

**FOSTER CARE: THE EXPERIENCES OF
BIRTH CHILDREN**

by

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I declare that **FOSTER CARE: THE EXPERIENCES OF BIRTH CHILDREN** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

DATE

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I dedicate this dissertation to all the birth children of foster families.

SUMMARY

FOSTER CARE: THE EXPERIENCES OF BIRTH CHILDREN

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Family foster care is the main resource of alternative care for children in South Africa. The researcher is of the opinion, and is supported in this by literature, that very little is known about the dynamics within the foster family and its effects on the different family members. Of special interest to the researcher is to understand what happens in the lives of birth children of foster parents when they have to share their “world” with a foster child. Up till now little attention has been given to the children who are directly involved in the fostering process.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experiences of birth children in the foster care system within the context of the family systems theory. The qualitative method implemented in the research made it possible to come to an understanding of the effects of fostering on these children and to give a true description to their voices.

Key terms:

Birth children

Experiences

Family systems theory

Foster care

Foster parents

OPSOMMING

FOSTER CARE: THE EXPERIENCES OF BIRTH CHILDREN

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Pleegsorg in gesinsverband is die hoofbron van alternatiewe versorging vir kinders in Suid-Afrika. Die navorser handhaaf die opinie, wat gerugsteun word deur die literatuur, dat min inligting bekend is aangaande die gesinsdinamika in pleeggesinne. Die navorser is veral geïnteresseerd om te verstaan wat gebeur in die lewens van biologiese kinders van pleegouers, wanneer hulle hul "wêreld" met 'n pleegkind moet deel. Tot op hede is daar min aandag gegee aan hulle wat eintlik direk betrokke is by die pleegsorg proses.

Die doel van die studie is om die belewenisse van die biologiese kinders van pleegouers te ondersoek en te beskryf binne die konteks van die sisteemteorie. Die kwalitatiewe metode wat in die navorsing geïmplementeer is, het dit moontlik gemaak om 'n begrip te verkry van die effek wat pleegsorgplasinge op hierdie kinders het en om 'n ware beskrywing van die kinders se weergawes te gee.

SLEUTELTERME:

Belewenisse

Biologiese kinders

Pleegsorg

Pleegouers

Sisteem teorie

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Throughout the recorded history, virtually all cultures and communities have dealt in some way with the problem of caring for abandoned, orphaned and neglected children. Families stood in the center of these practices, either informally taking care of next-of-kin (kinship care, apprenticeships) or of non-relatives through a more formal and arranged system (indentureships, Orphan trains, formal or informal family foster care) (Askeland 2006:3-5; McFadden 1996:545-546). According to Askeland (2006:7) and other authors referenced by her (Goody 1969; Presser 1971-1972; Zainaldin 1979; Carp 1998), most of these practices were found not to be serving the best interest of children, but were rather serving "... adult-centered, social and/or religious needs for kinship and continuity."

Already in 1909 during The White House Conference on Children, family care was preferred to institutional care and the aim of children's placements was to provide environments of nurture and safety to vulnerable children (McFadden 1996:546). In the decades following, fostering of children in families became a definite way of dealing with children in need of care. Especially during the 1970s to the 1990s there was a decrease in placement of children in residential care in countries like North America, Australia, Europe and the United Kingdom. There was a major shift in the United Kingdom to rather place children in foster care as the better option. Sinclair, Wilson & Gibbs (2005:7) state that over 75,000 children in the UK are looked after by Local Authorities, of which 60 per cent constitutes foster placements. In America there are about 500,000 children in foster care (Dickerson & Allen 2007:5).

South Africa was no exception, as the demand for foster care as substitute care rose during the decades due to the inability of institutions to address the needs of children entering the Legal Care System, as well as the preference for foster care as best option for alternative care. Currently the rendering of foster care services in South Africa is highly in demand, the presence of HIV/AIDS-related infections in adults and babies, abandonment of babies and children and all kinds of dysfunctional families being some of the most important factors. It presents an enormous challenge to institutions rendering foster care services in the country to recruit, screen and train enough suitable foster parents (which include the adolescents in charge of child-headed families) to be able to meet the high demand for substitute care in South Africa (Thiele 2005:1-4).

SASSA (South African Social Security Agency) provides the latest statistics regarding the beneficiaries of foster care grants for September 2007 which give some indication of the extent and growing figures of foster care placements in South Africa. The number of beneficiaries receiving foster care grants per province, from 31 January 2008 until 30 April 2009 is tabled as follows:

Table 1.1 (See Table 1.1 Annexure 1)

Beneficiaries Receiving Foster Care Grants in South Africa (Period 2008-01-31 to 2009-04-30)

Foster care itself is not simplistic, but as Sinclair et al. (2005:7) put it, it is “...a *highly diverse activity*”, because it involves the coming together of different family compositions, cultures, skills, commitments, age groups, temperaments, backgrounds, losses experienced by foster children, motivations of all persons involved, attitudes of birth parents and the community and the involvement of social workers.

Studies show that foster care breakdown occurs all the time due to many factors (Berridge & Cleaver 1987; James 2004; Sinclair et al. 2005). Weiner and Weiner

(1990:85) found that “...of all placements alternatives foster care proved the least durable.” Research supports the idea that foster care breakdown has to do with the foster child, the characteristics of the placement or both (Berridge & Cleaver 1987:11; Thoburn 1990:18-20; Stone 1995).

A primary literature review reveals that although foster care has been the favoured alternative care option for children in need of care, very little is known about how the members of the foster care unit experience the placement and what effects fostering has on the individual members. Most research conducted in the past focused on foster children and birth parents (Denuwelaere & Bracke 2007:67; Höjer 2004:38; Nutt 2006:12-13; Twigg 1994:297). It seems that available research on the experiences of the foster family as a system was mostly conducted through the eyes of foster mothers, often excluding the fathers, while very little recognition is given to the personal contributions of birth children (Kaplan 1988:281; Poland & Groze 1993:153; Sinclair et al. 2005:180-19; Twigg 1994:301, 302).

Practitioners acknowledge that fostering affects all members of the fostering unit and that the way all members react to these effects will determine the quality of foster care being provided and even the continuation of placements (Rhodes, Orme & Buehler 2001:86, 87, 95; Part 1993:26). Foster care changes foster parents' and their birth children's lives permanently and according to Part (1993:31) it seems that birth children “...can pay a price...” or they could “...be at risk...” in the fostering situation (Pugh 1996:37). Previous research findings are that foster parents indeed discontinued placements due to problems between foster children and their birth children (Rhodes et al. 2001:87, 95). Therefore it is vital to increase the knowledge base of the impact of fostering on the foster family unit, with special reference to birth children by whom, according to Twigg (1994: 309), the foster care experience can be “seen as a blow.”

During the literature search, the researcher did not come across any empirical findings made in South Africa, documenting specifically the experiences of birth children in the fostering situation. In contrast, several attempts have been made by researchers, among others in the United Kingdom, the U.S.A., Canada, Sweden, Germany and Belgium, to explore the impact of fostering on these children (compare Denuwelaere & Bracke 2007; Höjer 2004; Marmann 2008; Twigg 1994; Younes & Harp 2007). However, the researcher acknowledges that there may be documented information in social service and social development departments as well as tertiary institutions in South Africa, but perhaps not readily available to the general field of service.

This study attempts to contribute to the knowledge base of foster care in South Africa, by exploring and describing the experiences of birth children in foster care situations.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

During the researcher's work as a social worker rendering foster care services to foster families, previously in the Christian Social Council, Highveld Region and currently in the foster care supervision post of Child Welfare Tshwane, Centurion Office, it became evident that many foster care placements broke down, with far reaching effects on both the foster child and the foster family. As a result the researcher undertook a qualitative study during 2006 (for the purposes of a Non-Bridging Course at the Huguenot College) utilising five offices of the Christian Social Councils to explore the reasons for foster placement breakdown.

The study provided definite evidence (40% of the case studies and 30% of the questionnaires given to the foster parents) that placement breakdown occurred because birth children of foster parents were unable to adjust to the foster care situation. In the study foster parents emphasised that they and their children were lacking suitable training and ongoing support during foster placements. Two

suggestions made by foster parents were for support groups for their birth children and the availability of therapy to assist them through traumatic experiences during the placements.

The researcher has been employed in a specialised foster care post for the past two years. Within the first two months, three cases were reported where birth children could not cope in the foster care situations. Apart from these and other similar complaints received during the two year period, the researcher had to remove three foster children after breakdown of their placements occurred, mainly due to the inability of birth children to adjust to the placements.

As the researcher came to the conclusion during the literature review that very little attention is given to the actual experiences of the birth children and the impact thereof on foster placements, it motivated the researcher to look deeper into this matter by undertaking this empirical study.

The researcher made use of some older sources in the literature review and research study, mainly because these authors were experts in their field of study and their work are acknowledged as classical contributions to the body of knowledge.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:43) the heart of the research project is the problem. There must be clarity about the problem, stated precisely and if necessary divide into more manageable sub problems. Welman and Kruger (2001:12) state that the research problem will refer to some difficulty that is experienced in practice, and according to Creswell (2003:80) a problem can occur in literature or in theory, to which answers and solutions are being sought.

No foster placements can take place without the foster parent system and subsystem (foster father and/or mother with or without birth children). When a child enters foster care, he/she enters a new system, bringing along all the experiences of his own family and eco-system, both impacting on the other in a certain way. As such, the outcome of foster care seems to “...*depend heavily on the characteristics of the child, the foster family and the interaction between the two*”, as stated by Sinclair et al. (2005:91).

It is also apparent that the finding of enough capable family systems for foster care as the preferable alternative way of caring for children, apart from adoption, is a daunting task (Dickerson & Allen 2007:10). The researcher is therefore of the opinion that quality foster care systems are scarce commodities and that the dealing with foster parents and their own offspring needs to be done in a careful, understanding, informed and ongoing supportive way.

In view of the fact that there seems to be sparseness in the literature concerning the views and perceptions of the foster care system in relation to placements, with special reference to the views of the birth children, it is of interest to the researcher to focus more extensively on this specific scarce human resource. According to several authors (Shaw & Hipgrave 1983; Rushton, Sellick & Colton) in Nutt (2006:9,16,17), the foster family has been marginalised in various ways in the past by the social service system. Nutt (2006:16) reaffirms that there is little evidence available from previous studies about the foster care unit itself regarding their experiences, perceptions and understanding of being foster parents and a foster family. She found that much of the information on foster families came from questionnaires, surveys and the opinions of social workers and not from the role-players themselves.

There is evidence that birth children are affected through the fostering experience, both in a positive and negative way (Höjer 2004:47; Nutt 2006: 58; Pugh 1996:38; Twigg & Swan 2007:51), that their voices are not always being

heard and that they could feel left-out by their parents and the fostering system (Sinclair et al. 2005:180-195). The latter found that birth children's reactions to placements in the family are crucial for success in placements, even though they do not always feel negative about placements.

The questions are also being raised as to what effect birth children's development are being distorted by the fostering experience and whether they are being harmed emotionally in the process (Pugh 1996:37). In the study of Sinclair et al. (2005:89) a foster father gave some indication about his birth children's emotional experiences and the impact on the family: "*Our children suffered and life got very difficult.*"

The researcher is also of the opinion, after conducting a literature survey that very little mention is made of the adjustment of birth children in foster placements, and the documentation of their actual versions about their experiences in fostering is limited. With reference to the available evidence about birth children in foster placements, it is clear that birth children do experience difficulties in fostering and that these difficulties can lead to premature foster care breakdown (McFadden 1996:546; Nutt 2006:72).

It is also the researcher's opinion that, if the reciprocal effects of the interactions taking place in the foster family system, with special reference to the impact on birth children, can be identified and clarified, this knowledge can be utilised very effectively as follows in the practice of foster care:

- The formulation of more appropriate programs for recruiting and screening of foster families.
- The formulation of more effective programs to train foster families.
- The re-thinking and revising of existing matching methods in foster care.

- The rendering of more effective supervision and support services to all the members of foster families.
- In the long run, this knowledge can contribute to foster placement stability and the retention of foster families.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Against this background, the problem statement can be summarised as follows: Birth children's own voices of their experiences in fostering and the impact that fostering has on them are "...*just as muffled, if not absent from literature.*" Yet they are directly involved in the foster care system, the impact of which has far-reaching effects on their lives and daily functioning (Younes & Harp 2007:25). Most of the time practitioners are unaware of the effect of fostering on birth children and as such a lacuna exists in the available body of knowledge on foster care.

1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTION.

Research questions are common in qualitative studies (Fouché 2002:104). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2004:54) it provides guidance for the kinds of data that should be collected. Blaikie (2000:60) emphasises the necessity of the research question as follows: "...*a research project is built on the foundation of its research questions.*" Creswell (in Fouché 2002:106) stipulates that the research question relates to "*how*" and "*what*." According to Creswell (1994:4) research questions can either be a guiding hypothesis followed by sub questions or a '*grand-tour*' question. For this study the one "*grand-tour*" and "*what*" question opted for is:

What are the experiences of birth children of foster parents in foster care situations when sharing their home and family life with a foster child or foster children?

1.6 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

According to Fouché (2002:107) the aim is the end result or “*dream*” that the researcher wants to achieve and the objectives are the steps that need to be taken in order to realise the dream.

1.6.1 Aim:

The researcher aims with this research endeavour, and as part of uncovering meaning, to explore and describe birth children’s experiences of fostering.

1.6.2 Objectives:

The following objectives will be pursued in order to attain the goal:

(1) To undertake a literature study in order to describe the dynamics in the foster family from a systems theoretical perspective.

(2) To conduct empirical research focusing on the following aspects:

- To explore, by means of semi-structured interviews with from a sample of participants (the birth children of foster parents), their experiences of the foster care placement.
- To describe the experiences of the birth children regarding their foster care situations.
- To analyse and interpret the obtained data according to recognised methods.
- To explore, by means of semi-structured interviews, the views and impressions of social workers in practice about the way birth children experience foster care placements.

- To use the empirical data received from the social workers as a control measure in order to validate the empirical data obtained from the birth children.
- To use literature as a control measure in order to validate the empirical data.
- The researcher aims to formulate conclusions and make recommendation on the research topic.

(3) By means of exploratory and descriptive research, the researcher intends to draw conclusions and to make recommendations about the obtained results that could be useful for the following purposes in foster care practice:

- The screening and training programs for prospective foster parents.
- The selection of suitable placements for foster children.
- The ongoing support and supervision programs for foster placements in order to prevent breakdowns and to retain foster families.
- Recommendations for further studies.

The aim of this research endeavor, to quote Blaikie (2000:49), is to be *“...concerned with practical outcomes, with trying to solve some practical problems, with helping practitioners accomplish tasks, and with the development and implementation of policy”* and therefore falls within the ambit of applied research.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Welman and Kruger (2001:9) indicate that research methodology can be described at best as being the discovery of reality or the truth through scientific methods. The authors continue that quantitative and qualitative research methodologies allow the means to explore these phenomena.

1.7.1 Research Approach

According to Creswell (2003:18) the research approach can be characterised as either more quantitative, more qualitative or mixed method (Creswell 2003:18). The researcher made use of the qualitative approach. The qualitative method enabled the researcher to observe social life as it happened daily, to understand it, as well as the meaning that people attached to it (Babbie 2005:293; Fouché & Delpont 2002:79).

In contrast, the quantitative method aims to measure social happenings objectively, to test hypotheses, to predict human behavior and to develop generalisations that can contribute to theory (Cherry 2000:39; Fouché & Delpont 2002:79; Leedy & Ormrod 2005:95).

In the mixed approach method the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data is being done sequentially (Creswell 2003:21).

The researcher made use of the qualitative approach for the following reasons:

- It enabled the researcher to gain a first hand, holistic and in-depth knowledge and an understanding of the nature, setting and interactions that are taking place in the foster family systems, by means of the actual experiences of birth children and their interpretations of their real life situations. The researcher visited each child in their foster home setting and, by means of semi-structured interviewing, recorded their stories (Cherry 2000:39; Fouché 2002:105; Leedy & Ormrod 2005:133). Their own language is used in order to give a true reflection of their actual feelings and experiences (Fouché & Delpont 2002:81).

- It allowed the researcher to be flexible in the research process by not using fixed steps, but by acknowledging instead the uniqueness of each interview, using different questions to guide the process (Fouché & Delpont 2002:81).
- The researcher was able to concentrate on relationships between the elements and contexts in the unit of analyses, as suggested by the systems theory that the whole is always more than the sum (Fouché & Delpont 2002:81).
- The researcher was able to gain new insights into this peculiar phenomenon (birth children's experiences), which is a relatively unknown field (Twigg & Swan 2007:49). The researcher as the only instrument in the process was able to develop new insight into the phenomenon and to discover problem areas that certainly exist in foster care placements (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:133).

The qualitative method with its peculiar characteristics made it possible for the researcher to reach the aim and purpose of the study as stated previously, namely:

To explore and describe how birth children experience fostering.

1.7.2 Research Design

The research design refers to the plan or structural framework of how the researcher intends to conduct the research process in order to obtain the answers to the research problem. According to Mouton (1996:107) the research design is like a "route planner"; the set of guidelines and instructions on how the goal will be reached. Royse (1991:43) refers to the design as "...something like a blueprint" that provides the information about the "*who*", "*what*", "*when*", "*where*" and "*how*" of the research study. Mouton (1996:107) also indicates that the main

function of the research design is to enable researchers to anticipate what the appropriate research decisions should be in order to maximise validity of results.

In this study, applied research of an explorative, describing and contextual nature was conducted. The focus was to get an understanding of what birth children are experiencing in their foster care systems, in order to describe it in a way that the knowledge gained, can be utilised in future practice.

According to Babbie (2005:89, 90) exploratory research is conducted to familiarise the researcher with a topic or subject that is relatively new and to yield new insights into the field of interest. In this study the researcher aimed to gain insight and an understanding of how birth children give meaning to their experiences of foster care placements.

A descriptive strategy is also implemented, as the researcher aimed to describe the actual experiences of the birth children, reflecting the meaning and interpretations they have attached thereto, thus leading to a more complete description of their social reality (Babbie 2005:91).

Using the lens of Contextual strategy the researcher explored these experiences of the birth children (subsystem) within the wider context in which they function and relate, namely the foster family system.

Applied research, according to Neuman (2006:25), is “... *designed to offer practical solutions to a concrete problem or address the immediate and specific needs of clinicians or practitioners.*” The researcher aimed at formulating practical recommendations that can be applied in the field of foster care service rendering.

1.7.3 Research Method

1.7.3.1 Population

The population of a study refers to the specific study elements in total or the “...*large pool of cases or elements...*” with which the research problem is concerned (Babbie 2005:196; Neuman 2000:200; Strydom & Venter 2002:198,199). As the definition for a population is very wide, vague and without boundaries, Neuman (2000:201) suggests that the unit of interest be specified with geographical locations and temporal boundaries given to it. In this study the population was defined as:

- The birth children of supervised foster parents of school going age, living in a foster care situation, within the Centurion metropolitan area.
- Social workers in practice, rendering foster care services in the Pretoria and Centurion metropolitan areas.

1.7.3.2 Sampling

Neuman (2006:219) defines a sample as “*A smaller set of cases a researcher selects from a large pool and generalises to the population.*” In this study, the specific sample that was drawn from the population had a twofold purpose, namely:

- to be assessable and geographically within reach of the researcher.
- to be cost and time effective.

With probability sampling every element in the population has a known chance of being selected (Marlow 1998:136). Non-probability sampling is used when the number of elements in a population is unknown or cannot be identified and the selection of elements rests upon certain considerations (Kumar 1999:160). In this

study a sample was selected by means of the non-probability sampling procedure. It made it possible for the researcher to select the people who have in-dept information about the research topic and who were willing to share it (Yegidis & Weinbach 1996:121). This sampling method is also very useful to describe relatively unknown phenomena (Kumar 1999:162).

Participants (birth children) were therefore selected and a resultant sample was drawn from the current foster care caseloads of the three Non Profit Organisations that were registered with the National Department of Social Development, Gauteng as Welfare Organisations rendering foster care and supervision services in the Centurion Magisterial district, namely:

- The Christian Social Council of Lyttleton and Valhalla and
- Child Welfare Tshwane, Centurion.

Participants (social workers) who are providing foster care services to foster families in the metropolitan areas of Centurion and Pretoria were selected from the mentioned welfare organisations. Certain areas of operation were chosen solely because of easy access and time limitations. The areas were:

Centurion Lake, Cornwall Hill, Doringkloof, Eldo Glen, Eldo Manor, Eldo Park, Eldoraigue, Irene, Kloofsig, Kosmosdal, Lyttleton, Pierre van Ryneveld, Raslow, Rooihuiskraal, Swartkop, The Reeds, Valhalla, Wierda Park.

Under the non-probability sampling criterion, the purposive sampling technique with an expert approach was employed, as the purposive method of sampling gave the researcher access to special characteristics, conditions, or experiences that were hoped to be understood in the research topic (Yegidis & Weinbach 1996:122).

The sample from the caseloads was selected as follows:

- Current supervised fostering cases from the mentioned organisations in the selected areas, where birth children were still living at home.
- Birth children between the ages of 11-18 years (children had to be able to communicate their experiences) and still living in the foster care situation.

The professional participants that were selected were qualified social workers from the mentioned organisations, who were actively involved in the rendering of foster care services.

The sample sizes could not be determined at the outset of the study, but was determined by data saturation. Data saturation occurs when multiple participants are interviewed and the same information starts to recur, while no new information is being added (De Vos 2005:362; Greeff 2002:300).

After the list of possible participants was received from the three organisations the researcher proceeded by preparing the participants for their participation in the research inquiry. The steps indicated by Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996:65-67) were implemented as guidelines in the process. The steps are discussed as follows:

All the names and contact details of the participants were obtained from the various organisations. The researcher telephoned the parents of each selected participant, introduced herself and explained the purpose of the call. The parents were asked to consider their children's participation in the research inquiry. The researcher provided the following information, enabling the foster parents to make informed decisions on the matter:

- The type of questions that would be asked to the child.
- The anticipated length of the interviews and planned location where it would be conducted.

- The reason for using a tape recorder, namely to provide an exact record of the interview (written permission was obtained to record the interviews) (Greeff 2002:304).
- Clarification of all expectations with regard to the participant and the interview.
- The concept of voluntary participation.

The researcher emphasised the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity and simultaneously gave an explanation of the procedures that were to be followed regarding the handling and storage of the obtained information on the tapes. They were informed about both the researcher's and the study supervisor's access to the information on the tape. It was explained that the researcher would take responsibility to remove all identifying particulars of the participants beforehand. The manner in which the information would be reflected in the research proposal was discussed. The parents, together with their children, were given a short period of time to consider participation in the research project. Eventually thirteen birth children participated in the research project.

After the parents agreed to the participation, a written document with all the relevant information was given to the parents of the participants. The parents, as well as the children, gave written consent to participate in the research project. The participants and the researcher agreed on a convenient time for conducting the interviews.

The researcher obtained the participation and written consent from the professional participants in a similar way as the procedures being described that were followed with the birth children. Four social workers in practice participated in the research project.

1.8 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

According to Greeff (2002:292) interviewing is predominantly used to collect data in qualitative research. Mouton (2001:289) points out that in qualitative interviewing interaction takes place between the interviewer and the participant, in which the interviewer implements a general plan of enquiry, instead of a specific set of questions.

The researcher made use of interviews and more specifically of semi-structured interviews by means of an interviewing guide to collect data from the birth children of the foster parents and the social workers.

In a semi-structured interview the researcher has more freedom to "...pursue hunches and can improvise with questions" (Marlow 1998:160). According to Greeff (2002:302), the researcher can be guided by predetermined questions or key words in the semi-structured interview. The researcher can ask specific open ended questions to which the participant can provide his/her own answers or even introduce new issues.

With reference to the interviews, the researcher made use of the following request and main open ended questions as a guide during the interviews conducted with the birth children (Ruben & Ruben 1995:145).

Request: Tell me how it is for you to have a foster child (another child) placed in your home in the care of your parents.

Main Questions to the Birth Children

- What do you like about the foster placement?
- What do you dislike about the foster placement?
- What would you like to change?

- Were you informed / prepared about the foster placement in your home and by whom?
- What advice will you give to children like yourself who are going to be in fostering situations?
- What feelings/emotions do you experience in the placement?

Main Questions to the Social Workers

- How do you include the birth children of foster parents in your foster care services?
- Do you find in your service rendering to foster families any birth children that are positive about the foster placement? What do they stipulate as being positive?
- Do you find in your service rendering to foster families any birth children that have ambivalent feelings about the foster placement? Can you elaborate on this matter?
- Do you find in your service rendering to these families any birth children that are negative about the foster placements? What do they stipulate as being negative?
- Do you think social workers are doing enough for birth children in their foster care service rendering? Motivate your answer.

All the birth children that participated in the study were visited in their home environment. Eventually nine of the interviews conducted with the birth children took place in the comfortableness of their homes. The other four participants preferred the interviews to be conducted in the office of the researcher as it proofed to be the least interruptive. Two social workers preferred the interviews to be conducted in their own office settings; one social worker preferred to meet in an informal surrounding, while the fourth interview was conducted in the home environment of the remaining social worker.

The researcher used interviewing techniques during the interviews. Firstly the researcher entered the interview with an introduction. During the introduction phase the researcher introduced herself; the purpose of the meeting was briefly explained again; uncertain aspects were clarified and the researcher ensured that the participant felt comfortable to proceed with the interview. Then the researcher subtly guided the remainder of the interview by using the questions and interviewing techniques, but the necessary flexibility was kept in order for the participant to tell his/ her story. The researcher listened with interest, while probing for more detailed information by using keywords that were initiated by the participants. During the interview the researcher clarified any ambiguity when it was necessary. Throughout the interview the researcher made observations and took notes of any non-verbal communication. The interviews were subscribed by the researcher the following day after each interview was conducted. The introduction parts of the interviews were not audio taped and subscribed.

1.9 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

According to De Vos (2002:339) data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected. Data analysis already starts at the research site and continues throughout the rest of the process.

Qualitative data analyses are methods for examining research data without converting them to numerical format. It rather looks for and discovers the underlying patterns and meanings that appear from the data, across several interviews and observations, and typically represent the different phenomena under study (Babbie 2005:387, 388).

The researcher looked for these themes and patterns while collecting the data by means of the semi-structured interviews. When these patterns and themes were identified and became repetitive, the researcher concluded the interviews, as the data became saturated. The recorded interviews were then transcribed.

The eight steps proposed by Tesch in Creswell (1994:155) to analyse qualitative data, were used in the following way in order to provide a systematic process to analyse the obtained data:

- The researcher read through the transcriptions to get a feeling of the whole, while ideas that arose were formulated.
- The researcher took one recorded interview and read through it, while trying to establish the underlying meaning. All the thoughts that appeared were noted.
- This process was repeated with the other documents and the thoughts were organised in themes and subthemes. Similar themes and topics were clustered together in columns as “*major*”, “*unique*” and “*leftover*” topics. At this stage the researcher and the study supervisor reached consensus about the themes identified from the data.
- The data was then revised in terms of the list of topics. The researcher made use of abbreviated codes for the themes that were written next to the appropriate text context. The researcher was continuously watchful for possible new themes that could emerge from the data.
- Furthermore, the researcher decided on the most descriptive wording for the identified themes and subthemes, and categories were organised in terms of these. In order to reduce the total list of categories, related topics were grouped together, while interrelationships were indicated.
- Final decisions regarding the wording of the themes, subthemes and categories and where to place them was made in collaboration with the study supervisor.
- The obtained data was subjected to a literature control as an aid to support the patterns, themes and categories that have been identified (Creswell 1994:23).

1.10 METHOD OF DATA VERIFICATION

All research must sustain the trustworthiness of the study (De Vos 2002:351). The researcher made use of Guba's model of Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research (in Krefting 1991:214-222) in order to meet the required standards. The four aspects of trustworthiness are: truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality and were addressed as follows:

1.10.1 Truth-Value

To ensure having confidence in the findings of the research based on the research design, the participants contributions and the context, the researcher ensured the credibility of the study. This was done by the accurate description and interpretation of the experiences of the participants. Truth-value is established through the strategy of credibility. For this purpose the researcher implemented various techniques, namely:

- Interviewing techniques such as listening, probing, reflecting, restating and clarification and summarising in order to enhance credibility.
- Keeping a field journal to describe the daily schedules, logistics and methods applied, as well as the personal diary of the researcher's own thoughts, ideas and feelings about the research process in order to become aware of any bias and perceived assumptions coming from the researcher.
- Triangulation, which is the comparison of more perspectives by using different means of data collection (Krefting 1991:219). For this purpose the researcher interviewed:
 - birth children in current foster placements from three different welfare organisations and
 - qualified social workers from four different welfare organisations in order to verify the obtained information gathered from the birth children.

1.10.2 Applicability

Applicability refers to the possibility that the findings can be applied or generalised to larger populations (Krefting 1991:216). Guba (in Krefting 1991:216) refers to transferability or fitness as the criterion to which applicability can be assessed. Criteria for transferability are, according to Krefting (1991:216), a nominated sample, time samples and member checking, comparison of data to available demographic information and a dense background description of participants and research context.

To address transferability the researcher made use of social workers from the three mentioned organisations rendering foster care services to foster families as a panel to nominate participants representative of the phenomena (Krefting 1991:220).

The researcher also provided a dense description of the research methodology setting and process in order to enhance transferability possibilities.

1.10.3 Consistency

According to Krefting (1991:216), consistency refers to whether the findings, if repeated with the same subjects or in similar context, will be the same and not be altered. Consistency in qualitative research is defined in terms of dependability, because variability is expected in the qualitative process.

Strategies for dependability, according to Guba (in Krefting, 1991:221) are: a dependable audit, a step by step replication technique, and a procedure of coding and re-coding, triangulation and peer examination.

Dependability in this study was ensured as follows:

- The researcher applied triangulation of data resources and a dense description of the research process and methods in order to ensure dependability and consistency.
- The researcher discussed and checked the research plan and its implementation with the study supervisor, an expert in qualitative research methodology, to enhance dependability.
- The researcher engaged in consensus with the study supervisor, confirming the emerging themes, subthemes and categories that arose from the processes of data collection and data analysis.

1.10.4 Neutrality

Neutrality refers to the absence of any bias and that the findings are solely those of the participants (Babbie 2005:259). Neutrality is established through the strategy of conformability and by means of the following criteria: a conformability audit; triangulation of multiple methods, data sources and theoretical perspectives and reflexive analysis (Krefting 1991: 221).

The researcher implemented triangulation of data resources to enhance neutrality of the research findings.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Strydom (2002:63), ethics is a set of moral rules that are set by individuals or groups and are widely accepted. It offers rules of conduct and behavioural expectations towards all spheres of life.

Ethical matters that were considered in this study were as follows:

- Informed consent was obtained from the Boards of Management of the three welfare organisations to conduct the study within their working frame of reference.
- Informed consent was obtained from the foster parents for involving their children as participants in the study. In order for the participants to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in this research project, the organisations as well as the participants (the birth children of the foster parents) were issued with a written format consisting of all relevant information on the study: (a) how it will be utilised (b) what can be expected (c) the undertaking of confidentiality (d) the option to quit participation at any stage of the process.
- Informed consent was obtained for the purpose of recording the interviews.
- Voluntary participation - participants were informed that their participation was voluntary.
- Confidentiality – while the information may have a name attached to it, the researcher keeps it secret from the public (Neuman 2000:99). The researcher ensured confidentiality by adhering to the following: (a) by only recording necessary personal information to achieve the purpose of the study, (b) by storing all information in a safe place and (c) by removing all identifying particulars after the coding procedure.
- Anonymity - According to Babbie (2005:64), anonymity guarantees that nobody can “...*identify a given response with a given respondent.*” In this study the researcher guaranteed anonymity by transcribing the interviews personally and by replacing identification particulars with pseudonyms.
- Debriefing and Referral - The researcher was aware that interviews could cause emotional or psychological distress to participants and therefore the researcher conducted the interviews in a sensitive way. An open invitation was given to the participants to join debriefing sessions, should they prefer to do so (Babbie 2005:69).

- Research results are available on request.

1.12 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.12.1 Birth children

This refers to the biological/natural children of the foster parent.

1.12.2 Child Welfare Tshwane

A registered non-profit and non-governmental welfare organisation rendering social services to children and families of all race groups in the Tshwane area.

1.12.3 Christian Social Council - Highveld

It is a registered non-profit and non-governmental welfare organisation rendering social services in the Highveld region.

1.12.4 Family Systems Approach

This approach is grounded on the belief that all families are social systems, which operate through transactional patterns. Each family member is seen in relationship with the other members. Each member has an effect on the other members, while also being affected by them. No individual member is seen in isolation, as all the components of the human system are interrelated (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:6; Collins, Jordan & Coleman 2007:42; Minuchin 1974:51).

1.12.5 Foster Care

Foster care is temporally statutory substitute care within family context for a child whose parents are unable to take care of him/her for various reasons. Many of these children will eventually return to their parents.

An ecological view of foster care as stipulated by Munichin et al (in Mosek 2004:323) is of "... a coordinated network of agency, foster and biological families, mutually responsible for the parental care of a child and to each other."

1.12.6 Foster Care Breakdown (Placement disruption)

It refers to foster care placements that came to an end before their varied aims have been achieved or "... not lasting as long as needed ..." (Sinclair et al. 2005:8).

1.12.7 Foster Child

"foster child" means a child who has been placed in the custody of

(a) a foster parent in terms of

(i) Chapter 3 or 6 of the Child Care Act, 1983 (Act 74 of 1983) or

(ii) Section 290 of the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977)

or

(b) a tutor to whom a letter of tutorship has been issued in terms of Chapter iv of the Administration of Estates Act 1965 (Act 66 of 1965) (Juta Statutes of South Africa 2008: 4-260)

1.12.8 Foster Parent

"foster parent" means a person, except a parent of the child concerned, in whose custody a foster child has been placed in terms of any law, or a tutor to whom a letter of tutorship has been issued in terms of Chapter iv of the Administration of Estates Act, 1965 (Act 66 of 1965) (Juta Statutes of South Africa 2008: 4-260).

1.12.9 Social Worker – Foster Care

“social worker” means any person registered as a social worker under the Social Work Act, 1978 (Act 110 of 1978); or deemed to be so registered, and who save for the purposes of Section 42, is in the service of a state department or a provincial administration or a pre-scribed welfare organisation (Juta Statutes of South Africa 2008:2-93). It is the person who is responsible for rendering statutory, supervision and support services to the foster child and foster family.

1.12.10 Welfare Organisation

According to the Social Assistance Act (No. 59 of 1992) it refers to:

- (1) a welfare organisation registered under section 13 (1) of the National Welfare Act, 1978 (Act No. 100 of 1978).
- (2) an organisation not registered as such, but which renders social welfare services for non-profitable purposes (Social Assistance Act No 59 of 1992).

1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The research study consists of four chapters, namely:

- Chapter 1 of this study consists of a general introduction and an explanation of the research design and methodology.
- In Chapter 2 the family systems theory as conceptual framework is used to discuss the foster family and its dynamics.
- Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the empirical study undertaken and its findings within the context of the family systems theory.
- Chapter 4 presents conclusions and recommendations.

1.14 CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, the researcher introduced the reader to a small part of the broader field of foster care, namely the birth child in the foster family unit. Reference is made to why it is of importance to understand the context of the birth child in the fostering process. Furthermore, the researcher focused on the methodology that was applied in this study and relevant terminology was highlighted in order to clarify the foster care context to the reader.

The systems approach is the main focus in Chapter two. This approach is implemented to gain a better understanding of the dynamics within the foster family, in terms of the views and beliefs of this theory.

CHAPTER TWO

THE (FOSTER) FAMILY: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Foster care is all about family life and children. According to Whitelaw, Downs, Moore, McFadden, Michaud & Costin (2004:344) family foster care is a social system with many component parts and complex interrelationships between those parts. The addition of a new, unfamiliar child to the family, introduces new and possibly ongoing stressors into the family, which influence all members of the family system and in return create new effects. The family systems approach in social work offers a specific way of looking at and working with these families, enabling the practitioner to focus on the interacting family as a whole and not separating an individual behaviour as problematic. In this chapter I give a brief description of foster care and its role-players and I discuss the implications of fostering for the family from a systems perspective, which served as conceptual framework for the empirical research undertaken. Some of the “older” authors on foster care and the systems theory were implemented as part of the knowledge base of the study, mainly because of their expertise on their topics of interest.

2.2 FOSTER CARE AS ALTERNATIVE PLACEMENT OPTION

In defining foster care the following definition proposed by The Committee of Inquiry into the Foster Care of Children (1990:3) is opted for as it gives appropriate meaning to the intention and the purpose of fostering as an alternative placement option:

“Statutory substitute care within the context of the family for the child who cannot be cared for by his parents in the short, medium or long term, while services to the parents are continued with the purpose of restoring the child to their care

within a certain period of time. The purpose of foster care is to promote permanency in a child's life, either by restoring him to parental care or by achieving continuity in the foster care placement”.

In foster care, children born to others are temporarily being nurtured by the new family, enabling the foster children to grow and proceed with their developmental tasks, while their family of origin is helped to resolve those conditions that necessitate the foster care placements (Child Welfare League of America 1995:11).

In South Africa the period of placement for a child's stay in foster care, ordered by the Children's Court, is a two year period which is being revised every second year. This is not a fixed period, as a child can be placed back into the care of the biological parents at any given time when the parents are capable to resume their parental responsibilities in an approved way (Report of the Enquiry into the Foster Care of Children 1990:7).

2.3 REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME FOSTER PARENTS

Foster parents are key persons involved in the delivery of the treatment plan of every foster child and to the success or failure of the life experience of these children (Child Welfare League of America 1995:100; Silver, Amster & Haecker 1999:279). In South Africa virtually all adult persons can apply to become foster parents, whether married, single, in cohabitation relationships or gay couples.

Foster parents can be extended family members, friends or strangers to the child (Nutt 2006:8). However, every application is subjected to a screening and selection process of which the content may vary from organisation to organisation. The aim of the screening process is to establish whether the potential foster parents and their family have the qualities, characteristics and ability in themselves and in relation with their environment, to take care of

traumatised children in need (Shaw & Hipgrave 1983:77; Younes & Harp 2007:22). The aim is to recruit “*strong families in terms of both stability and family management skills*” (Child Welfare League of America 1995:17). In the old classic work of Stone (1970:60) it is suggested that foster families must be able to encompass the foster child’s special needs, problems, strengths, family situation and outlook for the duration of placement and the latter must be matched with the foster family’s needs and motivation. It is agreed that this is not a simple task, but a very responsible one as it involves “...*understanding the foster child and the foster family sufficiently to predict within reasonable limits how these complex human beings may affect each other in the close, continuous, interpersonal relationships of family life*” Stone (1970:60).

Years ago a group of specialist foster parents suggested the following five qualities that foster families should have in order to be suitable for the fostering role, which still is very much applicable to current practice:

1. *You have to be strong and united as a couple.*
2. *You have to have an ‘open’ lifestyle.*
3. *You must like a challenge.*
4. *You need a sense of humour.*
5. *Your whole family must be prepared to be involved* (Shaw & Hipgrave 1983:80).

Screening and selection processes involve evaluating family dynamics and family capacity, which includes for example the various roles in the family, the quality of relationships and interactions taking place in the family ways of problem solving and coping with stress, communication issues, financial management, health issues, family interactions with the wider eco-system and the birth parents, if they are part of the care plan (Cohen & Westhues 1990:21-70).

2.4 EXPECTATIONS OF THE FOSTER FAMILY

According to McFadden (1996:545) and Silver et al. (1999:281) it is expected of foster parents to provide foster children with a normal home and family life, to show care and acceptance to them similar to that of their own children. It is acknowledged that the pressures that accompany a foster child, surely affect the fostering task, putting strain on the skills and resources of the foster family. Children enter foster placements with various medical, developmental and social problems (Stone 1970:61).

According to Thomas (2005:116), foster parents must be able to provide the following in fostering:

- *make warm and effective relationships with children and young people;*
- *provide good physical and psychological care for them;*
- *enable children to feel at home, without disrupting their existing attachments;*
- *prioritise the needs of children and young people with a range of problems, without causing harm to the foster carers' own children;*
- *work in partnership with social workers and other professionals.*

In practice the careful selecting and screening of foster families are important to ensure the safety of the foster child, success of placements and the continuation of family life (Dickerson & Allen 2007:9-15). Then it is critically important that these families are thoroughly prepared and trained for the daunting task of fostering, acquiring as much knowledge on the issues of fostering the traumatised child and to gain insight about their own needs, strengths and weaknesses as members of the family (Dickerson & Allen 2007:39; Cohen & Westhues 1990:21-70; Nutt 2006:9; Thomas 2005:116). Dickerson and Allen (2007:39) state the following on this matter:

“Foster parents are individuals with special needs and the measure of their effectiveness will be determined by whether those needs are addressed by having foster children in the home.”

2.5 ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN FOSTER CARE

Social workers have welfare organisation-constituted authority as well as influence derived from knowledge and competence (Whitelaw et al. 2004:344). Thomas (2005:118) stipulates that a good working relationship with social workers is usually essential for success in fostering. Stone (1970:61) summarises the responsibility of the social worker as follows: *“...the worker to whom the child is assigned serves as the nucleus...the medium for surveillance and for assessment of the ongoing life situation...and is responsible for working with each of the individuals involved...also responsible for arranging supplementary services, and integrating them.”* When biological parents are involved in the foster children’s lives and reunification is the aim of the care plan of the child, the social worker supports and coordinates all services required to obtain the goal (Child Welfare League of America 1995:72).

Normally social workers and foster parents will negotiate amongst themselves the specific expectations and the tasks that either has to perform, as well as the clarification of roles (Whitelaw et al. 2004:345). These negotiations can be written down as working agreements or contracts between them. The signing of contracts between the role players is used to describe modes of intervention which are time-limited and task centered (Shaw & Hipgrave, 1983:96).

Whitelaw et al. (2004:352) list the following functions social workers have to fulfill:

- *ability to work across boundaries with many other disciplines,*
- *to advocate for children and families at the level of social policy,*

- *to develop resources within the community,*
- *to implement their skills of case and group work,*
- *must be generalists in their skills but specialists in their knowledge of issues affecting families and children.*

2.6 ROLE OF THE WELFARE ORGANISATION IN FOSTER CARE

According to Whitelaw et al. (2004:344) welfare organisations are responsible for children in care (foster children). Therefore they are obliged to monitor placement situations continuously, ensuring that proper care and treatment is given. They also have to consult with foster parents in a teamwork approach. In South Africa the National Department of Social Development designs, monitors and partly implements social welfare policy and it maintains the overall responsibility for managing statutory social services (Thiele 2005:26, 27).

In order to find enough suitable parents to foster children, welfare organisations engage in the recruitment, selection, screening and training of foster parents. Dickerson & Allen (2007:9) indicate that the methods for the selection, screening and training of foster parents can vary considerably from institution to institution. It is not different in South Africa. The researcher had been working for four different welfare organisations in South Africa over the past thirty years that were all involved in the recruitment, selection, screening and training of foster parents. None of these organisations had the same policy, stipulations and methods about the required service delivery on this matter. These services entail the following:

- Recruitment - Welfare organisations use multiple resources to recruit new foster parents, namely radio and television announcements, articles in local papers, church announcements, current foster parents, and social groups (Whitelaw et al. 2004:346).

- Selection and screening - Foster parents are selected by means of an approval process, which includes a home and family study (Whitelaw et al. 2004:346).
- Training - According to Titterington (1990) referenced by (McFadden 1996:552) foster families need extensive training due to the demands and expectations faced by them. Systematic training of foster parents proves to be very valuable (Whitelaw et al. 2004:350). Training should provide information on various topics such as attachment and loss, legal issues, the special needs of children in care, handling of destructive behaviour of children, fostering sexually abused children, assertive communication, adaptation to new roles, positive discipline structures and protection against allegations of abuse (McFadden 1996:552; Whitelaw et al. 2004:352).

2.7 THE FAMILY AS INTERACTIVE SYSTEM

2.7.1 Introduction

In the remainder of this chapter attention is given to the systems theory and its meaning for analysing and interpreting the dynamics in the foster family. The systems theory is also implemented as conceptual framework for conducting the empirical research. Social systems theory is useful to social workers because it is comprehensive and provides a means for conceptualising relationships among different entities - individuals, families, parts of families, small groups, agencies, communities, societies (Montgomery 1988:21).

According to literature, von Bertalanffy developed the general systems theory and introduced its concepts to the psychological and psychiatric fields (Nichols & Everett 1986:68). Munichan (1974) also played an important pioneering role in the formulation of the theory, primarily through his work with children with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma and anorexia nervosa. His focus

point was the structure of the family, with its rules, boundaries, subsystems and its adaptation to inner and outer pressures (Munichan 1974:51-66). Yet years ago primitive societies instinctively understood the dynamics of the systems theory: When a clan member became ill it impacted on the whole community. It meant the loss of a worker, which affected the whole producing system. It was in everybody's interest that the person regains health and his/her functioning. As such, the aim of healing was shared by everyone and it involved the patient, the community and the healer (Jones 2001:9).

2.7.2 The Family as a System

Gelles (1995:10) cited in (Hanson & Lynch 2004:4) defines a family as follows: *A social group and a social institution that possesses an identifiable structure made up of positions (e.g., breadwinner, child rearer, decision maker, nurturer) and interactions among those who occupy the positions. The structure typically carries out specialised functions (e.g., child rearing), is characterised by biological and socially defined kinship, and often involves sharing a residence.*"

Family systems are mostly constituted of members who are biologically related or bound in some form of legal contract. Families may also have their own broader idea of who belongs to their system. Normally, children are added to the system through birth, foster care, adoption or other guardian arrangements (Thomlinson 2007:3).

Thomlinson (2007:3) points out the following defining characteristics of a family:

- *Families share a sense of history*
- *Families have some degree of emotional bonding*
- *Families engage in direction and goals for the future*
- *Families may or may not be biologically related*
- *Families may or may not have legal ties.*

According to von Bertalanffy (1968) cited in (Ackerman 1984:11) a system is “*entities standing in interaction.*” Families consist of members who are in relationship with one another and who mutually affect each other through ongoing mutual interdependent interactions. As the latter forms certain predictable patterns, the family systems theory views every family as a system (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:5). According to Hanson and Lynch (2004:42), the family systems framework defines a system as a set of units, organised with subsystems and characterised by boundaries and rules for change. Hanson and Lynch (2004:41) add that this view of the family as an interactive system of individuals is used as a framework for understanding the roles and relationships among family members as they care for an individual with disabilities or developmental risk. In a similar way the systems theory guides our understanding of the dynamics that take place in the foster family while caring for somebody else’s child who many a time struggles to adjust to new settings, demonstrates difficult behaviour and may be in developmental risk him/herself. Montgomery (1988:21) says: “*The systems approach has helped us to understand the richness of family life.*”

In the foster family the biological parents, the foster child, the foster parents, the siblings, the foster siblings and the social workers from the welfare organisations are all integral parts “of the whole” or the family system (Whitelaw et al., 2004:344). The family as a system is seen as having structure, functioning and development. The structure includes its subsystems, which are classified by types of relationships (Yanca & Johnson 2008:13).

In the family systems theory, behaviours are not viewed in isolation, but always in context of how the family members inter-relate with each other as well as with the context of their environment (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982). A family structures itself through repeated transactional patterns and these transactional patterns regulate the members’ behaviour (Munichan 1974:51).

According to Collins, Jordan and Coleman (2007:44) the family systems approach is based on key assumptions that are also applicable to the foster family, namely:

- *The family as a whole is more than the sum of its parts.*
- *Families try to balance change and stability.*
- *A change in one family member affects all of the family members.*
- *Family members' behaviour is best explained by circular causality.*
- *A family belongs to a larger social system and encompasses many subsystems.*
- *A family operates according to established rules.*

Hansen and Lynch (2004:42) add another assumption to the list:

- *The system is not a reality but rather a way of knowing.*

2.7.3 Family Subsystems

Subsystems refer to the individual members of the family who carry out the various functions within the unit, based on different characteristics such as family role, gender, age, certain interests or possible triangles. When more members are added to the family, more subsystems emerge. The spouse, parental, parent-child and sibling subsystems are the most basic subsystems in the family (Collins et al. 2007:62; Janzen, Harris, Jordan & Franklin 2006:32-35). Dyads that form are, for example, the husband-wife, mother-child, sibling-sibling, and grandparent-grandchild relationships in the family system. Triangulation occurs when a dyad relationship in the family is under stress and a third party is drawn into the relationship to ease the discomfort (Collins et al. 2007:62). Subsystems are demarcated by invisible barriers or interpersonal boundaries that regulate the manner and amount of contact allowed with others (Nichols & Schwartz [S.a.] 67).

Nichols and Schwartz ([S.a.] 67) also indicate that subsystems need to be protected by these boundaries in order to develop relationship skills. The sibling subsystem is the initial experience of having a relation with other children and peers. In the subsystem they learn to make friends and allies, to negotiate; they learn about support and cooperation, to be a scapegoat; they learn about being isolated and how to achieve recognition (Munichan 1974:59). Siblings can be close to one another or distant and even conflicted in their relations. Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz cited in (Collins et al. 2007:65) made the suggestion that sibling conflict is the most common type of conflict within families.

For a social system to be able to maintain itself and fulfil its function, the subsystems or parts must make adjustments in their own functioning to meet the needs of the larger systems. When adjustments are supportive of the need fulfilment of individuals, no problem exists (Yanca & Johnson 2008:12).

According to Wolfe (1987) in (Merrithew 1996:9) the entrance of another child in the family, whether being troubled or not, impacts on the family. The addition of a foster child in the family system enforces the formation of new subsystems. It also has various effects on the existing subsystems and the situation can be accepted, tolerated, resented or rejected by the subsystems (Höjer 2004; Part 1993; Twigg & Swan 2007). Older children may, for instance, form part of the parenting subsystem by helping to care for younger foster children. Triangulation and coalitions can undermine sound family functioning in the foster family. For example, the older child caretaker can compete with the parents in nurturing the youngsters, a social worker may exclude the foster father in dealing with the family or the foster parents become so task orientated, that they neglect their own marriage relationship (McFadden 1996:549).

2.7.4 Interactions in the Family System

Family members are constantly engaging and behaving with one another in certain ways. Interactions in the family refer to those ways in which family members behave towards one another and when these “ways” of behaving with one another become habitual, it can be referred to as patterns of interaction (Munichan 1974:51). The systems theory identifies certain aspects of interactions that take place in the family system, which are useful when analysing the dynamics taking place in foster family life. Attention is given to the following of these aspects: mutual interaction and mutual influence, communication and feedback processes, change and stability, boundaries in the system and circular causality in the family.

2.7.4.1 Mutual Interaction and Mutual Influence

Family systems theory is looking at what is happening in a family and is therefore not explaining why things happen. It is an attempt to describe the way people are exchanging information and relate to each other. The focus is not on the individual, but rather all about how individuals interact and influence each other in the family. It is all about focusing on the processes, roles or context within the family that gives meaning to events and not on the doings of individuals or isolated events. The relations in the family influence each other and as such individuals reciprocally influence each other. As such the behaviour of one family member can only be understood by examining the family context in which the behaviour took place. Family interactions amongst family members take place on a repetitive ongoing basis and define the various relationships, functions and roles in the family. This is referred to as the structure of the family (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:21, 22); Munichan (1974:51, 52). These structures can vary from being very simplistic to incredibly complex. Twigg and Swan (2007:53) refer to Nichols and Schwartz (2006) who indicate that once these roles are established, they bring regularity to complex social settings.

When a family becomes a foster family, the family structure changes immediately as new relational patterns, roles and functions emerge in order to accommodate the new child, while previous ones may be lost, causing irregularity or displacement in the family (Merrithew 1996:10; Twigg & Swan 2007:53). The Child Welfare League of America (1995:46) indicates that the entry of a new child into a foster family, may have a profound effect on the children already in the family.

Hierarchies form part of family systems. It describes the power relationships within the family. In a normal situation, parents will lead the family. In a more dysfunctional situation, a child may co-parent in order to replace the non-functional parent, or the child may even start parenting the non-functional parent (Franklin & Jordan 1999:26). In the foster family the hierarchical order may change drastically and birth children's roles may become less prominent or more dominant with added responsibility. The '*baby*' of the family is instantly replaced by a younger foster child who becomes the '*baby*', or the eldest child becomes a middle child (McFadden 1996:550). The members, especially the own children of foster parents may experience displacement in their family and their sense of belonging may be disrupted. These feelings recur with every new foster placement as foster children come and go (Twigg & Swan 2007:53). As such, role change can happen constantly, leaving the foster family system to renegotiate and organise themselves continuously. The changes that parents make to adapt to their foster parent role, will inevitably affect and impact on all the members of the family, which again is an impetus for change in the other parts, putting constant strain on the system (Franklin & Jordan 1999:26).

The involvement of the welfare organisation in the foster family and its introduction of policies and their expectations on how to deal with foster children and their families of origin, further complicate roles and interactions in the

system. This has the effect of irrevocably changing former family life and role functions in the foster family (McFadden 1996:550).

2.7.4.2 Communication and Feedback Processes

- Communication

A characteristic of a living system is that it can manage information. The system's ability to handle information from the immediate environment ensures its continued existence (Montgomery & Fewer 1988:110). Individuals carry different kinds of information to the family coming from their own unique life experiences and perceptions. This information is individually, as well as collectively, being processed and managed by the members of the family. Normally some kind of decision will flow forth from it. This exchange of information between family members is defined as communication and these communication patterns, define the nature of relationships in a family system (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982: 11). These authors give three principles that govern information processing in the family:

- *One cannot not behave - Whatever we do, we are behaving.*
- *One cannot not communicate - even our silence is communication.*
- *The meaning of a given behavior is not the "true" meaning of the behavior; however, that individual's personal truth-all behaviour may be interpreted in more than one way.*

According to Merrithew (1996:9,12,15), Poland and Groze (1993:155), Pugh (1996:35), Watson and Jones (2002:51), Younes and Harp (2007:37) there is a need for open communication between foster parents' birth children, their biological parents and social workers representative of welfare organisations on the reality of fostering and its impact on the system and its members. These authors state that the absence of effective communication may result in stress

amongst the family members, especially the birth children who feel left out, and it can even lead to premature termination of placements. Birth children of foster parents felt that they needed more information, both in the preparation stage and after placement and these authors felt that the children's opinions about fostering were not taken sufficiently in account.

Misunderstandings between family members may develop during the process of passing-on and managing of information (Montgomery & Fewer 1988:114 – 115). In the healthy family system, most messages are communicated clearly and directly to the members. There is a balance between the needs of individuals, their requests and the fair distribution of resources. Parental agreement is essential to healthy family functioning. By having the same goals and agendas, parents reinforce their parental subsystem in the family system.

With regard to the foster care experience, authors Younes and Harp (2007:3) and Merrithew (1996:11) found that own children of foster parents are not always given the opportunity to make an input about the decision to foster. Mostly, the decision to foster was ultimately made by the parents and imposed on the rest of the family. In their studies on the impact of fostering on birth children, authors Höjer (2001:43,44) and Twigg and Swan (2007: 50,51) indicate that these children often share their parents' altruistic goals of caring for the less fortunate, but they do it for the sake of the parents, especially for their foster mothers ".../ *just want my mother to be happy...*" (Twigg & Swan 2007:51). Anderson (1982) in (Poland & Groze 1993:162) found that different expectations of fostering that exist between foster parents and their own children cause great stress in the family and as such it weakens the parental subsystem in the family.

- Feedback

Koopmans (1996) defines feedback as the "*repeated confirmation, in the course of interaction, of the nature of the relationship between the participants*".

According to the systems theory, the family system unit balances its need for internal organisation and stability with outside demands for adaptation and change by means of positive (amplifying) feedback and negative (attenuating) feedback. Negative feedback is corrective and maintains family functioning around a norm or standard. Negative feedback corrects what is wrong and indicates that stability has been maintained. Positive feedback allows for change to be introduced to the system and it corrects the system by reinforcing the operation of the system (Franklin & Jordan 1999:13). Positive feedback signals that change has taken place in the system and it is essential for the family's ability to adapt to new situations (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:19).

According to Nichols (1986:74) positive and negative feedback loops work together to maintain stability and to promote flexibility to changing conditions in the healthy family. Feedback processes are essential for the family system. It self-corrects the system as it introduces variation and fluctuations in the system, needed to increase the *"...probability of the survival of the system"* (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:18).

Several studies (Twigg 1994:307; Twigg & Swan 2007:55; Younes & Harp 2007:25) indicated that the foster children sub-system have a problem in giving feedback to parents about the real feelings they are experiencing in the foster care placements. Children were unable to *"voice their pain"*, or their voices got *"muffled"*, mostly because they were concerned about their parents' reactions, or they did not want to create more stress and guilt in the situation. The authors found that the children felt unheard by parents, which in return provoked anger in them towards their parents.

2.7.4.3 Change and Stability

Practitioners of the systems theory see families as equilibrium seeking systems in the midst of new challenges that prompt for constant change. The occurrence

of change and stability as integral parts of family functioning is discussed with reference to its implication for the foster family system.

A family system needs to retain stability, order and consistency in order to survive, while it develops and fulfils its functions. The pair of concepts used to describe stability and change in family systems is homeostasis and morphogenesis. Homeostasis refers to a system's tendency to remain steady and stable and to maintaining the status quo in the midst of change, while morphogenesis refers to the system's ability to grow, to be creative and innovative and to change. The latter may involve the reorganising of family patterns and rules and substantial shifts in role functioning, and it can involve internal family life cycle transitions (Vosler 1996:16). Both stability and change are necessary in systems and a healthy family succeeds in maintaining a balance between them (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:16). Resistance is based on the desire to maintain balance and stability and it involves opposing or avoiding something that is painful (Collins et al. 2007:58).

According to the systems theory, a change in one part of the family system inevitably causes change in the other parts of the system. With fostering the foster family has to incorporate the new child with his/her peculiar patterned way into the family's way of doing. It immediately brings change into the parent-child subsystem, as own children and parents have less time together and familiar routines may change drastically. Own children have to adjust to less privacy and the sharing of space and belongings. The family system is confronted with new and sometimes difficult and aggressive behaviours of the foster child, which in turn has an emotional effect of concern and fear on the sibling subsystems and the family as a whole. Foster parents may have to change their parental style, adjusting to these difficult behaviours, or to set stricter rules in the home, that all contribute to a changed and unfamiliar home atmosphere. Foster parents may expect their own children to function more maturely and to take up some of the care-taking responsibilities. Birth children experience stress and feelings of

abandonment when the new child becomes part of the family (Höjer 2004:44, 47; Merrithew 1996:10-12; Part 1993:28,29; Younes & Harp 2007:34; Twigg 1994:303,309; Twigg & Swan 2007:51,56).

Wilkes (1974) in (Merrithew 1996:9-10) studied the impact of fostering on the family. He identified the following stressors in the foster family that impact on the stability of the system:

- *Disruption of the family equilibrium*
- *Coping with a child in transition*
- *Dealing with an 'alien' agency*
- *Harbouring great expectations.*

Within families there are also rules, which refer to the prescribed expectations of behaviour (Yanca & Johnson 2008:13). Family rules help to keep homeostasis in check by determining acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the family. Families have different sets of unwritten rules governing their functioning as well as the power hierarchy within the family. Some families' rules are very rigid, while others have flexible rules enabling them to respond more easily to change.

Collins et al. (2007:61) refer to first and second order changes that revolve around rules. First order change involves the changing of behaviour and interactions in the family, while the rules stay the same. In the fostering situation, the family atmosphere can change, while the foster parents support the foster child to adjust to a different environment and different set of rules unfamiliar to the child. With second order change the rules of the family are altered, the structure and family functioning changes. In foster care, foster parents often try to keep the homeostasis in the home by making second order changes in the family rules. Rules may become much stricter and parents start expecting their own children to become positive role models for the foster children, or they just have higher expectations of their own children in general than of the foster children

(Höjer 2004: 44; Poland & Groze 1993:153; Younes & Harp 2007:33). Situations become more difficult to handle, when own children perceive discrepancies in discipline structure or the expectations parents have of them and they get angry with their parents (Merrithew 1996:11; Twigg 1994:31). Welfare organisations may have certain discipline requirements with regard to foster children, which may differ from the way foster parents manage their own children. This may cause resentment in birth children (McFadden 1996:552). Foster parents find it difficult to have two sets of discipline structures to manage the children in their home and still to be able to be fair to all the parts in the system (Nutt 2006:47). Janzen et al. (2006:33) state that parents find it difficult to maintain a balance between control and permission functions, which still supports autonomy, while exercising it at appropriate points in the developmental process of children.

Twigg (1994:303) suggests that if own children are unable to adjust to the changes that become imperative with each placement, they may begin to act out their inability in various ways at home, school or the neighbourhood, which in return impacts on the parents' ability to deal with all the actions taking place in their home.

2.7.4.4 Boundaries

Systems are characterised by boundaries, which are important structures of any system. Boundaries are symbolic lines that determine who belongs to the particular system or subsystem or not (Collins et al. 2007:56). These boundaries can be relatively open or relatively closed. Openness and closedness in family systems refer to the ease with which, information, people, ideas or resources can enter or leave the system (Yanca & Johnson 2008:12). When boundaries are very clear the members of the system are exposed to more influences from the larger eco-system (Franklin & Jordan 1999:12). Boundaries indicate who belongs to a particular system or subsystem or not and distinguish the system from its environment. According to Collins et al. (2007:57) families that are healthy

operate with clear, flexible boundaries that allow enough new ideas, thoughts and resources when needed, but they are closed enough to maintain their identity and purpose. Boundaries should also be ‘... *intergenerational* ...’ in healthy families and should allow enough space for role differentiation and appropriate development of members (Collins et al. 2007:58).

Boundary issues are a critical factor in foster families, as foster families are viewed to be very open systems. They have to face new accessions of children constantly, experience dismemberment with every separation and even demoralisation due to multiple losses they have been through (McFadden 1996:551,545; Twigg & Swan 2007:52, 53). According to McFadden (1996:551) foster family members are sometimes unable to work through their feelings of loss due to the rapid replacements of foster children. Foster families have to be open to the constant intrusion of their family boundaries by social workers monitoring placements (Twigg 1994:303). Their system has to be open to unknown biological family members, adding more complexity to the system. Foster families have to coordinate various professional services such as therapists, school teachers, paediatricians, psychologists and social workers in their daily routines in order to meet the special needs of foster children (McFadden 1996:545, 549).

2.7.4.5 Circular Causality

Circular causality refers to the process by which one event is believed to directly cause another event. Families usually interact in predictable and patterned ways. According to Collins et al. (2007:51) these patterns are in some ways habits that maintain family stability and homeostasis. Interaction and communication patterns take place in the form of transactional sequence between the members, moving back and forth between the persons while influencing each person. The way in which family members respond eventually forms predictable patterns. In the family systems theory, members of the family are not seen in isolation, but

rather as interacting and influential individuals within a family context (Jones 2001:29). Therefore an individual family member's behaviour cannot be understood without giving attention to the context in which it occurs.

Keeney (1979:120) (in Jones 2001:9) postulated the following generalisations relative to the systems theory that clearly indicate this circular process taking place in a system:

- *Difficulties in any part of the relationship system may give rise to symptomatic expression in other parts of the system.*
- *Symptomatic relief at one point of the system may result in the transfer of the symptomatic expression to another site*
- *Significant change in any part of the system may result in changes in other parts of the system (Franklin & Jordan 1999:26).*

The foster family's habitual patterned way of functioning impacts on the already traumatised foster child's way of functioning and in return the foster child's responses add to the family's stress experience and this impacts again on how the foster family handles the new situation. The following case example extracted from the caseload of Child Welfare Tshwane, Centurion office is utilised as illustration of the above:

Difficulties that arise within the foster-sibling relationships (constant arguing and fighting between the foster child and birth child of the foster parents), may give rise to new stressors (other siblings get involved through the formation of dyads or through triangulation) that impact on all the subsystem relationships (everybody including the parents are upset and cross), causing further responses (rules are changed in order to retain stability in the system) that have certain circular effects again on all the mentioned systems (privileges are taken away from the children) and birth children blame the foster child's being there as the cause of all problems. The foster child experiences rejection from the family

system and absconds from the foster family. In return the family members experience guilt and failure and blame themselves for the unfortunate happenings.

2.8 THE FAMILY AS PART OF A LARGER ECO - SYSTEM

A characteristic of a system is its links with other systems, subsystems and supra systems. The family system is a whole in itself and at the same time it is part of a larger social system (Collins et al. 2007:56). This larger social system may include the extended family, friends, the neighbourhood, peers, the city, the church, the school, the workplace, recreational and sport organisations and so on. The relationship between the family and its environment is also reciprocal. It is a continuous interactive relationship of give and take, of influencing and being influenced, of affecting and being affected, between the component parts. Together they form a whole that is greater than the sum of their interdependent parts (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:24, 25).

Foster families form part of extended family structures, social systems being their friends, church affiliations and community involvement as well as the wider community resource system. Fostering influences all these relations. When foster children show extreme misbehaving or misconduct, foster families may become reluctant to continue with relations as before. In the study of Twigg (1995) in McFadden (1996:551) on own children of foster parents, all the children indicated that they did not want to include the foster child in their social group. The school and other community institutions may also complain about inappropriate behaviour of foster children, to already over sensitive foster parents. Foster children with special needs may require specialised education or medical treatment for unidentified and unmet health problems (Silver et al. 1999:161; Thiele 2005:27). In practice the researcher found that all of this may have the following consequences in the lives of the foster family:

- the loss of longstanding friendship relationships and support systems,

- the changing of schools, work situations and even place of residing, which in return have substantial effects on the foster family system.

2.9 FAMILY SYSTEMS DISRUPTIONS

Disrupting life events are common to the family system and normally cause disequilibrium to the family. Such events can be death, various forms of separation, divorce, chronic illnesses, disability of a member, mental illness or new additions to the system (Collins et al. 2007:66).

With foster care placements new additions are made to the systems. According to literature, the foster family members experience these additions differently and it can vary from acceptance to intolerance. Foster children bring with them new and unfamiliar demands to the family system, which can impact quite harshly on the family's patterned way of interaction and functioning. Many a time the latter causes the loss of family equilibrium with significant effects on own children of foster parents. According to Twigg (1994:31), birth children experience "*narcissistic loss*" when a new child enters the family. Some children deny the pain, while others convert their anger into solicitude for the foster child.

Separation and loss are also a common disruption in the foster family system and this affects all the family members differently (Edelstein, Burge & Waterman 2001:12; McFadden 1996:550; Twigg & Swan 2007:52, 53). As foster care implies the temporary placement of children, it accentuates the inevitability of separation and loss that will take place when the foster child has to leave the system. When disruption of foster placements takes place due to the inability of the family system to adapt to the changes a foster child introduces to the system and to retain their equilibrium, similar feelings of pain, loss, disappointment and blaming exist amongst the family members (Edelstein et al. 2001:14). Foster families tend to grow attached to foster children. Even birth children perceive them as siblings and the loss of a foster child can cause great grief in birth

children (McFadden 1996:550; Twigg & Swan 2007:52). In her study, Part (1993:29) had five percent of own children stating that the leaving of foster children was the worst experience in fostering.

2.10 CONCLUSION

Fostering is not simplistic as it brings new challenges and stressors to family systems. The way in which the family interacts with these challenges, allows for new adjustment and change to take place and succeeds in retaining stability, will determine in a great way the outcome of placements. The family systems theory enables the social worker to understand the dynamics of fostering in the context and complexity of the system within which it operates, namely the family, without referencing any pathology to any of its members. Furthermore, it enables the social worker to view the fostering system in relation to its broader eco-system context, utilising these transactions in strengthening foster family functioning.

In Chapter three the information as obtained from the empirical research will be discussed and integrated with the systems theory and literature control where applicable.

CHAPTER THREE

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the data obtained through the interviews with the birth children of foster parents is presented. The empirical findings are presented within the context of a comprehensive literature control. As previously mentioned (refer to Chapter 1.1 p 4) there is limited research information available on foster parents' birth children's experiences in foster placements in South Africa compared to literature available in other countries.

In the presentation of the study results tables are used to describe the participants as well as to reflect obtained results; explanations are given and themes, subthemes and categories that emerged are identified and discussed.

Secondly, the information gathered from the interviews with social workers currently working in the field of foster care was implemented as control measure for verifying the data obtained.

3.2 RESEARCH SAMPLE

The sample consisted of two main groups, namely birth children of foster parents and social work professionals involved in foster care. A total of seventeen respondents participated, thirteen birth children and four social workers.

The birth children's ages ranged from 11 years to 18 years, regardless of their race or sex groups. All the respondents, but one, came from families that were fostering children and had at least been fostering for a period longer than six months. The other participant was in the situation where her parents decided to end the existing foster placement in their home. All the foster families came from the Centurion area.

Three social workers from Child Welfare Tshwane, Centurion and The Christian Social Council in Centurion, who are in specialised foster care posts and one social worker who performs (besides other social work responsibilities) all the duties required for foster care, were used.

The purpose of the sampling method was to obtain specific information about the first-hand experiences of foster parents' birth children in their foster home settings. The sample selection was purposive, as all the respondents had to have direct experience of foster care placements.

Three non profit welfare organisations rendering services within the boundaries of Centurion were approached to take part in the research project, namely Child Welfare Tshwane and Christian Social Services, Lyttleton and Valhalla. The Christian Social Service office of Lyttleton was unable to participate due to maternity leave of the staff member. The social workers responsible for rendering foster care supervision services identified the birth children that fitted the research criteria. All these children were willing to participate in the research project. The professional participants (social workers) were all involved in foster care services rendering.

3.3 SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS AND RESPONSES

3.3.1 Birth Children

The characteristics of the birth children and their main response towards foster care are tabled as follows:

Table 3.1

Characteristics of Birth Children and Main Attitude towards Foster Care

Respondent	Age	Gender	Education Level	Foster care period	Attitude towards Foster Care
Respondent 1	18 years	Female	Grade 12	4 years	Positive
Respondent 2	15 years	Female	Grade 9	4 years	Positive
Respondent 3	17 years	Female	Grade 11	6 years	Negative
Respondent 4	12 years	Female	Grade 6	6 years	Ambivalent
Respondent 5	18 years	Female	Grade 12	9 months	Negative
Respondent 6	13 years	Female	Grade 8	3 years	Ambivalent
Respondent 7	11 years	Female	Grade 6	3 years	Ambivalent
Respondent 8	18 years	Male	Grade 12	6 months	Positive
Respondent 9	16 years	Male	Grade 10	10 months	Negative
Respondent 10	12 years	Male	Grade 6	10 months	Negative
Respondent 11	18 years	Female	Grade 12	4 years	Positive
Respondent 12	17 years	Male	Grade 11	3 years	Ambivalent
Respondent 13	18 years	Female	Grade 12	4 years	Positive

3.3.2 Characteristics of Foster Care Placements

In order to give a description of the foster care placements, the characteristics of these placements are presented in the following table:

Table 3.2

Characteristics of Foster Care Placements

Participants	Kinship Placement	Single parent foster family	Single foster child placement	Single foster child (mentally handicapped) placement	Placement with two or more foster children
Participant 1				*	
Participant 2				*	
Participant 3					*
Participant 4					*
Participant 5		*			
Participant 6	*				
Participant 7	*				
Participant 8			*		
Participant 9			*		
Participant 10			*		
Participant 11			*		
Participant 12	*				
Participant 13			*		

With reference to table 3.2 the concepts are clarified as follows: a kinship placement refers to the foster care placement of a child with relatives (Thiele 2005:9). A single parent placement indicates that the foster child is placed within a single parent system. A single foster child placement consists of only one child being placed in that foster care system. The single foster child (mentally

hanicapped) placement indicates that only one child who is mentally handicapped is placed in that foster care system. The participants came from nine foster family systems. Four foster placements consisted of two birth siblings and foster children. In both of the the kinship placements there were two foster children in the home. In one of the placements with two or more foster children the two foster children were unrelated.

3.3 3 Characteristics of Social Work Professionals

In order to describe the sample (social work professionals) that was utilised as triangulation method, some characteristics of the sample are tabled as follows:

Table 3.3

Characteristics of Social Work Professionals

Respondent	Age	Gender	Education level	Years in foster care practice
Respondent 1	42 years	Female	Degree in social work	19 years
Respondent 2	37 years	Female	Degree in social work	14 years
Respondent 3	59 years	Female	Degree in social work	27 years
Respondent 4	37 years	Female	Degree in social work	14 years

As Table 3.3 indicates, the participants involved were qualified social workers, all of whom had extensive years of experience in social work practice. In this regard their knowledge and thorough experience of social and fostering practice added value and credibility to the data obtained from them.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The researcher gathered data from the birth children by asking the participants to respond to the following request:

- Tell me how it is for you to have a foster child (somebody else's child) in your home. What do you experience?

The participants were allowed to speak freely about their experiences of having a foster child or children in their home. In accordance with each individual situation the interviews were guided by some of the following questions:

- Can you tell me how have you been prepared for the placement of foster children in your home?
- What is your perception of foster care?
- How do you experience relationships in your home since the foster child came?
- What do you like about having a foster child in your home?
- What do you not like about having a foster child in your home?
- What kind of feelings and emotions do you experience in your situation?
- What advice can you give to own children of future foster parents?

The researcher interviewed the professional participants after the interviews with the birth children were concluded. The main purpose of gathering data from the professional participants was to verify the information obtained from the birth children. The interviews were semi-structured. Five main questions were posed to them, after which the interviews were guided by other questions flowing forth from the information that emerged from the main questions. The main questions were:

- Do you include the birth children of foster parents in your foster care services? And how?

- Do you find in your service rendering to foster families any birth children that are positive about the foster placement? What do they stipulate as being positive?
- Do you find in your service rendering to foster families any birth children that are ambivalent in their feeling towards the foster placements? Can you elaborate on this?
- Do you find in your service rendering to foster families any birth children that are negative about the foster placements? What do they stipulate as being negative?
- Do you think social workers are doing enough for birth children in their foster care service rendering? Motivate your answer.

3.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.5.1 Introduction

The exploratory research undertaken with birth children of foster parents has resulted in three main themes that emerged from the data obtained. These themes and several subthemes that were identified and formulated from the analysis of the raw data are discussed in the following paragraphs. Thirteen participants (birth children) participated in the research project and their responses are discussed under the appropriate themes.

The empirical findings of this study were supported by literature which indicates that not all birth children were dissatisfied with fostering. In her research findings, Thoburn (1990:68) established that 50% of birth children of adoptive or foster parents were completely or fairly satisfied with placements in their homes. Part (1993:26) found in her study that 80% of the children liked fostering. In the study of Quintin et al. (1998:131) 52 participants were positive about fostering, against 23 participants who responded negatively. The empirical findings indicated that 5 out of 13 participants fitted this description. Five participants were positive about the fostering experience; they welcomed the placements and they felt that they

and their families were rendering a service, which brought personal growth and fulfillment. Their responses are discussed under Theme 1. Four participants were ambivalent about fostering. They found certain aspects of fostering contributing in a positive way to their lives, but simultaneously they experienced great difficulty and losses in the fostering situation. As such they only felt fairly satisfied with fostering. These ambivalent responses are discussed in Theme 2. Four out of thirteen participants responded negatively about their experiences of fostering. They did not like the placements; they did not like the idea of it and they found themselves in a situation of tolerance for the sake of their parents. Their responses are discussed under Theme 3.

The following table illustrates the identified main themes, subthemes and categories that emerged from the data analysis:

Table 3.4

Themes, Subthemes and Categories

MAIN THEME	SUBTHEME	CATEGORIES
1. Positive about Fostering	1. New experiences	1. Gained new knowledge
		2. Positive about added responsibility
		3. Feelings of self-worth (altruistic)
	2. Positive family relationships	1. Satisfactory attention/responses/ support from parents
		2. Family more unified
		3. Can ventilate feelings to parents
	3. Preparation prior to placement	1.Children satisfactorily informed and actively part of the decision making
	4. Permanency of foster child	1. Foster child is like a sibling
		2. Prefer adoption/ permanency.

2. Ambivalent about fostering	1.New Experiences	1.Gained new knowledge
		2. Altruistic feelings of self-worth
		3. Companionship
	2. Disruption in family equilibrium	1. Distorted relationships
		2. Feel responsible for foster child and parents
		3. Losses in placement
		4. Deprived of equal treatment and fairness
	3. Preparation prior to placement	1. Little or no information given by parents
		2. Had different idea
	4. Emotional impact on birth children	1. Distress, worry, guilt, anger, frustration, un-happiness, sadness suicidal feelings.
	5. Separation and loss	1. Ambivalent feelings: prefer them to return to family of origin but worry about the outcomes
3. Negative about fostering	1. Poor preparation prior to placements	1. Had no preparation or little understanding of the placement
	2. Disruption in family equilibrium	1. Loss of position and role in family
		2. Loss of family outings
		3. Loss of intimacy with parents
		4. Unrealistic demands and manipulation by foster children
		5. Treated unfairly.

		6. Added tension/hostility and competition in relationships.
		7 Response of birth children -partial seclusion and silence
	3. Future of placement	1. Tolerance or termination of placement

The **main themes** are listed on the left hand of the table. The middle block of the table indicates the **subthemes** that emerged from the various main themes and on the right hand side of the table the **catagories** that were formulated from the emerging data are being listed. Four subthemes emerged from the “positive” main theme, namely new experiences, positive relationships, preparation prior to placement and permanency of foster child. Five subthemes emerged from the “ambivalent” main theme, namely new experiences, disruption in family equilibrium, preparation prior to placement, emotional impact on birth children and separation and loss. Three subthemes were formulated from the third main theme namely, poor preparation prior to placement, disruption in family equilibrium and future placement. The data from the subthemes was organised into categories. Nine categories were formulated from the data emerging from the “positive” main theme; eleven categories were formulated from the data emerging from the “ambivalent” main theme and nine categories were formulated from the emerging data of the “negative” main theme.

The empirical findings of this study obtained from the social work professional participants are discussed after each main theme under the heading “Triangulation - Method of Verification”.

3.5.2 Theme 1: Birth Children Positive about Fostering

The researcher will discuss under Theme 1 the following subthemes which pertain to the intricacies of birth children being positive about foster care placements in their home, namely:

- Gained new experiences
- Positive family relationships
- Preparation prior to placement
- Permanency of the foster child

The **categories** as indicated in Table 3.4 pertaining to foster children being positive about fostering are added in bold in the discussion of the subthemes.

3.5.2.1 Subtheme 1- Gained New Experiences

Previous studies indicate that foster care has a positive impact on birth children and that they **learn and gain new knowledge** through their foster care experiences. Although, according to Höjer (2004:43), studies were often done “... *through the eyes of adults*”, birth children gave indication of being positive about fostering. They indicated respecting and being proud of their parents because their parents cared for the less fortunate (Younes & Harp 2007:33). They acquired an understanding of how foster children’s lives are constructed and they gained an awareness of social issues (Höjer 2004:43; Twigg & Swan 2007:50; Watson & Jones 2002:52). In foster care birth children learn to build new relationships with strangers and to form new companionships (Höjer 2004:44; Pugh 1996:36).

According to literature, birth children also experience **altruistic feelings** of feeling good about being able to help and to “... *make a difference*” (Pugh 1996:36), or “... *seeing the child smile and be happy*” and “... *helping me appreciate what I have in life*” or “... *providing love*” (Watson & Jones 2002:52). The birth children became more open-minded: “*I don’t stereotype people so much...*” (Pugh 1996:37)

In her study Höjer (2004:44) found several foster parents indicating that their birth children helped them in performing the fostering task by **accepting certain responsibilities**. Another positive outcome, according to Pugh (1996:39), was that birth children became a bridge between the foster child and foster parents,

“... a way [for the foster child] to get through to mum and dad without actually having to talk to them face to face.” The author points out that these children need considerable skills to deal appropriately with various situations and information they receive from the foster child.

In this study all five participants had foster siblings several years younger than themselves. Two of the participants had a foster sibling who was mentally disabled. All the participants felt that they **gained new life experiences**. One adolescent responded that it was nice to learn new things, to know how children operate, to understand what they want and to know what is harmful to them. The participants also **gained insights into the lives** of children less fortunate than themselves. One eighteen year old responded as follows:

“...dat dit nie goeie omstandighede is vir ‘n kind wat nog groei nie. Daar was nie heelyd kos nie; die kind het honger gegaan; die ma het orals rondgetrek, baie boyfriends gehad.” (Participant no. 8)

Another participant felt that they as a family became acquainted with their strength as a family. She herself has learnt to be more patient, to make more inputs in relationships in order to accept a stranger as part of their family:

“Die hele gesin het op die einde gesien ons is sterk. Ek het baie geleer by my ouers, dat hulle eintlik baie sterk mense is...ek dink ek het geduld aangeleer, dalk die ander kinders ook om ‘n bietjie geduldig te wees en soort van aan te hou gee al voel jy dit is nou sy beurt. Mmm ... en geleer om situasies te hanteer. Dit was seker maar lewenservaring of iets, om ‘n vreemde mens deel van jou gesin te probeer maak.” (Participant no. 13)

All four of the participants felt positive about their **added responsibility** in the fostering process, which varied from bathing and feeding the foster child, baby sitting, assisting with school tasks, entertaining the foster child to ‘bridging’ their concerns and needs to the parents. They described feelings of **self-worth, joy and happiness** being able to assist the foster child. Some of the participants responded as follows:

“Dis ‘n nuwe kind, nuwe ervaringe en sy was nog klein ... so hulle het saam met ons geleer en omdat sy gestremd was, was dit ok, maar moeilik in die begin. Ons’t maar so saam-saam geleer, saam geleer waarvan sy hou. Ons het daarby aangepas en sy het by ons aangepas. Ons het meer verantwoordelikheid geleer. As my ma jou vra: “gee haar kos”, dan moet jy dit nou reg doen. “Help my gou hier, help my gou daar” so het ons meer verantwoordelik geraak en bietjie meer gehelp. Dit is eintlik lekker. Jy weet jy maak ‘n verskil in iemand se lewe. Dis ‘n goeie gevoel.” (Participant no. 1)

“Emosionele verantwoordelikheid kan ek sê ... die idêe dat jy is besig om iemand anders te help ... dis soort van soos om opofferings te maak en ek dink dit is verantwoordelikheid op ‘n manier, omdat jy’t daai keuse om selfsugtig te wees of rerig net bietjie oop te maak en te probeer help en ek dink daai gevoel, actually, ja ... laat jou voel, wow! ek kan so iets doen vir ander mense, of ek kan ‘n vreemde persoon help, of ek kan iemand wat slegter af is as ek, kan ek mee praat en laat beter voel. Mm ... so ja, ek dink nogal eintlik groot verantwoordelikheid op daai manier ... op so emosionele vlak ...”

(Participant no. 13)

This participant continued by saying:

“Ek het dalk geduld aangeleer. Dalk het die ander ook ... geleer om te gee al voel jy dis nou sy beurt ... mm en net geleer om situasies te hanteer. Dit was seker maar lewenservaring of so iets ... om net ‘n vreemde mens deel van jou huisgesin te probeer maak.” (Participant no.13)

Another response was:

“... dit laat my groot voel, want my ma vertrou my genoeg om haar by my te los, maar dis actually scary ook, want ek kyk na ‘n kind; iemand se lewe word in my hande geplaas en ek moet na haar omsien!” (Participant no. 2)

The dynamics taking place in foster families as revealed by the responses of the participants, illustrate the concept of circularity. Circularity describes the multi-

directional, reciprocal interactions taking place between individuals and systems. The success of circular interactions depends to a large degree on how sensitively and skillfully all the members understand and respond to each other (Collins et al. 2007:53). The outcome of the findings was that birth children perceived their parents as strong people, doing noble work and that they became a part of this noble work. Birth children learned along the way, acquiring new skills and consequently the foster parents could trust their children with new responsibilities. In return the birth children felt wonderful about their involvement, their gains and their achievements in the various foster situations.

3.5.2.2 Subtheme 2 - Positive Family Relationships

During the interviews it became apparent to the researcher that all five participants had positive relationships with their parents, even prior to the placements. The participants felt securely bonded with either one or both of their parents and as such they did not feel threatened by the presence of the foster child. All five participants were **satisfied with the attention and support** that they received from their parents. They felt that it was similar to that which they were used to receiving. They felt their parents made efforts to spend time with them:

“... daar is nie ‘n verskil met hoe lief hulle was vir ons en hoe lief hulle is vir haar nie en stuff. Dit voel nie asof hulle ons afskeep of so iets nie.” (Participant no. 2) and

“... altyd was my ma-hulle baie lief vir ons en ons het altyd die aandag gekry en toe sy nou inkom, die aandag was minder, maar nie so dat jy dit sou agterkom nie. Ons kon nog steeds voel hulle doen hulle beste wat hulle kan vir ons ... op ‘n manier kom ons nog steeds eerste ...” (Participant no. 1)

“Ons het net soveel aandag gekry. Dit het nooit gevoel dat my ouers ons wegskuif nie.” (Participant no. 13)

The participants were all able to **voice their thoughts and feelings** to their parents and they had the frankness to approach their parents with their concerns, needs and feelings. All the participants felt that their parents' mutual responses were satisfying to them.

In her study Pugh (1996:38) found that certain birth children felt that the impact of fostering on their family relationships was positive and that the foster care experience made them closer as a family unit. In the empirical study three of the participants felt that their **family became more unified** after the arrival of the foster child. One participant responded as follows:

“Ek dink ons het nogals baie nader aan mekaar geraak, want ons het nogal elkeen ons eie paadjies gegaan en vandat sy daar is ... meer as een persoon se aandag is op haar, so julle doen goed saam, julle beleef goed saam ... aa! sy het 'n nuwe woordjie geleer ... en dan luister almal wat sy sê. En ons het saam goeters begin doen, saam winkels toe gegaan, kyk saam TV ... so ja ons het nogal 'n hegte gesinnetjie geraak, vandat sy hierso is ...” (Participant no.1)

Some of the participants felt that their family members were **combined in purpose and goals** and all members gained new meaning and joy through fostering. One of the adolescents claimed that the foster child brought calmness to his mother:

“... die kind bring groot gelukkigheid by haar dat sy weet sy doen goed. Sy was voorheen baie gestress oor haar werk en alles, maar vandat die kind daar is, sy is meer rustig en ontspanne.” (Participant no. 8)

Another participant said that their mutual language became more soft-spoken and 'nice' with one another. The other participant felt that they as a family were very close and the foster child became automatically a part of the family. The fifth respondent felt that they had a mutual concern for their younger brother who finds it difficult to cope with the placement.

The researcher found no real evidence in literature about the existence of strong family relationship between foster parents and their birth children and contentment in fostering. The fact that foster parents do raise concerns about the well-being of their own children in foster care situations, gave the researcher the impression that birth children are important to foster parents (Poland & Groze 1993:158; Twigg 1994:302; Twigg & Swan 2007:49). In her study Pugh (1996:38) quoted a fourteen year old who felt that relationships in their family grew closer: *“You depend on each other so much more. We’re so much closer as a family than we would have been otherwise.”*

According to the systems theory a better understanding of children will be obtained, when they are observed within the interactions of the family. Of significance is how parents respond to children, how siblings respond to each other and, within the context of this study, how foster children respond to the children in the family. Then it is important to notice how the birth children in return respond to the responses of all others in the family. According to the empirical study the foster parents responded positively in their interactions, relationships and communication with their own children, setting consistent patterns of interactions between parents and children. In return, their children’s responses were positive when being challenged about including a foster child as part of their family system. As such, the interactions of these family members created an entity that was more than the sum of the individual personalities (Collins et al. 2007:45, 46).

3.5.2.3 Subtheme 3 - Preparation Prior To Placement

In all the cases the researcher had to stimulate responses about the way the participants were prepared for the foster placements. The empirical findings reveal that in the five foster care situations, the birth children and their parents had prior exposure to the welfare sector, as the mothers were actively involved in some kind of voluntary and community work at Children’s Homes or established welfare organisations. Already at that stage, the participants have developed sensitivity for vulnerable persons and fostering seemed the natural thing to do.

All five participants were part of **family discussions concerning fostering** and all of them were able to voice their opinions. The decisions to foster in these cases were eventually made by the parents, as reported by Younes and Harp (2007:29), but the assent of the participants was taken in account. All the participants felt **satisfied** about how their parents had prepared them for the placement of foster children. Some of the responses received were as follows:

“Ja, hulle het met my gepraat daaroor en ek het ook saamgestem dat hulle dit eintlik moet doen. Ek glo nie jy ... ook nie daaraan dat jy ‘n kind so moet laat swaarkry, ondervoed ... enige van daardie goeters nie”. (Participant no. 8)

“Ja, ja, hulle het ons gevra hoe voel ons daaroor; gaan ons gemaklik wees daarmee? Mm, gaan dit ons te veel ontwrig? So, dit was ook baie oop kommunikasie - ons het lank daaroor gepraat en almal het saamgestem ... En ek dink dit het nogals baie gehelp dat hulle met ons gepraat het, want ons ... ewe skielik neem ons iets nuuts in, dan is dit ‘n skok en jy weet nie regtig hoe om die saak te hanteer nie, maar om daaroor te praat het baie gehelp en ons kan ons opinies lewer en so aan ...” (Participant no. 13)

All the participants made **no reference of any social worker’s attempt** to get their opinions or to educate them on fostering issues and the process of fostering. Their sources of information were their parents. In her study Pugh (1996:35) explored the views of children of prospective foster parents on their preparation for fostering. She found a “... *somewhat superficial approach*” on how children were involved in the preparation process. Mostly the parents were seen as the educators of the children on fostering (Pugh 1996:36; Younes & Harp 2007:29). Preparation programs for foster parents’ children “... *appear to be the exception rather than the rule ...*” (Pugh 1996:36). According to Quinton et al. (1998:95) social workers do make attempts to include birth children of prospective foster parents in individual preparation sessions, but the parents felt that these discussions on the impact of fostering on their own children were insufficiently done or if being done, parents solely had to deal with the effects of fostering on their children (Poland & Groze 1993:155).

Becvar and Stroh Becvar (1982:1112) state that communication patterns define the nature of relationships in a family system and that information flow is a basic process in a social system. They further state that social systems are held together or changed by the transfer of information within and between the boundaries of different systems. Information exchange implies a capacity for action and the ability to move to either change or stability. The empirical research indicated that although the communication flow between the welfare system and the foster family was almost none, the communication patterns between parents and children were satisfactory. These foster family systems were able to act upon the new information flow of the fostering process; they were able to make the necessary adaptations by accepting the foster child into the system and they were able to move on and regain family stability.

3.5.2.4 Subtheme 4 - Permanency of Foster Child

The empirical findings indicated that the foster children became part of these families. Three of the participants **accepted** the foster children immediately **as siblings** in their homes and as an integral part of their families:

“Since he came the first time it was immediately like a family member, he was my, my little brother and my mom’s child.” (Participant no.11)

Likewise, a foster mother in Thoburn’s study (1990:47) remarked: *“We didn’t see ourselves as foster parents for him. We thought of it as permanent from the start ...”* In this study one participant said that they could never let the child return to the negative circumstances he was raised in and the fifth participant claimed that after two years the foster child really settled as a part of the family:

“... die laaste twee jaar was hy rêrig deel van die gesin, was dit soos ‘n boetie nog, asof hy nog altyd daar was, ja.” (Participant no. 13)

One participant clearly indicated that she would prefer the foster child to be **adopted**:

“Ek sou graag dit ‘n permanente ding wou maak ... aanneming kan werk! Moenie haar weg vat nie - ons is te lief vir haar!” (Participant no. 1)

Another participant’s parents were in the process of adopting the foster child. This was her response on the matter of adoption:

“It’s the same thing. Now it’s like he’s going to take our surname. It’s ... nothing is different. It’s just like you can’t take him away! Now it’s like written down: strongly ours!” (Participant no. 11)

The difference between permanent fostering and adoption is that in fostering the foster parents only carry parental responsibilities, whereas with adoption the full parental responsibility is transferred to the parents (Quinton et al. 1998:6). The same authors (1998:2) point out that the movement towards permanent placement of older children in care began after lesser infants were available for adoption and after it was recognised that the care system itself was not always serving the best interests of children. The principle of permanency planning and placement is still to offer stable and nurturing homes on a long term basis to children with special needs (Quinton et al. 1998:3).

According to the systems theory the family unit balances its need for internal stability with outside demands for adaptation and change. In order to reach this state of equilibrium, the system makes use of positive and negative feedback. Negative feedback indicates that the status quo has been maintained, while positive feedback allows flexibility, creativity and new behaviour in order to reach the preferred level of change. The latter is essential for families to adapt to new situations and conditions. In the foster families where birth children were positive about fostering, it was clear that the families were implementing both negative and positive feedback in their interactions; they were able to make the necessary changes and adjustments in their family setting in order to accept and unify the foster children with them as family units.

3.5.3 Conclusion - Theme 1: Birth Children Positive about Fostering

With reference to the above it can be concluded that birth children do have positive experiences in fostering, which make them optimistic about their role, place and contribution in the foster care experience. They acquired new skills and knowledge as well as a broader outlook on social life. It seems that if birth children are positive about fostering, it can contribute to the permanency of the placements. Furthermore, it seems that there are pre-requisites for obtaining positive responses from birth children, namely strong, healthy parent-child relationships, open communication channels and birth children's participation in the decision and preparation stage prior to placements.

3.5.4 Triangulation - Method of Verification

Social workers' responses were used to verify the information gathered from the birth children. In this part their responses to questions 1, 2 and 5 posed to them are discussed. The empirical findings obtained from these participants are as follows:

- **Birth children included in social workers' service rendering to foster families**

All four participants indicated that their inclusion of birth children in their service rendering was limited and all of them felt that there was room for improving the situation. One participant commented as follows.

"Ek dink daar was gevalle waar ek dit wel gedoen het, maar nie altyd nie, hoor."

"Ja, miskien nie genoeg nie."

Ons doen dit ... mm, ek dink nie genoeg nie." (Participant no. 3)

On the question, **how** they include the birth children in their service rendering, the following responses were received:

(1) *“Het pleegouerkeuringsgroepe/ opleidingsgroep twee maal per jaar, maar dit is die ouers wat daar by betrek word.”* (Participant no. 2)

(2) *“Met eerste besoek praat met die hele gesin – ook die eie kind. Doen dan tuisbesoek en sal weer met eie kind praat, sien dan net die pleegouer-eie kind raak op die agtergrond ...”* (Participant no. 3)

This participant indicated that she also intervened with the birth child when **problems** were encountered in the foster care situation:

“My inisiatief ... probleem tussen eie kind en pleegkind. Met eie kind ook gepraat om uit te vind waar lê die probleem.” (Participant no. 3)

Otherwise she did not really include them in service rendering to the family. She continued as follows: *“... andersins? nie rêrig nie, nee, nie rêrig nie”*. She did include birth children as part of the foster parent screening processes as she felt that that was important to do. On a following up question to this specific participant whether she would inform the child about the details of fostering, the following response was received:

“Ek sal verduidelik wat ek doen baie eenvoudig en kortliks, sodat die kind net verstaan waar pas ek in die prentjie in ... ja, dit sou ek doen, maar nie in detail nie.” (Participant no. 3)

All four participants felt that **services rendered to birth children by social workers were insufficient** and that serious thought should be given to the situation. One participant suggested the following on this matter:

“Ek dink ‘n mens moet terselfdertyd, wat ouers is by groepe, iets doen vir die kinders ook om hulle ook in te skakel en hulle ook meer deeglik voorberei - nie net ‘n gesprek nie; moet hulle op ‘n ander manier oplei ... tog is dit moeilik met die jonger kinders - hulle verstaan nie altyd nie.” (Participant no. 2)

- **Birth children positive about fostering.**

All four participants indicated that they perceive birth children to be in a way (“in ‘n mate”) positive about foster placements. Participant no. 1 felt that strong family relationships and open communication channels contribute to birth children having positive feelings about fostering. If relationships are positive, the children feel less threatened by the experience and they accommodate the child more easily in their lives. Participant no. 2 said that birth children are only positive during the honeymoon phase, especially when the children are of nearly in the same age. When the children are near in age the placements do not last very long:

“In die honeymoon fase is hulle baie positief ... maar dit voel vir my dis amper waar dit eindig” - behalwe as die pleegkind baie jonger is as die gesin se eie kinders, maar dieselfde ouderdom ... dit het vir my gevoel dit hou nie regtig lank nie.” (Participant no. 2)

Participant no. 3 felt that in general birth children were positive about placements, but she was not able to indicate what was actually positive for them in the placements. Participant no. 4 only knew one case where the child felt positive about the placement. According to three of the participants, birth children indicated the following as being positive about the placements:

“‘n maatjie om mee te speel”

“ lief geraak vir die kind”

“soos ‘n sussie geword.”

The researcher got the impression that the social workers were not able to relate the reality of what birth children were actually experiencing in foster situations, due to their limited involvement with them.

The social workers’ contributions confirmed:

(1) the empirical findings obtained from some of the birth children that they do feel positive about fostering as they have gained companionship, friendship and siblings through these relations;

(2) the empirical findings that strong parent-child relationships and open communication in the family contribute to birth children having positive experiences in fostering;

(3) previous research findings, namely that the needs of birth children were only sporadically and superficially being met in the past by the welfare system and that initial attempts were being made to meet those needs (Merrithew 1996:1). Merrithew also states that while birth children's needs are being recognised, it is still being "...*downplayed, nebulous, and not addressed in any systematic way.*"

3.5.5 Conclusion - Triangulation Method of Verification

From the discussions above it can be concluded that the overall feeling of the social workers was that birth children were in a way positive about fostering, especially about gaining companionship. It seems that the current involvement of social workers with birth children is limited to certain areas or incidents of the fostering process and that birth children are not fully integrated into the service delivery to foster families. As such, social workers are not able to comment in depth about the actual experiences of birth children in their individual foster care situations. There is agreement amongst social workers that birth children are being overlooked in the current service delivery system to foster families.

3.5.6 Theme 2: Birth Children Ambivalent About Fostering

The researcher's decision to discuss the ambivalence found among birth children about their fostering experience in a separate theme was solely because these four participants' experiences were torn between altruistic feelings of making a difference in the lives of needy children versus the negative outcomes of it, and as a result it seemed that they could not identify with either of the two poles. They had mixed feelings about their experiences of fostering, which differed

completely from the other participants who clearly felt, either positive, enjoying personal fulfillment out of their experiences, or those who felt completely negative about the placements and tolerated it on only for the sake of their parents. Hornby (2005:43) describes the word “ambivalence” as follows: “...having or showing both good and bad feelings about...” These four participants had both good and bad feelings about fostering. Höjer (2004:47) describes it very well: “*Fostering seems to be a coin with two sides for foster carers’ children.*” Younes and Harp (2007:36, 37) state as follows: “The fostering process is bitter-sweet ...” Nuske (2004:256) (in Twigg & Swan 2007:50) refers to it as “living within a contradictory experience.” In her study, Part (1993:27) found that 15% of her participants were not certain whether fostering was a good thing. In this study four participants indicated to be ambivalent about what they felt about their about fostering experience. The interesting fact about the participants in this study pertaining to be ambivalent about fostering, was that three of them were in the age group (7-13) that authors Ellis (1972) and Trasler (1960) (in Twigg 1994:303) and Berridge and Cleaver (1997:33) found to be having the most difficulty in adjusting to fostering.

The ambivalent feelings of these four participants were reflected in their views on fostering. Some of their comments were as follows:

“Om pleegkinders te hê is vir my ‘n goeie en ‘n slegte ding...” (Participant no. 7)

“Pleegsorg is goed en sleg. Aanvanklik was dit lekker; later was dit nie meer so nie.” (Participant no. 6)

“Foster care is kind of both... good and bad...” (Participant no.12)

“Dis ok vir my om pleegsorg kinders in die huis te kry; ek is gewoon daaraan...maar dit was lekker om K en M te laat gaan nie...dis ook nie lekker vir my as R doen wat hy wil nie...dis nie baie lekker nie.” (Participant no. 4)

The following subthemes that emerged from the data obtained from the birth children feeling ambivalent about fostering will be discussed under Theme 2:

- Gained new experiences
- Disruption of family equilibrium
- Preparation prior to placement
- Emotional and psychological experiences in placement
- Separation and loss

The categories as indicated in Table 3.4 pertaining to birth children being ambivalent about their fostering experiences are added in bold in the discussion of the subthemes.

3.5.6.1 Subtheme 1 - Gained New Experiences

On the positive side of the coin, the empirical findings indicated some gains that these four participants received via foster care. According to the participants, they **gained new knowledge and understanding** about people's lives and life itself, they became more caring and helpful and they took certain responsibilities upon themselves. This concurs with findings of Höjer (2004:44), Part (1993:27) and Younes and Harp (2007:31). One participant related her **initial excitement** about fostering as follows:

*“Ek was baie excited want ek ... ek het geweet ek gaan nuwe kinders ontmoet en ek gaan hulle help en alles. Dit was baie lekker vir my ... en toe kom R en hy was cool en hy is nog steeds cool en hy's nog steeds my boetie en ek is baie lief vir hom, **maar** die ding is: hy dra die ding teen ons dat hy in pleegsorg is ... dit is ook wat my pla, die ma en pa-hulle, die regte pa en ma. Hulle maak nie reg met hulle nie en elke keer wat hulle met hulle praat, dan is daar iets fout met ons familie wat vir al die kinders pla.”* (Participant no. 4)

The other participant indicated his initial happiness: *“I was happy at first ... **but** when time went on I thought to myself ... maybe this was not the right thing to do.”* (Participant no. 12)

The participants gave indication that they **gained self-worth** through the fostering experience by being needed and by caring for somebody else. One participant's response was as follows:

"...hulle sou in die Kinderhuis gebly het as ons hulle nie gehelp het nie. By ons is hulle lewe beter." On the question how she felt about that, the response was:

"It makes me feel good ", but further in the interview she related as follows:

"maar alles is nie meer dieselfde nie..my ma, pa en ons huis...dis anders en dit is nie lekker nie." (Participant no. 6)

All four participants felt that they have **gained companionship** through the placements:

"Now I've got a brother - I can talk to him" but the participant also related that there were *"sacrifices...had no time alone as before."* (Participant no. 12)

"Ons is byna dieselfde ouderdom met dieselfde belangstelling. 'n Mens is nie alleen nie..." (Participant no. 6)

"Daar is ander om mee te praat. As A weg is, is nog iemand in die huis. 'n Mens kan gevoelens deel en uitpraat die dinge wat jy nie andersins kan vertel nie." (Participant no. 7)

"... I really love R as a brother and he's like the world to me. He is always helping me and everything and when we go to camps ...but the foster child ..." basically takes over your life", which, she did not like at all. (Participant no. 4)

In this regard literature confirms the empirical findings. Both Part (1993:27) and Pugh (1996:36) found that in the fostering experience, birth children mostly enjoyed the companionship and the 'good feelings' about making a difference in other lives.

3.5.6.2 Subtheme 2 - Disruption of Family Equilibrium

On the other side of the coin, the empirical findings reveal that the same children experienced **immense anxiety and stress** in their situations. While having companionship on the one side, they resented the difficult and sometimes annoying behaviour that foster children reveal (Part 1993:28). In their study about support and conflict in the foster family, Denuwelaere and Bracke (2007:72) found that birth children and foster siblings experienced a similar amount of conflict in relation to each other. Merrithew (1996:9) calls it "... *disruption of family equilibrium*" and found it to be one of the stressors in foster care.

An outcome of the empirical findings was that participants felt burdened by **relationships in the home that became distorted**. Three of the participants in this study felt deeply hurt by the constant annoying, teasing, fighting and rude behaviour they had to endure from their foster siblings, despite their efforts of support and help towards the foster children. Two participants remarked as follows:

"... they can take out their 'being foster care' on you, but you didn't do anything; you just wanted to help them ..." (Participant no. 4)

"The 'bad' thing about fostering was ... that we used to fight a lot - there was no peace at all." (Participant no.12)

Participant no. 4 reported to have experienced **continuous anxiety and stress** due to the verbal abuse he and his single mother had to endure from the foster child. He was concerned about the extreme stress and deteriorating health his mother is experiencing. He stated that the manner, in which the foster child spoke to his mother, hurt him so much that he wanted to harm the foster child. This is confirmed by Younes and Harp (2007:30) who found birth children to be concerned about the bad treatment foster children gave their parents, while calling them "*Mom*" and "*Dad*" knowing it caused parental stress and unhappiness. McFadden (1996:546) found that foster parents feared that foster children would harm their children. Twigg and Swan (2007:51) stated that foster

parents' children have the risk of being on the receiving side of aggression, rudeness, manipulation, threats or destructive acts that foster children imposed on them. Twigg (1994:310) even felt that birth children may “... *be at significant psychological risk by the foster care experience.*”

It seems that where there is a large age difference between the foster child and the birth child or when they are close in age, their relationships tend to be poor (Thomas 2005:117). This has been reported by one participant living in a placement situation where both these scenarios were applicable. Her relationship with the elder one was characterised by irritation and her relationship with the foster sibling almost her age was filled with competition, quarrels and resentment. She felt very upset because the foster child interfered with her life-long peer relationship. About the older foster child she said the following:

“... met S is dit ‘n bietjie irriterend, want hy is irriterend, maar ... want hy dink hy is mos nou omdat hy ouer is weet alles en alles. So dit is ‘n bietjie ... jy voel uit...”

and about the younger one:

“Ek was die een wat vir my ma gesê het ek soek R in die familie, ek wil hom in die familie hê en dan is hy die een wat altyd teenoor my draai, met my mislik is en ja, ek skree partykeer op hom, maar ek probeer hom help en hy soek nie my help nie.” (Participant no. 4)

Studies of Quinton et al. (1998:132, 133) and Twigg 1994:308) confirm these findings.

A further outcome from the empirical findings was that birth children **feel responsible for foster children and their parents:**

“I feel I have to protect them, like R at school, I have to protect him. When he gets hurt and stuff like that and I also feel like ... that I have to, because I don't want them to get any more hurt than what they did with their parents. So I try to protect them from all the stuff around them ...” (Participant no. 4)

Three out of the four participants felt that they had to take responsibility for the foster children at school, either to protect them, or to explain their situation to peer groups. One participant, aged 11 years, was busy all the time, organising her foster sibling's room and cupboard in order to prevent her mother from "running away" as she had threatened to do. Pugh's findings (1996:38) affirm that birth children tend to get more protective, "... *almost parental* ..." towards their parents to shield them against outside pressures.

Researchers studying the impact of fostering on birth children refer to the fact that despite the valuable contributions birth children make in foster care, they simultaneously experience **deeply-felt losses** in their situations.

Birth children lose their **position and roles** in the family and with that they experience a sense of displacement, not being the eldest or the youngest any more (Merrithew 1996:10; Younes & Harp 2007:34). In this study two participants lost their positions as the youngest children in the family. According to Munichan (1974:51, 52) the power hierarchy in a family is part of the family structure, which is constructed by the repeated patterns of "*how*", "*when*" and "*to whom*" to relate. These transactional patterns regulate family members' behaviour. The addition of the foster child to the family brings change to the structure of the system, and as Munichan points out: in order to adapt to the change, the foster family needs the availability of alternative transactional patterns and they have to be able to mobilise them. The unease and unhappiness of the birth children about their loss of position and roles indicate that these families were not able to mobilise alternative transactional patterns in the family.

Birth children are sensitive about the **less attention, time, material goods and family outings** that they experience in foster care. The empirical findings reveal that this group of participants felt deprived of what they used to have in their homes:

“Ons het minder aandag; minder voorregte, tyd en sakgeld”. “Pleegsorg is sleg ... want jy kry minder aandag van jou ouers. Jy voel ook verantwoordelik vir hulle. Hulle kry goed van hul ander familie wat jy nie kry nie, al is daar ‘n reël dat almal dieselfde moet kry. Die familie gee nie om nie en dit maak my vies.” (Participant no.7)

“... No time alone as before... attention went to those.” (Participant no.12)

“... jy voel ‘n bietjie uit gelos, want my ma probeer om die meeste vir hom te gee ... aandag te gee, want hy voel uit ...Ek dink ons moet net gewoon daaraan raak om nie so baie attention te kry nie ” (Participant no. 4)

These findings correlate with literature. Several researchers found similar answers from participants who resented having to compete with children who *“... were but weren’t part of the family for their ‘rights’”* (Twigg 1994:307), or to feel emotionally ignored, unloved and shuffled into second place (Merrithew 1996:12).

Previous research revealed that birth children felt that they were also **deprived of equal treatment and fairness** in discipline as parents tended to be stricter with them, while expecting them to be non-complaining role models to the foster children (Watson 2002:49). This study revealed the following response on this matter:

“I get treated unfairly because of him ... I might be over reacting, but I mean like, it just feel to me like that.” (Participant no. 4)

Nutt (2006:46, 47) describes the moral dilemma that foster parents found themselves in while trying to treat all children in the households with equal fairness. The popular expectation is that foster children are entitled to *“... better, if not the best as they came from sad beginnings and that birth children are fine as they ... had all this.”*

The systems theory refers to the usual, repetitive way of doing things in the family as the “*redundant patterns of interaction*” between and among family members, which distinguish one family from another. These patterns are the rules by which a family functions (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:22). It happens that foster parents change these rules (the regular way of doing things) in order to accommodate the foster child, as well as the expectations of the eco-system (welfare system, birth parents) causing discrepancies in the subsystem, which in return stimulate unhappiness, tension and even competition in that system, as illustrated above in the response of a birth child.

3.5.6.3 Subtheme 3 - Preparation Prior to Placement

Previous research done with birth children of foster parents inter alia by (Denuwelaere & Bracke 2007:68; Merrithew 1996:17; Watson 2002:54; Younes & Harp 2007:29, 38) suggests the importance of **including birth children in recruitment and training** processes and in discussions where their interpretations of and concerns about foster care can be voiced. Birth children are a vital part of the fostering experience, which is complex in nature, and many researchers refer to the fact that all family members are affected in some way by fostering (Höjer 2004:38; Nutt 2006:59; Watson 2002:50; Younes & Harp 2007:37). A foster parent reflected as follows: “*It was me and my two children and we cared. We were foster carers ...*” (Nutt 2006:59). It is also stated in previous research that foster care can generate an expectation **of more adult behaviour** or emotional maturity from birth children. They must be more understanding, more useful, more helpful, more able, more thankful, more patient and tolerant. In order for them to comply with all these expectations and to deal with the complexity of fostering, birth children will acquire certain knowledge and skills (Höjer 2004:44; Nutt 2006:59; Poland & Groze 1993:154).

The empirical findings reflected that all the participants **had some information** about the necessity for the placement, but they gave no indication that the implications of fostering were explained to them. Three of the participants were consulted by their parents about the parents’ decision to foster children. In the

kinship placement, participant no. 6 and participant no. 7 knew about the problems that existed with their cousins' family and therefore their parents wanted to help out in the situation to prevent the children from staying in a Children's Home. In the other kinship placement the participant knew about the problems with his two cousins, but he was not part of the decision making process to foster the children. To the question whether he was prepared for the placements he responded as follows:

"No. My mother didn't want the children to split up - just told him that they were going to stay with them ..." (Participant no. 12)

To the fourth participant it was explained by the mother that they were going to help the welfare by helping children that do not have homes.

"My ma het ons vertel dat die kinders te help wat nie huise het nie en om die welsyn te help." (Participant no. 4)

The children gave **no indication that social workers involved** them in any screening, preparation or training processes. It is the impression of the researcher that all four participants were not part of an in-depth explanation of what fostering entails, as well as the anticipated effect on them as individuals and family. This correlates with previous research as referred to in paragraph 3.5.4.

3.5.6.4 Subtheme 4 - Emotional Impact on Birth Children

Martin (in Watson & Jones 2002:50) indicated the importance that adults must understand the demands that "caring" have on children. Pugh (1996:37) asks the question: *"Are children who foster at risk of growing up prematurely, or having certain aspects of their development distorted? Indeed, could they be suffering emotional harm?"*

During the interviews with the participants, the researcher noticed the **emotional strain** the participants experienced in the foster situations. They revealed their emotions quite spontaneously and the researcher got the impression that voicing their emotions was like a relief to them. Three participants repeatedly told the

researcher that they were not able to share their real feelings and emotions with their parents and that they tried to solve their problems on their own. They commented as follows:

“It is hard for me to talk to somebody else. It’s hard to talk to my mother. I solve my own problems.” (Participant no.12)

“I could have but I didn’t want to speak a lot about it because I was afraid that she ... dat sy weer ongelukkig geword het. Ek is bang as ek met my ma praat oor dit dan gaan sy wil vir R skuif en ek is bang dat sy sal voel dat sy iets verkeerd doen om pleegsorg kinders te hê.” (Participant no. 4)

“... ek kan nie met my ma-hulle praat nie ... ek skryf hoe ek voel in my dagboek.” (Participant no. 7)

The following **emotions** were reported by the participants or observed by the researcher during interviews with the respondents: frustration, anger, shame, guilt, annoyance, despair, fear, loneliness, sadness, resentment, feelings of being unloved, and disillusion. One participant said:

“Ek het gevoelens van wil nie meer lewe nie.” (Participant no. 7)

These emotions reflected either the impact of their daily interaction with their foster siblings or the emotional loss that they experienced in relationships with their parents. Twigg (1994:310) was taken by surprise in his study by the strength of birth children’s anger, which was often directed at the parents. As mentioned previously in paragraph 3.5.6.2, he also stated that birth children may be *“... placed at significant psychological risk by the foster care experience.”*

Communication is the energy input and output of human systems and can also be described as feedback about the usefulness of the product of the system (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1982:18). According to them, feedback seeks to maintain near-state function and therefore it serves to increase the probability of survival

of the system. The authors continue to say that when an individual cannot communicate, the person cannot give feedback analogically. By their inability to communicate with their parents, birth children's feedback is not flowing through to the system, which can in the long run disturb the near-state function of the family and even the survival of the foster care system.

3.5.6.5 Subtheme 5 - Separation and Loss

The empirical findings reveal the participants' ambivalence quite substantially when positioning themselves with regard to **the leaving of foster children**. The researcher observed that it was difficult for them to discuss the matter in detail. Three participants left the impression that although life was difficult with foster children and that it would be easier to stop fostering, for the sake of the foster children they would rather bear their stay. The concern about what will happen to them, where they would stay if they had to go away, was too big to carry. There is, however, one participant who acknowledged that even though foster children were difficult, it was even more difficult not to bond with them. She remarked:

"... it's uncomfortable for me to try not to get attached to children because I am afraid when I do get attach, they have to leave again ..." (Participant no. 4)

The effect of separation and loss of foster siblings on birth children is widely described in the available literature. Twigg and Swan (2007:52) indicate that several authors (Poland & Groze 1993; Steinhauer 1991; Wilkes 1974) suggested that separation anxiety may be a part of all foster placements, due to its temporary nature. According to Younes and Harp (2007:36) removal decisions are made within the welfare system, not really taking in account its impact on birth children and their families. Their study indicated that birth children had feelings which *"... ranged from relief to sorrow..."* and that removals were accompanied by very emotional and sad feelings, worry and non-closure on the happenings. In this study one participant was still worried about foster children who left them four years ago:

“Dit wasi lekker om K en M te laat gaan nie, want die pleegsorg vrou het hulle terug by hulle ouers gesit en hulle ouers het nie na hulle gekyk nie en ek weet nog steeds nie hoe dit met hulle gaan nie en dis ook wat my pla ... oor hulle vat kinders weg en sê nie hoe gaan dit met hulle en alles nie ... en ek weet nie of hulle daar ... they'll be safe? ... or I dunno if anything is going to happen to them ...” (Participant no. 4)

Hill (1958) referenced by (McFadden 1996:550) gives attention to the **crises of accession, dismemberment and demoralisation**, which according to the author are all part of foster family life. Every time a child enters a home the crisis of accession occurs and each time a child leaves the home, dismemberment occurs. Normally all family members experience loss when the foster child leaves the home (McFadden 1996:550). Demoralisation forms part of the family experiencing failure when a placement disrupts.

Foster families are regarded as open systems due to the accession in and dismemberment of foster children from the system and the temporary and ambiguous nature of the family's role (McFadden 1996:545). According to the systems perspective, these situations refer to the openness of foster family boundaries. Collins et al. (2007:58) indicate that when family boundaries are loose, involvement with the outside world is not regulated and the incoming and outgoing of individuals may be based more on the individual's needs and not the family's needs, regardless of the consequences to family members. In this situation birth children were concerned about the uncertainty of foster children's future and worry and fear in this regard affected their lives negatively, even over a period of time.

3.5.7 Conclusion - Theme 2: Birth Children Ambivalent about Fostering

It can be concluded that some birth children do experience ambivalent feelings in the fostering process. On the one hand they enjoy the social companionship of the foster children and the self-growth that they experience because of their new acquired knowledge and skills. On the other hand they experienced that their

lives and their family life have been disrupted, which has a negative emotional impact on them. Their lives would be easier without foster children, but because they have formed attachments with the children, they felt concerned and responsible for the outcome of the foster children's lives, as well as their parents' lives which bore vivid effects of fostering. Unknowingly these children took up 'adult' responsibilities, while not being emotionally matured in themselves to carry the load.

3.5.8 Triangulation - Method of Verification

Social workers' responses were obtained to verify the data that was gathered from the birth children. In this section their responses to question three, posed to them, are discussed. The empirical findings were as follows:

- **Birth children feeling ambivalent about foster placements.**

The first participant felt that birth children experience the foster child as a project in the family and therefore superficial attachments are formed with the foster child. The moment situations get worse, the child has to be removed from the family. Birth children see the foster child as the project of the parents:

“My ma is lief vir haar, so ek moet vrede maak daarmee; ek moet maar goed voel daaroor. Ek kry rêrig oor en oor: dit is my ouers se projek en ek is ‘n onskuldige, toeskouer bystander in die proses.” (Participant no. 1)

The second participant felt that birth children have ambivalent feelings about fostering. They have loyalty towards the foster children, because the child becomes a 'friend' or the child is a family member. Birth children realise that foster children cannot live with their parents (helping the less fortunate - altruistic feelings), but in the meantime their family has been changed by the arrival of the foster child and nothing is nice anymore. The participant explained it as follows:

“So, ja ... ons besef ons moet hierdie kind in ons huis hê, maar terselfdertyd weet ek ook nie of ek dit regtig wil hê nie.” (Participant no. 2)

As previously mentioned, participant no.2 felt that after the honeymoon period faded away, birth children felt deprived of parental attention and as such they felt neglected in the following ways:

“Ma en pa het nie tyd vir hulle nie”

“Die pleegkind kry al die aandag ... aandag word verdeel”

“Finansieel kry die pleegkind meer aandag. Hul spandeer meer aan die pleegkind ...”

“Pleegkinders bedreig hul posisie”

“Pleegkinders gaan kuier naweke en vakansies by die eie ma - daar word hulle bederf. So word hulle bederf by die pleegouers en hulle word bederf by die biologiese ouers en die eie kind van pleegouers voel maar hulle kry nie dieselfde nie”

“Die dilemmas met die pleegkind beïnvloed hulle verhouding met hul ouers ...”

“... en probleme met die pleegkind by die skool wat uitgesorteer moet word - gedrag van pleegkind beïnvloed hulle posisie by die skool.” (Participant no. 2)

This participant felt that birth children are not honest enough to reveal their real feelings to social workers or their parents. The way they feel is revealed in difficult behaving like staying away from home, preference of other friends to the companionship of the foster child, the discontinuing of the relationship with the foster child.

Participant no. 3 felt that birth children have ambivalent feelings about foster placements. She referred to a case where the birth child was an only child, who became very jealous of the foster child and after encountering serious problems between the two of them, the birth child still preferred the foster child to stay in the family.

Participant no. 4 indicated that the foster parents were mostly her informants about issues involving birth children and not the birth children per se. She found that birth children were unhappy about the following:

“Pleegkinders kry al die aandag”

“Eie kind moet help met alles”

“Eie kind word soort van weggeskuif”

“Hulle voel jaloers.”

3.5.9 Conclusion: Triangulation Method of Verification

It can be concluded from the empirical findings obtained from the social work professional participants and the literature control that birth children indeed have ambivalent experiences in fostering. They felt obliged, for the sake of their parents, and because of the awkward position the foster children found themselves in, to tolerate the situation. They enjoyed the friendship and companionship, but on the other hand their family life had changed and they felt deprived of parental attention. Furthermore, it confirmed that birth children were unable to communicate their real feelings, but rather displayed their unhappiness and dissatisfaction through difficult behaviour.

3.5.10 Theme 3: Birth Children Negative about Fostering

The empirical findings indicated that four out of the thirteen participants were negative about fostering. These participants did not like the foster children in their homes and they did not narrate any personal positive outcomes resulted from their fostering experiences. One participant said the following about the foster child:

“Meeste van die tyd is ek kwaad ... vir M. Ek dink dit was sleg dat sy hier kom bly het.” (Participant no. 10)

Part (1993:29) found four participants in her study that did not like fostering. Twigg (1994: 307,309) found in his study that all his participants felt that they had lost something through the fostering experience. He indicated that fostering can be seen “... *as a blow for foster parents’ own children.*”

The researcher will discuss the findings of Theme 3 under the subthemes that emerged during data analyses. Some of the subthemes are similar to those discussed under Themes 1 and 2, and might seem to be a repetition, but according to the researcher, they deserve to be discussed under a different heading. Due to the intensity of emotions observed during the interviews and the manner in which the participants told their stories, new information was obtained and new perspectives were formed, which are worth noting. The subthemes are as follows:

- Poor preparation prior to placement
- Disruption in family equilibrium
- Future of placement.

The categories as indicated in Table 4 pertaining to birth children being negative about fostering are added in bold in the discussions of the subthemes.

3.5.10.1 Subtheme 1 - Poor Preparation Prior to Placement

The empirical findings indicated that the four participants either received **no prior preparation** to the placements, or they **understood very little** about the proposed placement. Again no reference was made of any social worker’s involvement in preparing the participants for foster placements. Two participants claimed to have been informed by their parents, especially their mothers, about their plans to foster and limited information about the foster child was shared with them:

“... *Ek het geweet dat ... dat sy gaan kom en wat se graad sy is en dat sy ’n meisie is en hoe oud sy is - dit geweet.*” (Participant no. 9)

The next participant said that very little detail was discussed with her:

“... maar ek weet my ma het gesê dis ... gaan kindertjies invat wat, wie se ma-hulle sleg is en nie na hulle kan kyk nie en dis omtrent al.”

(Participant no. 3)

Another participant indicated that he new nothing about the proposed fostering and he got the news from his sister:

“My sussie N het vir my net drie keer gesê ... die dag ... die aand voordat sy gekom het, het my sussie vir my gesê hier gaan nog iemand soos P hier kom bly - so pleegkind.” (Participant no. 10)

Participant no. 5 indicated that she was part of the discussions within her family prior to the placement that she was excited about the expected placement, but she was not prepared for the reality of it. She eventually tolerated the placement for the sake of her mother who really wanted to foster that specific child. According to Younes and Harp (2007:30) both parents and children found the reality of fostering quite different from the preparation they had received, as a child stated: *“You don’t know what it is like until you do it.”*

It is worth noting that during some of the interviews conducted with the participants the researcher **observed emotional expressions** of sadness (tears), hopelessness (slumping of shoulders) and apathy (staring eyes and toneless voices) while narrating their stories and experiences of fostering.

Two of the principles governing family systems theory, as indicated by Becvar and Stroh Becvar (1988:13), i.e. one cannot not behave, and one cannot not communicate, are well illustrated in the behaviour of both the parents and their children. The children’s emotional responses to their parents’ reluctance to communicate with them in a proper way are their way of behaving towards the situation. Similarly, the inappropriate information flow from the parents is

signalling certain messages through to their children, which in return are interpreted by them in a negative way.

3.5.10.2 Subtheme 2 - Disruption in Family Equilibrium

Poland and Groze (1993:161) indicated that biological children wished that they were informed prior to placement on how much their homes would change as a result of foster care. Wolfe in (Merrithew 1996:9) states that another child entering the family, whether emotionally troubled or not, impacts on a family.

The empirical findings indicated that **change took place** in their families when the foster children came. According to the participants, they were uncomfortable with not being able to do “*as they used to do.*” Two participants perceived the change as being related to the **loss of their position and role** in the family, and as such they don’t feel that significant in the family structure any more. According to Nichols and Schwartz (in Twigg & Swan 2007:53) family theorists indicated that family roles serve to meet needs of family members and once being established, it is understood to “... *bring regularity to complex social institutions.*” They also state that by becoming a foster family, it implies the creation of new roles and the loss of others. Comments of the participants in this regard were:

“... want ek het al my regte verloor en sy nou die oudste is...’n groot verandering! Dis net nie dieselfde nie...” (Participant no. 9)

“... ek is maar nog altyd gewoond daaraan dat ek is die jongste. Ek word altyd as die jongste aanskou en nou tel niks meer van daardie goeters rêrig op my nie, want nou is hy daar ...” (Participant no. 5)

The participants indicated also other aspects of the change that took place in their family settings, namely:

- **Over crowding in the home:** “... ek meen vier kinders in die huis is net tē veel en dan is daar nog my ander sussie ook en ek ... is nou nie een vir baie kinders nie.” (Participant no. 3)
- the presence of foster children **jeopardising usual family outings or intimate parent-child relationships:** “... my ma sal nie enigetyd nou net ek en sy ‘n naweek weggaan of nie ‘n naweek weggaan nie, soos gaan fliëk of iets nie, want A moet aan gedink word ...’ en ‘... dis ‘n slep partykeer, want hy kan nie alleen gelos word nie - so almal kan nie een aand net uitgaan sonder dat ons nou eers wag dat iemand na hom kyk vanaand of so iets. So dit raak partymaal nogal bietjie frustrerend.” (Participant no. 5)
- The audacity of foster children to place **unrealistic demands** on their parents or manipulating their parents: “Sy verwag baie groot goeters dadelik op ‘n kort termyn ding van my ouers.’ ‘... toe ons moes stap die eendag, toe was dit warm en hmm ... sy’s toe ... hmm baie vinnig en kwaad: ek moet ‘n kar kry, nou, vinnig! As sy dit sê ... dit irriteer my nogal.” (Participant no. 9)
- birth children’s perception of **being treated unfairly or being ‘left-out’** by their parents: “... ek het dit net gesien as kompetisie, want hulle gaan inkom en hulle ouers gee nie om oor hulle nie en my ouers gaan meer omgee oor hulle en in daardie tyd het ek net gevoel daar is nie genoeg liefde om om te gaan nie.” (Participant no. 3)

The participants’ non-verbal communication, as observed by the researcher during the interviews, gave an indication of them having very **intense emotional feelings** about these issues of concern to them. One participant indicated having a poor relationship with her parents even prior to placements. It influenced her total perspective of fostering and she felt deprived of parental love. Although she

liked some of the foster children she was negative about fostering. She said the following on this matter:

“... ek het net gevoel daar is nie genoeg liefde nie ..., invaded ... dit was vir my moeilik want ek hou nie daarvan dat ander mense in ons huis intrek en daar is min kamers ... ek hou daarvan om my eie spasie te hê. As ek by die huis kom wil ek nie nog worry hier is nou twee nuwe seuns in die huis - ek moet nou kyk wat ek dra ... and neglected ... en ek het hulle ook blameer dat ek nie verhouding het met my ouers nie of enige een in die familie nie ... ek was net kwaad vir alles ...”

(Participant no. 3)

A further component of change identified from the empirical findings and being confirmed by literature (Höjer 2004:44; Merrithew 1996:9; Younes & Harp 2007:31) is the **added tension, hostility and competition** in foster family relationships, especially between birth and foster children. Participants reported foster children being ‘bossy’, shouting at them “... *gil en goeters op ons ... skel op ons*” and being “*hostile to them*” “... dan kan “*sy soos rênig met ons lelik wees ... baie lelik ...*” (Participant no.10) and verbally abusive, irritating and annoying towards them:

“... ek dink ek raak geirriteerd omdat hy die hele tyd hier is, want hy is nou so klein en ek is nie gewoond ... mos gewoonlik as jy ‘n klein broer of sussie het - is mos irriterende goed. So nou is dit vir my nog erger, want ek het dit nooit gehad nie en nou het ek hom elke dag hier en dan partykeer kan jy nie weggom nie, want hy is nog steeds hierso!” (Participant no. 5)

The participants repeatedly reported having, as a result, feelings of unhappiness, anger and resentment towards the foster children:

“Ek is hartseer. Meeste van die tyd is ek kwaad ... vir M.” (Participant no. 10)

The empirical findings revealed certain responses these birth children had to their circumstances. It was similar to those that Twigg and Swan (2007) discussed in their study, namely **partial seclusion and silence**.

According to Twigg and Swan (2007:54, 55, 56) through **partial seclusion**, birth children create for themselves a sense of space within their family that separates them from the foster children and as such, enables them to escape from the fostering experience. They can also address outside resources for support. In this study one participant said that things made him cross, but he eased situations by excluding himself and withdrew from family activities. Instead he played computer games on his own. The other participant indicated that she withdrew from the family and spent more time with friends. She said the following:

“Ek het weg van die huis af gebly die hele tyd. Ek was nooit ‘n naweek by die huis nie. Ek was altyd by my vriende. Ek het strond aangejaag.”

She also mingled with the wrong friends and became more involved in unacceptable social activities.

“Ek het tyd spandeer met verkeerde mense, omdat niemand, niemand gesien het wat ek gedoen het, omdat daar te veel kinders in die huis was ... ek het gekuier en gerook en sulke goed ... ek het slegte keuses gemaak omdat ek kwaad was en gevoel het dat ek alleen in die wêreld is, want ek het weggetrek van my ouers af; ek wou nie om hulle wees nie en baklei met almal die hele tyd. Ja, ek het groot foute gemaak, omdat ek gevoel het niemand gee om nie, so hoekom moet ek omgee?” (Participant no. 3)

Participant no. 9 indicated that staying out of the foster child's way, was a method for him to solve his problems that arose from the placement.

With **silence** children are unable to share their feelings of loss with parents. Because their parents are engaged in meaningful work, children feel their parents will perceive them as selfish by having hostile and negative thoughts, while they are better off than foster children. These children were normally very proud of their parents and of what they were doing (Twigg & Swan 2007:55).

Three of the participants claimed that they had **no confidence to ventilate their feelings to their parents** and they felt unhappy about it. Most of the time they felt too scared to speak to their parents:

“... want ek is bang hulle word kwaad vir my.” (Participant no.10)

“... hulle’t kwaad geraak - vir my gesê ek is selfsugtig en sulke goed ...”
(Participant no. 3)

These findings correlate with available literature (Mauro 1985; Norrington 2002; Nuske 2006; Swan 2000; Swan 2002; Twigg 1994 referenced in Twigg & Swan (2007:55). Twigg (1994:307) states that the cost of fostering involves the inability to voice pain at the losses experienced.

According to Twigg and Swan (2007:55) many research participants recognised the meaningful work their parents did and were proud of them. In this study three of the four participants indicated that they were **proud of their parents** being foster parents and they acknowledged their parents’ braveness for doing it. They indicated that their parents, especially their mothers, were eager to foster and found meaning in what they were doing. They tolerated the foster situation only on behalf of their parents who wanted to foster:

“... toe dink ek, ek is nogal trots op haar dat sy actually so ietsie sal invat en hierdie ding sal aanpak en alles en toe is ek nogal opgewonde ... ek dink nog, steeds sy is verskriklik braaf om so ietsie te doen en ek gee dit vir haar ...”
(Participant no. 5)

“Dit maak haar goed voel daaroor as sy haar deel gee in die gemeenskap - sy hou daarvan.” (Participant no. 3)

“... ek was eintlik verbaas dat hulle nog een sou aanneem in pleegsorg... nog ‘n kind sou aanneem ... dat hulle ... voel snaaks omdat ‘n kind so baie ‘goed’ kan doen aan ouers.” (Participant no. 9)

The way in which a family can maintain a state of equilibrium or a homeostatic balance, indicates a family's capacity to be stable (Becvar & Stroh Becvar 1988:16). Healthy families succeed in keeping a balance between stability (homeostasis) and change (morphogenesis). When a family keeps a state of morphogenesis, its members are willing to be creative, to grow, to be innovative towards changing conditions. Jones (2001:110) refers to (Wasilewski et al. 1988) who indicated that families, who succeeded in adapting to change, experienced less disruption. Symptoms as revealed by the birth children may indicate their difficulty in coping with the changes in their family system. According to the systems theory, difficulty in one part of the system may give rise to symptomatic expression in other parts of the system (Keeney 1979 in Jones 2001:9). As such, the previous discussion illustrates how birth children experience difficulty in relating with the foster children, which in return gives rise to their unhappy responses and even their misbehaving. Munichan (1974:63) points out that there are stages in family transition that require the negotiation of new family rules, or the drawing of new lines of differentiation and the forming of new subsystems that inevitably will cause conflict. These conflicts offer families the opportunity to grow, but if the conflict is not resolved, the transitional problems may give rise to further problems. In this case the birth children are deeply unhappy, because they experience no resolution in their situation and they are therefore unwilling to change and to adjust to the situation. They rather withdraw from the closeness of the family unit, into a “space” of their own, or find resolution away from the family in the wider eco-system.

3.5.10.3 Subtheme 3 - Future of the Placement

The empirical findings revealed that the four participants were **reluctant about the continuation of the placements** and they voiced their own solutions to the

problem. One participant indicated that if he had one wish it would be for the termination of the placement:

“Ek sou gewens het dat haar ma vir haar kon terugvat.” (Participant no. 10)

The other participant hated her parents’ idea to adopt the foster child. She revealed being angry about their decision:

“... want ek het nou uitgevind my ma-hulle wil die seuntjie aanneem. Ek is nogal baie woedend daaroor, maar ... kan maar niks daaraan doen nie.”

(Participant no. 3)

The third participant was very relieved that the placement term will end when the foster child completes her school education in a year’s time:

“Sy wil mos as sy 18 is, gaan sy mos universiteit toe gaan - dan gaan sy nie meer so baie hier wees nie. So ek het ... so ... toe ... ek het geweet sy gaan twee jaar hier wees, so ... wat nie so lank is nie. So ek het gedink dit gaan nie soos vir ewig wees nie ...” (Participant no. 9)

Participant no. 5 indicated with relief that she was almost in a position to leave the fostering situation, as she was completing her grade 12 and she planned to join her brother in England.

The researcher could not find any substantial evidence in literature commenting on how birth children felt about permanent placement or adoption of the foster children, but the high incidence of foster care disruption and ‘drift in care’ is well debated in literature (Berridge & Cleaver 1987:1.2; James 2004:601,602; Sinclair et al. 2005:19; Weiner & Weiner 1990:85). There is also significant evidence that foster care disruption due to birth children being unable to cope in their situations does indeed happen (McFadden 1996:546; Merrithew 1996:4). In her findings, Part (1993:30) referred to a situation where the placement turned into a nightmare for the family and the foster father could not wait to end the placement.

3.5.11 Conclusion - Theme 3: Birth Children Negative about Fostering

It can be concluded from the empirical findings that birth children do indeed have negative experiences about fostering and consequently they are intolerant of the placements itself. In these cases they gained nothing through the placements and they tolerated it only for the sake of the parents. The topic and implications of fostering were not clearly communicated to these children who had already lacked closeness with their parents. Then, the fostering experience itself, being imposed on them, brought further change and conflict, which affected their lives deeply. Because of the diffused parent-child communication channels, the birth children were not able to communicate their feelings and frustrations with their parents and as a result they found a way of 'withdrawing' themselves in various ways from the fostering experience.

3.5.12 Triangulation - Method of Verification

Social workers responses were obtained in order to verify the data that was gathered from the birth children. In this section their responses to question 4 posed to them are discussed. The empirical findings were as follows:

- **Birth children negative about foster placements**

Participant no. 1 indicated that birth children were negative about their fostering experience. They have resentment because of **less attention and time** they receive from parents. This caused tension in the sibling-parent relationship. Sometimes **physical issues** contributed to their resentment, like sharing space and rooms, leaving birth children without the required **privacy**. Sometimes the foster child was physically more attractive than the birth child, resulting in the birth child feeling jealous and inferior. **Birth children** felt that they were **not good enough for their parents** and that was why their parents were accommodating foster children in their family.

Participant no. 2 felt that birth children **do not voice their real feelings**, but they reveal feelings through their behaviour. This participant felt that there are

definitely certain cases where the birth child does not cope with the situation at all. She found in those instances that **parents are loyal to their own children** and they normally insist on the **quick removal of the foster child** without trying to retain equilibrium through any intervention methods.

Participant no. 3 could not remember any case where the birth child indicated to be negative about the foster placement.

Participant no. 4 was also not able to comment on this issue.

3.5.13 Conclusion: Triangulation Method of Verification

Although the findings obtained from the social workers were limited they confirmed that there were birth children who felt negative about foster placements and that their unhappiness could lead to immediate and premature foster care breakdown.

It can be concluded that the empirical findings obtained from the social work professional participants confirmed that birth children were indeed negative about fostering.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration the empirical findings, it surely accentuates the complex and challenging task that foster families have in accommodating strange children with special needs in their family life. Apart from the foster children, the birth children especially are the vulnerable ones, having to live in changed family systems. From both the theoretical and empirical research it has become apparent that these children are in the frontline of all the changes, happenings and challenges that confront the family through fostering, without receiving the necessary support, guidance and comfort. Unintentionally the birth children are put on the sideline, while services are concentrated on foster children and the foster parents as such.

The birth children experienced the foster placements in different ways. There were those who felt positive about the placements. Aspects that were in their favour helping them to adjust more positively to the challenges they were confronted with, were good, solid, loving family relations, open communication channels in the household, appropriate preparation for fostering and exposure to vulnerable people prior to placements. These families found a joint goal in becoming a system of aid to those less fortunate and birth children tapped wholeheartedly into the family mission.

Birth children who experienced ambiguity in their relation with the foster placement, found themselves in a win-lose position. On the one hand they gained friendships and companionships; they gained self-worth by being part of doing a noble deed, but on the other hand they lost all that was familiar to them in their home: their parents' closeness and special time together, their familiar way of doing things together, their position in the family, their privacy and space, their innocence to be a carefree child. It is sad realising that these children had optimistic ideas about the proposed placements, but the reality of fostering, which was never fully explained to them, put them in a position of being torn apart by their own emotional feelings of deprivation, guilt and sadness.

Thirdly, some birth children were totally negative about the fostering experience. It was the impression that they tolerated the idea for the sake of a parent. Again it became apparent that existing core problems in the home complicated the fostering experience, for example a lack of meaningful relationships in the home, ineffective communication systems between parents, children and social workers, and inability of the family to unite around a combined goal. These children experienced the addition of a foster child as an intrusion upon their lives, which gave rise to strong emotional feelings of resentment and conflict between them and the foster children.

Both the theoretical and empirical findings indicate that the role of the social worker in the world of the birth children of foster parents is ineffective and insignificant. It leaves the concern that the professionals have been ignorant to

the 'special' needs of other vulnerable children, possibly assuming that they were not the 'clients' and that they were okay. All these findings give a bleak picture of the reality of a small fragment of the fostering process, but a very significant part in the process, which may be a crucial factor in foster care disruption that too often, takes place in the reality of daily practice.

The next chapter will be a concluding chapter. An overview of the themes that emerged from the empirical findings will be provided. The researcher will reflect on the study, formulate conclusions and propose recommendations, flowing forth from the findings of this study. Hopefully these recommendations will lead to a more inclusive and holistic approach when working with the foster family system, recognising the being and role of birth children as an important part of the system, and that this will also stimulate future research. It is also hoped that it will stimulate revised policy and decision making with regard to practice implementation on the aspects of recruiting, screening and training of foster families.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENERAL SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Although foster care is the main source of alternative care for young people who for a variety of reasons are unable to live with their parents, little is known about the dynamics of the foster family system, with special reference to one subsystem, namely the birth children in the family. There has recently been a growing interest in lived experiences of this subsystem, but little consistent and systematic research has been done (Twigg & Swan 2007:49). As the demand for foster care and, as such, the demand for suitable foster families is ever increasing, the researcher found it imperative to conduct research on the matter. The reasons are twofold:

- to increase the knowledge base about the foster family system
- to assist social practice and policy making with reference to recruiting, screening, training, supporting and retaining of foster families.

While conducting the empirical research, birth children of foster parents voiced their lived experiences in the fostering situations. The empirical study undertaken with the social work professionals was used as a measure to verify the obtained information. The literature review was implemented as a measure of controlling the research findings. The researcher also studied the systems theory and utilised it as a conceptual framework for the research study.

- In Chapter one the introduction to the study and general motivation for the study are discussed. Furthermore, the problem is formulated and the aim of the study, as well as the research process, is explained.
- In Chapter two the systems theory was implemented as a theoretical framework together with a literature review to discuss the implications of fostering for the foster family system.

- Using a systems theoretical framework, the empirical findings as obtained from the research study, are discussed in Chapter three. Both a literature control and triangulation are implemented to verify the empirical findings.
- In this chapter a short summary of each chapter is presented, together with conclusions and recommendations deriving from the empirical findings and knowledge base of the researcher. The postulated aim and objectives of the study are evaluated.

4.2 CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

4.2.1 Summary

In this chapter the motivation for the study is explained, the research methodology is discussed and the way in which the research was conducted is explained.

- In the **introduction** the phenomenon of foster care is discussed, with special emphasis on the lack of empirical evidence on how birth children are experiencing fostering and adapting to their situations.
- **Problem formulation** - The study focused on the evidence found in literature that birth children's accounts of their experiences in fostering, as well as its impact on them, are almost not taken into account in practice and, as such, leaves a gap in the knowledge base of foster care.
- The **motivation for the study** was based on the researcher's experiences in the practice of foster care as well as on findings derived from previous research undertaken by the researcher, namely that birth children experience difficulty in fostering, which leads to premature ending of placements. Literature confirmed that there was little systematic research available on the experiences and well-being of birth children (Twigg & Swan 2007:49).

- A “grand-tour” “what” **research question** was opted for:
What do birth children experience in foster care by sharing their parents, home and family life with foster children?
- The **aim of the study** was to explore and describe from a systems perspective the experiences of birth children in foster care.
- The researcher implemented the **qualitative research approach** as it enabled her to obtain in-depth knowledge and understanding of the phenomena. Birth children voiced their actual experiences and interpretations of fostering, while observations of their emotional interpretation were captured.
- The **research design** that was followed was threefold;
 - An explorative strategy in order to explore the actual experiences of birth children in fostering
 - A descriptive strategy in order to describe the experiences of birth children in the foster care situation
 - Using the lens of contextual strategy in order to explore and describe the experiences of birth children in the wider context of their family system.
- The **research method** - A purposive sample was drawn from birth children aged 11-18 who were still living in foster care situations from two different welfare organisations rendering foster care services in Centurion, Pretoria.
Data was collected from the birth children by means of semi-structured interviews aided by an interviewing guide.

Triangulation was mainly implemented for verifying the data. For this purpose semi-structured interviews were conducted with four social workers from two different welfare organisations.

- **Ethical Aspects** were described in order not to obtain information at the expense of the individual.
- The following **key concepts** were identified and defined: birth children, Child Welfare Tshwane, Christian Social Council, Family systems approach, foster care, foster care breakdown, foster child, foster parents, social worker and welfare organisations.
- The **arrangement of the research report** was determined as the introduction, the foster family from a systems perspective, the empirical research and finally the general summary, conclusions and recommendations.

4.2.2 Conclusion

The qualitative method with its special characteristics used in this study was a very appropriate study method for examining the proposed phenomena, as it enabled the researcher to reach the proposed aim and objectives, obtaining satisfactory results.

4.2.3 Recommendations

No recommendations are formulated for this section.

4.3 CHAPTER TWO - THE (FOSTER) FAMILY: A SYSTEMS APPROACH

4.3.1 Summary

Introductory to Chapter 2, a general description was given of foster care and its role-players. Furthermore, a literature study on the systems theory was undertaken in order to describe the dynamics within a family with reference to the foster family. Attention was given to certain assumptions of the systems theory, describing the interactive family system as meaningful for understanding foster family dynamics:

- The foster family as a system.
- Subsystems in the foster family play a significant role in the dynamics, role performance and interactions of the family.
- Interactions within the foster family affect individual members who in return affect each other and the system - attention was given to the dynamics of mutual interaction and mutual influence, communication and feedback processes, how the family tries to balance change and stability and finally how the circular causality process continues in the system.
- The foster family forms part of a larger eco-system and its members has to have the ability to interact with various outside role-players and institutions.
- The foster family is also affected by disruptions; many a time it happens prematurely, because of the family's inability to adapt to the changes necessary to retain family equilibrium.

4.3.2 Conclusions

The following conclusions are formulated with reference to Chapter 2:

- The human family system is utilised by the welfare system as an important resource for the fostering of young people who were found to be in need of alternative care.
- Great pressure that necessitates adjustment and change in the family is exercised on the ability of the foster family system, which already nurtures biological children, by the addition of the foster child and its family to the system.
- The systems approach with its holistic, integrative method for studying family systems is a useful tool enabling the practitioner to come to a better understanding of the family dynamics in the whole of the foster care system.

4.3.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested with reference to this chapter:

- In order to render a truly understanding and supportive service to foster family systems, social workers should inform themselves of the dynamics that are taking place in foster family systems.
- In-service training and supervision programs aimed at social workers in foster care practice should also address the knowledge needs (i.e. systems theory tool) of social workers in order for them to comply with the demands experienced in practice.

4.4 CHAPTER THREE - EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

4.4.1 Summary

The researcher made use of the qualitative method for data collection in the study.

- The **sample** consisted of two main groups, namely the birth children of current foster parents and social work professionals involved in foster care practice.
- **Semi-structured interviews** were firstly conducted with 13 birth children of contemporary foster parents living in the Centurion area to collect qualitative data from the research participants. Secondly, as a method of verification, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with four social workers from two different welfare organisations in Pretoria. Through the interviews conducted with the social workers, qualitative information was obtained from the experts.
- The **exploratory research** undertaken with the birth children resulted in **three main themes**, namely:
 - Birth children positive about fostering
 - Birth children ambivalent about fostering
 - Birth children negative about fostering.
 -
- Under these themes certain **subthemes** were identified, namely:
 - Theme 1- Birth children **positive about** fostering
 - Gained new experiences
 - Positive family relationships
 - Preparation prior to placements
 - Permanency of the foster child

Both the method of triangulation and the literature control verified that some birth children were indeed positive about fostering.

- Theme 2- Birth children **ambivalent** about fostering
 - Gained new experiences
 - Disruption in family equilibrium

Preparation prior to placement

Emotional impact on birth children

Separation and loss

Both the literature control and triangulation implemented to verify the obtained information, confirmed that some birth children have ambivalent experiences in fostering.

- Theme 3 - Birth children **negative** about fostering

Poor preparation prior to placement

Disruption in family equilibrium

Future of placement

Both the literature control and triangulation implemented to verify the obtained data, confirmed that some birth children have over-all negative experiences about fostering.

4.4.2 Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn with reference to the empirical findings in this chapter:

- **Theme 1 - Conclusions**

- Birth children have the capacity to adapt to and accept change in their circumstances, depending on having the required support.
- Fostering has positive and life enriching inputs in birth children's lives.
- There are prerequisites for obtaining positive responses from birth children out of their fostering experience, namely:
 - (1) Strong, healthy parent-child relationships;

- (2) Open communication channels between parents and social workers;
 - (3) Birth children's participation in decision making and preparation prior to placements;
 - (4) The family system's ability and commitment to adapt to change and to regain stability;
 - (5) It is beneficial if birth children have previous exposure to voluntary work in the field of social services.
- Happy foster families are more likely to consider the adoption of the foster child.

4.4.3 Recommendations

- **Theme 1-Recommendations**
 - A holistic assessment of proposed foster families is imperative during the selection and screening programs.
 - Birth children should be included in training programs for the foster family.
 - The holistic needs of birth children should be taken into account with every placement.
 - Appropriate and sufficient support systems should be established by the welfare system, not only for the benefit of the foster parents, but also in direct aid of birth children.
 - Research should be implemented focusing on the holistic needs of foster families in order to recruit, screen, train and retain foster families for the field of foster care.

4.4.4 Theme 2 - Conclusions

- Birth children have the ability and capacity to adapt to and accept change in their life circumstances.
- There are gains in fostering for birth children, depending on birth children receiving the required support from the parental system and the welfare system.
- If birth children are not included in the preparation and training programs prior to placements, they tend to see fostering as a project of the parents.
- Birth children need continuous love, support and attention from their parents throughout the fostering process.
- Equality in parent-birth child and parent-foster child subsystems is a necessity for maintaining family equilibrium.
- Placement of foster children in age close to birth children, or where the ages differ too much, has a greater risk of failing.
- When birth children lack the necessary support and involvement from their parents, they struggle to adapt to the changes in their family system.
- Birth children experience immense emotional stress in fostering.
- Closed communication systems in the family add to the distress of birth children and it can lead to the eventual conducting of difficult behaviour.
- Birth children mature earlier in foster care situations due to added responsibilities, which include taking care of themselves.
- Social workers are not overseeing the well-being of birth children, unless problems arise in the birth children-foster children subsystems.

4.4.5 Theme 2 – Recommendations

- The needs of birth children should be taken into account in the selection, screening and training programs of foster parents.
- Birth children should be an active part of the preparation process prior to foster placements.
- Foster parents and their children should have time alone with one another.
- An appropriate support network system should be established in aid of the foster parents and their children.
- Training programs for foster parents should address the need for capacity building of family members, strengthening of relations and functioning in the family, effective communication skills for all family members, as well as ways of coping with stressors and change in the family.
- It is imperative that social workers include birth children in their working relationship with the foster family system.
- Birth children experiencing anxiety, emotional stress and depression, should receive therapy.

4.4.6 Theme 3 - Conclusions

- Birth children were not part of the placement process prior to placement and they feel betrayed in the process.
- Relationships between birth children and their parents were unsteady prior to placements.
- Communication channels in these families are diffuse.
- Through fostering these children gained nothing; instead they lost everything dear to them.

- Some birth children do not have the ability to adjust to the stressful changes that fostering brings about and in return they react by misconduct.
- Birth children are not emotionally supported by their parents.
- Social workers do not render direct services to birth children.
- Unhappy birth children tolerate the foster placements for the sake of their parents.

4.4.7 Theme 3 - Recommendations

- A holistic assessment of proposed foster families is imperative during the selection and screening programs.
- Birth children should be an integral part of preparation processes prior to placements.
- Training programs should be holistic, addressing all the informational and educational needs of the foster family regarding fostering.
- Sustaining supportive network systems should be available to foster families.
- Social work services should be readily available to foster families and it should be imperative that social workers engage via direct service rendering to birth children.
- Social support services should be of a quality able to guide foster families through times of challenge and change, back to stability.
- Therapeutic services should be available to birth children under emotional stress and behaving with misconduct.

4.5 CHAPTER FOUR- EVALUATION OF AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

4.5.1 Aim of the Study

To explore and describe birth children's experiences of fostering.

The aim of the study was achieved. Sufficient information was gathered through conducting the research project making it possible to describe the actual lived experiences of birth children in foster care situations.

4.5.2 Objectives of the Study

Objective 1

To implement the systems theory as theoretical framework, together with a literature review in order to discuss the implications of fostering for the foster family system.

This objective has been reached, as the systems theory and its main assumptions were described and implemented, together with previous research findings on the experiences of birth children, in the discussion of the implications of fostering for the foster family system.

Objective 2

To conduct empirical research as follows:

- *To explore by means of semi-structured interviews the experiences of birth children in foster care placements;*
- *To describe the experiences of birth children relating to the foster care placements from a systems perspective;*
- *To analyse and interpret the obtained data according to recognized methods;*
- *To implement triangulation and a literature control to verify the obtained data.*

This objective has been reached. Interviews with birth children were conducted until data saturation was reached. Qualitative data indicated the lived experiences of birth children. The obtained data was analysed according to the systematic process proposed by Tesch (in Creswell 1994:155). The actual experiences of birth children were described utilising the systems theory as conceptual framework. The obtained data was also subjected to verification that was done by means of triangulation and a literature control. In order to implement the method of triangulation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with social work professionals. A detailed literature study was undertaken. The findings of previous research on the experiences of birth children in fostering were applied to confirm the findings of the study.

Objective 3

To formulate, by means of the obtained data, conclusions and recommendations.

This objective was reached. Conclusions were formulated, which resulted in the formulation of concrete recommendations aimed at social work practice.

4.5.3 Conclusion

It can be concluded that overall the researcher has succeeded in reaching the initial goal with the research project, namely to obtain a better understanding of what birth children are experiencing in foster care, by means of giving voice to their experiences. It has been a valuable undertaking, firstly by gaining first hand knowledge and experience of this relatively unknown area in the practice of foster care and secondly to be able to apply the obtained knowledge in the every day practice of foster care.

4.6 LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

- The methodology chosen in this study was interviews with a small sample of participants in order to pursue the experiences of the participants in

greater detail. In this manner the choice of methodology sacrificed the ability to measure a large sample of participants.

- All the participants live in Centurion and were from families in the middle class. This means that although the information was gripping and informative, it cannot be generalised to the universe of birth children in foster care situations.
- The research included only participants between the ages 11-18 years, still living in foster care situations, giving information applicable to their age-related developmental stages. This implies that valuable information from other developmental stages was not captured in the study. The research would have been much more richly described and informative if the foster parents' opinions, as well as older, independent birth children's experiences were also described in the study.
- The researcher as only instrument, the small sample size and interviewing methodology imply the possibility of interviewer bias. An attempt was made to be as objective as possible in the face of obvious inherent subjectivity, being the only interviewer conducting interviews.

4.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to obtain a more holistic view of the research topic, it will be valuable to explore the views and experiences of older birth children, as well as the inputs of the foster parents themselves. Taking in account characteristics as geographic location, cross-racial placements, family size and socio-economic status may have potential importance for the study and is worth focusing on in further studies, finding differences or similarities.

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APPENDIX

Annexure 2

15 Oktober 2008

Die Direkteur
Maatskaplikewerk Dienste
Child Welfare Tshwane
Groenkloof
PRETORIA

VIR AANDAG: MEV L. NEL-BUYS

BENUTTING VAN KLIËNTSISTEEM IN NA-GRAAD STUDIES

Ek is tans besig met navorsing studie vir my MSW graad te Unisa. My studie handel oor die belewenisse wat die eie kinders van pleegouers ervaar in hul pleegsorg situasies. My huidige pos as pleegsorg werker in Centurion, verleen aan my 'n ideale geleentheid om met hierdie kinders in gesprek te kan tree.

Hiermee rig ek die versoek dat toestemming aan my verleen sal word om die kliëntsisteem (eie kinders van huidige pleegouers) van Child Welfare Tshwane in Centurion, by my navorsingsprojek te betrek en wel by wyse van onderhoudvoering van ongeveer 30-60 minute lank. Ek onderneem om op die voorgeskrewe etiese wyse met die pleegouers en hul kinders te handel. Dit sal insluit dat hulle ten volle ingelig sal word oor die proses wat gevolg sal word, asook my onderneming aan hulle met betrekking tot anonimiteit en konfidensialiteit. Dienooreenkomstig sal hulle en hul kinders skriftelik tot die deelname moet toestem. Ek beoog om ongeveer agt kinders uit die kliëntsisteem te betrek.

U is baie welkom om verdere inligting aan te vra, wat met graagte aan u verskaf sal word. Ek vertrou om so spoedig moontlik terugvoering van u te ontvang.

MEV K E VAN DER RIET

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INTERVIEW NUMBER 9
PARTICIPANT- MALE
AGE 11
GRADE 6

REQUEST: Tell me how it is for you to have a foster child placed in your home in the care of your parents?

Dit was lekker in die begin-lekker gepraat en alles en toe 'n bietjie lateraan het sy begin so, ... so baserig begin word en goed en sy het begin vir ons sê wat om te doen en alles.

Hoe voel jy daaroor?

Dis nie baie lekker nie, maar ek weet sy is our as ek. Dis nie heeltemal lekker nie.

Vertel my as jy sê dit is nie heeltemal lekker nie, wat bedoel jy daarmee?

Hmm...ek dink sy sê, sy sê die heelyd vir ons ons moet nie...ons moet wegbly van haar af en ons mag nie in haar kamer gaan nie. Ons mag nie haar hond optel of enige iets nie en dit is nie eens haar hond nie! Onthou tannie dis die hond wat kleintjies gekry het en sy maak of sy die baas is ...en ons mag die klein hondjies nie optel nie.

Is sy die baas?

Nee!...maar sy maak so!

En as julle die hondjies sou optel, wat gebeur dan?

En dan kom sit sy op ons skree en goed.

Hoe voel jy daaroor?

Ek voel nie lekker nie. Ek word partykeer kwaad.

Is daar iets wat jou gelukkig maak dat die pleegkind (sy) hier by julle bly?

Ja-ja. Partykeer maak sy vir my koffie...en dan maak sy vir ons kos en dan partykeer sit sy vir ons sweeties in en goed skool toe. Sy maak ook broodjies vir skool om saam te vat.

Is daar nog iets wat jou gelukkig maak?

Nee, nie eintlik nie.

Is daar iets wat jou ongelukkig maak dat ‘n pleegkind by julle bly?

Partykeer as die hond, wanneer die hond nog ‘n babatjie was en ons optel dan tjank die hond, dan begin sy op one gil en goeters en dan sê sy “miskien is die hond se bene gebreek of ietsie.”

Hoe voel jy as sy op jou gil en raas?

Ek voel...partykeer word ek kwaad. Partykeer sê ek vir my ma-hulle. Partykeer sê...doen ek net niks. Partykeer is ek net...doen ek niks. (Participant looks aloof and very sad with slumping shoulders)

Kan jy met jou ma-hulle gesels oor hoe jy voel?

Hmm...ek hel al...eenkeer of wat.

En?

En toe sê hulle hulle sal met haar praat.

Weet jy of hulle met haar gepraat het?

Nee...ek weet nie.

Sedert jy met hulle gepraat het, het daar weer goed gebeur wat jou ongelukkig gemaak het?

Ja! Ja!

Wat het gebeur?

Sy het bietjie baie klere en goeters gekry-bietjie meer goete as ons gekry...soos klere en al daai goeters en toe...en toe...ons het kwaad geword. Toe sê my ma sy’t nie baie klere en goeters nie-toe moet sy nou meer kry...maar net vir ‘n kort rukkie!

En hoe het jy daarvoor gevoel?

Ek was hartseer en goed.

En hoe voel jy nou?

Nee, sy kry dieselfde hoeveelheid klere as ons-ons het dieselfde hoeveelheid as sy...ja...dit is so bietjie en dan voel ek beter.

Wat is jou ouers se reëling in die huis: kry almal dieselfde goed?

Nee, A en X ...my ma het 'n begroting opgestel. Ons moet al ons eie goeters betaal soos fliëk en sweëts en so, maar A en X moet hulle eie badgoed en alles betaal omdat hulle ouer is en ek en C kry 'n bietjie minder geld.

Hoe voel jy oor die reëling?

Dit is honderd persent reg!

Kan jy jou ouers vertel as jy so kwaad word?

Nee, nie altyd nie.

Kan jy my vertel hoekom nie?

Want ek is bang hulle word kwaad vir my.

By die vorige geleentheid wat jy hulle vertel het dat jy ongelukkig is, het hulle kwaad geword vir jou?

Nee.

Wat gee jou die gevoel dat hulle vir jou kwaad gaan word as jy hulle vertel wanneer jy ongelukkig is?

Nee, ek is nie seker nie, maar ek kry net so 'n gevoel.

Wat maak jy met al hierdie gevoelens wat jy binne-in jou voel?

Ek maak daarvoor niks-ek dink net weer daarvoor.

Is daar iets wat jy soe wou verander het in julle huis?

Nee, want alles het verander.

Wat het verander?

Ons gaan eet meer uit en alles en sy maak partykeer al die kos...en ja...mm...mm...ja.

Hoe is jul verhoudinge in die huis?

Mamma is dieselfde. Pappa het 'n bietjie verander.

Hoe dink jy het hy verander?

Mmm...hy's meer by die huis as wat hy was. Dit is vir my lekkerder as hy meer by die huis is.

Hoekom dink jy is hy meer by die huis?

Want ek dink hy wil meer tyd met haar spandeer.

Hoe voel jy daaroor?

Dit maak my hartseer.

Vind jy dat jou ouers net soveel aandag aan jou gee, as wat dit was voordat die pleegkind gekom het?

Ja dieselfde...ja.

Het jou ouers met jou gesels voordat die pleegking gekom het en aan jou verduidelik het, waarom die pleegkind gaan kom?

Nee. My sussie C het vir my net driekeer gesê...die dag...die aand voordat sy gekom het, het my sussie vir my gesê: hier gaan nog iemand soos D hier kom bly...so... 'n pleegkind.

Wat was jou reaksie?

Nee, ek was al...en toe gaan...en toe gaan vra ek my ma of dit nou waar is en alles en toe sê sy "ja".

Wat was jou reaksie?

Ek was opgewonde.

Het jy verstaan waaroor dit gaan?

Ja.

Is daar nog enige iets wat jy my wil vertel van hoe dit is om 'n pleegkind in julle gesin te hê?

In die begin het dit...was dit olraait, maar nou is dit nie meer lekker nie. Sy begin al hoe meer op ons skel en goeters.

Op wie skel sy?

Dis net op ek en A-net op my en A.

Hoe is dit vir jou dat sy net op jou en A gil en goeters?

Ek word partykeer kwaad en dan sê ek my ma, partykeer, maar nie altyd nie. Meeste van die kere sê ek vir hulle.

Hoe reageer hulle dan?

Toe! hulle doen niks. So een of twee keer het sy vir haar gesê ons ...ons...ons-so moenie op ons raas...skreeu nie. En partykeer sê sy: "wat het ons aan haar gedoen?"

Hoe is dit vir jou as jou ouers niks doen nie?

Dis nie baie lekker nie.

Wat voel jy dan?

Ek is hartseer. (Participant very sad)

Enige iets anders wat jy voel behalwe hartseer?

Meeste van die tyd is ek kwaad.

Vir wie is jy kwaad?

Vir X.

Wat dink jy oor haar?

Ek dink dit was sleg dat sy hier kom bly het. Dit is reg, want niks van haar familie wil hê dat sy by hulle gaan bly nie-so dis olraait as sy hierso bly, maar dis nie...partydae is dit lekker-meeste van die dae is dit nie lekker nie.

As jy een wens kon gehad het, wat sou jy wens?

Ek sou gewens het dat haar ma vir haar kon terugvat.

Hoekom sou jy dit wens?

Dan kan alles weer anders wees...soos altyd.

Hoe was dit?

Meer gelukkig...mm...nie altyd kwaad.

INTERVIEW WITH SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL (PARTICIPANT NO. 1)

Question 1

Betrek jy die eie kind van die pleegouers in jou dienslewering? Indien wel hoe?

Ja, daar word ook gesprekke gevoer met die eie kind wanneer pleegsorgkeurings gedoen word om vas te stel hoe hulle oor die plasing voel. Dienste is nie so direk nie; die fokus is maar op die pleegkind en wat die pleegouers sê. Daar word meer oor die eie kind gepraat as wat direkte dienste gelewer word.

Question 2

Vind jy in jou dienslewering aan die pleeggesin enige eie kinders wat positief is oor die pleegsorg plasing?

Ja, in 'n mate. In die honeymoon fase is hulle baie positief. Dan is hulle maatjies; hulle speel lekker saam, maar dit voel vir my dis amper waar dit eindig-behalwe as die pleegkind baie jonger is as die gesin se eie kinders...maar dieselfde ouderdom!...dit het vir my gevoel dit hou regtig nie lank nie.

Question 3

Wat dui hulle aan as positief in die plasing?

*'n Maatjie om mee te speel, veral die enkel...alleen kind. Of ander sibbe wat ouer of jonger is, waar die pleegkind baie jonger is: vir hulle is dit soos 'n babatjie in die huis om meet e speel, wat cute en oulik is, **totdat** die babatjie te veel tyd vat en die jong kind te veel tyd van die ouers vat en die ouer, eie kind afgeskeep word, dan is dit nie meer lekker nie.*

Question 4

Wat sal hulle aandui as “afgeskeep word”?

- *Ma en pa het nie tyd vir hulle nie*
- *Die pleegkind kry al die aandag*
- *Finansieël meer aandag. Ouers spandeer meer op die pleegkind.*
- *Pleegkinders bedreig hul posisie*
- *Aandag word verdeel*
- *Pleegkinders gaan kuier naweke by eie ma. Daar word hulle bederf. So hulle word bederf by die pleegouers en hulle word bederf by die biologiese ouers en die eie kind van die pleegouers voel maar hulle kry nie dieselfde nie.*

Question 5

Watter emosies tel jy by eie kinders op?

Ek dink...jaloesie...dis maar die grootste.

Question 6

Wat vertel hulle aan jou oor hul verhouding met hulle ouers?

- *Ouers het minder tyd*
- *Ouers skeep hulle af*
- *Die dilemmas met die pleegkind beïnvloed hulle verhouding met hulle ouers, veral waar probleme met die pleegkind by die skool uitgesorteer moet word. Die gedrag van die pleegkind beïnvloed hulle posisie by die skool.*

Question 7

Vind jy in jou dienslewering aan die pleeggesin enige eie kinders wat ambivalent voel oor die pleegsorgplasing?

Ek dink tog ook so. Hulle het 'n stuk lojaliteit teenoor hierdie kind. Miskien 'n maatjie of 'n familielid. Hulle besef die kind kan nie by eie ouer bly nie, maar terselfdertyd is dit ook nie meer in die huishouding soos dit was nie-en dit is ook nie meer lekker nie. So ja ek wil dit graag hê, maar terselfdertyd weet ek ook nie of ek dit regtig wil hê nie.

Question 8

Vertel die kinders aan jou wat dit aan hulle doen?

Ek weet nie of kinders altyd so eerlik sal wees om jou reguit te sê nie...sien dit meer in die gedrag en dat die kinders ook maar half uitreagerende gedrag het en moeilik raak en meer en meer miskien weg is van die huis af, of by maatjies kuier of ander maats maak en nie meer miskien sulke hegte maatjies met die pleegkind is nie. So in woorde self: nie regtig nie...maar mens sien dit meer in die gedrag.

Question 9

Vind jy in jou dienslewering aan die pleeggesin enige eie kind wat negatief is oor die pleegsorg plasing?

Hulle sal nie pertinent sê nie. Baie min sal. Weereens, mens sien dit in hulle gedrag. Hulle sal nie sê: "ek wil nie hierdie kind moet nie meer in die huis wees nie." Sien hul gevoel in die gedrag. Het 'n geval gehad- 'n mislukte pleegsorgplasing miskien as gevolg van die eie kind. Ja, vir die eerste ses maande baie goed gegaan. Die twee kinders was ewe oud. Na ses maande-die eie kind cope nie-moes die kind inskakel by sielkundige berading en terapie. Die kind was 'n enkel kind vir tien jaar. Toe kom die pleegkind; kon nie cope met nog 'n kind in die huis nie.

Pleegouers se lojaliteit bly eerstens by die eie kind. Hulle wou nie kans gee vir enige intervensie nie. Die pleegkind moes by hulle aanpas; hulle is nie bereid om die kind te akkommodeer nie.

Question 10

Word die eie kind betrek by voorbereidings programme met die oog op pleegsorg plasing?

Ons doen dit...mmm...ek dink nie genoeg nie. Het pleegouer keuringsgroepe-'n opleidingsgroep tweemaal per jaar, maar dit is die ouers wat daarby betrek word. Ek dink 'n mens moet terselfdertyd wat ouers is by groepe iets doen vir die kinders ook om hulle ook in te skakel en hulle meer deeglik voorberei, nie net 'n gesprek nie-moet hulle op 'n ander manier oplei. Tog is dit moeilik met jonger kinders. Hulle verstaan nie altyd nie.

Question 11

Wat kan maatskaplike werkers doen vir die eie kind?

Pleegouers wil 'n diens lewer. Die eie gesin is 'n prioriteit. Die hele gesin moet dadelik by terapie inskakel, ten spyte van die honeymoon fase. Dit moet opgevolg word met opleiding van al die gesinslede, waarby eie kind betrek word.

Geagte Mnr en Mev.....,

Ek is 'n maatskaplike werker verbonde aan Child Welfare Tshwane. en tans besig met my Meestergraad studies in Maatskaplike werk. Ek doen huidiglik navorsing oor hoe beleef die kind of kinders van pleegouers die feit dat daar 'n pleegkind/pleegkinders in pleegsorg by u-hulle geplaas is.

Die **doel** van die studie is om 'n begrip te verkry van hoe eie kinders van pleegouers, pleegsorgplasing ervaar, om sodoende 'n groter sensitiwiteit vir die wêreld van die eie kind te ontwikkel met betrekking tot pleegsorgplasing. Die nagevorsde kennis kan uiteindelik sinvol aangewend word in die praktyk van pleegsorgplasing.

Ek het die **goedkeuring** van Child Welfare Tshwane verkry, om my ondersoek te onderneem met pleeggesinne van die Organisasie se kantoor in Centurion. Dit is egter u en u kind se keuse of u kind op vrywillige basis aan die navorsing sal deelneem. Dit staan u kind vry om te eniger tyd van die navorsingprojek te onttrek, indien dit verkies sou word.

Ek beoog om u eie kind/kinders by die studie te betrek deur middel van onderhoudvoering van om en by een uur lank. U kind sal gevra word om bloot te vertel van sy/haar belewenis/ervaring van die pleegsorgplasing. Die onderhoud sal wel op band geneem word vir rekord doeleindes. Die inligting op die band word so spoedig daarna getranskribeer, waarna die inhoud op die band uitgewis sal word.

Die onderneming word aan u gegee dat die onderhoud **anoniem** hanteer sal word. Die inligting word nie aan persone gekoppel nie, maar sal net as data dien wat verwerk sal word. Sekere identifiserende inligting soos onder andere die ouderdom, geslag, graad in skoolopleiding, van die kind sal wel behou word. Alle inligting sal **konfidensieel** hanteer word. Verdere toeligting ten opsigte van die beoogde navorsing, sal op aanvraag aan u verskaf word.

Indien u toestem tot deelname van u kind aan die navorsing word u vriendelik versoek om die dokument hieronder te teken. Hierdie toestemming tot deelname sal ook as vertroulik behandel word.

Byvoorbaat baie dankie vir u bereidwillige deelname.

Mev K E van der Riet.

Ek,(volle name en van), biologiese ouer van.....(volle name en van) gee hiermee toestemming dat genoemde kind aan die beoogde navorsing mag deelneem.

GETEKEN TE.....OP DIE.....DAG VAN.....2008

BIOLOGIESE OUER

INGELIGDE TOESTEMMING VAN DIE RESPONDENT (EIE KIND VAN PLEEGOUER)

Ek(naam en van) verklaar hiermee dat ek verstaan wat die navorsingprojek behels, asook my deelname daaraan. Ek verleen my toestemming dat die onderhoud op band geneem sal word. Ek is tevrede dat my anonimiteit behou sal word; dat die inligting wat ek sal deurgee nie aan my as persoon gekoppel sal word nie, asook konfidensieel behandel sal word. Ek neem vrywillig deel en verstaan ook dat ek te enige tyd my deelname kan onttrek, indien ek dit sou verkies.

**GETEKEN TE.....OP DIE.....DAG
VAN.....2008**

RESPONDENT

BESONDERHEDE VAN DIE NAVORSER

Mev K E van der Riet

Tel nr. 012 664 6175 (w)
 0832990161 (selfoon)
E-pos gvdr@absamail.co.za

Dear Foster Parent.....,

I am a social worker employed at Child Welfare Tshwane. I am currently studying a Masters Degree in Social Work at Unisa. I am conducting research on the experiences of birth children of foster parents in the foster care situation. I hope to get a better understanding of birth children in order to apply any new knowledge in a more comprehensive service rendering to foster families in future.

I have obtained the **permission** from Child Welfare Tshwane and from the Christian Ministry of Caring, Pretoria North to conduct the research project with foster families in their working areas. Your child has been indicated as a possible participant for the project. All participation will take place on a **voluntary basis**.

I am planning to conduct an **interview** of between 30 minutes to one hour in length. Your child will be asked just to narrate his/her experiences of the foster placement. The interview will be **recorded** on tape recorder for the purpose of accurate documentation of the interview. I myself will transcribe the information on the tape, after which I will discard all the information on the tape.

I undertake to keep your child's **anonymity**. The information will not be connected to the person, but it will only serve as data that will be analysed by myself under supervision of the study leader. Certain identification information i.e. age, gender, school grade will be used in the study. All information will be handled as **confidential**.

Any further information about the research project, it will be given on request.

If you agree to your child's participation in the research project, you are requested to sign the consent hereafter. Your consent will be handled as confidential.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Mrs K E van der Riet.

PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER

Mrs. K E van der Riet

Tel nr. 012 664 6175 (w)
083 299 0161 (cell)

E-mail address gvdr@absamail.co.za

INFORMED CONSENT OF THE FOSTER PARENT

Herewith, I, _____ (full name & surname)
biological parent of.....(full name & surname of
participant) am giving my consent that the child mentioned can participate in
the proposed research project.

SIGNED AT.....ON THIS.....DAY OF.....2008

BIOLOGICAL PARENT

**INFORMED CONSENT OF THE RESPONDENT (BIRTH CHILD OF
FOSTER PARENTS)**

Herewith I.....(name & surname)
declare that I understand what the research project entails, as well as my
participation in the project. I give my consent that the interview be tape-
recorded and understand that the information of the interview will be
discarded, after it has been transcribed. I am satisfied that my anonymity will
be kept and that all information will be kept confidential. I am participating on
a voluntary basis and I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any
given time, if I so wish.

SIGNED ATON THIS... .DAY OF.....2008

PARTICIPANT

Respondent's name:.....

Researcher: Karin van der Riet

Tel. 012 998 2266

Email: gvdr@absamail.co.za

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

I hereby give consent for participation in a research project according to details provided below:

1. ***Title of the Study:*** Foster care: Birth Children's Experiences of Foster Care.
2. ***Purpose of the Study:*** The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of birth children in foster care situations.
3. ***Procedures:*** Data will be collected by means of semi-structured interviews with birth children. Data verification will be done through means of semi-structured interviews with social workers in practice.
4. ***Risks and Discomforts:*** There are no known physical risks or discomforts associated with this research project.
5. ***Participant's rights:*** Participation in this study is voluntary and any participant may withdraw from participating in the study at any time.
6. ***Benefits:*** There are no known direct benefits to the participants for participating in this study. The results of the study may help practitioners and researchers to gain a better understanding of how birth children perceive and experience fostering.
7. ***Financial Compensation:*** No compensation in anyway will be provided for participation in the study.
8. ***Confidentiality:*** Confidentiality will be honoured at all times. Anonymity will be kept during interviews and during the processing of acquired data.
9. ***Release of Findings:*** The findings of this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional conferences, but no records or identifying particulars from participants, or the agency, employer of the participants will be revealed unless required by law.

In case of any questions or concerns the researcher may be contacted at 083 299 0161 at office hours.

I understand my rights as a research participant and I voluntarily consent to participation in this research project. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done. I will receive a signed copy of this informed consent letter.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE