


**Voluntary Closure Study:  
Former Foster Care Families in Arizona  
April 2014**

COLLEGE OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

**Arizona Child Welfare Collaborative**

 **Center for Applied  
Behavioral Health Policy**

---

A R I Z O N A   S T A T E   U N I V E R S I T Y

# **Voluntary Closure Study: Former Foster Care families in Arizona**

Prepared in 2014 by:  
Arizona State University, College of Public Programs  
School of Social Work

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the School of Social Work, College of Public Programs, Arizona State University, under contract number DE111132001 with the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Child Safety and Family Services (ADES/DCSFS).

Judy Krysik, Ph.D. served as the Principle Investigator and Andrea Hightower served as Project Coordinator, Strategic Partnerships for Child Welfare Training.

The authors wish to thank the following staff of the ADES/DCSFS for their ongoing cooperation and assistance: Deidre Calcoate, Emilio Gonzales, and Roxann Miller.

We would also like to thank Hyunjung (Rachel) Cheon and Amber Williams, students with ASU's Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy, who contributed to this report through research support.

Finally, the authors wish to express appreciation to the former foster parents who participated in this voluntary survey. Their personal insights, experiences and recommendations for improving the foster care experience are invaluable and greatly appreciated. Most notably, their dedication to the children in their care is recognized and honored.

Suggested citation:

Hightower, A. & Krysik, J. (2014). Voluntary closure study: Former foster care families in Arizona. Phoenix, AZ. Arizona State University.

## I. Executive Summary

The former Division of Children, Youth and Families, now the Division of Child Safety and Family Services (Division) requested ASU's assistance in 2013 with the development, administration and analyses of a survey designed to better understand foster parent recruitment and retention within Arizona's foster care system.

The Division is deeply committed to the goals of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes. This survey of family foster homes who voluntarily discontinued foster parenting establishes baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It also attempts to respond to a number of the retention issues reported by agency stakeholders within Arizona's 2008 second round federal Child Family and Safety Review (CFSR) (Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, 2008).

In 2008, Arizona was one of only 19 states to be in substantial conformity with federal CFSR standards regarding Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention (Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau). Arizona received a rating of "strength" in this area because the State was found to have in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families.

In 2012, Arizona was ranked by the Foundation for Government Accountability as the second best state in the nation for establishing "Forever Families ASAP" (Bragdon, 2012). In addition Arizona was ranked as a Top 10 state both in 2006 and 2012 for, "Which State Child Welfare Systems Are Right for Kids?" (Bragdon, 2012).

National studies have estimated over half of foster parent cease providing care within one year of their first placement (Gibbs, 2005). Respondents of this survey reported an average length of service of 3.28 years.

- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 4.92 years stated their primary goal was altruistic, responding to the need for foster care in their community (17% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 2.81 years stated their primary goal was temporary care for a child (13% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 2.51 years stated their primary goal was adoption (29% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 1.75 years stated their primary goal was legal guardianship (7% of respondents).
- Foster parents who provided care for an average of 1.31 years stated their primary goal was temporary care (23% of respondents).

Over 85% of the survey respondents indicated they felt they were successful in meeting their primary goal in becoming a licensed foster parent.

Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated they felt child placements in their homes were consistent with their preferences. Comments from those who felt placements were not consistent

indicated that once a need outside of their preferences was made known, most accepted the placement and did not feel negatively about their decision.

Primary closure reasons reported by survey respondents were adoption (43%) followed by other life priorities. Comments made by foster parents who had closed due to adoption, indicated a number of them would be interested in providing some care in the future but needed time to stabilize their newly formed family unit. Dissatisfaction with either the Division or licensing agencies represented only 14% of the respondents.

Survey respondents also were invited to share suggestions for improving the experience of foster parents. Their responses included: More involvement in the decisions about a child's welfare (22%); More appreciation and respect from DES/CPS and/or Licensing (21%); Additional funds to support the needs of children in my care (12%); Behavioral Health Services that provide more adequate care (12%); Additional Child Care or Respite services (9%); and Better Supports for Kinship Parents (7%)

In addition to the set of survey questions, a separate opportunity was provided for former foster parent to communicate their interest in re-opening their license. Ninety-seven individuals responded to this question:

- Thirty percent were not interested in re-opening their license.
- Forty percent indicated that they were interested in re-opening their license
- Thirty percent reported being unsure of whether or not they were willing to reopen their license.

Recommendations and opportunities for consideration include:

- Utilize Administrative Data from Licensing Records in the assessment of survey responses.
- Inquire at the point of licensure as to the intended goals are for foster parenting, including what time frame they are hoping to accomplish those goals in.
- When a foster home closes their license due to adoption, ask permission to follow up with them down the road for consideration of re-licensing, either for foster care or even respite services.
- When a child-specific home (kin or non-relative) closes their license, inquire about the interest in continuing to provide services to a community child (non-related) or in providing respite services to other foster families.
- Administer this survey on a continuous and ongoing basis.
- Involve Foster Parents, HRSS Licensing Agencies, Foster Parent Associations, and other Stakeholders.
- Fully support foster parents and relatives in the care of children placed in their homes.
- Continue targeted recruitment with messages specifically aimed to capitalize on new areas of interest in the general public related to foster care and/or adoption.

The creation and administration of a survey for foster homes who voluntarily discontinue foster parenting services is intended to establish baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It supports the Division in reporting progress against federal CFSR outcomes, responds to issues identified by stakeholders, utilizes collaborative partnerships, and reflects the voices and experiences of foster parents with the ultimate goal of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes for Arizona's children in need of out-of-home care.

## Background and Context

### The Issue from a National Perspective

The initial Federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) (Administration for Children and Families, 2004) for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, provides a national perspective on the performance of state child welfare systems as evidenced by important outcomes including:

- Quality of care for children who are unable to remain in their homes of birth; and
- timely achievement of adoption for children who have been legally freed through the termination of birth parent(s) rights.

Reviews found no state achieved conformity with federally set standards, including Arizona, on the timely achievement of permanency goals for children in foster care. Common challenges identified from these reviews included:

- emergency shelters frequently utilized for initial placements and temporary after a disruption occurs, even for young children (18 states, 51%);
- scarcity of appropriate placement options for children with developmental disabilities or with severe behavior problems (19 states, 54%)
- inconsistent provision of services to foster parents to prevent placement disruptions (21 states, 60%)
- placements tended to be based on availability rather than matching of child with a home best suited to meet their needs (21 states, 60%)

In addition, only six states performed satisfactorily on the timely achievement of adoption. States that did not, including Arizona, struggled with lack of consistency in conducting adoptive home studies and in completing adoption related paperwork in a timely manner.

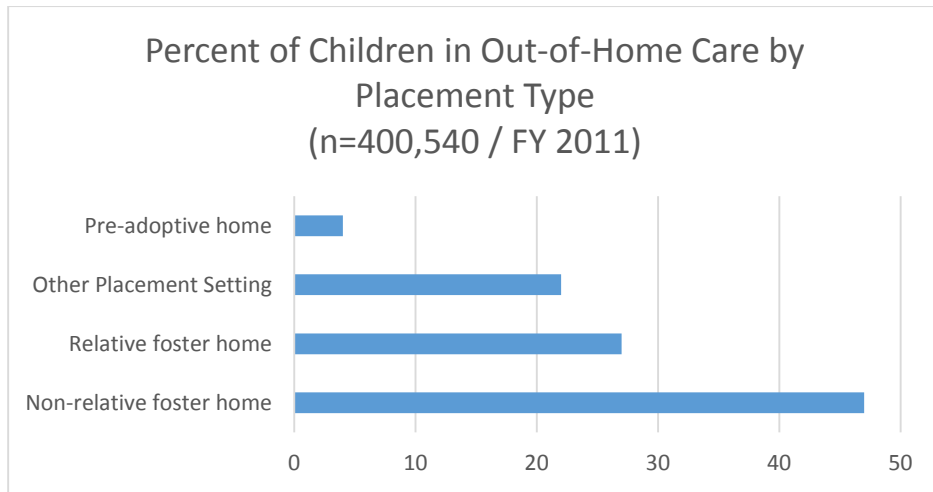
In 2010, second round reviews (Administration for Children and Families, 2011) reassessed progress in these outcome areas. Despite the passing of six years and concentrated efforts by states to improve, no significant progress was found in timely achievement of permanency and stability in foster care placements, and no state received a strength rating. In fact, thirty-seven states (71%) were found to be struggling with the common challenge of an insufficient number of available foster placements, particularly for children with special care needs or severe behavior problems. In addition, 17 States (33%) were found to have, limited resources available to support foster parents (Administration for Children and Families, 2011).

States also continued to struggle with the timely achievement of adoption, and no state performed satisfactorily. Continued lack of consistency conducting adoptive home studies and timely completion of adoption related paperwork was also noted.

The Children Affected:

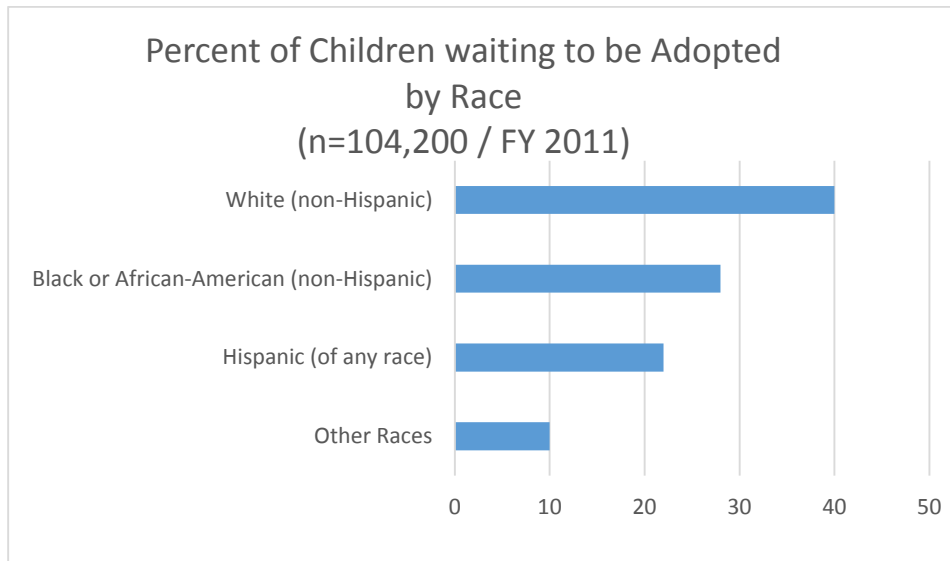
The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) reported 400,540 children in foster care on the last day of FY 2011 (Administration for Children and Families, 2012).

The average age of these children was 9 and they had been in care an average of 24 months. 52% of these children had a case goal of reunification and 25% had a goal of adoption.

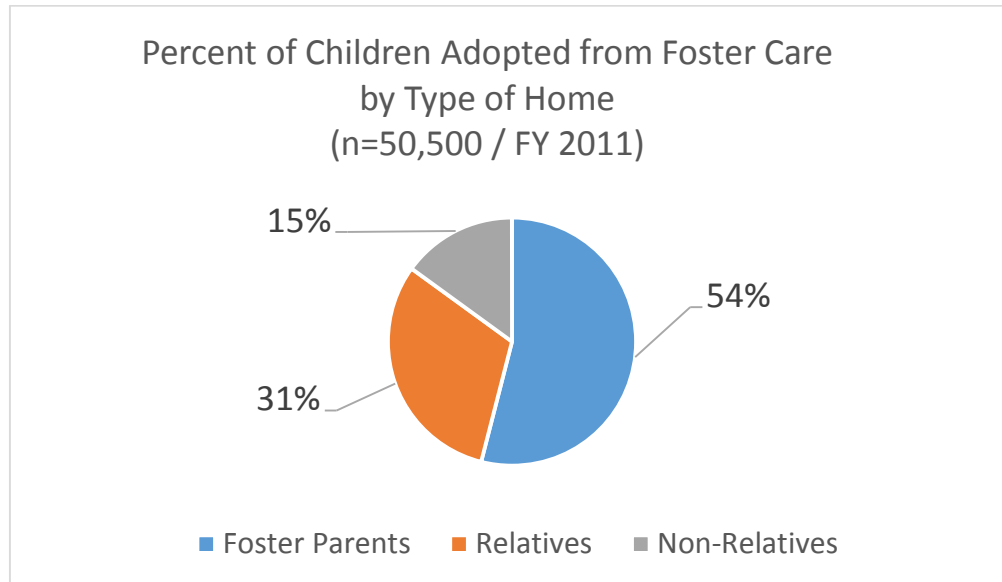


AFCARS data also showed 104,200 children (26 % of the children in Out-of-Home Care) waiting to be adopted on the last day of FY 2011 (Administration for Children and Families, 2012).

The average age of these children was 8 and they had been in care an average of 24 months



In FY 2011, 50,500 children and youth were adopted who had public child welfare agency involvement (Administration for Children and Families, 2012).



#### Increasingly urgent need for foster parents

From February 7, 2013 to February 7, 2014, 149 separate news articles were published focusing on state and/or county child welfare systems need for increased foster and/or adoptive families (Child Welfare Information Gateway). Review of these articles found 40 states represented with the number of articles per state ranging from 1 to 20 over the course of the 12 month period. Seven states were most frequently featured with multiple articles and are indicated on the map on the following page.

Shortages of foster homes is nothing new to state child welfare systems. When the number of children entering out-of-home care rises, a corresponding increased need for licensed foster homes is seen. Eighteen states reported increasing numbers of children coming into care and rising needs for foster care homes (Child Welfare Information Gateway).

What is fairly new, is a perplexing shortage of homes in states where the numbers of children in out-of-home care are falling. Five states fall into this trend: California, Florida, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania (Child Welfare Information Gateway).

An article from the state of Wisconsin published in The Journal Times on November 13, 2013 indicated a potential reason for the occurrence of foster care shortages was in part because many foster families became adoptive parents.





### Persisting Misconceptions:

- Forty-six percent of Americans incorrectly believe that adoption from foster care is expensive.
- Two-thirds of those considering adoption fear the biological parent will take the child back and are not aware of the permanent termination of parental rights.
- Less than half of Americans believe that a single parent raising an adoptive child can definitely provide a healthy environment.
- Only 37% believe a person over the age of 55 can definitely provide a healthy environment.
- Only one-third believe same-sex parents can definitely provide a healthy environment.

### Process Barriers:

- Only 23% of those interested in foster care adoption completed the process and adopted a child.
- Almost 50% of those interested chose not to engage in the process after obtaining information by phone.
- Twenty-two percent began the process after a phone call, but subsequently decided not to continue.

In the review of news articles previously mentioned, 24 separate articles were identified as representing either national or international views on adoption issues (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013 - 2014).

Three of these articles highlighted adoption from foster care:

#### **US: The internet cheers for little girl whose adoption finally became official**

Huffington Post - February 06, 2014

A representative for the Dave Thomas Foundation said that Gina's photo has sparked interest in adoptions with more than 11,000 comments and questions on the photo. "Many of the comments are people looking for more information on [adopting from foster care](#). It has created so much interest in adoption that DTFA's website crashed."

#### **US: New PSAs raise awareness of the 31,000 older youth awaiting adoption in the U.S. foster care system**

PRNewswire - January 23, 2014

In addition to the PSAs, a Facebook Chat will take place today from 2 to 3 pm ET on AdoptUSKids' Facebook page to connect prospective parents with campaign representatives, parents and their adopted older youth. The online chat will also be an opportunity to debunk many of the top myths about [foster care adoption](#).

#### **US: Adoption rate increases for children in foster care**

Administration for Children & Families - August 12, 2013

New data on [adoption and foster care](#) suggests that while the number of children in foster care remains steady, the adoption rate continues to climb. According to statistics released by HHS' Administration for Children and Families, approximately 13.1 percent of the children in foster care were adopted last year, an increase from 12.6 percent the previous year and 9.5

percent in 2003.

A number of articles speculated that growing challenges with restrictions in international adoption may result in U.S. families re-examining other domestic options including foster care adoption. In addition, evangelical Christian campaigns continued to tout foster care and adoption as a religious call to action.

**US: AdoptUSKids.org Celebrates 20,000 Foster Children Adopted Through Website (INFOGRAPHIC)**

Huffington Post - June 21, 2013

The number is especially significant because the majority of those adopted were not infants, but many were teens, minorities and those with disabilities. The vast majority however spoke to recent restrictions in International adoption and how that may be turning some back to considering domestic adoption instead. The trend of evangelical Christians embracing adoption and foster care as a religious "call to action" continues strong.

**US: Fewer children available internationally**

Register-Mail - December 23, 2013

The study shows "a growing number of the girls and boys being adopted from other nations today are not the infants of adoption's recent past but, instead, are older children with sometimes serious special needs." The institute study examines this development as a result, in some cases, of countries signing and ratifying the Hague Convention of 1993.

**Russia: Adoption ban still affecting prospective parents**

Philadelphia Inquirer - January 17, 2014

Johnson, who went to Russia to meet Oksana, then 6, has made the difficult decision to adopt from a country other than Russia. Others are doing the same or adopting within the United States, adoption officials and activists say.

**US: God called them to adopt. And adopt. And adopt.**

New York Times - November 14, 2013

Of the dozens of evangelical and conservative Christian parents the author spoke to, many said that church sermons, Christian radio shows or other Christian campaigns, including Focus on the Family's national foster-to-adopt program, pushed them to adopt. Some Christian leaders and other critics, however, worry that all this promotion overshadows the hardest and most important part of adoption: parenting these kids.

### An Arizona Perspective:

Arizona has been ranked as a “Top 10 Right State for Kids” by The Foundation for Government Accountability in both 2012 and 2006 (Bragdon, 2012). Their most recently published report ranked Arizona as the second best state in the nation for establishing “Forever Families ASAP”. The report considers a variety of child well-being indicators in order to rank states on their overall effectiveness in serving children and families.

*States can and do significantly change how well they serve abused and neglected kids in a very short amount of time. A child welfare system is not an immovable bureaucracy. It is a dynamic system and its performance can quickly and dramatically change. On the other hand, this also indicates that top performing states must be vigilant and pro-active to preserve their good standing. In fact, only Arizona, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, and North Carolina were Top 10 States in both 2012 and 2006 (Bragdon, 2012).*

Arizona was one of only 19 states to be in substantial conformity with federal CSFR standards regarding Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention (Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2008).” Arizona received a rating of “strength” in this area because, “...the State was found to have in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.”

As part of the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process, interviews with child welfare stakeholders are conducted to provide an outside perspective on the strengths and challenges within various program areas. Following are comments from those stakeholders who offer suggestions for continued improvement with respect to recruitment and retention of foster homes (Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2008).

- While the agency is engaged in diligent recruitment, there is a general lack of foster homes and adoptive families.
- Recruitment of foster parents should be supported by efforts to retain existing foster parents and the agency does not appear to make concerted efforts with regard to retention.
- The agency does not collect information on why foster parents cease being foster parents, so it is difficult to focus on retention because the factors associated are not known.
- It has been reported that respite care services for foster parents are difficult to obtain and may be one reason why foster parents are leaving. Respite care can be provided by licensed foster parents only, so there is a need to create a network of foster parents who can provide respite services.
- Foster parents often struggle in their relationship with the child’s caseworker and this may be an area where efforts are needed to ensure the retention of foster parents.
- Foster parents are usually effective recruiters of other foster parents, but when they are seen as struggling and experiencing difficulties with the agency, they are not going to be effective recruiters.

In response to the CFSR reports, states create and submit a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Although Arizona received a rating of Strength in their second round review, their PIP outlined continued improvement strategies related to foster care recruitment and retention (Administration for Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2008):

**Primary Strategy 5: Implement the Family to Family strategy of recruitment, development and support of resource families (applicable CSFR Items: 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 21 and 23).**

Goal: Assure that children who cannot be placed in their own home will be placed with a safe and stable family member or with a family from their own community or neighborhood.

Examples of action steps within this strategy include:

- Working with contracted agencies including licensing and support agencies to ensure the achievement of contract goals related to recruitment and retention.
- Working with internal agency staff to promote the agency philosophy that, “support of resource families is everyone’s business”.
- Developing new systems and supports that enable the receipt of issues and concerns from prospective and current resource families; tracking and responding to them in a more efficient and effective manner; and identifying trends in order to guide systemic improvement.
- Identify and re-engage families who choose to leave foster parenting or decline license renewal.

The creation and administration of a survey for foster homes who voluntarily discontinued foster parenting services was intended to establish baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It supports the Division in reporting progress against federal CFSR outcomes, responds to issues identified by stakeholders, utilizes collaborative partnerships, and reflects the voices and experiences of foster parents with the ultimate goal of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes for Arizona’s children in need of out-of-home care.

## II. Recruitment or Retention

State child welfare agencies are often underfunded and over-extended. Many are greatly challenged to devote equal time and energy to both foster home recruitment and retention.

Research conducted by Friedman et al (1980), and that of Rodwell and Biggerstaff (1993) found recruitment of new foster homes is one way to ensure an adequate supply for children in out-of-home care. However recruitment is also known to be a costly, time-consuming process that has not resulted in the production of enough foster family homes to meet the agency demands for placements (Rhodes, Orme & Buehler, 2001).

Without a doubt, recruiting a sufficient number of foster families to fit the need is a difficult challenge. A necessary first step, however, is to do a better job of retaining the foster families the Division already has. In 2002, the Office of the Inspector General of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services, commented on the importance of foster parent retention, stating *“the loss of these trained and experienced foster parents greatly impacts the foster care program,”* and suggesting *“...it may have an even greater impact on programs than failing to recruit new foster families”* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

An often overlooked benefit of retaining foster families is their powerful impact as a recruitment tool.

*Word of mouth is more important than media for finding potential foster/adopt parents. Waiting child features like “Wednesday’s Child” create general awareness. Most prospective foster/adopt parents we spoke to, however, were drawn by a personal connection. Many mentioned a relative, friend or co-worker who had adopted a child from foster care. Many also noted that they were adopted, had been in foster care, or had grown up with foster children* (Boatright, Wilson and Katz, 2005).

Understanding why foster parents are quitting is key to determining how much effort should be placed on recruitment and how much on retention. Rhodes, Orme & Bueler’s study of why foster parents quit (2001) confirmed what prior studies have shown, foster homes close for five general reasons:

1. Normal family changes: These include things such as family moves, changes in employment, pregnancy, changes in health, or changes in family structure such as death of a spouse or adoption of a foster child. Tracking these factors over time through exit surveys will provide an estimate of how much planning over a year’s time is necessary to set recruitment needs.
2. Dissatisfaction with Agency Relationships: These include poor communication, unresponsive caseworkers, inadequate services, etc. Ensuring parent contact with both licensing support agencies as well as the child case carrying agency is based on good customer service and respect is essential and ensures foster parents have only positive things to say about their experience. In the arsenal of recruitment tools, word of mouth recommendation by current and past foster parents is the most powerful.
3. Unpreparedness to foster: These mainly stem from a lack of training (or ability to integrate the training) prior to licensure. An exit survey that asks probing questions regarding the quality of training offered can indicate content that needs improvement and possibilities for new training that would strengthen the preparedness of foster parents.

4. Stress associated with caring for foster children: These include specific children's behaviors and needs while placed in the home, interactions with birth family, lack of respite care, allegations of abuse, etc. Tracking the specific reasons for closure within this category will provide valuable information on potential training that is needed and/or areas of service and support that would alleviate these stressors.
5. Problems between placed foster children and biological or adopted children in the home: This can include actual confrontations and/or fear for the safety of children on either side. This is an area that cannot easily be anticipated. Having this data however, informs your pre-license training and will help prospective families consider this aspect in a more concrete manner. It also allows a state to add this category in to "given" recruitment needs.

Further support for the focus on foster home exit data include is found by Gibbs (2005), in referencing a report published by RTI International for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

*While the fact that most current foster parents report they are satisfied is worth celebrating...cross-sectional survey data can be misleading because long-term (presumably satisfied) foster parents are disproportionately likely to be included in the sample.*

Siegel (2011) also stressed the importance of examining exit surveys as a means to promote foster parent retention.

*Furthermore, if the intent is to determine how to retain more foster families, then the focus should be on the group who stops fostering, particularly those who express dissatisfaction with the foster parent experience.*

### III. Study Design

To aid in the identification of why foster parents chose to discontinue their license, and because this was an exploratory area of research, open-ended qualitative items were included to encourage participants to identify salient issues without being constrained by pre-determined choices. Qualitative items were also included to capture critical information the Division was interested in obtaining.

The Division intends to re-administer this survey on a routine basis in order to collect and analyze trends in reporting. In addition they hope to utilize information and areas of learning from this survey to construct and administer a separate and complimentary survey for open/active licensed foster parents to further explore options to improve foster parent recruitment and retention.

This survey was designed as an anonymous self-administered questionnaire which was mailed out to 701 (100%) foster homes which had voluntarily closed their foster home licenses within the preceding 12-months. This survey collected:

- demographic information,
- goals foster parents had at the point of licensure & if they felt they were met
- placement preferences foster parents had & if they felt they were met
- reason for license closure, and
- suggestions regarding what would have improved their foster parenting experience

ASU provided the printed surveys, postage paid return envelopes and outer mailing envelopes. The Division mailed the surveys out from their distribution center utilizing addresses provided by the Office of Licensing Certification and Regulation, the Department of Economic Securities' office responsible for issuing foster parent licenses in Arizona.

Completed surveys were returned directly to ASU via the postage paid return envelopes included in the mailing. Response to the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Confidentiality of survey response was explained within a cover letter authored by ASU and included in the mailing.

Of the 701 mailed surveys, 184 were returned to ASU undeliverable as addressed; 3 surveys were returned indicating that the foster home was currently licensed; and 4 surveys were received after the survey cut-off date.

Of the remaining 510 respondents, 116 returned their survey between July 24<sup>th</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> 2013 resulting in a response rate of 23%.

Returned surveys were destroyed after responses were entered into a secure electronic database for analyses.

#### IV. Survey Sections and Responses

Following are the responses, displayed in aggregate form. Where a comparison could be made, either to national data such as those found in the 2010 AFCARS Report, or from other state reports, it has been included as well.

##### Goals in becoming foster parents

Measuring goal achievement in addition to assessing satisfaction provides a deeper level of understanding of the experiences of former foster parents. It is possible to be dissatisfied with elements of a program yet ultimately achieve the goals established.

Within the survey, former foster parents were asked to reflect upon the goals they had when first deciding to provide foster care services. They were then asked whether or not they felt those original goals were met. Respective lengths of service are also noted.

Primary Goal of Becoming Licensed (n=99)	% of Total	Average Length of Service	% Reporting Goal was Met (n=107)
<b>To Adopt</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>2.51 years</b>	
A Relative	6%	1.13 years	100%
A specific but unrelated child	7%	2.41 years	71%
A previously unknown “community” child	15%	4.01 years	87%
<b>To Provide Temporary Care for</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>1.31 years</b>	
A Relative	15%	1.97 years	87%
A specific but unrelated child	5%	0.92 years	100%
A previously unknown “community” child	2%	1.06 years	100%
<b>To Provide Long Term Care for</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>2.81 years</b>	
A Relative	6%	2.40 years	100%
A specific but unrelated child	4%	4.10 years	25%
A previously unknown “community” child	3%	1.94 years	100%
<b>To Provide Legal Guardianship for</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>1.75 years</b>	
A Relative	5%	3.02 years	80%
A specific but unrelated child	2%	0.51 years	50%
<b>I heard there was a need and decided to help</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>4.92 years</b>	<b>81%</b>
<b>More than one option selected</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>1.13 years</b>	<b>80%</b>

The primary goals reported by survey respondents for becoming licensed are similar to those reported in other studies. A 2009 foster parent study (Gregory & Kaye, 2009) categorized four categories of “motivation” that initially prompted Maryland foster parents to become licensed: 1) Adoption, 2) Caring for a family member, 3) Loving children & having resources, and 4) Giving back to the community.

For those former foster parents who elected to participate in this survey, the program appears to have supported the vast majority (over 85%) in reaching their goals.



For those who reported their primary goals had not been met (15% of respondents), the vast majority of the explanations provided were able to be categorized according to prior studies (Rhodes, Orme & Bueler, (2001).

Normal Family Changes:

*We had a family emergency and a business move made it impossible to continue.*

*At the time of licensing we became pregnant with our first child and decided to wait.*

Dissatisfaction with Agency Relationships:

*I felt pushed away and disrespected by the CPS worker and aids often. This would so frustrate me that I wouldn't have any foster children in my home for a time. Then I would read in the paper about the need for foster homes and then again until they exasperated me again.*

Unpreparedness to Foster:

*...placement was returned to family.*

*The children were returned to the parent.*

*We did provide care, however child was reunified with mom.*

Stress Associated with Caring for Foster Children:

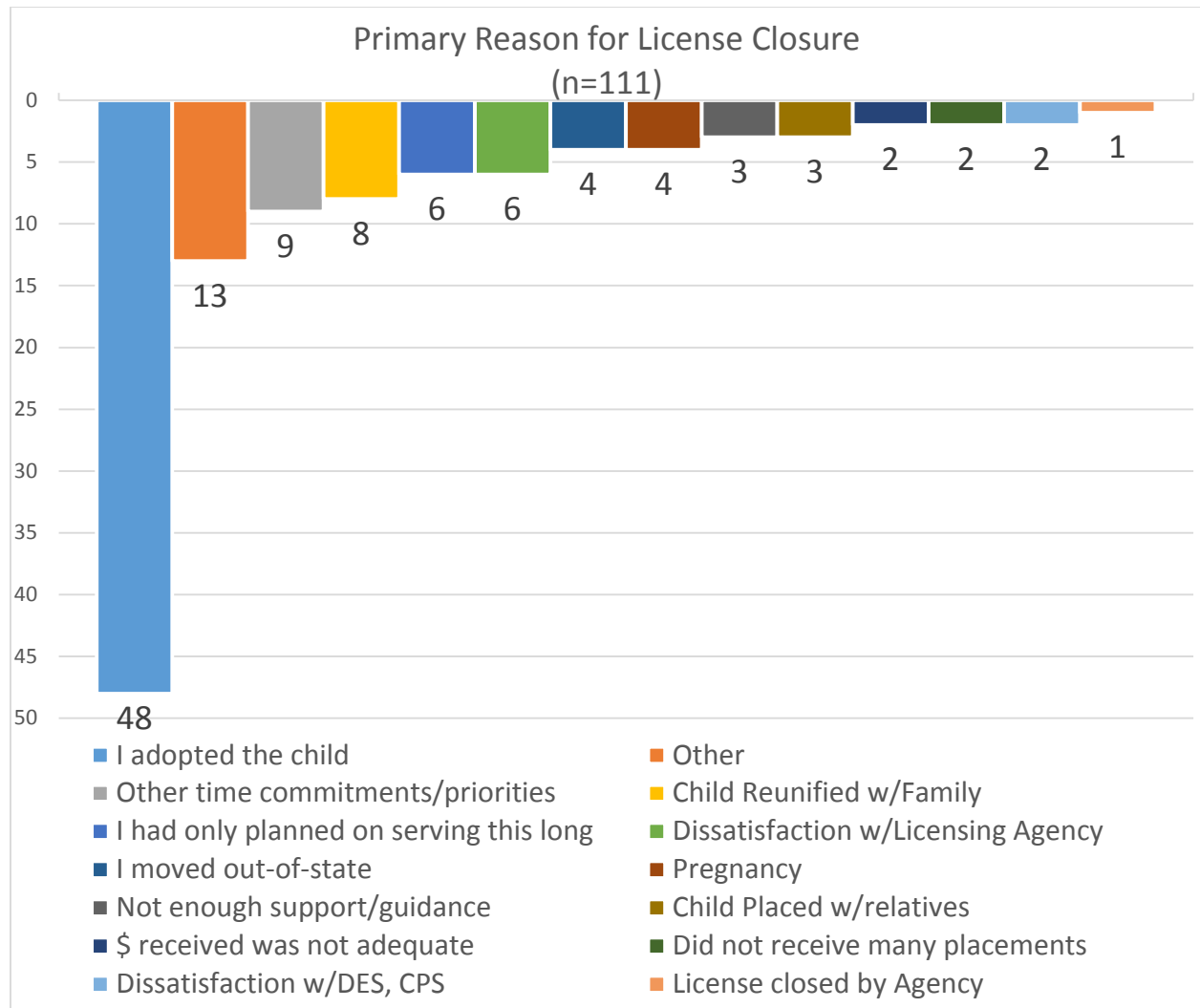
*...foster children did not work out and did not want to be adopted.*

*She moved out at 18.*

Problems between foster and biological or other adopted children:

*We realized our own children (sic) too small to expend great time and energy on meeting the 24/7 needs of a hurting child in a disorganized system. Maybe once our kids are older.*

Primary reason for license closure/discontinuing foster parenting



Adoption

By far, the largest reason for the closure of foster homes is adoption. Within this group of respondents 48 (or 43%) indicated adoption as the primary reason for closure representing a total of 56 children.

A parallel trend between increased adoptions and license closures has been seen in the study of other states as well (Gibbs, 2005).

Tennessee’s report of exit surveys (2012), found adoption to be the primary closure reason for 30% of former foster homes.

Maryland’s annual report of foster parents (2009), reported 54% of exiting foster parents had adopted foster children.

Additional comments from adoptive parents regarding their decision to close their license:

*We wanted to adopt our second child and we did. That is all we feel we can handle at present with our very busy working schedules.*

*We closed our license after adopting two kids to take a break and get adjusted to our other foster kids being adopted by another family.*

*We would have been willing to foster more after a period of one or two years so our son would understand he is here forever. However that did not seem to be an available option.*

*My, now adopted, children need so much love, time and attention that it wouldn't be fair to have another placement (at least not right now).*

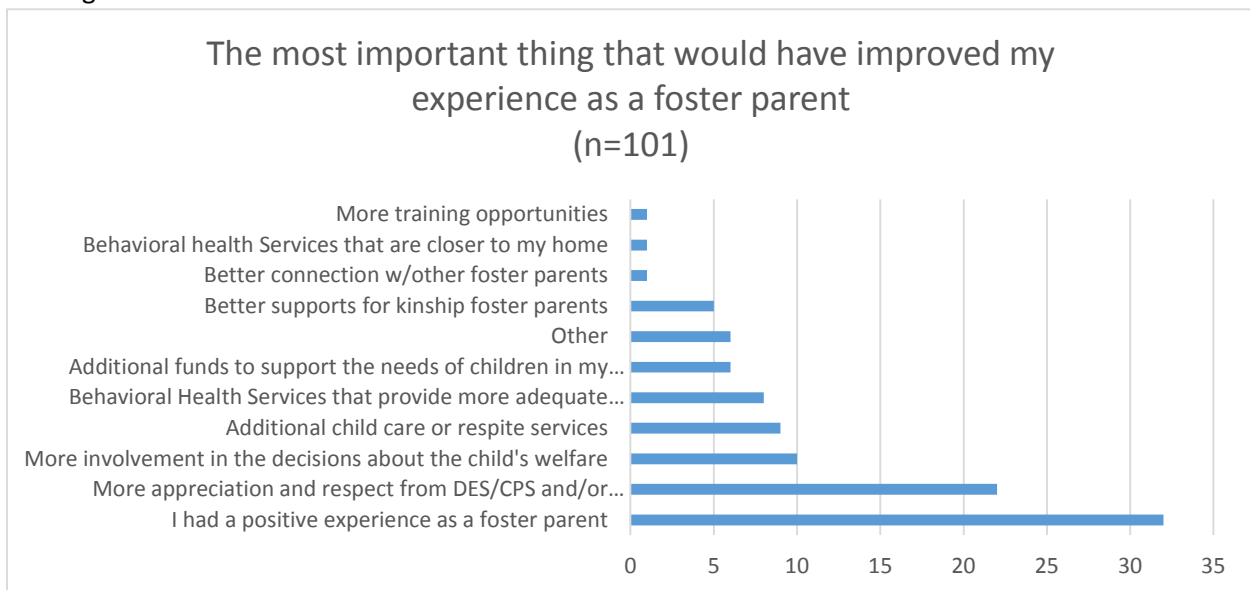
*Our adopted child's attachment needs require great attention and we did not feel it would be in her best interest to have foster children in the home.*

Dissatisfaction with the Division agency was listed as the 6<sup>th</sup> most frequent closure reason by this particular group of former foster parents, however it may not be reflective of all foster homes who had closed their licenses during the prior 12-months due to the voluntary nature of the survey.

#### Suggestions for improving the foster parenting experience

Former foster parents were asked to share the most important thing that would have improved their experience in one question, followed by an opportunity to select a second item. In the first question an option, "I had a positive experience as a foster parent" was included. This option was not available in the second question.

While 31% of respondents indicated in their first answer they had a positive experience as a foster parent, the most frequently reported suggestions related to agency relationships, followed by services and supports. Connection with other foster parents and more training opportunities fell last in the ranking.



The distribution of results for those who chose to indicate a secondary suggestion followed a pattern almost identical to that of the prior question.

Combining the numbers for the top 5 suggestions from both primary and secondary questions resulted in the following ranked list:

- #1 Suggestion: More involvement in the decisions about a child's welfare (22%)
- #2 Suggestion: More appreciation and respect from DES/CPS and/or Licensing (21%)
- #3 Suggestion: Additional funds to support the needs of children in my care (12%)
- #3 Suggestion: Behavioral Health Services that provide more adequate care (12%)
- #4 Suggestion: Additional Child Care or Respite services (9%)
- #5 Suggestion: Better Supports for Kinship Parents (7%)

A report issued by the Connecticut Association of Foster and Adoptive Parents, Inc. (Siegel, 2011) found 27% of former foster parents who cited, lack of involvement in decisions about the welfare of children in their care as a negative factor.

Recommended improvements would not likely have had an effect on these particular foster parents decision to close their licenses. Primary closure reasons were adoption and other life priorities not dissatisfaction with either THE DIVISION or the Licensing agencies. In fact, only 14% of the respondents (16 foster parents) noted agency-related reasons.

It is important to strive for improvement in all aspects of a program. However recognizing where you have the chance for largest impact is also essential.

From this preliminary data, it appears the largest loss of licensed homes was due to adoption at 43%, which is the ultimate goal for children in foster care who are not able to return to their original families. Further data would be needed in order to determine if this was a loss rate which should be expected annually.

Supporting the home in understanding they may need time to form as a forever family and that this may mean closure of their license is a natural expectation. However, comments made by adopting families indicate they would be willing to explore re-opening their license after a period of time. Asking if it would be okay to follow up in the future to explore re-licensing, and then developing a tracking mechanism to do so may result in increased foster home resources for the agency down the road.

Demographics

Age of Foster Parent (n=116)	
21-29 years old	4%
30-39 years old	28%
40-49 years old	30%
50-59 years old	23%
60-69 years old	12%
Over 70 years old	3%

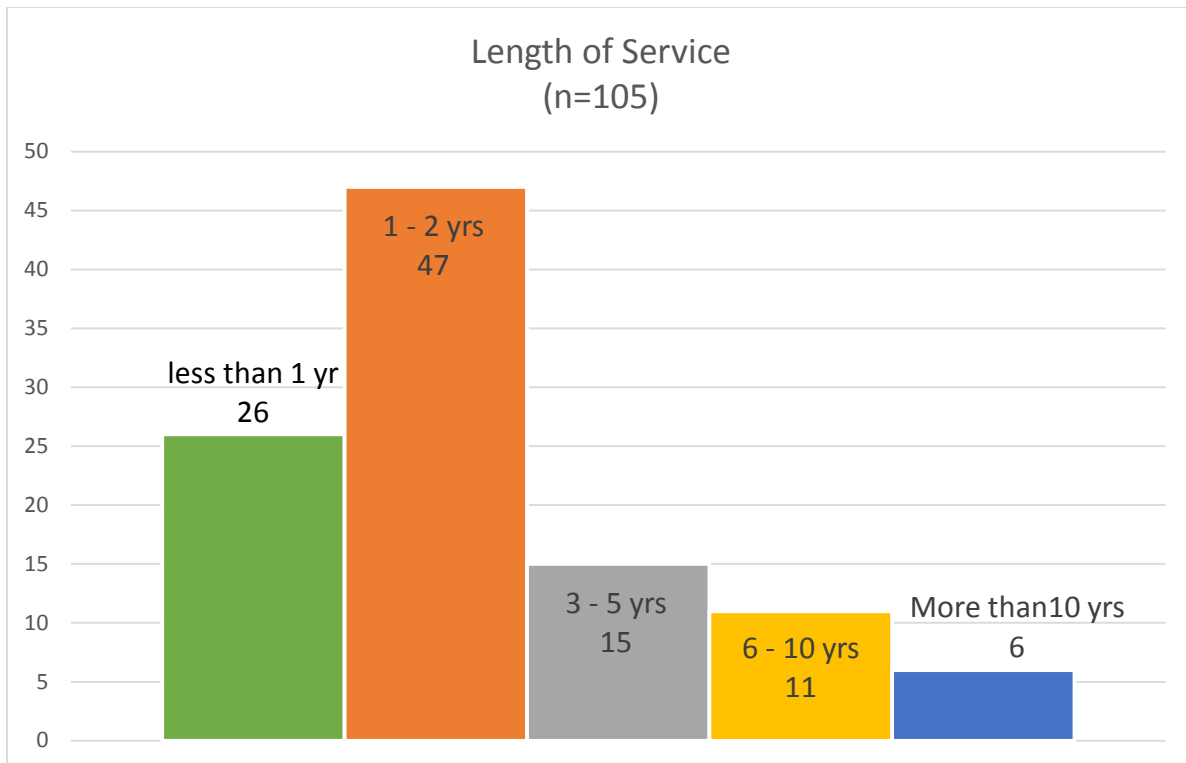
Race of Foster Parent (n=121)*	
White	71%
Hispanic	22%
African American	7%
Other / Prefer Not to Say	3%
American Indian	2%
Asian	0%
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0%

Marital Status (n=116)	
Married	69%
Not Married	31%

\* Total exceeds actual number of respondents as some selected more than one answer

Length of foster parenting service

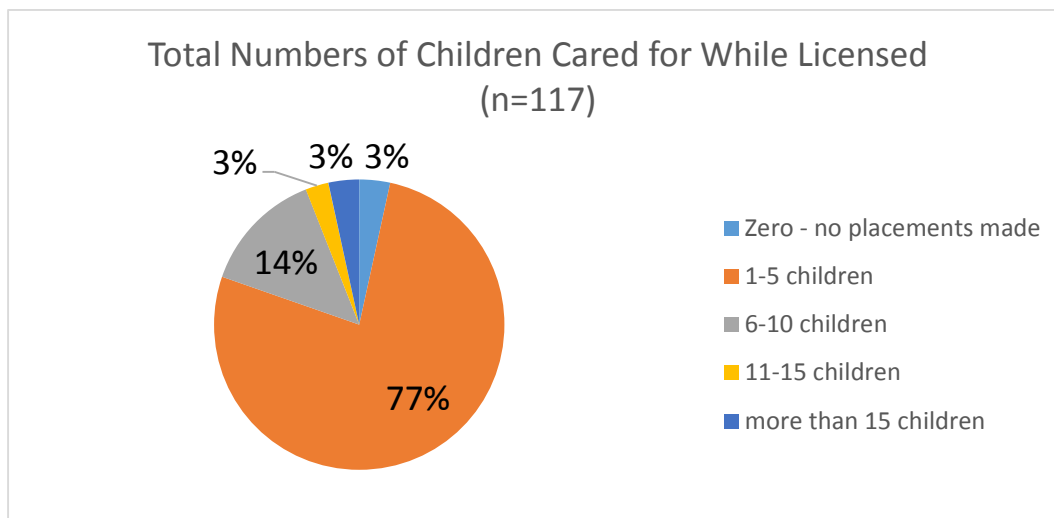
The average length of service for respondents was 3.28 years. Three foster families reported serving Arizona’s foster children for 15, 17, and 30 years respectively.



Length of service studied in Oklahoma, Oregon and New Mexico (Gibbs, 2005) found that across the three states, the average foster child's stay in foster care exceeded the typical service provided by foster homes. The study cautioned that although children's episodes of care may include planned placement changes, children whose stay in care exceeds the typical length of service of foster parents are at great risk of unnecessary disruptions due to foster parent exits.

The median length of stay in both New Mexico and Oregon was 8 months, and approximately 14 months in Oklahoma (Gibbs 2005).

Total number of children cared for over the course of your licensure



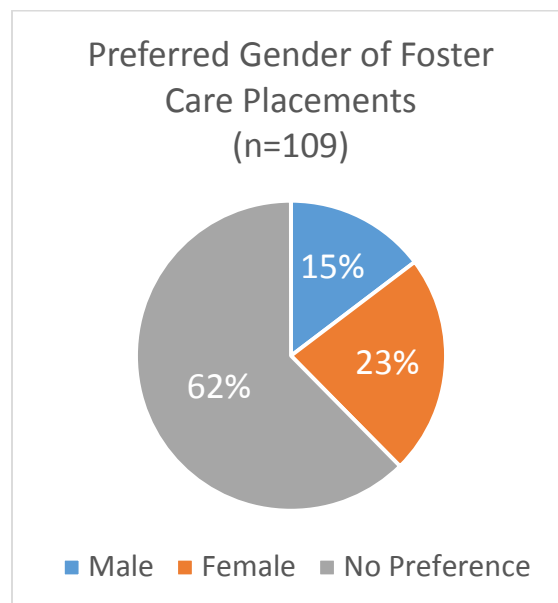
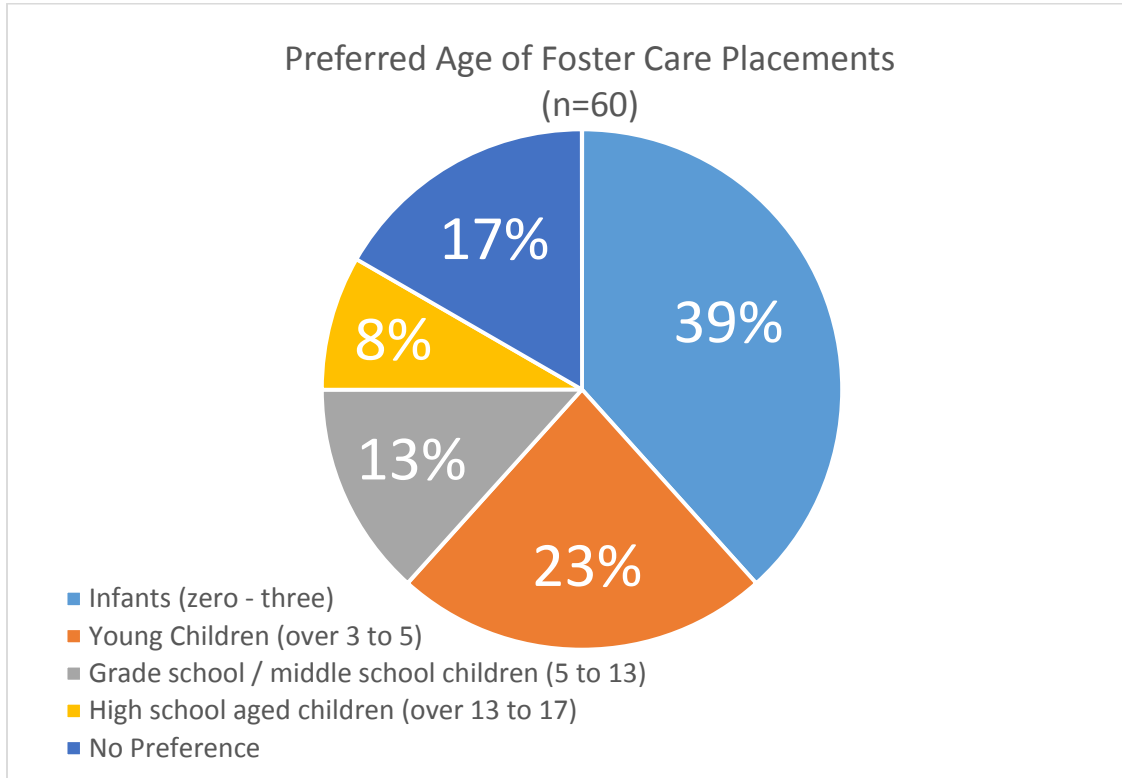
For these respondents, 18% of the homes provided care for more than 6 children over the life of their license (average length of service = 3.28 years). The majority of homes cared for between one and five children during this time, this is typical of past research findings.

Gibbs' (2005) study of occupancy rates in Oklahoma, Oregon and New Mexico found the average home had between 1-2 children placed on a hypothetical day. This distribution suggests that a relatively small group of foster parents have much higher occupancy rates. For these states, 10% of licensed homes cared for four or more children.

Placement Preferences

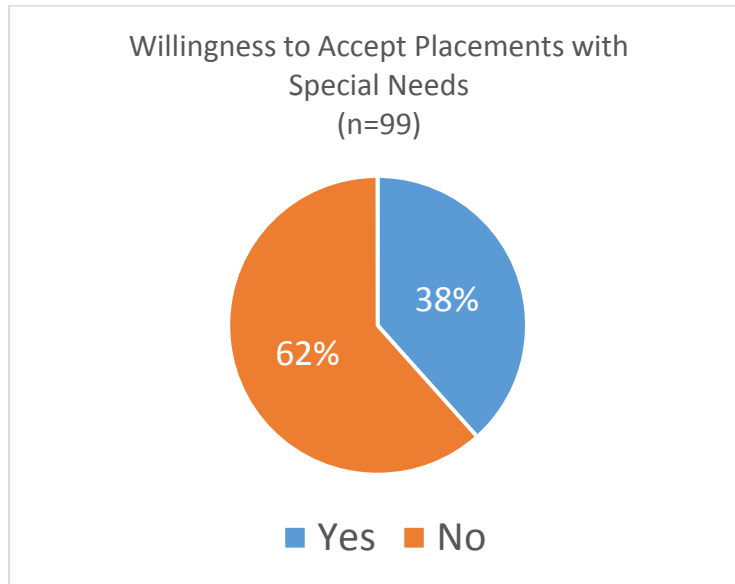
Respondents were asked about the preferences they had for the children to be placed in their home.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents (n=60) indicated they preferred to provide care to children under the age of five.

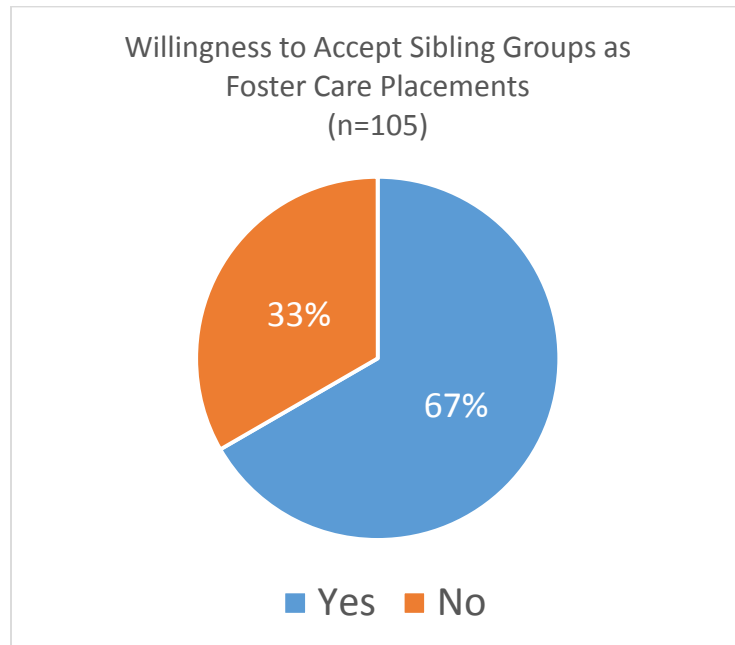


One of the most striking findings related to length of service by Gibbs (2005) was that care for children who might be considered more demanding – infants, adolescents, and children with special needs – was associated with longer lengths of service.

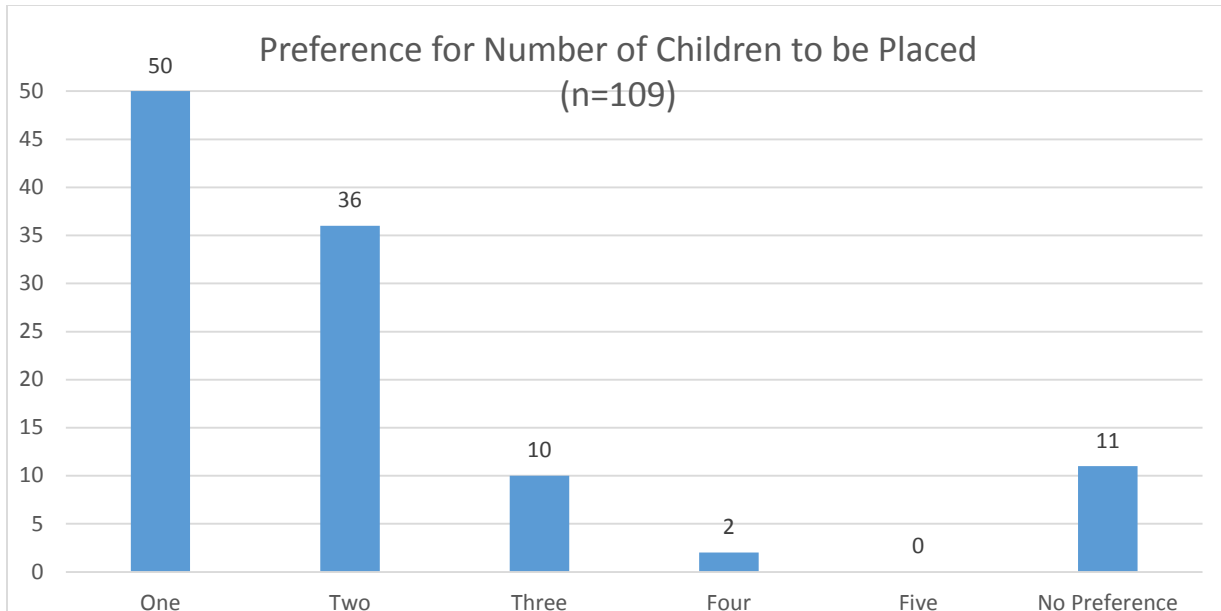
The average length of service for respondents who were willing to accept special needs children as placements was 3.8 years a slight increase as compared to the entire respondent group as a whole at 3.28 years.



The average length of service for respondents who were willing to accept sibling groups as placements was 2 months. It is unknown how this compares to the Gibbs study as sibling groups was not studied.

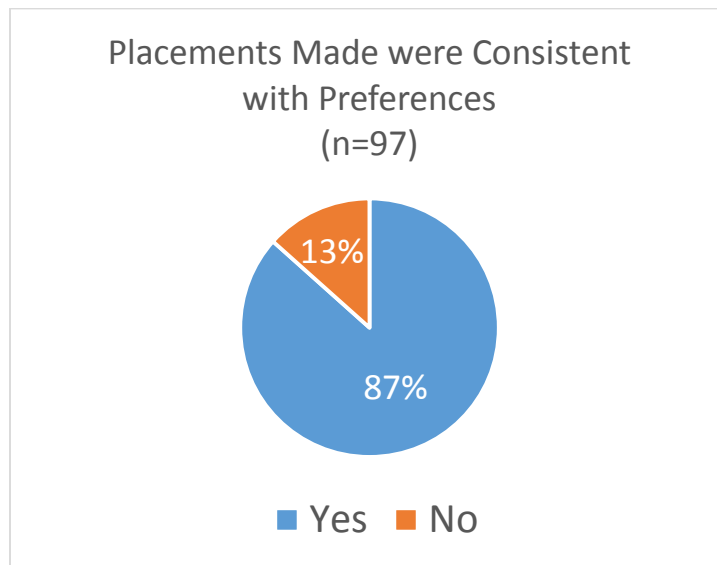






Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated a preference for no more than 2 children to be placed within their homes.

In comparison, Gibbs' (2005) study of occupancy rates in Oklahoma, Oregon and New Mexico found a similar trend of between 1.5 and 1.6 children placed on a hypothetical day.



For those former foster parents who elected to participate in this survey, the program was able to make placements consistent with the preferences established 87% of the time.

By comparison, a 2007 report by Arkansas' Division of Children and Family Services, found 77% of their foster parents agreed placements were made consistent with preferences.

A sampling of the comments from the thirteen percent who felt placements were not in line with their preferences follows. The majority of the comments indicated once a need outside of their preferences was made known, most accepted the placement and did not feel negatively about their decision.

*... our preference was for a female , 1 to 2 years. However an 8 month old boy was placed as CPS was seeking a Hispanic family who spoke English in our area in order to be close to biological mother's group home. We were told it would be temporary placement for 2 months while the dad did background check. In the end we adopted him. Felt it was God's plan.*

*Not initially but were happy with the change to younger children. Initially licensed 5-9 year old females and first placement was a 2 year old male we were introduced to. We adopted him almost two years later then continued to provide care for infants – toddlers.*

*Ages were higher than what we had preferred, but all other requirements /preferences were met. We felt fine with our decision again since all other preferences were met.*

*All them were consistent except one. We did a favor by allowing a girl in for 6 weeks because our agency asked if she could stay with us because her school was by our home. She was going to be adopted by her aunt at the end of the school year, which was right around 6 weeks. We normally would not allow a kid with her severe behavior issues, but it was an exception.*

Other respondents indicated placements made outside of their preferences was a problem:

*We have 3 birth children and did not want placements with a history of sexual abuse. We did not know the accurate history prior to accepting the placement.*

*Michigan was not very honest with us, but we are ok now.*

*I was asked to take placement outside of preferences. It took too long between placements so I asked for placements.*

*We weren't given accurate information on 2 of 4 children regarding previous history. Other 2 were to be very short term.*

#### Other feedback

A final opportunity was provided at the end of the survey for respondents to provide feedback that may not have been covered within the set survey questions. Following is a sampling of those responses:

*I wish I could financially afford it.*

*The decrease in pay rate in approximately 2006 or 2007 made it seem like what I did was of no value and I couldn't provide for the children as well.*

*I'm sorry but I was just trying to retain custody of my granddaughter. I realize the overwhelming need for foster parents but my home is not large enough to allow for all that is required.*

*I would continue but the person I am currently involved with didn't want to and that wouldn't be fair to the children.*

*The system was challenging to deal with - poor communication at times regarding meetings, visits and transportation.*

## **VI. Willingness to re-open license**

In addition to the survey materials, a blue sheet of paper was included asking if the former foster parents would be interested in re-opening their license and if so, requested what type of care they would be willing to provide.

As all returned surveys came directly to ASU, these forms were removed and separated from the returned surveys to assure confidentiality and the re-opening information was passed on to the Division.

From the 116 former foster parents who completed the survey, 97 returned the blue sheet of paper.

Thirty percent were not interested in re-opening their license.

Forty percent indicated they were interested in re-opening their license

Thirty percent reported being unsure of whether or not they were willing to reopen their license.

While the form did not provide a space for comments, many former foster parents provided their thoughts along the margins and on the back side of the sheet of paper:

*We would consider reopening our license but only in certain circumstances: 1) that the child is known to us, and our input and knowledge of the family would be considered when moving to sever (parental rights) or reunite (with birth family); and 2) if our son's birth-mother had another child that was taken into foster care.*

*Only to adopt kids (for which) parental rights have already been terminated.*

*Our adopted son is not open to it.*

*Not now with our young baby, but in the future.*

*I am willing but not at this time. My husband and I are working to get our girls settled.*

*Yes, in the future.*

*Interested in providing all forms of care at a later time when our children are grown.*

*When our daughter moves out we would be willing.*

*In a year or so.*

*Not until our birth children are much older.*

*Not at this time, perhaps when current children are older.*

*Not at this time, but yes in a couple of years.*

## **VII. Recommendations & Opportunities**

The creation and administration of a survey for foster homes who voluntarily discontinue foster parenting services is intended to establish baseline data to better understand the reasons behind their license closure decisions. It supports the Division in reporting progress against federal CFR outcomes, responds to issues identified by stakeholders, utilizes collaborative partnerships, and reflects the voices and experiences of foster parents with the ultimate goal of improving both recruitment and retention of highly qualified family foster homes for Arizona's children in need of out-of-home care.

### **1. Use Administrative Data from Licensing Records to assess if survey responses are representative of the broader population.**

Overall demographic information for the study population (all closed licenses within a 12 month period) was not available, therefore it is not known if the survey responses are representative of the broader group.

We recommend future surveys include a data pull that includes both a manner in which to contact foster parents who closed their licenses, but also demographic information that can be used to better understand if responses are representative of the intended sample.

### **2. Inquire at the point of licensure as to the intended goals are for foster parenting, including what time frame they are hoping to accomplish those goals in. Then, check-in with foster homes at least annually to review their goals and progress towards meeting them.**

Foster parenting is a voluntary service. Just as volunteers on advisory boards are provided with an estimate of term and inquiry into personal goals, so should foster parents. Knowing up front how many foster parents are planning to adopt, how many are interested in only caring for a specific child and/or relative, etc. allows you to understand your true capacity and set true recruitment goals.

### **3. When a foster home closes their license due to adoption, ask permission to follow up with them down the road for consideration of re-licensing, either for foster care or even respite services. Develop a mechanism to track this information and follow-up with homes at the agreed upon point in time.**

A majority of respondents who returned the "interest in re-opening license" flyer noted they would be interested but at a later point in time.

### **4. When a child-specific home (kin or non-relative) closes their license, inquire about the interest in continuing to provide services to a community child (non-related) or in providing respite services to other foster families. If they are licensed child-specific, assist them with the necessary actions to expand their license if they wish to continue foster parenting.**

Comments from one former relative foster parents indicated they were unaware that it would be possible to care for other children, given their child-specific license.

**5. Administer this survey on a continuous and ongoing basis in electronic form**

Immediately following the HRSS exit interview, provide discontinuing families with a link to the closed license survey. Provide a paper copy upon request if a family reports they do not have internet access.

The more time that passes from the end of foster parenting to the time of survey can reduce the reliability of the resulting data. The amount of time that is necessary for “reflection” may create a tendency for respondents to reconstruct or reframe their experience to conform to their decision to quit fostering. Administering the survey as close to the time of license closure will help reduce this factor.

A reminder can be sent out on an annual basis to those who have closed their license.

**6. Involve Foster Parents, HRSS Licensing Agencies, Foster Parent Associations, and other Stakeholders.**

Create a mutually beneficial relationship that supports the voice of foster parents for the improvement of the foster parenting experience and improved outcomes for children.

Share the results from this survey (and other surveys of actively licensed foster parents) with HRSS licensing agencies and the broad stakeholder groups and encourage collaboration in the discussion of findings and action planning that may result.

Involve stakeholders in the modification of this survey to include items of interest to them.

**7. Fully support foster parents and relatives in the care of children placed in their homes. This responsibility belongs to more than the HRSS Licensing and Support Agency.**

Foster parent and relatives are shown in research, AFCARS data, and in the respondents of this survey, to most frequently become the adoptive families for children and youth. As such they should be fully supported in preparation to transition to permanent family setting for the children and youth they care for.

Ensure foster parents have the necessary tools, information and resources to educate themselves about the role of foster parenting and also to successfully parent children in care. Consistent support through quality home visits and phone contact are imperative for foster parents as they navigate through the child welfare system and care for children who often have complex needs that require a great deal of time and attention.

Case carrying child welfare staff (including Case Aides) should work to develop and maintain mutually respectful relationships with foster families. Remembering that foster parents are volunteers, graciously giving of their personal time to support a child in need is imperative.

Increase efforts to provide more opportunities for foster parents to engage with one another to promote a sense of community. There are ways in this digital age to create a secure and monitored space for foster parents to meet each other’s needs, to support one

another through challenges, and share resources and perhaps even coordinate respite availability.

**8. Continue targeted recruitment with messages specifically aimed to capitalize on new areas of interest in the general public related to foster care and/or adoption.**

Based on the literature review, and specifically on the current media stories about foster care and adoption, examine if there are new opportunities for targeted recruitment. Keep informed about what's happening not only with foster-care adoption, but domestic and international adoption as well.

Although Faith Based Initiatives are not necessarily a new strategy in recruitment, paying close attention to trends in other states and across the nation that are attracting media coverage may create new opportunities or ways of thinking about messaging.

Similarly, trends affecting international and/or private domestic adoption, especially those that are negative may be an opportunity to re-message the option of foster care as a path to adoption.

## References

- Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2012). *The AFCARS Report No. 19*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/afcarsreport19.pdf>
- Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2011). *Federal Child and Family Services Reviews Aggregate Report: Round Two Fiscal Years 2007 – 2010*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/resource/fcsfr-aggregate-report-round-2>
- Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2004). *General Findings from the Federal Child and Family Services Review*. Retrieved from website: ([http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/summary\\_of\\_the\\_results\\_of\\_the\\_2001\\_2004\\_cfsr.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/summary_of_the_results_of_the_2001_2004_cfsr.pdf))
- Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (various). *Reports and Results of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)*. Retrieved from website: [http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb\\_web/SearchForm](http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/cwmd/docs/cb_web/SearchForm)
- Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services, Legislative Analysis, Research & Planning Unit. (2007). *Division of children and family services foster parent survey*
- Bragdon, T. Foundation for Government Accountability, (2012). *Right for kids ranking: Which state child welfare systems are right for kids?*. Retrieved from website: <http://rightforkids.org/files/8113/4064/8461/FGA-RightForKidsBook-web-single-pages.pdf>
- Bruns, J. North Dakota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services. (2008). *North Dakota foster care provider recruitment and retention survey*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/2008-foster-care-provider-survey-results.pdf>
- Byalin, K. (1993). Assessing parental satisfaction with children's mental health services: A pilot study. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 16, 69-72. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0149718993900184>
- Children's Bureau (n.d.). *Child Welfare in the News*. Daily Electronic email subscription distributed by Child Welfare Information Gateway ([www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov))
- Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, (2007). *National foster care adoption attitudes survey*. Retrieved from website: <https://dciw4f53l7k9i.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DTFA-HarrisPoll-REPORT-USA-FINALI.pdf>

- Davis, M. (1995). *Use of consumer satisfaction information to promote change in child/adolescent mental health settings*. Paper presentation at the 9<sup>th</sup> annual conference on children's mental health research, a system of care for children's mental health, University of South Florida.
- Gibbs, D. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (2005). *Understanding foster parenting: Using administrative data to explore retention*. Retrieved from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/foster-parenting/>
- Gregory, G., & Kaye, S. University of Maryland School of Social Work, Ruth H. Young Center for Families and Children. (2009). *The experience of being a foster parent is invaluable to the children: Annual report of the maryland foster parent survey*
- Huebner, R. A. (2006). Comprehensive family services and customer satisfaction outcomes. *Child welfare*, 85(4), 691-714. Retrieved from <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1P3-1148326011/comprehensive-family-services-and-customer-satisfaction>
- Lebow, J. L. (1983). Research assessing consumer satisfaction with mental health treatment: a review of findings. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 6, 211-236. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0149718983900034>
- Morrison Dore, M. Foster Family-based Treatment Association, (2010). *User's guide to measuring consumer satisfaction in treatment foster care*. Retrieved from website: [http://www.ffa.org/research\\_outcomes/consumer\\_user\\_guide.pdf](http://www.ffa.org/research_outcomes/consumer_user_guide.pdf)
- Rhodes, K., Orme, J., & Buehler, C. (2001). A comparison of family foster parents who quit, consider quitting, and plan to continue fostering. *Social Service Review*, 75(1), 84-114. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/591883>
- Siegel, J. Connecticut Voices for Children, (2011). *Increasing retention of Connecticut's foster families*. Retrieved from website: <http://www.ctvoices.org/publications/increasing-retention-connecticuts-foster-families>
- Tennessee Department of Children's Services (2012). *Report of Results of Exit Interviews of Former Resource Parents*. Retrieved from website: <http://archive.tennessean.com/assets/pdf/DN1972991117.pdf>
- United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General. (2002). *Retaining foster parents* (OEI-07-00-00601). Retrieved from website: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/05/foster-parenting/>
- WorldAPP. (n.d.). *Developing successful customer satisfaction surveys*. Retrieved from [http://www.keysurvey.com/resources/whitepapers\\_full\\_text3.jsp](http://www.keysurvey.com/resources/whitepapers_full_text3.jsp)
- Zill, N. (2011). *Adoption from Foster Care: Aiding Children While Saving Public Money*. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from website: [http://www.brookings.edu/2011/05\\_adoption\\_foster\\_care\\_zill.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/2011/05_adoption_foster_care_zill.aspx)



