

Foster Parent  
Survey Report  
2009

Department of Health and Social Services  
Office of Children's Services

## Highlights of Findings

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The foster parent survey was mailed to 933 licensed foster homes. There were 500 foster parents who returned the survey for a response rate of 54 percent.

Key results of the survey are listed below.

- 72 percent of the foster parents were providing care for a foster child at the time of the survey
- 32 percent of the foster parents were providing care to a child they were related to
- 63 percent of the foster parents indicated they plan to continue to provide foster care to children after their current foster children leave their home
- 86 percent of the foster parents responded, “caring for children is important and rewarding” as a reason they intend to continue to provide foster care
- 66 percent of the foster parents responded, “caring for children is my way of contributing to my community” as a reason they will continue to provide foster care
- 57 percent of the foster parents plan to adopt the children in their care
- 61 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for two years or less
- 39 percent of the foster parents had been providing foster care for three years or more

## Section I: Introduction

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The Evaluation Unit of the Office of Children's Services conducted a survey of foster parents. The purpose of the foster parent survey is to solicit information from foster parents regarding their experiences with the foster care program. A survey was sent to all foster parents in the state who are licensed and who provide care to children in the custody of the state. Foster parents who had children in care at the time of the survey as well as foster parents who did not have children in care were asked to complete the survey.

A survey instrument was developed which had four areas of inquiry. The first area asked foster parents about the current placement status of their home. The second area inquired about training the foster parents had participated in and their plans for continuing to provide foster care. The third area asked participants for suggestions and comments regarding support they believed were needed to provide care for children. The final area sought comments regarding their experiences in working with the system of foster care and the Office of Children's Services. A final narrative area was provided to allow participants to offer any other comments they believed would be helpful.

The survey instrument was mailed or e-mailed via an on-line survey service to 933 licensed foster homes. An initial mailing was conducted with two follow-up mailings to those who had not responded. A cover letter accompanied each of the surveys. The foster parents were assured that responses would be compiled with other responses so that no individual respondent could be identified.

The data collected from the surveys was analyzed and the narrative comments reviewed for content and subject area. The comments were summarized and presented so that individual respondents, field offices, and caseworkers were not identified.

Table 1 presents the number of respondents by region.

**Table 1**

<b>Surveys Sent and Foster Parents Responses by Number and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Sent</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Returned</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Response</b>
Northern	152	84	55%
Southcentral	341	187	55%
Anchorage	323	167	52%
Southeast	117	62	53%
Total	933	500	54%

## Section II: Findings

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The following tables present the information gathered from the survey respondents. Each area of inquiry is presented in the table heading with the results presented in the table. **Note: All tables will not reflect the total number of 500 survey respondents, as all respondents did not answer each question.**

### Foster Home Placement Status

Table 2

<b>Foster Homes with Children in Placement by Number and Percent</b>				
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number of Foster Homes with Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes with Children</b>	<b>Number of Foster Homes Without Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Without Children</b>
Northern	56	67%	28	33%
Southcentral	129	69%	58	31%
Anchorage	134	80%	33	20%
Southeast	41	66%	21	34%
Total	360	72%	140	28%

N=500

### Relative Caregivers

Table 3

<b>Foster Homes Providing Care for Related Children by Number and Percent</b>			
<b>Region</b>	<b>Foster Homes with Children in Placement</b>	<b>Foster Homes Providing Care to Relative Children</b>	<b>Percent of Foster Homes Caring for Relative Children</b>
Northern	56	15	27%
Southcentral	127	47	37%
Anchorage	132	41	31%
Southeast	41	11	27%
Total	356	114	32%

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

<b>Length of Time Foster Home Licensed by Period of Time and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Number Licensed Homes</b>	<b>Percent Licensed &lt;1 Year</b>	<b>Percent Licensed 1-2 Years</b>	<b>Percent Licensed 3-5 Years</b>	<b>Percent Licensed 6-10 Years</b>	<b>Percent Licensed &gt; 10 years</b>
Northern	83	25%	28%	24%	13%	10%
Southcentral	184	32%	32%	21%	8%	8%
Anchorage	165	28%	35%	20%	12%	6%
Southeast	62	29%	32%	19%	11%	8%
Total	494	29%	32%	21%	11%	8%

**Foster Parent Training and Retention****Table 5**

<b>Foster Parents Have Participated in Training by the Alaska Center for Resource Families by Number and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Northern	64	76%	18	21%	2	2%
Southcentral	121	65%	53	28%	13	7%
Anchorage	139	83%	24	14%	4	2%
Southeast	43	71%	15	25%	3	5%
Total	367	74%	110	22%	22	4%

N=499

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

<b>Foster Parents Using Specific Methods of Training by Number and Percent</b>		
<b>Method of Training</b>	<b>Number of Foster Parents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Web-based courses	174	35%
Mailed self-study courses	239	48%
Telephonic courses	38	8%
Classroom courses	208	42%
Did not participate in training provided by ACRF	103	21%

N=500

**Child Placed Prior to Foster Parent Training**

**Table 7**

<b>Reasons Placement Occurred Before Foster Parents Received Training by Percent</b>	
<b>Type of Training</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Child was an Emergency Placement	78%
Training was not Conveniently Available	13%
Other	22%

N=218

**Training Adequacy**

**Table 8**

<b>Agreement With: Training Prepared Foster Parents for Challenges of Foster Parenting by Number and Percent</b>				
<b>Region</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>No, Do Not Agree</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Northern	58	84%	11	16%
Southcentral	113	86%	19	14%
Anchorage	122	87%	19	14%
Southeast	33	75%	11	25%
Total	326	85%	60	16%

**Placement Duration**

**Table 9**

<b>Length of Time Foster Parent Licensed Before A Child Was Placed in Their Home by Number and Percent</b>						
<b>Region</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>Placed Prior to Licensing</b>	<b>Placed Immediately After Licensed</b>	<b>Placed 1-3 Months After Licensed</b>	<b>Placed Greater than 4 Months after Licensed</b>	<b>Although Licensed, No Child has Been Placed</b>
Northern	82	45%	32%	9%	13%	1%
Southcentral	184	53%	24%	9%	11%	3%
Anchorage	166	49%	25%	16%	10%	0%
Southeast	60	32%	28%	22%	13%	5%
Total	492	48%	26%	13%	11%	2%

**Retention of Foster Parents****Table 10**

<b>Foster Parents' Plans About Continuing to Provide Care by Number and Percent</b>						
Region	Will Continue	Percent	Will Not Continue	Percent	Unsure	Percent
Northern	55	66%	23	28%	5	6%
Southcentral	109	59%	61	33%	14	8%
Anchorage	112	67%	46	28%	9	5%
Southeast	35	60%	18	31%	5	9%
Total	311	63%	148	30%	33	7%

N=492

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

<b>Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Continue to Provide Care Selections by Percent</b>	
I believe caring for children is important and rewarding	86%
Caring for children is my way of contributing to my community	66%
I am interested in adopting	35%
It is important to provide care for children	74%
I enjoy being a member of a service team and working with social workers	36%

**Table 12**

<b>Reasons Foster Parents Plan to Discontinue Providing Care Selections by Percent</b>	
I would like more time for my family and myself	27%
Reimbursement does not adequately cover my costs of care	20%
The demands of foster care conflicts with my own family's needs	19%
I do not receive enough support from the Office of Children's Services	20%
I am interested in providing care for my related child only	24%
I plan to adopt my current foster child	38%

**Reimbursement of Costs**

**Table 13**

<b>Reimbursement is Adequate to Cover Costs by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	82	31%	46%	18%	5%
Southcentral	179	17%	46%	22%	15%
Anchorage	163	15%	42%	33%	9%
Southeast	55	13%	44%	26%	18%
Total	479	18%	45%	26%	12%

**Table 14**

<b>Reimbursement is Received in a Timely Manner by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	80	35%	51%	10%	4%
Southcentral	177	32%	50%	13%	6%
Anchorage	166	37%	47%	11%	5%
Southeast	55	31%	49%	15%	6%
Total	478	34%	49%	12%	5%

n=478

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

<b>Child had Adequate Clothing at Time of Placement Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	79	13%	14%	38%	35%
Southcentral	180	13%	16%	28%	43%
Anchorage	162	11%	11%	34%	45%
Southeast	55	9%	13%	44%	35%
Total	476	12%	13%	34%	41%

**Table 16**

<b>When Needed, an Initial Clothing Voucher was Provided in a Timely Manner Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	64	17%	31%	17%	34%
Southcentral	136	20%	21%	25%	34%
Anchorage	138	22%	15%	31%	32%
Southeast	49	27%	22%	12%	39%
Total	387	21%	21%	24%	34%

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

<b>Foster Parents Received Sufficient Information to Meet the Child's Needs by Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	77	26%	22%	38%	14%
Southcentral	173	23%	27%	32%	18%
Anchorage	157	25%	31%	29%	15%
Southeast	53	19%	45%	19%	17%
Total	460	24%	30%	30%	16%

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

<b>When Placed, Were You Able to Participate in Development of the placement Plan? Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	78	27%	23%	30%	21%
Southcentral	179	28%	21%	20%	32%
Anchorage	158	28%	22%	22%	29%
Southeast	55	31%	31%	18%	20%
Total	470	28%	23%	22%	28%

**Table 19**

<b>When Children Were Placed in Your Home, were You Given A Placement Plan and Agreement? Level of Agreement and Percent by Region</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	76	33%	12%	29%	26%
Southcentral	173	28%	19%	16%	37%
Anchorage	157	24%	19%	14%	44%
Southeast	55	31%	27%	18%	24%
Total	461	28%	19%	18%	36%

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

<b>Caseworker Helped Foster Parent Get Needed Services for the Child by Level of Agreement and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	74	28%	30%	20%	22%
Southcentral	160	26%	27%	28%	19%
Anchorage	151	31%	23%	30%	17%
Southeast	50	20%	30%	30%	20%
Total	435	27%	26%	28%	19%

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

<b>Foster Parent Able to Reach the Caseworkers When Needed by Level of Agreement and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never
Northern	78	32%	30%	32%	6%
Southcentral	179	25%	30%	40%	6%
Anchorage	162	32%	28%	36%	3%
Southeast	55	26%	35%	33%	7%
Total	474	29%	30%	37%	5%

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

<b>Frequency of Worker Visits to See Foster Children by Region and Percent</b>					
Region	Weekly	Monthly	2-3 Months	4-6 Months	No Visits
Northern	1%	37%	23%	23%	15%
Southcentral	2%	41%	28%	14%	15%
Anchorage	3%	55%	27%	8%	6%
Southeast	0%	47%	32%	17%	4%
Total	2%	46%	28%	14%	11%

n=469

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

<b>Period of Time Prior to Court Hearing Foster Parent Was Informed by Period of Time and Percent</b>					
Region	Total Respondents	One to two weeks in advance	Three to four weeks in advance	Less than one week in advance	Not at all
Northern	75	43%	29%	19%	9%
Southcentral	160	34%	18%	21%	28%
Anchorage	150	37%	20%	15%	28%
Southeast	52	39%	23%	14%	25%
Total	437	37%	21%	18%	24%

**Court Hearing Attendance**

**Table 24**

<b>Foster Parents Attendance at Court Hearings by Number and Percent</b>				
Region	Attended	Percent	Not Attended	Percent
Northern	51	65%	27	35%
Southcentral	96	54%	83	46%
Anchorage	90	56%	72	44%
Southeast	32	60%	21	40%
Total	269	57%	203	43%

N=472

**Comments Given in Court Hearings**

**Table 25**

<b>Foster Parents Able to Made Comments at Court Hearings by Number and Percent</b>				
Region	Yes, comments Provided	Percent	No, comments not provided	Percent
Northern	36	72%	14	28%
Southcentral	69	75%	23	25%
Anchorage	63	72%	25	28%
Southeast	24	77%	7	23%
Total	192	74%	69	26%

N=261

## **Section III: Comments**

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### **3.1 Foster Parents' Additional Comments**

An area was provided for foster parents to give additional comments that were important to them. Foster parents were asked, "If there is any other information you would like us to know, please give us your comments."

Comments provided by foster parents have been reviewed and are summarized into two areas. The strengths area reflects comments by foster parents that were positive in nature and detailed experiences in fostering that have been beneficial to them. The area also reports the statements made by foster parents concerning positive experiences in working with the agency and staff. The area of resource and support needs reflects comments by foster parents where there were gaps in support in meeting their needs or where there were system issues that increased the difficulty in the foster parents' ability to carry out their tasks. The area for resource issues also describes comments by foster parents where they have identified needs that the agency may have for increased resources which they believe would enhance the ability of the agency to carry out its foster care mission.

#### **Strengths**

- Foster parents expressed the joy of caring for children. They described satisfaction in seeing the children grow and learn new behaviors.
- Many foster parents commented on the professional job their workers do. They felt that workers cared for the children and provided support.
- Foster parents who were adopting spoke of the opportunity to be meaningful in a child's life and to provide a permanent family for the child.
- Several experienced foster parents spoke of the ongoing challenges of working with a large system but that the overall experience was positive. They spoke of workers who spent time with them and their families in supporting them in providing care for children.
- Comments were made about the enjoyment of working with caseworkers. The difficulty of the workers' jobs was described and it was noted that workers who are in an overwhelming position do a great job. Their support in assisting with transportation and in getting paperwork done was noted with gratitude.
- A foster parent noted that the workers in her field office are high quality and caring people. Their dedication and genuine concern for children was noted. This foster parent also expressed appreciation for the increase in financial support.

- The Alaska Center for Resource Families was commented on as being very helpful to foster parents. The Center was described as being a good resource for foster parents.

### **Resource and Support Needs**

- The costs for establishing a foster home with needed items such as a crib, diapers and other supplies, car seats, and appropriate toys was noted. It was suggested that it would be supportive to foster parents if there were an initial payment to cover these costs. It was noted that costs for children are on a reimbursement basis and that initially it is a very large expense for new foster parents to properly equip their homes.
- There were concerns expressed about the process to receive augmented rates. It was expressed that when children have special needs which have been identified prior to placement, the foster parent should not have to request the augmented rates, that the payment should accompany the child based on the needs. It was noted that there are delays in the paperwork being processed and there should be a more timely procedure.
- The issue of providing children with clothing was a concern. It was noted that when an initial voucher has been given, the child may outgrow many of their clothing items and that the costs of winter clothing such as coats and boots far exceed the payment for caring for children. It was suggested that an annual allowance for clothing be provided.
- The importance of timely communication with caseworkers was identified as an issue. There were concerns expressed that foster parent phone calls need to be responded to promptly as they concern the well being of children. It was also suggested to use experienced foster parents as “contact points” for new foster parents so that answers can be given to general questions that the worker may not have time to respond to promptly. It was suggested that foster parents be able to evaluate caseworkers every six months to give input on when they carry out their tasks well or when there are areas of growth.
- Several foster parents indicated their frustration with the lack of home visits from the caseworkers. There were several comments regarding the importance of the stability of the caseworker staff. The loss of the knowledge of experienced workers was noted as was the time needed to train new workers.
- The importance of receiving information about children prior to their placement was stressed. It was noted this enables the foster parent to plan care for the child that is appropriate to the child’s background and experiences.
- Foster parents expressed concern that they are not always notified of court hearings. Some indicated that they never received a notice, but later learned from other sources that there was a court hearing. The importance of foster parents being asked to speak in court was noted. Foster parents commented that court hearings are important to them because it helps them to know what is going on in the child’s case.

- Several foster parents expressed they would like increased support such as more training available in rural areas. The difficulty in finding time for completing training at home was noted as after caring for their family and the foster children little time is left for self-study.

## **Conclusion**

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Foster parents play a significant role in assisting the Office of Children's Services in providing care to children and support to families. Foster parents throughout the state are to be commended for sharing their homes and assisting the agency in caring for Alaska's children.

The provision of services to families and children is challenging and requires the efforts of members of the community including service providers, relatives, and licensed foster parents throughout the state of Alaska. The responses and thoughtful comments to this survey by foster parents are deeply appreciated and will be incorporated by staff and management in their work with families and children.