process starts. This requires skills, knowledge and the correct attitude regarding foster care services. In this regard Sellick et al., (2004:53) remark that..."the role of the social worker – for the child, the family and the foster cares – remains pivotal." Foster placement supervision is a rather specialised function requiring the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude. Sellick et al., (2004:18) emphasize that... "the success or otherwise of the child placement worker depends in part on the quality of the interventions in the life of the child

and parents before and after placement.” Hubbel, as quoted by Crosson-Tower (2004:324) summarises the role of foster care social workers aptly with the following statement:

“Being a foster care caseworker demands intelligence, fairness, good judgment, empathy and determination. The job entails being responsible for the safety of foster children, being the target of angry or bewildered biological parents, consoling confused or anxious children, and handling the demands and irritation of foster parents.....Endless reams of paperwork accompany all tasks.”

The second but equally important resource is the welfare organization rendering foster care services. Perlman (1957:43) already expressed herself in 1957 in this connection as follows: “the social agency is an organization fashioned to express the will of a society or of some group in that society as to social welfare”. The welfare organization is the support structure for the social worker from which they get their authority. It provides the resources the social worker needs for rendering foster care services. An important source from within the welfare organization is supervision, the vehicle to professional independence. Regarding resources to meet programme goals, Lewis, Packard and Lewis (2007:173) list facilities, equipment, and training needed in a welfare organization. Amongst human resource needs, Coulshed and Mullender (2006:123) list staff development and staff care as resources to be provided in support of staff of the welfare agency.

An essential resource are Children’s Courts chaired by a trained and sensitive presiding officer who understands the needs of the child and are familiar with relevant legislation, in this case the Children’s Act (2005). Indicators for child protection recommended by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC, 2006:13) are percentage of presiding officers who have attended any form of training on child care and development and family matters and length of experience in years as presiding officers in children’s courts. The assumption in this regard is that presiding officers of children’s courts should have some special qualities.

An important financial foster care resource is foster care grants provided by die South African Social Security Agency. Although foster parents need foster care grants, problems are reported in this connection mainly as the result of the limitation that foster care orders could only be extended by an order of the court, and not administratively. The root of the problem seems to be a backlog caused by a shortage of social workers and a lack of capacity to process extension orders (News24, 2011).

A very important community resource which forms the basis of a well-functioning foster care system is prospective foster families (Böning, 2009:254). In this regard, the HIV/AIDS

situation in South Africa, which developed into a problem of crisis proportions over the last two decades, had a drastic effect on foster care resources and practices (Gerrard & Ross, 2009:5). Placements had to be found for large numbers of children infected or affected by HIV or AIDS, placing a huge burden on the shoulders of family welfare organisations and the Department of Social Development. Kinship foster placements, although done in the past, rapidly became a dominant pattern (Delport, 2007:37). Many children had to be placed with families of the parents of these children, increasing the foster placement situations to be supervised multifold. Recruitment of suitable foster parents thus became a major issue. This placed a huge demand on especially the time and skills of foster care workers.

The following research question guided the empirical investigation: To what extent are needed resources available for foster care work in the Free State Province?

### **3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The study was done with the following goal and objectives in mind.

#### **3.1 Goal**

The primary goal of the study is to determine which needed resources are available to the foster care workers in the Free State Province.

#### **3.2 Objectives**

In order to reach the abovementioned goal, the following objectives will be pursued to:

- Describe the resources required in a foster care system.
- Determine the needs of foster care workers in the Free State Province regarding resources necessary for foster care work
- Make recommendation regarding the needs of foster care worker in connection with foster care work in the Free State Province.

### **4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION**

In order to practice foster care social work, a variety of resources must be available and accessible to the foster care worker in the Free State Province.

## 5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Research approach

The research approach will be a mixed methods approach in view of the goals and objectives of the study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). It will focus on the experience of foster care workers in the Free State Province of existing and needed resources for carrying out their work.

### 5.2 Research design

The research design is mostly a phenomenological one which is used in science to describe a knowledge that relates empirical observations of phenomena to each other. The researcher is of the opinion that the phenomenological design is most suitable qualitative design in light of the goals and objectives of this study

Phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research approach. Its primary position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to the environment. A theoretical perspective supports the philosophical stance underpinning a methodology, and provides a context for the process involved and a basis for its logic and its criteria. There are two main phenomenological approaches: descriptive (eidetic) and interpretive (hermeneutic). They differ in how findings are generated and used to augment professional knowledge (Flood, 2010: 7-8).

According to Flood (2010: 8-9) Husserl's philosophical ideas gave rise to the descriptive phenomenological approach to enquiry. Husserl believed that subjective information should be important to scientists seeking to understand human motivation because human actions are influenced by what they perceive to be real. Thus, to bring out the essential components of the lived experiences specific to a group of people, a scientific approach is needed. This requires researchers shed all prior personal knowledge (bracketing) to prevent their biases and preconceptions influencing the study, and to ensure scientific rigor. Flood (2010: 9) further explains that Heidegger suggested that rather than focus on people or phenomena, the exploration of the lived experience or 'dasein' ('the situated meaning of a human in the world') should be the focus. Hermeneutics goes beyond description of core concepts and essences to look for meanings embedded in common practices – what people experience rather than what they consciously know. Heidegger used the term 'lifeworld' to express the idea that individuals' realities are invariably influenced by the world in which they live. According to Flood (2010: 9) Heidegger asserted that humans are embedded in their world to such an extent that subjective experiences are inextricably linked with social, cultural and

political contexts. While individuals are free to make choices, their freedom is not absolute – it is circumscribed by the specific conditions of their daily lives. Another philosophical assumption is that presuppositions or expert knowledge on the part of the researcher are valuable guides to enquiry. Heidegger emphasised that it is impossible to rid the mind of the background of understandings that has led the researcher to consider a topic worthy of research in the first place; thus personal knowledge is useful and necessary to phenomenological research (Flood, 2010: 10).

Phenomenological research is inductive and descriptive. The researcher aims to understand the cognitive subjective perspective of the person who has the experience and the effect that perspective has on the lived experience. In phenomenological research, the interview is reflective rather than observational as seen in quantitative research. The interview is the main method of data collection: participants' descriptions can be explored, illuminated and probed using reflection, clarification, requests for examples and descriptions, and listening techniques. While the researcher may start with only a general plan about the direction the conversation will take, it will pass through three structured stages: Establishing the context of the interviewee's experience, the construction of the experience and reflection on the meaning it holds (Flood, 2010: 10-11).

### **5.3 Research participants**

The term sample always implies the simultaneous existence of a population or universe of which the sample is a smaller section or a set of individuals selected from a population. A distinction is drawn between the terms universe and population. Universe refers to all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested. Population, on the other hand, is a term that sets boundaries on the study units. It refers to individuals in the universe who possess specific characteristics (De Vos et al., 2005: 193)

The participants of this study consisted of the total universe of foster care workers from NGO's in the Free State and were made up of thirty foster care workers working within the Free State Province and who rendered or renders foster care services. This included specifically non-profit organization in the Free State region. No sampling thus had to be done. The social workers (foster care workers) were also grouped according to organisations employing them, leading to number of organisations also presented in the tabulations.

Due to some complications that presented itself during the time of data collection, the final sample consisted of 22 respondents from 10 NGO's in the Free State. Complications

included that most respondents could not attend focus groups after office hours as most have families to care for, no time could be found within office hours which fit all invited respondents to attend and crisis's that presented prevented some respondents not being able to attend.

Thirteen respondents were from three NGO's in Bloemfontein - they received and completed the questionnaires and were interviewed during focus groups that were held in March 2012.

Three respondents were from two NGO's in Kroonstad – they received and completed the questionnaires and were interviewed according to the interview schedule during focus groups that were held in March 2012.

Three respondents were from an NGO in Welkom – they received and completed the questionnaires and were interviewed according to the interview schedule during focus groups that were held in March 2012.

Three respondents came from other NGOs in the Free State – they received and completed the questionnaires and were interviewed according to the interview schedule during focus groups that were held in March 2012.

#### **5.4 Data-gathering instruments**

Data were gathered by means of questionnaires and focus groups. The purpose of the questionnaire was (due to time constraint which each of the respondents face in service rendering) to save time in gathering demographic information like age, gender, number of years working as social worker, number of foster care cases. These are close-ended questions which need no extra explanation or exploration and the researcher found it time consuming to discuss these in the group. Therefore the researcher found it best to address these in a questionnaire. The questionnaires were followed by focus group discussions which provided the foster care workers the opportunity to discuss the resources available to them and also to provide an opportunity to voice concern with regards to the lack of resources. The researcher believes that a comprehensive knowledge of this could not be obtained with the use of questionnaires only and therefore made use of focus groups.

According to De Vos et al. (2005: 300) a focus group can be defined as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined are of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. It is also described as a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher. The use of focus groups

best serves the purpose of this study as it will provide both exploratory and descriptive information.

In the case of the focus groups, an interview schedule was used (Greeff, 2011:360). The initial plan was to compile three focus groups from three different areas of the Free State province, choosing the members of the group on an availability basis (Grinnell & Unrau, 2008:150) at a time convenient for all the members of the groups (Greeff, 2011:360) .

## 5.5 Procedure

- Ethical approval for the project has already been secured by submitting a research proposal and obtaining approval from the North-West University (NWU-0001-10 SU).
- Questionnaire were designed to obtain demographic details like age, gender, number of years working as social worker and number of foster care cases.
- Focus groups and personal interviews were held to obtain information regarding the resources available to the foster care workers or the lack thereof.
- Data was processed and analyzed and results were interpreted by the researcher and are discussed in more details later on in this article.
- A pilot study was done in order to identify and eliminate any deficiency or uncertainty with regards to the discussion guideline and questionnaire.
- The report was written and guidelines were formulated which is provided at the end of this article.

## 5.6 Ethical Aspects

The following ethical aspects were attended to:

- The rights of the respondents were taken into consideration and respected at all times (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:37-38).
- Ethical approval for the research project was obtained from the Ethical committee of the School for Psycho-Social Behavioural Sciences of the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus).
- Consent from the participants was voluntary and informed, without any implied deprivation or penalty for refusal to participate. They were informed that their participation can be terminated at any time (Strydom, 2005: 67).
- All information obtained about participants was treated confidentiality (Babbie, 2011:482). Participants were informed of this confidentiality within the questionnaire as seen in Appendix 2 and they were also reminded of this at the beginning of the focus groups.

- Participation remained anonymous in that no names were made known (Strydom, 2005:61-63). The researcher made it clear during the beginning of the focus groups that none of the names of the participants or the organisation for which they work would be made known within the article.

## **5.7 Data analysis and interpretation**

The analysis and interpretation of the qualitative responses obtained in the focus groups were done by making use of thematic analysis according to Byrne (2001). The demographic data obtained in the questionnaires was reduced by the researcher herself by making use of simple statistics only requiring a pocket calculator.

## **5.8 Pilot Study**

A pilot study was done in order to identify and eliminate any deficiency or uncertainty with regards to the discussion guideline and questionnaire. For this purpose, one foster care worker from an NGO in Bloemfontein was identified and in an interview the questionnaire was completed and the researcher tested the discussion guideline with the respondent.

During the interview it became clear that the questionnaire and the discussion guideline were mostly sufficient. Therefore only slight modifications were made. The final discussion guideline and questionnaire are attached in Appendix A and B of this article.

In the following section some of the data is presented in quantitative format by means of diagrams and tables to give an indication of the profile of the research participants. The second part is presented in qualitative format, in line with the sequence in which the research approaches were followed.

# **6 THE EMPIRICAL DATA**

## **6.1 Demographic details**

The demographic information obtained in the questionnaires will be discussed below.

### **6.1.1 Profile of the participants**

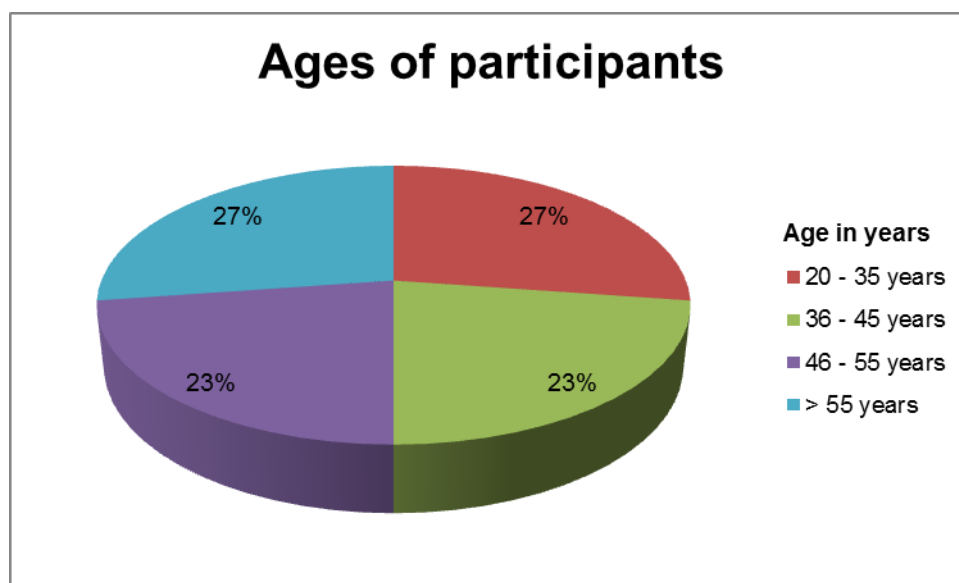
The profile of the participants was drawn up by considering their gender and age, career span and the organisations for which they work.

### ***Gender and age***

The first area of investigation pertained to the gender and age of the participants. The findings with regards to gender and age are presented below and in figure 1.

All the respondents were female which to some extent is to be expected, considering the gender profile of social workers in South Africa. It was not determined how gender influences the views of the respondents because it was not one of the objectives.

**FIGURE 1: AGE OF PARTICIPANTS**

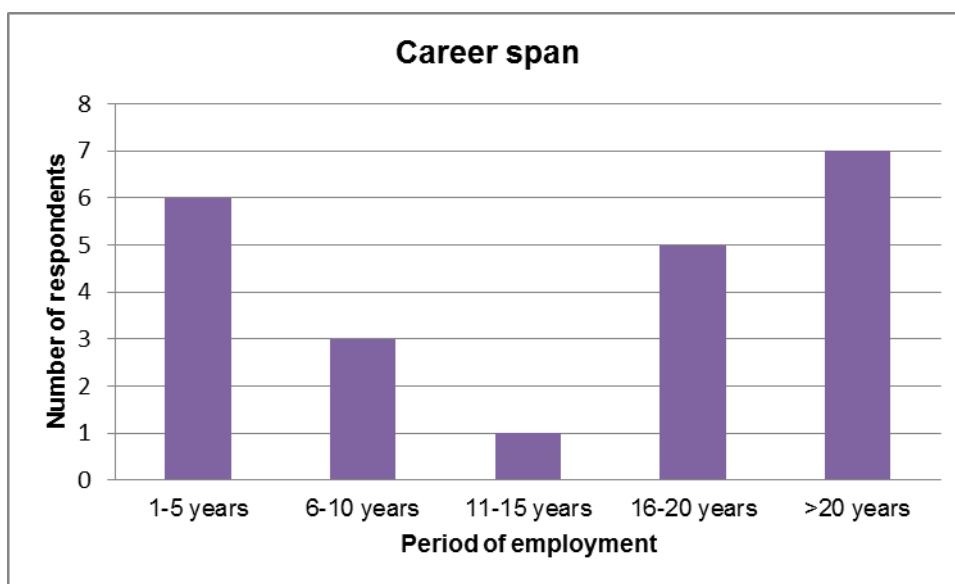


With regards to age, it is clear that there is more or less an even distribution across all the different age groups. It gives an indication of the even distribution of age amongst social workers in foster care practice.

### ***Career span***

The second area of investigation pertained to the career span of the participant. The findings are presented in figure 2.

FIGURE 2: CAREER PATH



From figure 2 it is clear that most of the respondents were experienced social workers.

Six of the respondents have been working as social workers for between one and five years. Three of the 22 respondents have been working for longer than five years. One of the respondents has more than ten years' experience. Five of the respondents have more than 15 years experience, while seven of them have more than twenty years experience as a social worker.

The opinions reflected in the research data represent views over a broad spectrum of experience. The level of experience lends legitimacy to the answers given by the respondents, and to the statement on age distribution.

### ***Organisation***

In the third place, enquiries were made as to the type of organization that each participant represented as well as the city or town in which these organizations are situated. For ethical reasons the names of the organisations will not be disclosed. This information is presented below and in figure 3.

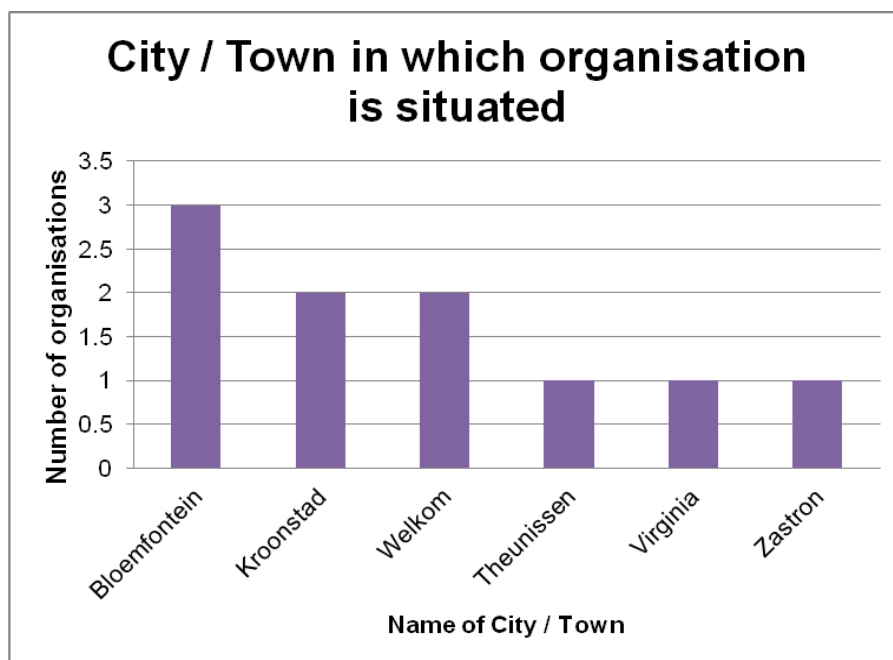
## **6.2 Organisation Profiles**

### ***Type of organisations***

All the organisations are NGO's. All the NGO's are family and child welfare organizations. Social workers from government departments were intentionally not included in this study

as the researcher was aiming to place the focus on NGO's focusing on child welfare services in particular.

**FIGURE 3: LOCATION OF THE ORGANISATION**



N = 10

The participants represented NGO's in ten organisations in six different towns or cities and one province – Free State. Three organisations are situated in Bloemfontein, two are situated in Kroonstad, two in Welkom, one in Theunissen, one in Virginia and one in Zastron. They were thus well spread geographically. As mentioned previously, social workers from government departments were intentionally not included in this study as the researcher was aiming to place the focus on NGO's focusing on child welfare services in particular.

### 6.3 Background Information

The size of social workers' caseloads is a big concern in South Africa, since there are too few social workers for the amount of work. Many authors mention the vast numbers of foster care cases in South Africa and how this is preventing social workers from rendering in-depth services to any of their clients (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72).

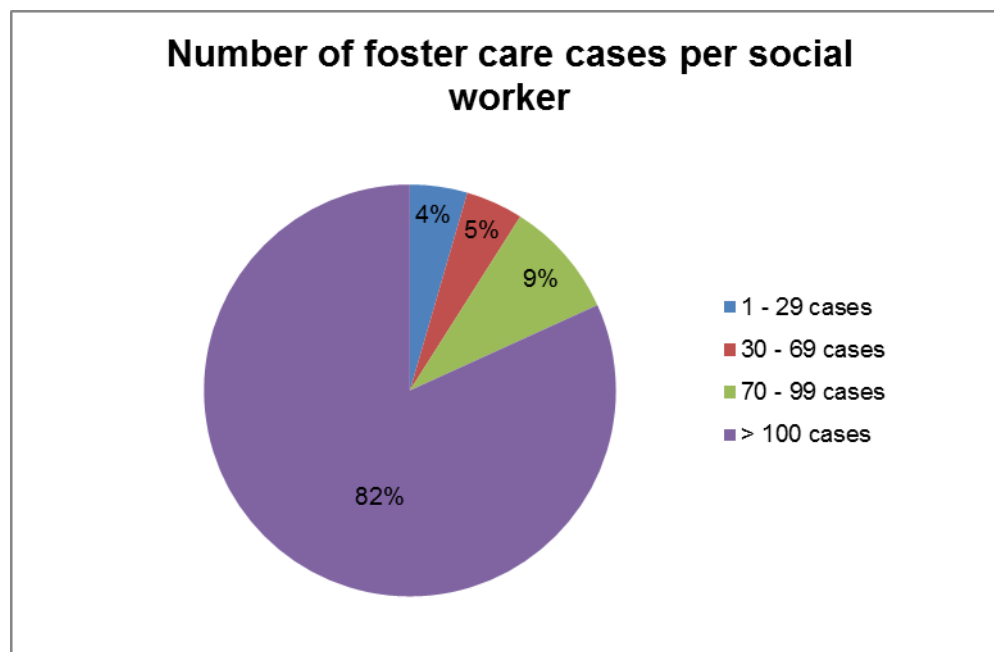
To gain an understanding of their workload, the participants were asked about the number of foster care cases in their caseloads. This information will prove to be valuable in interpreting the data.

Furthermore, background information were also obtained with regard to the number of social workers employed by each organization, foster care as specialty field and the scope of the area in which services are rendered.

### 6.3.1 Size of caseloads

The following pie chart illustrates the size of the respondents' caseloads:

**FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF FOSTER CASES PER FOSTER CARE SOCIAL WORKER**



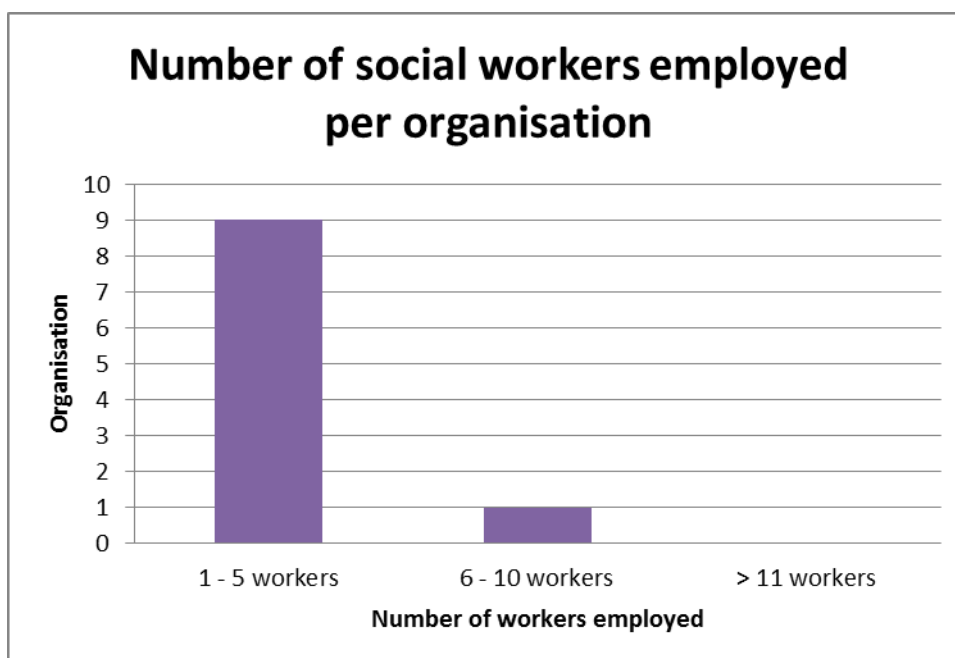
N = 100%

One respondent has a caseload that ranges between 1-29 cases. One respondent has a caseload ranging between 30 – 69 cases. Two respondents have between 70 - 99 cases, while eighteen respondents' caseloads more than 100. One of these respondents indicated that her caseload is 489. This means that 18 out of the 22 respondents have caseloads bigger than 100. These numbers are very high, and it is to be expected that it will place some pressure on available sources, including the energy of the social worker.

### 6.3.2 Number of social workers employed at each organization

It can be assumed that the more social workers there are employed at an organization, the more the caseloads can be distributed and shared amongst all the social workers of that organization. The number of social workers employed at each organisation is presented in figure 5. The respondents were requested to only provide the number of foster care cases that they have and not include any other generic case work.

FIGURE 5: NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY THE ORGANISATIONS IN THE RESEARCH GROUP



N = 10

From the above figure it is clear that in most cases between one and five social workers are employed at each organisation. Only one organisation has more than 5 social workers employed.

#### 6.4 Foster Care as speciality field

Some organizations have certain specialty fields within the organizations. They might have one or more social workers dedicated only to do foster care while another does only the intakes. The enquiry was made whether foster care was such a specialty field within the participants' organizations. The findings are in presented in table 2.

TABLE 2: FOSTER CARE AS SPECIALTY FIELD

Is Foster Care a Speciality Field for you in your Organisation?			
Yes	55%	No	45%

N = 100%

In almost 50% of the organizations, foster care was a specialty field where the social workers could devote all their resources to foster care services. In the rest of the organisations foster care was not a specialty field, and was functionally located within the

broader field of child welfare. This has an impact on the amount of resources the social workers have available to render foster care services as they will have to divide their available resources between foster care and other generic case work.

## 6.5 Area of Service rendering

For further background, it was assessed whether the participants rendered foster care services only to clients living within the city or town or to other clients outside the city or town boundaries also. This information is presented in table 3.

**TABLE 3: SCOPE OF SERVICE RENDERING**

<b>Scope of service rendering per social worker.</b>			
<b>Within same town / city boundaries</b>	95.5%	<b>Outside of town / city boundaries</b>	4.5%

N = 100%

In most cases the participants rendered services only to clients living within the city or town in which the organization is situated. The fact that only a small percentage of organisation render services outside the boundaries of their city or town, may result in some areas not receiving effective and sufficient services.

## 7 DATA FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

There are always a number of challenges that foster care workers face during the foster care process – for example foster children with behavioural problems, aiming to help guide the foster parents and foster children to achieve positive outcomes when the foster children leave the foster care system and recruiting suitable foster parents. There are also some challenges that are a result of the unique South African context. Some of these were discussed during focus groups held with social workers working at NGO's in the Free State and the outcomes will be discussed below.

The interview schedule that can be found in Appendix 1 was used to conduct and guide the interviews.

## **7.1 Organisation Resources**

An organization is a consciously coordinated entity, with a relatively identifiable boundary, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or goals. Organisations encompass or involve workforce and structures of staffing, systems of working and markets of demand for goods or services, as well as less tangible facets such as culture, ethos and patterns of power and influence. Organizations are also places where identities can be formed, social lives and careers established and political aspirations realized (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 74 – 75).

Since it is not always possible, or even desirable, to set up wholly new organizations, the wider challenge to professionals is to seek planned change within their own agencies, whether they observe that service or employment practices are outdated or oppressive. A parallel stimulus from managers towards organisational change is being triggered by the need to balance increased demand and higher expectations with a shortfall in resources (Mullender & Perrot, 2002: 81).

During the focus groups at the different organisations in the Free State, the first main question asked in the groups were to discuss organisational resources available to the foster care worker with regards to the foster care system in the Free State, focusing on behavioural problems represented by the foster child and the time and skills of the foster care worker to therapeutically address these issues, the Code of Ethics and the facilities at their organisation which can either enable or hinder them to provide a quality service.

### **7.1.1 The Foster Care System**

While discussing the foster care system with foster care workers in the Free State, it became clear that every foster care worker were working with foster children representing with behavioural problems, depression and unresolved losses. In fact, some workers said that they have very few cases where foster care children did not have behavioural problems. There are a number of foster care placements that failed because of these behavioural problems.

Reasons for behavioural problems varied between the organisations. Social workers working in a rural area of Bloemfontein were of the opinion that the community, in which the children grow up, had a large influence on their behaviour. They mentioned that there are a lot of drug abuse, gangs and street children in the community. Another organisation in Bloemfontein felt that some of the main reasons were the fact that the foster parents did not

have the necessary skills or insight with regards to the underlying issue which were causing the behaviour problems and therefore did not know how to handle it.

There were also a clear differentiation between kinship foster care and non-relative foster care. An organisation in Welkom mentioned that in kinship foster care, most of the foster children are placed in foster care as babies but the foster parents never tell them that they are in foster care. When the foster child must sign certain documents according to the new Children's Act he or she finds out that the parents that he or she is living with is not their real parents. This causes a lot of these foster children to act out by means of behavioural problems. They also mentioned that another cause is the age difference that there is between the foster parents and foster children. In many cases the children are placed with grandparents who are not able, either physically or mentally to cope with their grandchildren's' behaviour. The children start to rule the household and the foster parents are not able to gain back control. This seems to be a problem in both small children and teenagers.

Other social workers in Bloemfontein felt that this behaviour was more common in non-relative foster care than in kinship foster care due to the trauma that children go through when removed from their biological parents. The foster children often struggle with adapting in the new environment. In kinship foster care they experienced that the reason for behavioural problems were due to unresolved losses.

Some social workers in Kroonstad were of the opinion that a main reason for foster children acting out was the fact that there were no resources available for the rural community. The foster care workers experience a problem with understanding the culture of the foster families and there is also a language barrier which makes it difficult for the worker to address possible issues.

### 7.1.2 Time and Skills

When it came down to discussing the time and skills of the foster care worker to handle the behavioural problems of foster children, most foster care workers were of the opinion that if they knew about the behavioural problems and IF they had the time to provide a therapeutic service to the foster parents and foster children, they would in most cases be able to sufficiently address the issues which were causing behavioural problems in foster children. They were all of the opinion that they had the sufficient skills to provide such a therapeutic service. The main challenge that they face are too little time due to high case loads and administration that took up most of their time. **The fact that they experience a lack of**

**time may be related to the problem that they do not always become aware of behaviour problems amongst foster children.**

It was mentioned that there were a large increase over the last decade or two with regards to the amount of administration required in foster care. The case loads have also grown. Most foster care workers find this frustrating as this is causing them to not have the time to provide a therapeutic service to the foster children and foster parents and this means that they are only managing crises instead of managing their services. Once again, this points to time as a scarce commodity with other service implications.

A foster care worker in Kroonstad mentioned that she is the only social worker for this specific organisation therefore she was the only worker providing services in the area for which this organisation is responsible. She also does intermediary work in the area and therefore does not have the time to render a therapeutic service. The lack of time to render services to those needing it the most is serious obstacle and is related to a shortage of social workers.

There were some of the foster care workers that did feel that there were cases where they felt that even though they did have certain therapeutic skills and training, some issues like depression or other psychological issues, and even scholastic or health issues, would best be addressed by referring the foster children and parents to other professionals who are specifically trained to address these issues. They are of the opinion that they might do more damage than good to the child if they were to attempt to address these issues themselves. **This point to a need for specialist professionals and thus more of a team approach.**

The challenges faced in this are that in the smaller towns these other resources might not be available. An organisation in Kroonstad mentioned that they had limited resources available and could not always refer a child with behavioural problems to another professional person. The closest town or city to which they could refer them is Bloemfontein, however then they again face a challenge of transportation required to get to Bloemfontein and the finances to pay for other professional services. The foster care workers mentioned that there is a psychiatric department at the local hospital, however there is only one psychologist whom is also overworked and not always available to render the necessary services. They also mentioned that there are no follow-up services available which they felt are necessary. **There is thus a need for mental health services for children.**

Even in the larger cities like Bloemfontein, some organisations were of the opinion that even though there were resources available to which foster children and parents could be referred, the systems were not effective. For example if a foster child were to have scholastic issues, the school is supposed to refer the child for an assessment to find out whether the child is eligible for special education, however the school does not refer the child. The foster parents turn to the foster care worker for help but the foster care worker is not able to refer a child for such an assessment. By the time that the school does refer a child, it might be (and is in most cases) too late for a successful intervention. On the other side of the spectrum there is also the problem that there are not enough schools available in the Free State for children with learning or physical disabilities. The question of how effective these other resources are, then presented itself. **This point to a lack of resources in the allied area of education.**

Again the differentiation between kinship foster care and non-relative foster care were made. An organisation in Bloemfontein mentioned that many of the foster children in non-relative foster care were already receiving therapeutic services from other professionals. However they mentioned that in the rural areas, where kinship foster care were more prevalent, there are a lack of these resources and can they not always be referred to other resources. **This is a problem characteristic of rural areas which places an exceptional burden on all human service organisations in rural areas.**

### 7.1.3 Values and Ethics

There is a lack of conceptual clarity about many of the terms used that form part of the lexicon of 'social work values and ethics. The boundaries of 'social work values and ethics' are imprecise and ill-defined, so the notion of what should constitute 'Social work values and ethics' is itself part of a discussion about the nature of social work values. In trying to understand values and ethics in social work, we should be as much concerned with the questions we ask, as the answers we might find – not perhaps a satisfying position for the busy practitioner in search of help in dealing with a particular client (Shardlow, 2002: 33 - 34).

The Code of Ethics can according to some members of the focus groups be considered as an organisational resource as any social worker working at an organisation should be registered as a social worker at the SACSSP (South African Council for Social Services Practitioners) and are therefore bound to the Code of Ethics provided by them. The fact that social workers should be registered subjects them to ethical standards which serve as

protection for their clients. It thus serves as a form of quality control regarding the services of the organization.

Three aspects mentioned in the Code of Ethics were discussed in the focus groups. These were the following: According to the code of Ethics in SA, we as Social Workers have the obligation to render a quality service and should not refuse service-rendering to a client irrespective of whether or not the client is in a position to pay the fees for such services. It also states that: Conduct that concerns the community shall mean, for a social service practitioner to enhance and promote service-rendering to the community under all circumstances by utilizing and developing resources in the community (SACSSP, 1986).

The Policy Guidelines for Course of Conduct, Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers (SACSSP, 2012) states that the primary mission of social workers is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and impoverished. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of client systems. The word “client systems” includes individuals, families, groups and communities. It further states that social workers’ primary goal is to assist individuals, families, groups and communities and address social needs and social problems. Social workers elevate service to others above self-interest. They are encouraged to contribute a portion of their social work time to little or no personal advantage by way of volunteering or providing a community service.

All the foster care workers mentioned that as they work for NGO’s they do not charge their clients any fees for services rendered. Therefore the statement of not refusing service-rendering and rendering a free service to a client is mostly effective. With regards to this, a foster care worker in Kroonstad did mention that they charged the clients a R5-00 fee for doing a foster care placement in the past. This was done for the sole purpose of covering the costs of all the paper work done by the organisation. She mentioned that the foster parents did not have a problem with this in principal as it created co-responsibility and promoted participation in the process. It also created a feeling that they paid for a service and therefore they received a service. She mentioned however that they did not charge for a service if the foster parents were not in a position to pay. They rendered the service in any case. After it was changed to rendering a free service, she is of the opinion that the clients became much more demanding. They do not take ownership of their responsibilities anymore. She also experienced that they give up on the foster care placement much easier. She feels that the foster parents attached more value to the foster care when they

pay for the service and that they were proud of their role within the service they received. She still feels that this has a place and a meaning in current service rendering.

Some of the foster care workers mentioned that a suggestion was made with the implementation of the new Children's Act that the ideal would be that every one social worker should have a caseload of only sixty clients. The question now raised of whether this statement is truly as effective as was thought, because even though the Children's Act does not explicitly state the above mentioned the idea was brought up, but the Code of Ethics demands that service-rendering may not be refused to any client. They felt that it was not a realistic expectation looking at the current caseloads of foster care workers and they also felt that the two systems were ambiguous with regards to this. They suggested that the statement should read: "Conduct that concerns a client shall mean, inter alia, for a social service practitioner to not refuse service-rendering **or to refuse to bring them in contact with the resources that can provide the necessary services** to a client irrespective of whether or not the client is in a position to pay the fees for such services

When discussing rendering a quality service most of the foster care workers in the focus groups felt that this statement was not effective or realistic in practice. Due to the large caseloads that each of these workers face, they feel that they do not have the time anymore to render a quality service. The workers mentioned that currently they feel as if they are only managing crises and doing the administration with regards to placing children in foster care and maintaining the foster care grants. They all have the training and qualification to render therapeutic services, but none of them have the time to do this. They felt that it might be in the best interest of the child to rather refer him or her to another professional than to render a poor quality service and even perhaps do more harm than good due to lack of time. It is however a need for all of these workers to be able to render a quality service and all of them aim to render the best quality service as is possible with their caseloads. One of the workers also mentioned that it is important to keep in mind that the meaning of quality differed from community to community. Some communities connect quality to therapeutic services, others – for example the more rural communities – connect quality to physical things like housing and running water. The perception of quality is also defined differently by certain generations. In certain cases she feels that even the Children's act places boundaries on quality service rendering. **What the social workers implied is that there is a relationship between quality services and human resources, and that there is a strain on available human resources**

In all group discussions the foster care workers felt that the final statement was not at all realistic or effective. Some felt that they can try to develop resources in the community,

however in order to do that they need the time and finances available which it requires. It also does not happen overnight. It develops over a period of time. Currently most are just aiming to maintain the resources currently available, which is in itself already very time consuming. Some are of the opinion that community and resource development is a specialized service on its own. Some workers felt that it cannot be expected of a statutory worker (or foster care worker) to do community development and be effective in both roles. **This clearly points to a need for community and resource development, intervention on macro level thus by the necessary qualified staff**

#### 7.1.4 Facilities

With regards to the facilities available for these foster care workers, most agreed that the facilities at each organisation were sufficient to a certain extent. The foster care workers working at the smaller organisations mentioned that their facilities were a bit more limited. Some limitations were in regards to space to have group work. Social workers in Kroonstad mentioned that they had a data projector at the organisation which they would use for group presentations, however in order to use this projector they had to use another foster care worker's computer to connect it to. This would cause that the worker, whose computer is being used, is unable to do her work which could in turn cause her to fall behind with her administrative work. Some foster care workers felt that their facilities were sufficient at the office itself however when they had to go out to the community to the service points, the facilities were less sufficient.

Some workers felt that even though the organisation's facilities were sufficient for service rendering, it did not reflect the professionalism of neither the organisation nor the foster care workers working there. One worker mentioned that when it comes to the offices, the first cuts that are made are with regards to the luxuries. She also felt that this is wrong and believes that if you want a community to perceive you as foster care worker as professional, you and your office should reflect professionalism. **There is thus a need for the necessary office technology to get the work done.**

Other issues with regards to the facilities were a lack of human resources – from administrative personnel to social workers, a lack of vehicles and the increasing cost of fuel, electricity and stationary.

## 7.2 Community Resources

A main resource that drives a community is Social Policy. Social policy aims to improve human welfare and to meet human needs for education, health, housing and social security.

Social policies will be approached in vastly different ways depending on the ideological leanings of the governing power. Important areas of social policy are (Wikipedia, 2009):

- The welfare state
- Social security
- Unemployment insurance
- Pensions
- Healthcare
- Social housing
- Social care
- Social exclusion
- Education policy
- Crime and Criminal justice
- Labor regulation

The above mentioned policies are important for foster care because it provides guidelines, principles, legislation and activities that affect the living conditions conducive to human welfare and therefore also in certain settings for foster care.

The term 'social policy is defined by the New Dictionary of Social Work (1995: 59) as the accepted guideline for the changing, maintenance or creation of living conditions conducive to human welfare. As mentioned earlier social policy aims to improve human welfare and to meet human needs for education, health, housing and social security. The foster care worker can use social policy as a resource as it provides a guideline when rendering services and making decisions and recommendations. It can also be used to provide support to the foster family, foster child and biological parents in ways that the organisations might not be able to, for example financial assistance.

The second main question asked in the groups were to discuss the community resource available to the foster care worker with regards to the foster care system in the Free State, focusing on social policy which includes the rights of a child and best interest of a child, the Social Security Act, Law, the foster care placement and reunification and the use of volunteers

Social justice is central to the mission of social work and the focus of intense debates throughout the nation. Social policies reflect decisions about what constitutes justice and how it can be achieved. A clear vision of a just society is offered as “a society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure (Barusch, 2006: 1-5). Acknowledgment is given in judicial reformation to the fact that the developmental needs of a child are legally enforceable right. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1995 stated: “The child shall enjoy special protection and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means, to

enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose the best interest of the child shall be the paramount consideration” (Schultz, 2002: 6 – 7).

### **7.2.1 Rights of a Child and Best Interest of the Child**

The rights of a child and the best interest of a child is another resource used by foster care workers as set out in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and Section 7 of the Children’s Act. These can serve as guidelines for the foster care worker when having to make decisions over a child’s life. When a decision or a recommendation has to be made with regards to a child certain things should be in place. These things are the best interest and the rights of the child. If these are not in place, the child might be placed in a situation where he or she is worse off than where they came from. While discussing the use of the rights and the best interest of a child in the foster care system the question arose whether it was always possible to place the rights and best interest of a child central in the service rendering to a foster child. Some of the workers in the focus groups were of the opinion that it can and that it should be. They feel that it should be the guideline for every foster care worker. They feel that the Children’s Act is very clear with regards to the best interest of a child and the rights of a child. They are also of the opinion that foster care workers should start standing on the rights of a child more prominently and start using it in report writing and including it in the permanency plan for each child placed in foster care.

Others were of the opinion that even though it should be, it is not always possible to put it central in service rendering. A reason for this is because every situation differs. Sometime a child’s best interest is to be placed with a family member, but that family member might not be in a position or even willing to take the child into his or her care. In other instances people fight over getting a child in their care and even though they might have the best intentions, it might not always be in the best interest of a child to be placed with those people. Part of a child’s rights are to take part in the process, but sometimes the foster care worker needs to act against that of what a child wants to ensure the best possible care for that child. Sometimes the foster care worker even has to break a child’s trust in him or her by revealing issues privately shared by the child. This in turn can cause that the foster care worker will no longer be able to render a quality service to that child as that child no longer trusts the worker. Some of the workers of the organisations in the smaller towns felt that they cannot always place the rights of a child central in service rendering as they have limited resources and have to work with what they have. If it is in a child’s best interest to be placed in a children’s home but there are no children homes in the area, they have to

look at what weighs the most and act according to that. Also, in a smaller town with limited resources, if a child needs special services like special education for instance, he or she has the right to such a service but if there aren't the resources available to provide this service, the right of the child cannot be placed central. The argument emerging regarding this issue of the best interests of the child is that there are not adequate resources available to make choices.

Other issues that came up during the discussion were the fact that children are very aware of their rights and sometimes they misuse and abuse it. They do not realize that with rights there come certain responsibilities. There are also different perceptions as to what the rights and best interest of a child is and how it should be used. This causes a conflict between all parties trying to act in the best interest of the child. The foster care worker does what he or she can, but sometimes the foster care system does not allow him or her to act in the best interest of a child. Some workers experienced that courts ignore the rights and best interest of a child. Especially when lawyers come into play it becomes extremely hard to act in the best interest of a child as they fight for what their client wants. They do not consider whether what they are fighting for will be in the best interest of a child or not. The rights of a child are a crisis in itself as the systems are not geared for providing in the rights. Some workers shared that they have a number of children with whom they work whose parents come from Lesotho. One of the rights of a child is that each child has the right to an identity, however when an attempt is made to obtain a birth certificate or ID document, the Department of Home Affairs have their own agenda. This in turn causes a cycle of problems with regards to completing the foster care placement, registering for a foster care grant, enrolling these children into school, and so forth.

### **7.2.2 Financial assistance (Foster Care Grants)**

Another challenge is the deluge in foster care cases. According to the Annual Report of the Department of Social Development 2000-2001 foster care grants were received for 49 843 foster children by foster parents in 2000. In 2009, there were 500 000 children in foster care in South Africa. More and more families are beginning to rely on grants for financial support and the foster care grant is particularly appealing, since it is almost three times the amount of the child support grant. The danger here is for foster care to become a poverty alleviating measure, instead of a strategy for child protection. Some are of the opinion that impoverished parents could see in the foster care grant an incentive to place their children in the care of others (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72).

Section 71(6) of the draft regulations of the Children's Act (Department of Social Development, 2008) states that foster parents have the right to financial assistance with regards to the foster child/children in their care (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72).

Walker and Walker (2002: 56-57) are of the opinion that the social security system is the main instrument used by governments to tackle the issue of poverty.

During the discussion in the focus groups, the foster care workers were asked to give their thoughts regarding the above mentioned statement focusing their attention on the foster care grant. They shared that even though they felt that the social security system itself was not a solution for poverty the foster care grant did have a place and a meaning in the foster care system. They reacted more positively toward the foster care grant than towards other grants as they felt that there is more control over this grant than over the others. They mentioned that they could teach the foster parents how to do financial planning. They did however mention that there were cases where the foster care grants were being abused. In some instances it is not a case of abusing the grant, but rather a case of mismanagement of the grant that causes problems. Some were of the opinion that the grant caused co-dependency and they even had some cases where people told lies in order to foster children and by doing so, receive a foster care grant. They felt that in some instances it was no longer about the child, but about the grant.

When the question came up of whether the foster care grant was sufficient for providing in the needs of the foster children, most of the foster care workers felt that it was not. They all agreed that even though they felt that the grant was not sufficient, they believed that it is making a difference. To some foster families the foster care grant is the only source of income the family has. Some felt that it all depended on perspective, culture and the age of the foster child. They mentioned that the grant is currently R740 per foster child. They also mentioned that the foster care grant is not being adapted according to age. The amount stays the same regardless of whether the foster child is a baby, a toddler, a young child or a teenager even though certain age groups have a larger financial demand with regards to care than others. A baby's physical care can put quite a financial strain on a family as they need things like diapers and milk. Teenagers also require more in terms of finances when they start to do sports, go to school camps or participate in other activities common to their age group. Toddlers and young children in primary school on the other hand do not require as much financial care. In current times it is not always possible for children to go to a school close to their home and sometimes have to travel in order to get a proper education. The fares for public transport also have to come out of the foster care grant and then the grant gets used up very quickly. Some children need to attend a school for special

education and if that school is not within close proximity of the home in which the child was placed, then the child would need to live in a hostel and the costs for that would also have to come out of the foster care grant. All of the above mentioned things only came down to the physical needs and care of a child. In addition to physical care, most children removed from biological care need therapeutic services to work through the trauma caused by either the experiences that caused them to be removed or the anxiety of being removed and placed with people who are not their biological parents and having to adapt in a new environment than what they are used to. As already established during the focus group discussion, the foster care workers do not have time to provide these therapeutic services to the foster children and they are mostly referred to other professionals. These professionals however can charge a large amount of money for such therapeutic services, which should also be paid out of the foster care grant. In spite of all of these, the basic cost of living also increases substantially over time. The cost of food, electricity and fuel keep on rising.

One foster care worker was of the opinion that if the foster care grant was to be taken away, the organisations itself will have to compensate therefore but there are no funds available at the organisations for this. Another mentioned that as school fees and stationary is free for foster children and if the grant was to be used only for clothes and food, it should be more or less sufficient, but the reality is that the whole household is now dependent on the grant. **It seems as if the foster care grants were conditionally regarded as a valuable source if used for the purposes for which it is intended.**

Other issues experienced by them with regards to the foster care grant are the application process which is sometimes extremely difficult. In cases where someone suspects that a grant may be abused, it is referred to the foster care worker for investigation. The workers felt that it was not the responsibility of the foster care worker to investigate possible fraud with regards to grants. This in turn increases the workload of the foster care worker also. It was also mentioned that foster parents are placed under enormous pressure due to place of safety payments that are not made while a child is in place of safety care at the prospective foster parents. **This point to a need for more government employees to successfully manage the grants in order to alleviate the pressure put on foster care workers to manage this.**

### 7.2.3 Law / Children's Act

South Africa lacks the resources to adequately carry out the stipulations of the Children's Act. It has been estimated that 66 000 social workers, and R44 billion, are needed to

implement the new Children's Act successfully. The reality is that there are currently only 16 504 social workers in South Africa. **This shortage of social workers poses a huge challenge for the South African foster care system.** The former minister of Social Development, Zola Zkweyiya, identified the shortage of magistrates trained as presiding officers of child welfare and the shortage of dedicated children's courts as further challenges to foster care. The shortage of social workers, children's courts, presiding officers of child welfare and foster parents, coupled with the high caseloads facing social workers all contribute to the huge backlog in foster care cases (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72). During the discussion with the focus groups it became clear that the foster care workers in the smaller towns in the countryside did experience this challenge with regards to the shortage of magistrates trained as presiding officers of child welfare and the shortage of dedicated children's courts. The workers working in the larger cities did not experience this challenge so much, although they did mention that there is a challenge in the number of caseloads being handled daily. Another concern mentioned was the fact that some of the workers experienced that recommendations made in their reports to the court was disregarded even though they felt that those recommendations were in the best interest of the child.

The relationship between social work and the law remains complex. One tension that remains is whether the law or an ethical duty of care is social work's defining mandate. Practitioners can experience contact with the law and legal system as stressful. Vulnerability is amplified by concerns that practitioners feel unable to retain their professional values in the face of work pressures, procedural and bureaucratic forms of decision-making, increasing control and regulation of practice, and growing managerialism. Judicial scrutiny of practice may further provoke feelings of vulnerability, particularly in the context of diminishing resources and infrequent post-qualifying training. Another tension surrounds purposes and outcomes. The legal mandate contains conflicting imperatives: needs versus rights, welfare versus justice and autonomy versus intervention (Braye & Preston-Shoot, 2002: 62 - 63).

The aim of the Children's Act (38/2005) is to:

- give effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution;
- set out principles relating to the care and protection of children;
- define parental responsibilities and rights;
- make further provision regarding children's courts;
- provide for partial care of children;
- provide for early childhood development;

- provide for the issuing of contribution orders;
- provide for prevention and early intervention;
- provide for children in alternative care;
- provide for foster care;
- provide for child and youth care centres and drop-in centres;
- make new provision for Convention on Inter-country Adoption;
- prohibit child abduction and to give effect to the Hague Convention or International Child Abduction;
- provide for surrogate motherhood;
- create certain new offences relating to children; and
- provide for matters connected therewith.

While discussing the aim of the Children's Act as mentioned above the foster care workers shared that according to the new Act they should now have contact with each foster family at least two times a year but because of the high caseloads, this expectation is not always realistic. They mentioned that reports are longer than it was in the past and there are forms that are additional to the reports, which should be signed by all role players. They felt that even though this requires more from them as workers, it ensured that a report with good quality was written. However waiting for documents which had to accompany the report is very time consuming. The foster care workers participating in the focus groups who were familiar with the previous Child Care Act said that the new Children's Act requires much more in terms of administration and this has a large impact on the costs involved. In the past, the Department of Social Development was responsible for making and sending copies of reports and court orders to all relevant role players. Now it has become the responsibility of the organisations itself. Even though all the foster care workers responded positively towards the new Children's Act, there were quite a few who expressed their frustration with regards to the systems and human resources required to make this Act a success not yet being in place and sufficient. They also felt that the systems that were in place did not know the Children's Act or their role in it, which also caused a lot of confusion and frustration. **There might be a need in more training to all role players with regards to the new Children's Act. There is also a need to get the systems and human resources in place which is required to make optimal use of the Children's Act.**

Some mentioned that the new Children's Act requires a new way of thinking from the foster care workers. They believe that the Act can be used very creatively and if it is used right from the beginning, it could save the foster care worker as well as the foster family a lot of trouble in the future. Some of these workers mentioned that they have previously worked

overseas with an Act very similar to this and confirmed that it encompasses much more than the previous Act. They did however mention that the infrastructure was present in that land which led to the successful application of the Act. They believe that once the infrastructure in South Africa is in place the new Act can work just as good, if not better than it does overseas. However this will take a lot of time and money to get all the human resources and systems in place.

Some workers did admit that they had a lot of resistance for the new Act as they were used to and familiar with the previous Act's processes and even might have fallen into a comfort zone with it. The resistance was because the new Act required work and more energy from the workers themselves. It requires a new way of thinking. Some positive aspects mentioned were the family group conferencing and parenting / foster care plans as mentioned in the new Act. Some believe that this could even save the foster care workers some time. It also promotes a shared responsibility and is much more focused and all-inclusive than the previous act. The foster care worker is bound by the Children's Act when removing a child from his or her biological parents and placing a child in alternative care. Therefore certain sections from the Act are used when doing this. But the Act can also be used as resource for foster care workers to make certain recommendations to the children's courts with regards to participation of the biological parents in for example parenting plans, involving more people in service rendering to the child, making sure that a child is not placed with sexual offenders.

**During the discussion the thought was brought up that the Act has great ideas and a good meaning behind it, but that a good idea that was not practical might become a greater burden than a resource.** It was also mentioned that the Act might even work better in the larger cities, than in small towns due to a lack of resources in the small towns. The new Act includes other role players like for instance teachers. The cause of frustration with this as previously mentioned is the fact that these other role players do not know the new Act or their role in it. Some foster care workers felt that the new Act exposes the foster care worker in a certain sense. With the new Act the foster care worker can get a court order for the biological parents to attend certain interventions, which is a very positive aspect for the foster care workers but the issue that this presents is the fact that there are no resources available to refer them to and as soon as this court order is issued, the services should be rendered. The new Act sets a norm of each social worker having only 60 cases, however in the current social welfare system in South Africa and in the Free State this is not realistic or practical.

#### 7.2.4 Availability of and Support to Foster Parents

The dominant view in South Africa and internationally is that the best environment for a child to grow up in is in a family. South African legislation supports this view, by prioritizing a foster care placement as the first option for alternative care. The White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Welfare, 1997:60) also expresses South Africa's support of the international viewpoint that children "...need to grow up in a nurturing and secure family that can ensure their survival, development, protection and participation in family and social life" because they are vulnerable. Families should impart values and life skills to their members while giving them a sense of belonging. Two critical elements of foster care and child welfare are a successful placement and family reunification. A successful placement could be difficult to attain, while successful reunification is only possible if the relationship between the biological parents, the siblings and the child can be maintained during placement. Reunification is difficult in the South African context, as biological families are rapidly disintegrating because of various factors. As is evident in the above discussion, the White Paper for Social Welfare recognizes the fact that families need support to cope with the increasing pressure and the Department for Social Development is committed to family-oriented policies and programs. Part of the foster care process is training and support for foster families, but again, heavy workloads prevent social workers from giving it the necessary attention (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72).

**During the focus group discussion the foster care workers shared that they are struggling to recruit foster parents.** In the rural areas most of the children placed in foster care are already staying with the family with whom they are placed. In most cases this is extended family. In other cases the organisations do have people that are willing to take children into their care, however these families are limited. Organisations try to help each other out by sharing foster families but there are not enough families to provide in the increasing need.

All prospective foster families go through a selection process however most of the foster care workers were of the opinion that the selection process was not sufficient. They explained that in most cases when a child is removed, it is already a crisis situation that needs to be acted on as soon as possible. In many of these cases the children are placed with other family or neighbours who are willing to care for this child as this is the only option the foster care worker has. There is no time to first put these families through a selection process. If a child is placed with complete strangers, it is usually with families that are known to the organisation and have already been selected to act as foster parents. These families, as mentioned before, are very scarce and usually already have some children in

temporary safe care (TSC) or foster care. The foster care worker does not always have time to follow up with references provided by prospective foster parents even though this forms part of the selection process. The workers also mentioned that they aim to train the foster families as best they could, but again due to caseloads they do not have the time to do thorough training with them. Some organisations do have Foster Care Forums where they train the foster parents and also provide opportunity to discuss any issues which may present itself. These forums are run by the foster care workers themselves. This is also time consuming and causes that these forums are not on a regular basis. Some of the foster care workers mentioned that even though they had forums, they experienced that most of the time the foster parents did not attend these meetings. In turn this increases the workload of the foster care worker as many issues that could be addressed in the forums in a group setup, now has to be addressed individually by the foster care worker. It also takes away some self empowerment from the community as it is members from the community that attend these forums and that help each other to solve some problems through their own experiences.

The foster care workers shared that they did not have the time to give the necessary support to the foster parents after a child has been placed. They do provide the basic information with regards to the child's rights and their responsibility as foster parents and the needed administrative information however they felt that **this was not nearly enough information to sufficiently prepare the foster parents for the issues they might have to face during the placement. This is causing frustration to both the foster parents and foster care worker.** In some cases the foster parents do not give their cooperation but the main causes for this according to the foster care workers are that the foster parents are not familiar with the process and because they might feel as if they are left to fend for themselves when they do not get the necessary support. The biological parents can also make the situation difficult for the foster parents when they get lawyers which puts extra pressure on them. Another possibility is that the foster care placement might be wrong – the child might have been placed with foster parents because it was a crisis situation, but that may not have been the correct or best possible placement. The foster care workers feel that the organisations has to link more closely with each other to prevent people who might be a risk to foster children to not be screened and approved as foster parents. There have been cases where people volunteered themselves to be foster parents, but during the screening process it became clear that these people could be a risk to children in their care and were therefore not approved or used as foster parents. The same people went to another organisation and were approved as foster parents. It only later appeared to be that they have offered their services to a number of organisations in the city.

Once again a distinction was made with regards to culture. The foster care workers shared that in the black community, families are much more willing to take children into foster care. They feel that they have a much more supportive community than in the white community. This is a very important cultural resource. Even though the focus of this study was not on cultural resources, a culture of a community (for instance the culture of taking care for each other's children – also known as “Ubuntu”) does serve as a very important community resource. Without a culture a community would not be able to exist in its whole.

### **7.2.5 Permanency Planning and Family Reunification**

In America, within 18 months of the child's placement, a dispositional hearing is supposed to be held to place children in the least restrictive, most family-like setting that was available and appropriate (Barusch, 2006: 338-339). States were required to make “reasonable efforts” to reunify families. Funds were provided for reunification services, which included a wide range of supportive activities, from parenting education and stress management to budgeting and case management. If progress toward reunification was not made, the law required states to begin “permanency planning” on behalf of the child. That is, the state agency was required to develop a plan for the permanent placement of the child in long-term foster care, guardianship or adoption. No longer could social workers wait and hope that abusive parents would change. Instead, for a limited time, workers became active partners with biological parents in an effort to preserve the family unit (Barusch, 2006: 338-339).

One of the purposes of foster care, as stated in section 181(b) of the Children's Amendment Act, no. 41 of 2007, is to establish permanency in a child's life – either through reunification with his/her biological parents, or through connecting the child with other family relationships intended to last a lifetime. Should the biological parents wish to resume care of the child, he/she/they will have to commit to be a willing participator in the family reunification process. When reunification is not an option it is desirable for the child to remain in the same foster family until at least the age of 18. Before having a child placed with them, non-kinship foster caretakers have to agree to work with birth families towards reunification. When reunification is not an option, it might still be in the best interest of the child to maintain contact with his/her extended family of origin. Contact with the extended family might have the same benefits for the child a kinship care: the child will be able to preserve and build connections with members of his/her extended family; siblings who were separated can remain connected; the child's ethnic, cultural and family identity will not be lost; and the child will have more people in his/her life that care for him/her. The ideal

ending for the foster care process is permanency and stability in the child's life through being part of a caring family (De Jager, 2011: 59 - 72).

With regards to family reunification the workers shared that even though there might be some level of resources available, their two main problems were the fact that they did not get any cooperation from the biological parents and that they did not have the time to work with them and lead them in the right direction. In cases where the biological parents live in an area which another organisation is responsible for, the foster care workers sometimes struggle to get cooperation from that specific organisation as well. They shared that most of the times the biological parents want to do things on their own terms. They frequently come up with excuses and most of them have little or no insight and their abilities are limited. One worker admitted that it is not always the biological parent's fault as they might be ignorant of the process and what is expected of them because the foster care worker did not inform them. Another mentioned that if one worker works with both the foster parents and biological parents, the worker tends to neglect the biological parents as the prognosis is poor. This in turn can cause a poor relationship between the child and biological parents.

The question now exist that if the biological parents were informed of what was expected of them and they were aware of the process and the worker did work with them and referred them to the necessary resources, whether family reunification might be a more common phenomenon. Are these biological parents not perhaps rebellious and uncooperative because of the fact that they are not informed? And what impact does this have on permanency planning? **Family reunification does not realize in the majority of cases for various reasons such the social worker's lack of time to work with the biological parents due to their focus on the child in foster care, biological parents that have little or no insight, are not informed or uncooperative, and little or no contact between the biological parents and their children.**

### 7.2.6 Volunteers

In general terms, volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services.

Social work volunteers can play a vital role in an organisation and can usually conduct a wide range of activities. In foster care, most of the foster care workers were of the opinion that volunteers could not – and should not – be used due to the sensitivity of information shared. Some mentioned that not even auxiliary workers were allowed to gather information or write reports therefore they felt that volunteers could not be used in the foster care process. Other workers felt that there are a need and a place for volunteers in the

foster care process. They feel that the volunteers are their eyes and ears in the community. They feel that volunteers could be used to assist with the language and culture barrier in some communities. However they did also mention that it depends on the community in which they work. They felt that the black community would be more open to the idea of talking to someone living in their community who might also be a foster parent and could relate to their situations. One worker shared that she felt that volunteers could even be used in group sessions as she doubted the therapeutic role and contribution that she as foster care worker had in a group session. She mentioned that in the community she works with, the group sessions focused on practical information sharing. It was seldom that she had to give a therapeutic input and is of the opinion that when such an issue presented itself within the group, the volunteer could inform her of this and then she could attend for one or more sessions depending on the seriousness of the issue. However she felt that for all the other sessions a volunteer could be used to lead the group sessions. The white community, especially the higher functioning community, is a much more private community who would not easily communicate with a stranger. These foster parents are also the ones who do not attend groups. Most of the foster care workers however were of the opinion that the foster care process is too complicated for a volunteer. Some workers were of the opinion that foster care is a too professional and complicated field for volunteers to work in. Others were of the opinion that this is exactly the field in which volunteers can be used. This also differs from community to community. Some communities may be more open to having volunteers – who are not their foster care workers – to enter their homes and their lives than other communities. The researcher is of the opinion that this subject can be explored more in detail to establish the level of participation of volunteers in this area of social work. **Even though volunteers can play a vital role in a social work organization it is still undecided whether they can be used effectively in foster care. Once again the culture of a community plays a vital role in how volunteers are perceived. Volunteers might also be professionally trained persons offering a free service to foster families and children however these are in general a limited resource.**

### 7.3 Professional Resources

The complex and uncertain nature of social work, with its ethical base, legal accountability, responsibility for complex decision-making and risk assessment, public profile and constantly changing legislation, requirements, structures and organisation requires social workers to engage in ongoing development, personal and professional, if they are to survive, respond effectively to users and clients, and managing the uncertainty which is endemic to the profession (Lishman, 2002: 97 - 98).

In order to respond effectively to users and clients, foster care workers must make use of other professional resources and multidisciplinary teams. They also have to engage in ongoing training in order to stay current with development in the profession.

The third question asked in the groups was to discuss the use of professional resources within the foster care system. They were asked to discuss whether these resources were available and if so, whether they made use of them. The use of multidisciplinary teams and their own personal training were also discussed.

### **7.3.1 Other Professionals**

During the group discussions it became clear that other professional resources were available for the foster care workers to whom they could refer their clients. These resources were more available in the larger cities than in the smaller towns. Foster care workers in the smaller towns said that they did not have many resources available, but they did refer them to resources situated in the larger cities. Most foster care workers mentioned that they referred their clients to other professionals working in government institutions as these services were mostly free of charge or more affordable than other professionals working in private practices. The foster care workers working in the rural areas said that other resources were not as available due to the fact that these resources were situated far from where the clients are living and that there is a language and culture barrier. The foster care workers in the smaller towns also mentioned that they experienced the same issue with the alternative resources. They mentioned that in the smaller towns resources were limited. Those that were available, they found were not effective due to high caseloads that those professionals have. In some of the extreme cases they refer clients to professional resources situated in the larger cities however this brings its own problems with regards to travelling arrangements and costs. The availability of other professional resources than those of social work is determined by the location of the agency.

The foster care workers discussed that in crisis situations they found that other professionals are always willing to help out however it is also important to realize that the services rendered by professionals working in their own private practices are those professional persons' own income. Without that income their practices may not be able to exist and they may not be able to render those services. In certain cases children placed in foster care can be added to the foster parents' medical aid. In these cases the medical aid would pay for certain therapeutic sessions or other medical procedures needed for that child. In those cases the foster care workers guide the foster parents to the correct resources to which they can take the foster child. Most of the foster care workers

mentioned that if the foster parents did not have the money to pay for other resources and if services from government institutions were either not available or accessible, the organisations would not be able to refer and pay for services rendered by other professionals. They mentioned that there are limited funds and they might be able to refer one or two children in extreme circumstances however it would mostly be only for one assessment and not ongoing therapy.

There are also situations where resources are available and accessible but when a client is referred they do not give their cooperation in showing up for appointments. Some workers were also of the opinion that in certain cases where other professionals would offer their services free of charge, those services would not always be a quality service and would then rather prefer to pay for a service and know that the service the foster child received were of good quality and in their best interest. Another issue experienced with government institutions is the movement and change in employees. They find that as soon as a relationship has been established with a certain professional, that person is moved or resigns for another opportunity that has come on their way. Then the foster care workers need to build up a new relationship with a new person who in turn needs to build a new relationship with the foster child. **Accessibility, affordability and effectiveness to other professional resources are thus a main issue related to resources.**

Even though it seems as if professional resources are available, the question did arise whether these resources were accessible, especially to clients living in smaller towns and rural areas. When professional resources are utilized, there may be issues of busy schedules and expensive service charges that come to light which can also lead us to question the effectiveness of these services. However, it is not only accessibility and effectiveness that may cause poor service rendering. It is sometimes the fault of the clients themselves that do not show up for appointments made at these professionals. The reasons for this may again return to the assumption that resources may not be accessible, but other factors may also have an influence – factors over which neither the professionals nor foster care workers have any control.

### **7.3.2 Multidisciplinary Teams**

The New Dictionary of Social Work (1995: 34) defines an interprofessional team, also known as a multidisciplinary team as a group comprising members trained in different professional disciplines that work together to resolve a common problem or achieve a common goal through continuous intercommunication, re-examination and evaluation of

individual efforts toward team objectives and taking group responsibility for the final outcome.

With regards to the use of multidisciplinary teams, all the foster care workers said that they did make use of teams in their organisation.

Even though most of the foster care workers felt that it would be beneficial to have a team compiled with professionals with certain core skills such as social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists and doctors, however the reality is that they do not have these resources available. When a multidisciplinary team needs to be held it is in most circumstances due to a crisis situation. They then only include the people who are involved in and familiar with the specific case. It also depends on what the problem is. If it is necessary and if funds are available to refer a foster child for an assessment, then the person who did the assessment will also be invited to attend the meeting. Multidisciplinary teams are thus only used on an ad hoc basis

There were mixed opinions with regards to the effectiveness of using multidisciplinary teams. Some foster care workers were of the opinion that it was very effective. They feel that the inputs given by other professionals are valuable in making decisions and effective service rendering. They also experience it as very supportive and they receive good cooperation from the rest of the team.

Some of the foster care workers mentioned that they had some struggles with the use of multidisciplinary teams. One of the foster care workers working in a smaller town said that there was not always time to have multidisciplinary team meetings. She was of the opinion that the use of multidisciplinary teams had a bigger role in larger cities than in small towns. Even though she believed that there was a definite function and use for it in foster care, she said that it was not as feasible in the smaller towns due to limited resources and time constraints. She also mentioned that it was sometimes difficult for all parties to attend such a multidisciplinary meeting due to the fact that the other professionals that form part of this team also do not have the time to set aside to attend a meeting. It was also mentioned that sometimes the foster care worker is the only therapeutic person included in the team. Most felt that more therapists should be involved. Other workers mentioned that they sometimes struggle to get reports from the other members of the team and they often experience that other members of the team do not want to make statements with regards to the specific cases as they might be implicated. They feel that the main reason for having a multidisciplinary team is to have a shared responsibility, however sometimes the other members do not give their support and therefore do not share responsibility for the

decisions that are made. Some experienced that the members in the team did not know their own role within the team and this would cause confusion when a decision had to be made. Another struggle experienced is the fact that a multidisciplinary team meeting cannot be held for each and every child as the case loads are too large. As the organisations do not have an existing core team it would be extremely time consuming for all the members to have to attend a meeting every second day. It would also not be cost effective.

**Even though multidisciplinary teams are utilized it seems as if it is only used in the most serious of crisis situations when life-changing decisions need to be made regarding a child. Since members of these teams are not employed by the social work organisations, it is neither time or cost efficient to make use of these on a more regular basis.**

### 7.3.3 Personal and Professional Development

The context of social work practice has not been favorable to personal or professional development. Other barriers to professional development and learning include:

- A tension between a local authority's requirement for a technically competent worker, and a professional requirement for critical reflective practice, which may include criticism of the agency practice;
- a lack of agency recognition in terms of pay and status for the achievement of professional development;
- a lack of time allowed for professional development;
- a lack of access to professional development (Lishman, 2002: 97 - 98).

When discussing the personal and professional development of the foster care workers, they all admitted that they do get training on a regular basis at their organisations. They mentioned that the CPD point that was required by the SACSSP to stay registered ensured that they do training in order to receive those points. Most of the foster care workers were satisfied with the training that they receive. They mentioned that the organisations provide most of their training. If they would want to attend other trainings not offered by the organisation they would have to pay for it themselves and also put in leave to attend it if the training was provided on a normal working day. Some foster care workers felt that they were 'over trained' in some areas like time management, stress and foster care. They felt that the trainings provided was not effective anymore and that the focus should be shifted to other possible subjects that would also be beneficial to both the foster care worker and the community they are working in. They also felt that when considering other topics for training the wellness of the foster care workers should be taken into account and should be focused on. They felt that the training received by the government with regards to the new

Children's Act was very meaningful and effective. They did however mention that the struggle were with other resources like for instance law enforcement who does not know the Act or their role in it and felt that there was a need for training to be provided to other role players also making use of the Children's Act. They did mention that needs assessments were done however the organisations do not always have the funds available to provide in these training needs. The foster care workers who have attended other trainings for which they paid themselves felt that the training was meaningful but they did not have the time to use it in practice.

**The scope of training provided to social workers should be re-assessed in order to provide training that is more relevant to foster care. Whether the funds will be available for such training is still unsure.**

The use of multidisciplinary teams seems to be a valuable contribution to service rendering for the foster care workers. Currently it seems as if it is only utilized for crisis situations. It may be even more helpful to the foster care workers to implement the use of multidisciplinary teams in other cases however the issue of time again comes to the foreground. Despite the large caseloads that each foster care worker face on a day-to-day basis, the professionals included in the multidisciplinary teams also have practices in which they themselves have to work and may not be able to commit to attendance of these team meetings on a more regular basis. Even though the foster care workers strongly believe that their own training is essential to better service rendering, the issue of time (whether it is time to attend training or time to apply that training in practice) and the issue of costs involved to receive training plays a vital role in this.

#### **7.4 Challenges in the current foster care system**

The final question asked in the focus groups were for the foster care workers to discuss the biggest challenges or needs that they experienced in the current foster care system. Responses to this varied between all the different organisations.

To one organisation the biggest challenges they face were the fact that there were no alternative places or institutions available for placements of foster children between the ages of 10 and 12 who represented with behavioural problems and were not adjusting in the the current foster care placement. There is no space available in the children home and they are too young to be placed in a school of industry. They also experience a challenge with regards to language. They have to make use of interpreters but they are not able to afford professional interpreters. They then have to make use of other people living in the

community which can cause another challenge with regards to keeping the information confidential and reliable. Due to the language barrier it also makes therapy with a foster child difficult if the child and therapist cannot understand each other. The workers mentioned that they did have forums for the foster parents, but felt that in this there was a challenge in its own as the community is not motivated and therefore do not attend the meetings that are held. Another challenge is that of too little social workers. The shortage in foster care workers leads to large caseloads. When a student graduates and starts to work in the field, they are so overwhelmed by the amount of work that they leave the profession the first chance they get. According to some workers another cause of this is the fact that they feel that social work is one of the worst paid professions in South Africa. **There is a lack of professional assistance to deal with teenagers presenting with challenging behaviour. There is also a language barrier in therapy which makes service rendering more challenging. In addition to this there are high caseloads that some feel are unmanageable and a lack of enough human resources to lighten the burden.**

Foster care workers at another organisation felt that the biggest challenge to them were the fact that a foster care worker was trained to do therapy and to render a quality service, but currently this is not possible due to large caseloads and too little foster care workers. They said that this was a cause of a lot of frustration which in turn cause a lot of workers to leave the field of social work. They mention that foster care workers are trained to do therapy, not administration and yet administration takes up most of their time in service rendering. The community do not always have a clear understanding of what the role of the foster care worker is. For some foster care workers this cause frustration. They do experience challenges with regards to cooperation between different organisations, however this could also be attributed to the time constraint that each worker has in their job. The foster care workers at this organisation mentioned that they are in need of more specialised resources to which they could refer foster children, foster parents or even biological parents. **It is a challenge to find balance between administration and therapy as both of these are vital in service rendering. Many social workers experience disillusionment when they start working in the field due to expectations and perceptions created of what social work is supposed to be. There is also a lack of specialised resources to aid in rendering a holistic service to the foster child and all other parties concerned.**

Some foster care workers who have recently got their degree and are relatively new in the field of social work mentioned that during their training the focus was placed on therapy but when they started working in the field they were disillusioned by the large caseloads and the

volume of administration that they had to do. They mentioned that all the services were in place, but they did not have the time to render those services. They also experience a challenge with regards to quality due to this. There are challenges with regard to a shortage of trained foster care workers and the salaries paid to these workers. They mentioned that the bursaries provided to serve as incentives for student to study social work and the low admissions requirements is causing a lot of frustrations as more people are qualified as social workers but not all of them do their job as they are supposed to. They feel that more foster care placements should be transitioned into permanency placements in order to reduce the foster care cases in each foster care worker's caseload. They are also of the opinion that emotional well being is mostly ignored due to time constraints in crisis situations. They feel that there is a challenge in moving the focus back to therapy and the emotional well being of the foster child and foster family, but this can only be done if the caseloads of each foster care worker are reduced dramatically. **Lack of time to render services causes a decrease in the quality of those services. Incentives like bursaries attracts many to study social work, however not all that studies social work has a passion for it and those who do are over worked and under paid. Focus should shift to permanency planning in order to see a decrease in foster care cases, but is this fair to the child or biological parents as it is a child's right to be able to live with his or her biological parents? The emotional wellbeing of a child should be put on the foreground when making decisions regarding the child's life and future.**

Other workers mentioned that besides the scarcity of social workers, high caseloads, poor salaries and too little time, other challenges also exist. They mentioned that better facilities are needed to help and control children with behavioural problems. They also mentioned that it is challenging for the different systems working together within the foster care system to realize each other's goals and processes and to show respect for these processes and the people involved. Changing the way of thinking and the mentality with regards to foster care also creates a challenge of its own. Other challenges that the foster care workers face are getting accessible and effective resources to work therapeutically with the foster child. This would also mean to get hold of a multidisciplinary team to whom these children can be referred to and who would be willing to render services at a reduced cost or even for free. Other challenges include training and preparing foster parents better for the challenges that lie ahead for them, empowerment of foster parents and making them feel worthy, being able to do therapy with the foster child and also empowering the biological parents to better their circumstances. **Once again the lack of professional assistance to deal with children with challenging behaviour is an important issue to consider. Due to time constraints it is challenging to bring teamwork, empowerment and preparation of**

**foster parents and therapeutic service rendering together. Social workers need to change the way they think about the service they render, how they render that service and to whom they render the service.**

Due to all of the above mentioned challenges which the foster care workers face, they feel as if they are never truly able to do their absolute best. This is a challenge in itself that the foster care workers must face - **the challenge of obtaining work satisfaction.**

## **8 CONCLUSION**

This article gave an overview of foster care and specifically of foster care resources in the South-African context. The focus was on the Free State Province specifically in Non-Governmental Organisations. During this discussion, some points surfaced that have great implications for foster care resources and that are important to this study. Foster care workers have large caseloads and do not have the time or the human resources to fulfill in all their client's needs and render an effective quality service. This suggests that the methods being used by foster care workers are time- and resource-consuming. Since resources are limited it creates a vicious circle in which the foster care worker has less and less time to render services which can cause seemingly small problems in the beginning to spiral out of control and is therefore even more time consuming to address at a later stage. Even though a limited amount of resources are available, it is in some cases not utilized, not accessible or ineffective due to a number of reasons. Many of the reasons are not within the control of the foster care worker as outside factors may have an influence.

Quite a number of challenges have been identified for instance lack of professional assistance, language barriers and cultural differences with regards to how certain things are perceived, high caseloads and lack of human resources. Poor salaries, time constraints and the disillusionment with regards to perceptions and expectations that social workers have of the services they should render has a negative impact on the quality of services and the level of job satisfaction that social workers experience. This causes social workers to resign which in turn has an impact on the number of social workers available to render services to the increasing number of foster care cases. Family reunification services also suffer due to this.

In the next section the conclusions that were reached based on the empirical and literature study will be presented. Recommendations will also be offered, based on the conclusions, in an effort to provide guidelines to foster care workers in order to equip themselves in

effectively utilizing more resources and also to develop more resources within the work place, community and amongst professionals.

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# **SECTION 3: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The **goal** of the study was to determine the extent to which needed resources are available to the foster care workers in the Free State Province working in NGO's. This goal was achieved in the previous chapters of the study. The purpose of this section is to meet the final objective of the study, which is to come to conclusions and make recommendations based on the results of the literature review and the empirical study that can be used as guidelines when working within the foster care system.

## 2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the findings from out of the focus group discussions.

### 2.1 Profile of the participants and background

The participants were mostly experienced social workers, who worked for nine established NGOs in the Free State. The 22 respondents had a collective foster care caseload of more than 2485 cases.

**It can be concluded** that each social worker has an average of 113 foster care cases which they should manage (which includes administrative and therapeutic services) together with other generic case work, group and community work and day to day crisis's that arise. Because the social workers have such high caseloads, they do not have enough time to render in-depth foster care services.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Social workers should consider using other methods to manage their caseloads which are less time consuming and thereby enabling themselves to have more time to render quality therapeutic services. One way of doing this is to make use of Section 186 of the Children's Act (38/2005) where the foster care placement can be extended until the child turns 18 and no further social work supervision or reports are required.

### 2.2 Organisation resources

The organisational resources available to the foster care worker were investigated in this study. The findings show that the foster care workers encounter foster children with behavioural problems on a daily basis. They have very few cases in which foster children

do not show behavioural problems or signs of depression or other types of emotional problems.

Foster care workers do have the skills to work therapeutically with these children in most cases, however due to high caseloads they do not have the time for this. The amount of foster care cases have grown considerably over the years. South Africa has lost many foster care workers to other countries and the current shortage of social workers is causing high caseloads for the foster care workers left in South Africa.

Foster care workers and social workers in general, are bound by the Code of Ethics to render a quality service to clients and not to refuse service rendering to a client irrespective of whether or not that client is in a position to pay for such services. They are also required to enhance service-rendering to the community by utilizing and developing resources in the community. This is a big cause of frustration to the foster care workers as even though they do render a free service, they experience an inability to render a quality service. They are also not able to utilize or develop resources in the community as they do not have the finances or time available to do this. They were of the opinion that some parts of the code of ethics were not effective or realistic in practice.

Finally a vital resource required to be able to render services in an organisation is the organisation itself. The physical aspects needed for the foster care worker to render services, for example an office, computer, telephone, car and so forth. Even though the foster care workers were content with the physical resources available at each organisation, they were concerned that it did not reflect their professionalism to the community they rendered services to.

**It can therefore be concluded** that even though organisational resources are available and effective to a certain extent, there is still much room for improvement.

**Recommendations:**

- Foster care workers should investigate ways in which to manage their time more effectively in order to make room for providing therapeutic sessions.
- Foster care should be made a specialty field where foster care workers only deal with the processes of foster care and not with any other social work related issues.
- Foster care workers should investigate new ways of interpreting and utilizing the Code of Ethics and also propose the revision of the Code of Ethics by the SACSSP to make it realistic and feasible.

- Foster care workers should investigate the possibility of making provision in the budget of the organisation to improve the appearance and equipment of their offices in order to reflect their professionalism to the community.

## 2.3 Community resources

All respondents agreed that even though it was essential in foster care, it was not always possible to put the rights and the best interest of the child central in service rendering due to other systems that have their own processes and agendas. They also felt that the foster care grant did make a difference within the foster care system even though they did sometimes encounter cases where the grant was misused.

The foster care workers were mostly positive regarding the Children's Act. There were some that were of the opinion that the Children's Act had many ideas but questioned the feasibility of processes set out in the Children's Act as the human resources is lacking. There were however many positive aspects mentioned with regards to the Act.

When it came to the foster care families, it became clear that the foster care workers did not have enough families available with which to place foster children. Pre- and post-placement training are the least likely steps of the foster care process to be followed. The foster care workers explained their omission of these steps by stating that they do not have enough time, foster parents give little co-operation and the social workers have big caseloads. It suggests that the foster parents are not aware of what is expected of them. Most of the foster care workers indicated that they do support the foster parents. However, the meaning of this statement is completely dependent on each respondent's definition of what constitutes support. In the absence of training and support, it can result in an unsuccessful placement. It can be concluded that a lack of resources (time, human resources), and a lack of structure in the intervention process are the main stumbling blocks to implementing all the steps of the foster care process. This is also a concern for reunification work with the biological parents. The second least likely step of the foster care process is family reunification. The foster care workers explained that they even had less time to render these services and stated that the biological parents gave little or no cooperation and if the prognosis was not positive, they would rather focus on the foster care placement than on family reunification. It can further more be concluded that family reunification is not on the foreground for most social worker's service rendering due to time constraints and their focus on rendering effective foster care services.

Volunteers are used by some in the foster care process, however most foster care workers were of the opinion that foster care is a too specialized field to involve volunteers in. Others were of the opinion that they can be useful to relieve some pressure off the foster care worker.

**It can therefore be concluded** that certain community resources available to foster care workers are limited. The limited amount of resources that are available can be considered unrealistic, ineffective and not feasible in most circumstances.

**Recommendations:**

- Foster care workers should make more use of the rights and best interest principles of the child as emphasized in the new Children's Act when rendering foster care services. They should use it during report writing and bring it under the attention of other role players.
- The provision of foster care grants should be re-evaluated and adjusted to provide in the different kinds of needs depending on certain age groups of foster children.
- Foster care workers should promote foster parent and foster child groups to train and support foster parents and support foster children emotionally, because the support and training (pre- and post-placement) of foster parents and the emotional support (pre- and post-placement) to foster children are very important. The lack of resources that seems to prevent its proper implementation can be combated by social workers finding a way to render these services in a resource-friendly manner.
- Foster care workers should create structure in the way that the foster care process is facilitated. One way of doing this is to contract with prospective foster parents from the first contact so that they are completely aware of what is expected of them. The contract can stipulate, for example, that the foster parents are required to attend a foster parent cell group as well as how often it will take place. If they do not agree with the conditions, then placement is not possible. If they fail to adhere to the terms of the contract after the placement has been finalised, then the placement will be terminated. These are extreme measures, but the well-being of the child is at stake. They should also be rewarded if they successfully adhere to the terms of the contract.
- Foster care workers should promote permanency placements in order to lessen the burden on foster workers and the foster care system.
- Foster care workers should create structure in the way family reunification is facilitated. One way of doing this is to contract with biological parents from the first contact that they are completely aware of what is expected of them. The contract can stipulate, for example, that the biological parents are required to attend certain groups as well as

how often it will take place. If they do not agree with the conditions, then reunification will not be possible. These are extreme measures, but the well-being of the child is at stake.

- Foster care workers should investigate the use of volunteers in the foster care process and if found feasible, they should train volunteers to be able to render certain foster care related services.

## 2.4 Professional Resources

In the small towns there is a struggle to get hold of other professional resources to whom clients could be referred to. In the larger cities these professional resources are more common but not necessarily accessible to the community. Most of these professionals are already overworked and over burdened. Multidisciplinary teams are utilized, but none of the organisations have the core professions considered for a successful and effective multidisciplinary team. They only involve the people who is directly involved with each specific case.

The foster care workers were mostly satisfied with their own personal training, however they experienced that they did not have the time to put their training into practice.

**It can therefore be concluded** that even if professional resources and training are available, but it is not accessible or feasible within the foster care service rendering process, this resource is not effective.

### Recommendations:

- Foster care workers should make use of other professionals such as occupational therapists, psychologists, doctors and other social workers working in private practices that are available to refer their clients to in order to alleviate their own caseloads.
- Foster care workers should build a strong relationship with other professionals in order to be able to work closely together with them in rendering optimal services to the foster parents and foster children.
- Multi-disciplinary teams should be utilized in every situation possible to ensure that the correct decisions are made and the responsibility of those decisions is shared.
- Foster care workers should utilize their own training in practice in order to render a quality service to the clients.

## 2.5 Challenges in the current Foster Care system

The foster care workers listed many challenges which they face in the foster care system and when training and supporting foster parents. **It can be concluded** that their main challenges are a lack of resources and time, a lack of co-operation from the foster parents and the biological parents respectively and the shortage of foster care workers in South Africa. The majority of respondents indicated however that they still have hope and is positive in regards to the resources that are available to the foster care workers in the Free State.

### Recommendations:

- Foster care workers should find resource-friendly ways of equipping foster parents through training and support to parent foster children, which are not as time consuming.
- Foster care workers should focus on formally contracting with prospective foster parents and biological parents to try and avoid co-operation problems later on.
- Foster care workers should promote social work and motivate other social workers and social work students to remain in South Africa and within the profession of social work in order to lighten the caseloads

## 2.6 Future research

In view of the results of this study, it is recommended that further research be done regarding resources required for foster care in the Free State and in South Africa and should focus on:

- Researching what resources are available and effective on governmental level.
- The full scope of resources required to render an effective and quality foster care service.
- The recruitment and use of alternative resources.
- Establishing community projects that could develop and promote certain resources needed for foster care workers.

# **SECTION 4: APPENDIXES**

## **APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS**

1. Please discuss the organisational resources available to the foster care worker with regards to the foster care system in the Free State, focusing on behavioral problems represented by the foster child and the time and skills of the foster care worker to therapeutically address these issues, the Code of Ethics and the facilities at your organisation which can either enable or hinder you as foster care workers to provide a quality service?
2. Please discuss the community resources available to the foster care worker with regards to the foster care system in the Free State, focusing on social policy which includes the rights of a child and best interest of a child, the Social Security Act, Law, the foster care placement and reunification and the use of volunteers?
3. Please discuss the use of professional resources within the foster care system. Please discuss whether these resources were available and if so, whether you make use of them. This includes the use of multidisciplinary teams and your own personal training.
4. Please discuss the biggest challenges or needs that you as foster care workers experience in the current foster care system?

## APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE

### QUESTIONNAIRE TO REGISTERED AND PRACTISING FOSTER CARE WORKERS IN THE FREE STATE

**Title:** The availability of Foster Care System Resources in the Free State Province: A Social Work assessment.

**Researcher:** Magda Kok

North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

Dear Social Worker

The researcher requires data on the availability of resources within the Foster Care system of NGO's in the Free State.

This questionnaire is only to capture the logistics and will be followed by a structured discussion set up according to a discussion guideline.

The social worker's cooperation and willingness to participate in this survey as well as the focus group discussion with representative will be highly appreciated. Please be assured that your valuable responses will be kept under strict confidence. As such, you are not required to indicate your name on the questionnaire.

It is requested that you indicate your response by using an X in the relevant block.

Thanking you for your continued participation.

**Magda Kok**

**01 March 2012**

**1. In which city / town in the Free State is your organisation situated?**

Bloemfontein	
Welkom	
Kroonstad	
Other: (please specify)	

**2. Does your organisation render services only to clients living in that city / town?**

Yes	
No	

If NO, please specify? \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Type of organisation**

Non-Governmental Organisation	
Other (specify)	

**4. Gender**

Male	
Female	

**5. Age**

20 – 35 years	
36 – 45 years	
46 – 55 years	
56 years and above	

**6. Period of employment as a social worker**

1 – 5 years	
6 – 10 years	

11 – 15 years	
16 – 20 years	
21 years and above	

**7. Number of social workers employed by your organisation**

1 – 5	
6 – 10	
11 or more	

**8. Is Foster Care an area of specialization in your organisation?**

Yes	
No	

**9. Number of foster care cases in your post**

1 – 29	
30 – 69	
70 – 99	
100 or more	

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**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**I hereby confirm that the thesis has been proofread and edited accordingly.**



**Gerda Niemann  
B.Tech.: Language Practice**