

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE


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# Why Foster Parents Quit

A Study for the Maine Department of Human Services



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Human Services Development Institute

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Why Foster Parents Quit

A Study for the  
Maine Department of Human Services

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## PURPOSE

Why do you no longer wish to be a foster parent?

- We have outgrown room for another person. We have enjoyed being foster parents. Some of our foster children still keep in touch.
- The child returned to his parents.
- A no-win situation. Child knew this to be a temporary placement. Therefore, no commitment to changing behavior.
- We wanted to adopt and there was a child that could be adopted in a year, so we became her foster parents for that year instead of waiting for her to become adoptable.
- Foster child's privileges are beyond natural child's--creates problems.
- The only child we were offered in the two years was a 14 year old; we had already said we didn't want teenagers.
- Mentally and emotionally exhausting.
- Caseworkers overworked. Not enough individual attention.
- Don't tell me to love my foster children like my own and expect me to give them to whoever they say like they are unwanted puppies.

These responses, while varied, are typical of the (203) former Maine foster parents who participated in a study on why foster parents resign.

One of the more pressing problems facing the administrators of Maine's foster care program is the lack of families willing and able to provide consistent, reliable care to the hundreds of children needing foster family homes. In the past few years the Bureau of Social Services has noted what it considers to be a high rate of foster family drop-out. Not only is it hard to find families, especially for teenagers and children with behavioral problems, it is difficult to keep them.





In preparation for hiring a new staff member to deal with issues of foster parent recruitment and retention at the state office level, the Bureau of Social Services requested that the Human Services Development Institute (HSDI) use some of its technical assistance days available under the University of Connecticut Child Welfare Technical Assistance sub-contract to do a small study on why foster parents withdraw their services. Using a university to collect the information from anonymous respondents would help to obtain candid answers. The findings, in turn, would assist the Department to devise techniques for retaining this invaluable resource, Maine's foster families.

The Department supplied HSDI with a list of 785 foster parents who have discontinued service over a three-year period (see Methodology). A mailed survey to this group produced 203 responses. They wrote from every part of the state. Some provided only terse answers but the majority used the opportunity to speak candidly and often emotionally about their experiences.

This report summarizes the findings and then presents a review of the literature, a statement of methodology, a more complete discussion of findings, and concluding remarks. Appendix A contains a copy of the survey while Appendix B provides all narrative responses submitted by the former foster families.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study was aimed at answering five major questions. These questions and brief responses from our findings are given below. The next section describes the findings in greater detail.

✓ 1. What were the primary reasons foster parents resigned?

The five primary reasons offered were:

- a. No say in the child's future (24 percent)
- b. The child's behavior (23 percent)
- c. No DHS understanding of my (the foster parents') problems (20 percent)
- d. Personal change (20 percent)
- e. Inadequate money (18 percent)

2. What was the relationship between the kind of children foster parents expected and the kind they actually received?

- a. Got and didn't expect: 63 percent of the foster families received a type of child they didn't expect.
- b. Expected and didn't get: 59 percent didn't get at least one kind of child they expected.
- c. Got and expected: 41 percent got exactly the type of child they did expect.

As might be predicted, the longer foster parents served, the more likely they were to receive a child they had not expected. Also, parents in Regions III and V were more likely than elsewhere.

3. Was there a statistically significant relationship between the reasons for resigning and the region in which foster parents resided?

Yes. There was a significant disparity among regions relative to the child's behavior as a reason for resigning. In Region III this was given by 36 percent of the people, whereas in Regions II and V it was given by only 10 percent. (Regions I and IV were 27 percent and 18 percent respectively.)



4. Did the reason for resigning differ according to the length of time foster parents served?

Yes, in two areas. Dividing the foster parents into groups that served 0 to 5 years and 6 or more years we found that the lack of say in the child's future differed from only 20 percent in the first group to 34 percent in the longer serving group while the lack of DHS understanding about their problems differed as well, from 18 percent to 27 percent.

5. What suggestions do you have to the Department of Human Services

a. for recruiting foster parents:

The 79 responses to this open-ended question can be grouped into five categories--better advertising and publicity, more money, improved training, better licensing requirements and procedures, and more psychological support.

b. for retaining foster parents:

The 89 suggestions can be grouped as follows: better communication between DHS and foster parents, more accurate information about the child and its natural parents, better training, more respect for the "rights" of foster parents, and more money.

6. What would DHS have to do for you to become a foster parent again?

The largest group, over 43 percent of the 119 respondents to this question required improved relations with the Department. The next largest, 28 percent, said nothing, citing personal changes and bad former experiences that would preclude future involvement. In a concluding question on additional comments 23 out of 88 parents offered praise to the Department and discussed positive foster parenting experiences.



### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A literature search was undertaken to determine what has been published since 1980 on why foster parents withdraw their services. Two primary references were consulted: Social Work Research and Abstracts by the National Association of Social Workers, and Social Sciences Citation Index from the Institute for Scientific Information. While the Citation Index provided a greater number of references, they were generally not available in the University library system. Consequently, the Social Work Research and Abstracts served as the primary reference source for publications which were reviewed.\*

The most useful study uncovered in this search (Hampson and Tavormina, Social Work, 1980) involved interviews with 34 foster mothers on what they considered to be the factors contributing to the success or failure of a foster care experience. Interviews were conducted by independent researchers. The length of time a child had been in the home averaged 3.33 years (a successful placement was considered to be one lasting two or more years) indicating an above average sample.

Problems reported by the mothers centered around child rearing (e.g., discipline and behavior), relations with the child's natural family, and disruptions in the foster home after the child arrived. Case management complaints were most frequent, particularly lack of communication, constant turnover and unavailability of case workers. A need for greater continuity

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\*A more definitive survey of the literature was not possible due to time and budget constraints.





of care was expressed, as well as more support and aid from workers, especially during the first year of care.

The authors suggested that the difficult problem of access to caseworkers, as well as their rapid turnover, could be eased by contracting a professional consultant, operating a "hot-line" service, or using experienced foster parents as consultants. The lack of decision-making power by the foster parent indicated a need for professional status. Inclusion in casework decisions and conferences could increase satisfaction and sense of empowerment to counteract the lack of real parental rights.

Edelstein (1981) echoes the findings of Hampson and Tavormina in an article about the foster parents' need for support when a foster child leaves. Although she is specifically concerned with the grief process, she expresses similar problems, e.g., lack of communication, relationship with the social worker, need for social and educational programs and self-help groups and, in addition, legislation reform. In contrast, Kaplan and Seitz (1980) discuss the separation trauma by suggesting that, having chosen the mission to care for another human being, a foster parent cannot avoid the reality of being the one who needs to be more understanding, more aware, the one to whom someone else can turn. "This responsibility for taking the lead here falls to you."

Two articles emphasized the need for foster parent input in the training process. Noble and Euster (1981) found that foster parent input in choosing topics and teaching staff was crucial to the development of an effective foster parent training curriculum.



Norgard and Mayhall (1982) described an innovative program which addressed itself to the educational and communication needs of foster families. These families contributed heavily to the development of workshops, credit courses, independent study courses and, of special significance, the Foster Family Institute which involves entire families including children over twelve.

The findings contained in this study of Maine's former foster families are fairly consistent with Hampson and Tavormina. The two key problems of lack of say about the child's future and the child's behavior are similar to Hampson's issues around case management (lack of communication, turnover, unavailability of workers) and child rearing (discipline and behavior).



## STUDY METHODOLOGY

### Questionnaire Development

Data was collected from the former Maine foster parents through a two-page, mailed questionnaire which yielded both quantifiable data as well as narrative responses. The mailed questionnaire was chosen over telephone or personal interviewing primarily because of cost and time considerations. In addition, however, the researchers and the Department of Human Services had concerns about invading the privacy of families who have chosen to discontinue their services.

The greatest problem encountered from choosing the mailed questionnaire was a relatively low response rate (26 percent). We believe that this can be attributed to both methodological short-comings and the nature of the subject. For example, we were not able to do a follow-up mailing and some families may have had personal reasons for not responding.

A secondary problem was the inability, through a mailed questionnaire, to probe into, or clarify, answers. This limitation became of less concern in light of the exploratory nature of this study and the lengthy responses provided by many families.

### Hypothesis Development

A number of sources provided input into our hypotheses and suggested reasons for foster parents withdrawing their services. The Maine Foster Care Survey Report (1980), and Your Neighbor's Kid: Report of the Governor's



Task Force on Foster Care for Children (1980) provided much background on foster care programs and services in the state. The research for these reports included collecting testimony from selected former foster parents.

Another source of hypothetical reasons for families terminating their services was consultation with the State's Foster Home Licensing Program Specialist. Additional consultation as well as review of the questionnaire were solicited from administrators of Maine's Bureau of Social Services whose broad responsibilities include administration of the foster care program.

One hypothesis which we found commonly suggested by foster care professionals was that foster families withdraw from service because they are not called upon to care for the type of child they had expected.

The method which we developed to test this hypothesis involved asking former foster parents which types of children they had expected to serve, and which types they actually did serve. The variable for types of children was operationalized by listing both the causes for children being placed in foster care and the ages of the children. The causes list included various handicaps that the children might have had or types of abuse or neglect that they might have suffered (See the questionnaire in Appendix A). The survey respondents were invited to indicate as many types as were appropriate. This data was then used to construct a scale of the discrepancy between each family's expectations and the foster children that they actually served.

Other assumptions explored by the study involved the relationship between the foster parents' length of service and the reasons which they specified for terminating service. The questionnaire suggested a list of possible reasons for termination. Each reason became a dichotomous variable for use in analysis.





Those same reason-for-termination variables were used to test the assumption that relationships exist between the county or region in which foster families serve, and their reasons for withdrawal from the program.

Thus, in this study we tried to answer the following questions:

1. What were the primary reasons foster parents resigned?
2. What was the relationship between the kind of children foster parents expected and the kind they actually received?
3. Was there a correlation between their reasons for resigning and the region in which they resided?
4. Was there a correlation between their reasons and how long they had served as foster parents?

We called these quantifiable questions. In addition, we asked the foster parents two open-ended questions:

1. What suggestions do you have for the Department of Human Services
  - a. for recruiting foster parents
  - b. for retaining foster parents once they agreed to serve.
2. What would DHS have to do for you to become a foster parent again.

#### Sample Selection

Selection of the sample was based on the records of the Bureau of Social Services, Maine Department of Human Services. The overall population which was represented consisted of foster families who discontinued their services for the State's foster care program. They initiated this termination in one of the following ways:

- o families who had applied to be licensed but withdrew their interest prior to completing the process;



- o licensed families who allowed their annual licenses to expire, or
- o families who cancelled their licenses while still active.

The Bureau of Social Services provided 785 families from this population. This sample included all families who had withdrawn from the foster care program between March of 1981 and June of 1984. The sample did not include families whose withdrawal had been requested by the Bureau.



STUDY FINDINGS

The following data represent responses from 203 people out of 785 who were sent questionnaires.

Profile of the Respondents

Regarding the length of time they had served as foster parents, nearly 50 percent had served two years or less including 26 percent who had served less than one year while 19 percent had served 10 years or more. Six percent of the group had never actually received a foster child.

Included in the sample were 77 percent who had either received a license and quit or whose licenses had expired and 23 percent who had never received a license in that they withdrew prior to completing the licensing process. (Since only 6 percent had never had a child one can surmise that many in the group whose licensing process was not complete received foster children.)

Regarding regional breakdown, the following table shows response rate in comparison to the average percent of foster care cases handled by each region. By this measure Region IV is relatively under-represented in the survey and Region I is relatively over represented.



TABLE I  
Questionnaire Response Rate by Region

<u>Region</u>	<u>Percent Response</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent of Foster Care Cases</u>
I	35	67	29
II	11	21	14
III	23	45	25
IV	18	34	23
V	11	21	9

Many of our data were analyzed by region to see if there were significant regional differences after taking into account the percentage differences.

Regarding length of time served, we did find a significant difference among regions. After dividing the respondents into two groups--those serving five years or less, and those serving six years or more--we found that 43 percent of the respondents in Region V had served six years or more while only 15 percent of those in Region I had. Conversely, of those who had served less than five years, Region I had the most (85 percent) while Region II had the least (52 percent).

#### Reasons for Withdrawal

In the questionnaire we provided 19 possible reasons, four of which we left room for further explanation, and a category marked "other" which we also asked them to explain.

Arranged in order of frequency, the most prevalent reasons given (including those they categorized themselves) are shown in Table II.





TABLE II  
Reasons for Withdrawal

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No say in child's future	48	24
Child's behavior	46	23
No understanding by DHS	40	20
Personal change	40	20
Inadequate money	37	18
Problems with natural parents	30	14
Difficult social worker	29	14
Had to go to work outside home	25	12
No respite	23	11
Continued care for former foster child	9	4
Unrequested type of child	8	4
Poor health	8	4
Aging	6	3
Inadequate space in home	6	3

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Next we determined whether the reasons for withdrawal varied significantly by region and found that sometimes they did. The three top reasons given by the respondents in each region are as follows:



TABLE III  
Reasons for Withdrawal by Region

<u>Region</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
I	Child's behavior	18	27
	No say in what happened to child	17	25
	DHS does not understand my problems	15	22
	Change in family	15	22
II	Problems with licensing	5	24
	No say in what happened to child	4	19
	Problems with biological parents	4	19
III	Child's behavior	16	36
	No say in what happened to child	14	31
	Not enough money	13	29
IV	No say in what happened to child	11	32
	DHS does not understand my problems	8	24
	Worker hard to get along with	7	21
V	Change in family	5	24
	Had to work	4	19
	Not enough money	4	19
	Unclear expectations of foster parents	4	19

Some of the more salient differences are, for example, in Region V having to work outside the home appeared three times more frequently than in Region IV (19 percent compared to 69 percent). However, the need for respite appeared two and a half times more often in Region III (22 percent) than V (9 percent). Money was a much larger issue in Region III (29 percent) than in II (14 percent) and IV (15 percent). No DHS contact was somewhat higher in Region IV (18 percent) than elsewhere--I (12 percent); II, III, V (less than 10 percent). Problems with the child's behavior cropped up far more in Region III (36 percent) than Regions II and V (less than 10 percent each).



Licensing problems were greatest in Region II with 24 percent citing them whereas no understanding from DHS was lowest there (only one person compared to 22 percent or more in Regions I, III and IV).

The social worker being hard to get along with appeared twice as often among Region III (20 percent) and IV (21 percent) respondents than Region I (9 percent).

No say in the child's future loomed larger in Regions IV (32 percent) and III (31 percent) than V (4 percent).

Finally, inadequate services for the child was a relatively infrequent problem in Region II (5 percent) compared to Region III (20 percent).

Looking at the reasons for withdrawal in relation to length of time served, we found that more foster parents who served six years or more had problems with their lack of say about the child's future than those that served five years or less (34 percent versus 20 percent). More longer-serving parents also had concerns relating to the lack of DHS understanding about their problems (27 percent compared to 18 percent).

We grouped the various reasons for withdrawing into three categories to see which, if any, were significantly correlated with length of time served: changes within the foster parents' own household; problems with the foster children's behavior; problems with the Department, as shown in Table IV.



TABLE IV  
Reasons for Withdrawal by Length of Time Served

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Length of Time Served</u>	
	<u>0-5 Years</u>	<u>6+ Years</u>
Changes within own household	49 percent	66 percent
Problems with child's behavior	21 percent	20 percent
Problems with DHS	60 percent	63 percent

Families were allowed to give more than one reason so the totals exceed 100 percent. The only statistically significant difference is in the category, changes within the family's own household. The longer they serve as foster parents the more likely a death, divorce, new family member, move or other change in personal circumstances necessitate a withdrawal from the program. Problems with the child's behavior or the Department did not vary significantly with length of time served.

When these summary variables were compared across regions, DHS problems were indicated most frequently in Region III at 69 percent and least frequently in Region V at 43 percent. Family-related problems were indicated most frequently in Region V with 67 percent and least frequently in Region II with 43 percent. And, as indicated earlier, problems with the child's behavior appeared most frequently in Region III and least frequently in I and IV.

Many people supplied narrative explanations as to the reasons they no longer wished to be foster parents. In Appendix B (Question 6: Why do you no longer wish to be a foster parent?) we list each response.





They can be summarized as falling into three general categories: problems with the Department (61 individuals); problems with the child's behavior (35 individuals), and personal changes (79 individuals). In addition, 17 cited inadequate support services and three inadequate money.

#### Problems with the Department

Problems with the Department had three primary sources: inadequate communication, DHS policy and practice, and feeling misunderstood or unappreciated.

Communication. Inadequate communication included the foster parents' view that DHS didn't listen to their findings about the children, that DHS did not share complete case histories with them, and that social workers were hard to reach or did not return phone calls. One respondent reported that during the eight months s/he had a foster child, the DHS worker never met the child and saw the parent only once, at a PET meeting.

Respondents also complained about foster children turning to social workers rather than themselves when communicating problems. They didn't like that these communications were privileged, making them feel like outsiders in the children's lives, no more than custodians or sitters. They worried that perhaps these communications contained negative responses to themselves or their care that they should know about, feeling DHS policy in this area encouraged children to be "sneaky," to go behind their backs. Some also mentioned jealousy on the part of natural children, who had no similar confidants.



Policy and Practice. DHS policy problems were in the areas of licensing, rights of natural parents, child placement, and inequities between foster and natural children. Licensing problems were related to DHS stringency on housing requirements. Several said they could not afford to make the necessary repairs. Ten out of the 15 who mentioned licensing cited fire marshall inspection criteria or other physical home standards. Several thought DHS put housing requirements above the children's best interests.

Responses about rights of natural parents showed an overwhelming consensus that natural parent contact is confusing to the child and disruptive to foster parents. By implication, these respondents were saying DHS should not allow natural parents their current access to their children. One respondent pointed up the conflict between the natural parents' rights to see their children and her own reluctance to let these people into her home. She felt DHS should have made other arrangements for these meetings. Another said that visits with natural parents, though destructive to the child, were supported by DHS regardless of results.

Respondents' differences with DHS placement policy were threefold: not getting the type of children requested, having no input into foster children's future placement, and knowledge that placement is only temporary. Most parents who didn't get the types of children they requested had wanted pre-adoptive children. Others requested younger and got only teenagers. One family complained that DHS wasn't willing to wait until they were over a period of family crisis to let them adopt their foster child, moving the child from their home after two years to another adoptive family.



Regard for foster parent input into future placement was pictured, by implication, as a mark of respect. Foster parents who felt they deserved this respect because of intimate knowledge of their children, concluded DHS didn't care about their opinions or observations when it came time to moving children.

Foster parents said that knowing placement is only temporary had bad effects both on them and the children. They expressed fear in making any emotional investment in children who wouldn't be staying long. At the same time they believed that the children had no commitment to improving their behavior in a short-term situation.

They also cited the general inequity between foster and natural children with the surprising result that foster children come out ahead. Weekly allowance, Christmas money, annual double Christmas and birthday celebrations, CETA job eligibility, and support services all set foster children up to appear more privileged than natural children, causing family jealousy. One respondent said DHS's stated policy was that the foster child's needs should always come first. Another said that social workers take foster children out for ice cream while they talked, and foster children would subsequently gloat over it to natural children.

Feeling misunderstood. The feeling of not being understood or appreciated is the last category of foster parent grievance with DHS. Parents complained of social workers always taking the child's side in conflicts, DHS being insensitive to their feelings, social workers having authority over foster parents, and DHS turning a deaf ear to foster parents' requests for adoption.



Problems with the Child

Respondents citing foster children's behavior as their reason for termination point to sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, stealing, destruction of property, running away, temper tantrums, multiple-personality disorders, and suicide attempts that negatively affected their natural family. Many said children showed more intense behavioral problems after contact with natural parents.

Pervading these responses was the notion that DHS would always take the part of the child in conflicts over disruptive behavior, and that foster children's knowledge of this gave them superior leverage in the family. Many reported children demanding that foster parents give in to their every whim. Others said that DHS did not make these children accountable for disruptive behavior, citing situations where DHS simply moved problematic children on to other foster homes, leaving the former foster family to pick up the pieces.

The way the child is seen by the family--as a special case with special needs and support services other members don't have--might be as much a problem here as the specific disruptive behaviors described. That is, the child's status as a foster child seems to intensify the perceptions and effects of his/her disruptive behavior. This group of responses clearly shows the foster parents' frustrations and even resentment over the foster child's differences, by definition, from the rest of the family.





### Personal Changes

A few families underwent negative personal changes under the strain of the child's behavior, resulting in their termination. Others found they were unsuited for the particular age or type of child they had received, or simply unsuited temperamentally to foster parenting. Others terminated when they adopted foster children. However, most personal changes cited as termination causes were unrelated to the foster program. Pregnancies, new needs of natural family members, housing, moving, job changes, health, and aging were the most frequently mentioned.

### Difference Between Children Expected and Received

Foster parents were asked what kind of child they had originally expected to receive by age and condition and what kind of child they actually did receive. Scales measured their responses.

A scale for the number of unrequested children received was derived by adding the number of types received from what was requested.

Results of these scales showed that 63 percent received a type of child they did not expect; 59 percent expected a type of child they did not receive; and 37 percent received exactly the type of child they requested.

Whether the discrepancies reflected in the first group directly affected the foster parents' decision to quit we do not know. But they do point out a problem in expectations which the Department may wish to address: either to emphasize to the foster parent that their expectations may not be able to be fulfilled or to be more aware of these expectations in making placement decisions. (From speaking to people in the regions I find they are aware of the foster parents' desires but often perceive no option but to exhort them to accept particular children.)



We analyzed this data by length of time served and by region as well. The longer a parent served, the more likely he or she was to receive a child s/he didn't want. This can be attributed to one of two reasons. First, the longer the Department has worked with a foster family the more free the worker may feel to request that the family take a child it may not want. (Workers will freely admit that they tend to take advantage of their most loyal foster parents because they have been so helpful in the past.) The second is that it only stands to reason that the longer a person serves, the more probable they will receive a child who is different from her/his expectations. (Conversely the longer serving family may come to expect anything!)

Regional analysis shows that parents in Regions III and V were more likely to receive a child they didn't expect than the others.

#### Foster Parent Suggestions

We requested open-ended responses on suggestions to the Department for recruiting foster families and retaining them. Seventy-nine answered the first part and 89 the second. Many of the responses were similar indicating that either the people saw their recruiting suggestions as equally effective for retaining foster parents, or did not keep the distinction between the two questions clearly in mind when answering.

Recruiting. Suggestions for recruiting foster parents fell roughly into five categories: better advertising, improved training, better licensing requirements and procedures, more psychological support and more money.



The 23 advertising and publicity suggestions showed that foster families have a wide range of informational needs. Targeting recruitment efforts to specific groups, making better use of the media and being more honest in the approach were major issues. Suggested target audiences were older couples whose children have grown up, childless couples, couples with one child, couples with impending "empty nests," friends of foster parents and DHS workers, "upper class people" with financial resources to care adequately for children, service clubs, and the military community. Suggested media for reaching these audiences were bulletin boards, newspapers, TV, and scheduled meetings.

The content need most frequently cited was an honest depiction of foster parenting to prospective parents. Suggested forms this honesty could take were distribution of pictures of children in need of homes, TV ads made by and featuring the children themselves, open question sessions for prospective parents, thorough portrayal of child and case history before placement, and accurate projections of placement dates.

Some suggested that these honest depictions would necessitate a negative image of foster parents: let prospective parents know from the outset that they have no rights, that they are no more than babysitters. Others stressed highlighting the positive aspects of foster parenting, like increased family love and solidarity.

Training suggestions were not specific although requests for "honest" and "intense" training reflected a feeling of inadequate or misguided preparation. Several requests for more training emphasized preparing prospective parents for damage the children may cause and disrupting



influences natural parents can have, but others were more positive. One suggested training sessions run by seasoned foster parents who can report firsthand on intrinsic rewards of the experience. Another suggested holding training sessions within convenient travelling distance of prospective parents.

Licensing requirements and standards reflected disparate views on the adequacy of present procedures. Some thought DHS's requirements to be too strict, thereby discouraging many prospective loving families. Others asked DHS to be more thorough in its screening, citing money as too many families' motives. Knowledge of applicants as people, not just workers, was given as an antidote. There was also mention of a shift in values needed: pay less attention to proper windows, doors, and other safety features of the house and more attention to the morals and warmth of the family. Don't be afraid to place children far away (geographically) from their natural parents, and don't be afraid to place children with Christians, were two other responses. A last suggestion was to speed up the licensing procedure.

Suggestions for stronger support by DHS to foster parents focused on relations with social workers and natural parents. Respondents wanted more visitation, more continuity (less switching of social workers from case to case), and better working relationships with social workers.

They overwhelmingly wanted less exposure to natural parents, asking that their rights over the children, as foster parents, be clearly delineated. Some asked that the children have less access to natural parents: one suggested not letting children see their real parents for at least three months after coming to foster care, another that children under five shouldn't see their parents at all.





Other support suggestions included giving foster parents first option to adopt children in their care as they become available, 24-hour crisis intervention, respite care, regular support groups for foster parents and children, and professional counselling.

Of the 15 respondents suggesting foster parents receive more money, one correlated lack of money to feeling mistreated and tied down by DHS; another mentioned peer- and age-related items like prom gowns and class rings having to come out of her own pocket. A more specific response was that food stamp allotments and foster home payments be separated; counting food stamps as part of foster parents' benefits reduces either food stamp allotments or foster parenting monies, discouraging food stamp recipients from wanting to become foster parents. An isolated concern was money allocated to a foster-child's weekly allowance when the family couldn't afford paying allowance to their own children.

Retaining. Many of the 89 suggestions for retaining foster parents paralleled those for recruiting. Better communication between DHS and foster parents, more accurate information about the child and his or her natural parents, better training, more respect and "rights" for foster parents and more money were major concerns. Of these, the most clearly delineated were communication and foster parent rights.

Communication suggestions stressed frequency: social workers should contact foster parents more often on a regular basis. (One respondent specified every one to three months as a schedule for DHS home visits.) During visits social workers should listen more than talk to foster parents. Another telephone line should be established in the Department to accommodate more calls from foster parents; a 24-hour seven day/week hotline should exist exclusively for foster parents, another suggested.



Respondents seemed very concerned about foster-parent rights; they frequently mentioned wanting more choice in which child they got as well as more authority in that child's future. Some saw foster parents as deserving more decision-making power regarding the child's management and future than the natural parents or DHS ("let them be parents!"), and some simply contrasted foster parent rights with their suspected image as "just babysitters." "Respect" for foster parents by DHS was a frequently cited want.

Regaining These Foster Parents. We asked the parents what DHS would have to do for them to become foster families again. The largest group of 119 respondents (52) required improved relations with the Department. "Nothing" was the next highest response (33), with most of these citing personal changes and the remainder had former foster parenting experience, both of which would preclude future foster parenting. The next largest group (14) was positive: "just ask" they said, and they'd become foster parents again. Twelve others wanted changes in licensing requirements and procedures, and eight required more money.

Improved relations with DHS included several elements. The most frequent request was for more understanding of foster parents. This understanding was seen as more regard for foster parent assessment of child and situation, better listening skills by social workers, and more DHS empathy with foster parents.

The next most frequent request was for increased foster parent rights. These consisted of more voice in the child's future placement, authority to make the child's medical decisions, and veto power on changes initiated by natural parents.



A related request was foster parent's determination of the type of child they would get as well as the child's length of stay. Other requirements were that DHS prove to foster parents that they are truly concerned with the child's welfare above all else, that DHS provide supportive services such as counselling, respite, and transportation, and that social workers be more helpful.

The remaining conditions for bringing respondents back were changed licensing procedures and more money. In licensing, less stringent housing and medical screening of applicants were the chief concerns. Of those wanting more money, some mentioned that DHS should make it financially feasible for them to stay home to give the children the attention they need. These five said they'd be foster parents again if they didn't have to continue working outside the home.

Additional foster parent comments. The request for additional comments produced 88 responses falling into four categories: suggestions to DHS for improvement (32); praise and gratitude to DHS and expressions of positive foster parenting experiences (23); negative feelings and complaints of powerlessness (21); and personal changes unrelated to foster care (12).

Suggestions for improvement echoed earlier thoughts: more contact with social workers, greater foster parent placement choice, foster parent rights to prevent interference by natural parents or relatives, accurate information on children and duties at the beginning of each case, realistic requirements for licensing, and more regard for foster parent assessment of cases. New suggestions favored DHS's continued psychological, if not financial support of selected children after they turn 18, acceptance of



foster parents who cannot provide children with individual rooms, mandatory counselling of children with severe behavioral problems, social worker support for foster parents' natural children, and younger adoption availability for children of abusive parents.

Positive respondents expressed gratitude for their experiences of foster parenting and praised DHS's support system. They said DHS workers were helpful and supportive. "They are still helping as much as they can towards a college degree." Several expressed gratitude at finally being able to adopt their foster child. One said, "I would be willing to talk to a group of people interested in becoming foster parents and tell them how we helped mold a 12 year old into a 19 year old fine young man."

Negative respondents blamed children with behavioral problems, their own legal vulnerability to natural parents, and DHS. And unrelated terminations were prompted by job changes, moves, and aging.

Perusal of all the individual responses in Appendix B will allow readers to infer their own nuances and make their own interpretations.





CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is beyond the scope of this small survey to make global recommendations to the Department based on its findings. We did not endeavor to search the literature for model foster family practices or innovative recruitment ideas. However, some summary observations are in order.

Reasons for Withdrawal

If Rodney Dangerfield were writing this report he could summarize the thrust of many of the foster parent responses quite easily: I don't get no respect.

You will recall in our Summary of Findings that there were five primary reasons foster parents resigned: no say in the child's future; the child's behavior; no DHS understanding of the foster parents' problems; personal changes; and inadequate money. Each reason had about equal weight or claimed 20 to 25 percent of the responses. One of these reasons, changes in the foster families' personal lives, is largely outside the control of the Department. (I say largely because occasionally the changes resulted from the presence of a foster child.) Since personal changes were cited by about 20 percent of the people, with a larger proportion in the group that served six years or more, the Department probably cannot prevent at least 20 percent who drop out from doing so in the future.

That leaves the other 80 percent over whom it may have some control. Bearing in mind that people were allowed to provide more than one reason for



resigning, three out of the top four reasons bear directly on DHS policy or practice: no say about the child's future (24 percent), lack of DHS understanding about their problems (20 percent) and inadequate pay (18 percent). It is interesting to note that one of the problems often mentioned by workers, child's behavior (23 percent), does appear but certainly no more frequently than the other reasons. In addition, the open-ended comments emphasized the foster parents' desire for more control.

States such as New Hampshire have experimented successfully with integrating foster families more fully into the treatment team. If it is feasible to include foster families more in the decision-making process about the child it appears that this would help to retain some of them. This is a basic policy issue that needs to be debated at all levels of the agency before a decision is reached and a change implemented. What are the advantages and disadvantages of including foster parents in decision making? How would this be achieved? Does the case review system (which was implemented after many of these families resigned) already move in that direction? With what results?

Clearly many of the former foster family views about such issues as natural parent visiting is contrary to Department policy and good social work practice. Perhaps the Department needs to be more clear with the foster parents about why visiting is important and more helpful in showing the foster parent how to help the foster child handle a confusing or disrupting visit. On the other hand are these foster parents telling the Department something that it really needs to rethink regarding the application of visiting policy to particular cases.



Recruiting Families: The Children's Care Corps, A New Concept

The parents offer some interesting suggestions about targeting foster parent recruitment to various groups, using other foster parents in the process; and being totally above board in describing the difficulties and hardships of the job.

The new foster parent recruiter will want to consider the various suggestions independently to see which make sense and can be implemented. In the meantime, I would humbly like to put forth a recruiting idea of my own that may both appeal to the social conscience of potential recruits and raise the status of foster parents in the process, initiating a new concept of short-term foster parenting tentatively called the Children's Care Corps. Borrowing from President Kennedy's Peace Corps, perhaps it would be possible to recruit people on the basis of a one- to two-year commitment to serve in the Children's Care Corps for the good of Maine's children. Foster parenting is a social responsibility that should be shared. Perhaps families would be less hesitant to become involved if their commitment were time limited. If local institutions such as churches and service clubs could be organized to help to recruit for the Children's Care Corps there would be personal incentives and peer pressure to join. Also, if the parent commitment were openly limited this should help remove the expectation of foster parents having a long-term say in the child's future.

Parents serving under these conditions would not expect to become decision-makers about the child or professional service providers. Instead, they would be acting in a community spirit to help alleviate a pressing social need.



The problems with a one- to two-year commitment from a group of families would be the stepped up need for recruitment, training and licensing. But if the publicity promoted community responsibility, status, personal rewards and limited commitment, it may be easier to attract people. State tax deductions or exemptions may also be considered in recruiting the upwardly mobile. Those who are well suited to the job may be able to continue beyond the two years, but there would be no pressure or expectation. People can leave with grace when their time is up.

It would be possible to conceive of two generic groups of care providers emerging over time, those serving their one- to two-year terms and those in more of the professional home category who would have a longer-term stake in the system and whose counsel would be sought more systematically in making decisions about the child.

One could imagine a bold initiative emanating from the Commissioner's or Governor's office launching the Children's Care Corps. Child abuse crises have piqued the concern of citizens and heightened their desire to help. If successful, Maine's foster parent recruitment effort could serve as a model for other states.





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**APPENDIX A**

**1984 FOSTER HOME SURVEY**



# 1984 Foster Home Survey

1. How long were you a foster parent? <sup>(1)</sup>

- ☐ <sub>1</sub> Less than 1 year      ☐ <sub>3</sub> 3 to 5 years      ☐ <sub>6</sub> More than 10 years  
☐ <sub>2</sub> 1 to 2 years      ☐ <sub>4</sub> 6 to 10 years

2. Which county did you live in when you were a foster parent? <sup>(2-3)</sup>

- |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>1</sub> Androscoggin | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>5</sub> Hancock  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>9</sub> Oxford       | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>13</sub> Somerset   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>2</sub> Aroostook    | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>6</sub> Kennebec | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>10</sub> Penobscot   | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>14</sub> Waldo      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>3</sub> Cumberland   | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>7</sub> Lincoln  | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>11</sub> Piscataquis | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>15</sub> Washington |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>4</sub> Franklin     | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>8</sub> Knox     | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>12</sub> Sagadahoc   | <input type="checkbox"/> <sub>16</sub> York       |

3. Did you withdraw your interest in being a foster parent prior to receiving a foster home license? <sup>(4)</sup>

- ☐ <sub>1</sub> Yes      ☐ <sub>2</sub> No

4. For what age and kind of child did you originally expect to provide foster care? (*Check as many as apply.*)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (5) <input type="checkbox"/> Birth to 2 years | (9) <input type="checkbox"/> Neglected                              |
| (6) <input type="checkbox"/> 3 to 5 years     | (10) <input type="checkbox"/> Sexually abused                       |
| (7) <input type="checkbox"/> 6 to 12 years    | (11) <input type="checkbox"/> Physically abused                     |
| (8) <input type="checkbox"/> 13 to 18 years   | (12) <input type="checkbox"/> Chronically ill                       |
|   | (13) <input type="checkbox"/> Physically handicapped                |
|   | (14) <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally disturbed                 |
|   | (15) <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally retarded                     |
|   | (16) <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-adoptive                          |
|   | (17) <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>Please specify</i> ) _____ |
|   | (18-19) _____   |

5. For what age and kind of child did you actually provide foster care? (*Check as many as apply.*)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (20) <input type="checkbox"/> Birth to 2 years | (24) <input type="checkbox"/> Neglected                             |
| (21) <input type="checkbox"/> 3 to 50 years    | (25) <input type="checkbox"/> Sexually abused                       |
| (22) <input type="checkbox"/> 6 to 12 years    | (26) <input type="checkbox"/> Physically abused                     |
| (23) <input type="checkbox"/> 13 to 18 years   | (27) <input type="checkbox"/> Chronically ill                       |
|  | (28) <input type="checkbox"/> Physically handicapped                |
|  | (29) <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally disturbed                 |
|  | (30) <input type="checkbox"/> Mentally retarded                     |
|  | (31) <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-adoptive                          |
|  | (32) <input type="checkbox"/> Other ( <i>Please specify</i> ) _____ |
|  | (33-34) _____   |

(35) ☐ Not enough money

(36) ☐ Had to go to work

(37) ☐ Change in my family:

(38) ☐ Separation

(39) ☐ Divorce

(40) ☐ New child

(41) ☐ Other new family member

(42) ☐ Death

(43) ☐ Boarder

(44) ☐ Child care problems

(45) ☐ No relief from foster care

(46) ☐ DHS-related closing of foster home  
(e.g., license denied, not encouraged to renew)

(47) ☐ No contact from DHS

(48) ☐ Foster child's behavior

(49) *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

(50-51) \_\_\_\_\_

(52) ☐ Problems with licensing  
*(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

(53-54) \_\_\_\_\_

(55) ☐ DHS worker difficult to get along with

(56) ☐ No DHS understanding of my problems

(57) ☐ DHS expectations of foster parents unclear

(58) ☐ Inadequate training

(59) ☐ No real recognition of my efforts

(60) ☐ Problems with natural parents

(61) ☐ No say in what happened to the child

(62) ☐ Transportation problems to obtain  
required psychological, medical or  
dental care for the child

(63) ☐ Not enough services for foster child

(64) ☐ *(Please specify)* \_\_\_\_\_

(65-66) \_\_\_\_\_

(67) ☐ Not satisfying *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

(68-69) \_\_\_\_\_

(70) ☐ Other *(Please explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

(71-72) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

a. for recruiting foster parents?

b. for retaining foster parents after they have agreed to serve?

8. What would DHS have to do for you to become a foster parent again?

9. Any additional comments?

Thank you. Please return by July 25 to the Human Services Development Institute, 246 Deering Avenue, Portland, Maine 04102. No stamp is required on the enclosed envelope.

**APPENDIX B**

**NARRATIVE FOSTER PARENT RESPONSES**





Question #6: Why do you no longer wish to be a foster parent?

- o The money paid by the state does not even begin to cover the expense of having the foster child in your care. They have school needs (e.g. school supplies, special school clothing such as gym outfits, sports outfits, etc.) extra activity needs (e.g. girl scouts, boy scouts, dues, books, etc.), spending money, personal items (e.g. tampax, jock straps, deodorant, etc.), regular clothing needs which the clothing allowance nowhere nears coming to covering (e.g. boots, winter coats, bathing suits, etc.). When I would like to have taken them out for a treat such as Burger King it was too expensive to take my natural family and the foster children. The foster children also tended to overdo their ordering and when told no, it was thrown in my face that I got "paid" good money for taking care of them and I should spend it on them. They also had needs as my own children do -- for example, invitations to birthday parties and outings where they needed extra money. When my own natural family hurts because of lack of money, I felt it was time that I couldn't afford them and the foster children because the foster children "demand" it more from the foster family.
- o Board should be \$50.00 a week (\$75.00 for teen) and \$50.00 a month for clothing.
- o I feel that at least twice a year the foster family should have some time for the immediate natural family to be able to do something as a family unit. After all, the natural family and children have to share their home, parents and many other things all year. They should be able to go for a ride and buy an ice cream or to be able to talk amongst themselves as a family unit without being made to feel guilty. Foster children are very demanding, possessive, and jealous. The more you do for them the more they want. They are also very good at setting the natural family up to be in a bad situation and the foster child comes out smelling like a rose while the foster family suffers for a long time after. We have to have a break to put our own family's feeling back into order.
- o Child needed a lot of counseling.
- o No ramp provided for C.P. Quad. to exit house!
- o Counseling needed.
- o DHS was working on their time (9 to 5). Children needed more.
- o Special education needed.
- o Help for school needed.

- o Could have used more advice with the girl.
- o No support with volunteer.
- o One foster child needed special school at high school level. Not really why I don't want to be a foster parent, but it made it very difficult for one particular boy I had.
- o Psychological.
- o It seems like DHS feels every child who comes into foster care needs counseling so when a new child comes to you, you can be prepared for many psychological, medical and dental trips which the foster parent is always expected to be involved in regardless of whether you have time or not. It really gets to be a problem if there are other children in the home; e.g. smaller children need a babysitter, there is no reimbursement for this, or some other child may need to be in another place at the same time. There are always problems when a foster child needs this extra care because it puts stress on the family in many ways.
- o Truck couldn't make it to Houlton.
- o Too much transporting.
- o Not enough money to make changes required at home. New fuse box, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, etc.
- o We moved into our basement, and did not believe we could be relicensed.
- o Home too small.
- o State would not accept bedroom size.
- o Husband didn't (would not) have medical exam. (Even wrote a letter to Augusta and still denied.)
- o The relicensing procedure is a very costly game. Especially the state fire marshall's segment of it. As many years as I was licensed, each and every time it cost for the "privilege" to be relicensed. I did not understand how come every year they came -- even though nothing in my home changed -- they always found things wrong with my home. They are nit picky and more concerned with making a name for themselves than helping to provide good stable homes for foster children. I can't afford to get my license.
- o We still want to be foster parents but when a young woman from the Fire Marshall's office was here she said she didn't like our wood furnace. We disagree with her. We have a fire sprinkler and fire alarms.
- o Have to do some minor repairs.

- o We had to put another stairwell upstairs because we already had 6 sleeping upstairs. We have a ladder escape but they said that wasn't good enough.
- o First would use my basement, then would not. New home 1974 built to state specs.
- o I felt we did all we were asked, but DHS were unfair and especially one social worker that DHS covered up for.
- o I need a way to Portland.
- o We had 3 foster children for over 1 year and still were not licensed.
- o Dept. of Mental Retardation recommended surrendering license to get Adult license, then we were turned down on the Adult license because we had minor children of our own.
- o It was costing us more than we could afford to give them each a bedroom. Some things were necessary, but we got the feeling that housing was the important issue over the child themselves.
- o For all of the (above) mentioned reasons and many more, it is the least satisfying job there is. You give 110% of yourself and it's a sure guarantee you'll be the one to be shot down in the end and always be made to look like everything you do is wrong.
- o Hard to care and get close to someone who will be taken away.
- o Feelings were not important to DHS.
- o Wanted younger children, but was encouraged to take older.
- o As a former foster parent of many children over a period of time, being with them day in and day out, I feel we got to know the children pretty well and when a change was necessary felt that I could and should have had some input into where they were going, but I don't feel I was ever listened to or that DHS even cared what I thought. Any more information concerning this item can be had by checking past files of children who lived with us, that is if things were recorded accurately.
- o Visits with parents very confusing for child. She went regardless of the results. Information regarding neither the abuse nor the retardation was shared with us.

- o Two years ago me and my family were going through a critical time in our lives. My husband had just lost his job of 17 years and we were having problems with a foster daughter and my son. Our feelings of adequacy as parents were being tested. We had a little girl (then 2 1/2 years old) whom we had from birth who was eligible for adoption. In the midst of our crises we were made to make the decision of whether we would adopt her or not. Feeling as inadequate as we did at the time we said no because we didn't feel we could provide her with the things we felt she should have. Consequently she was adopted by someone else and we have hurt ever since. Had we been given time to straighten our thoughts out after the blows we had to take, that little girl would be ours now. Not a day goes by that we don't think about her. We loved her so much that we gave her up to what we thought would be a better life for her. We have now stabilized ourselves financially and emotionally again but it's too late. DHS was more interested in putting their statistics on paper than giving us the time we needed.
- o After giving and being a parent to someone else's child we are not acknowledged for all the things we as a family have to live with, put up with or go through. A social worker can undo more in an afternoon with a foster child than a foster family can do for months after. I feel if we are with the child day in and day out then anything a social worker has to say to the child should be said in front of the foster parents and not out on some excursion somewhere. All of the efforts that we pour into a child can be undone more quickly by "secrets" than by open-faced honesty. I never had anything to hide from the child or DHS and think it's unfair when a social worker or child has things to say behind my back. How can I help a child understand his thoughts or feelings if I'm left on the outside looking in. I never said anything to a child or social worker in secret that I wouldn't say to their faces and I felt I deserved the same treatment.
- o Always taking the child's side of issues.
- o Our worker was terrific. Though we may not have agreed always.
- o The worker was a complete pain. She never returned phone calls. Changed her mind often i.e., was inconsistent and blamed her unprofessionalism on the foster parents.
- o Supervisor and child's psychologist would both say one thing to us one day and deny they said it two weeks later. We felt hurt because it showed that we were lied to.

- o Not enough support.
- o Limited contact from DHS.
- o Too much contact from DHS.
- o When a foster child either saw or went with his natural parents, it always made life more difficult. Sometimes I didn't feel that I should have to have some of these people in my home and I felt that other arrangements could have been made for them to meet. I also didn't like the fact that when the foster child had a birthday, Christmas or special occasion and the natural family was involved he got 2 birthdays, 2 Christmasses, etc. They expect to get equally as much from us as the natural children got but they also asked their natural parents for more and in some cases got it. It makes my natural children wonder why. Sometimes the natural parents did or said things that took us weeks of staying up with them at night, trying to help explain their feelings or helping them to understand why they couldn't be with them right then. In most cases, I found the natural parents' contact with the child to be more destructive than constructive.
- o I realized when I became a foster parent that there would be child care problems but I didn't realize that I would always be the one to pay. The foster children have a cop out in a social worker and the DHS. A foster child is placed in a normal home environment where he is expected to live in a normal family situation living by the home's rules (or so I thought). I treated every child who came into my home as I did my natural children. They were loved, punished and treated equally. However, they wanted to make life miserable for us or wanted to be treated special they called the social worker who came to talk to them by taking them for a soda or an ice cream, took them to the movies or some other special thing and made the kid feel special so he could come home and rub it into the other children about what they had or did and the ones who were left at home didn't have. We are also as a foster parent supposed to tolerate behavior which isn't acceptable in our natural children but is supposed to be O.K. because of the "poor" foster child's past. The foster child created many bad situations and it was me and my family who had to listen to the comments made by others about us and that's not fair because who protects the natural family and children?
- o Uncontrollable behavior.
- o Lying, stealing, other behavior problems.

- o Emotional.
- o Child being torn between natural parent and our home.
- o Dishonest, uncooperative.
- o No cooperation and child expected us to give in to every whim.
- o They only want to stay if you allow them to do what they want.
- o Not appreciative of our efforts.
- o Running away, change in personality.
- o The biggest thing is they are placed in a foster home where they should abide by the same rules in the family as everyone else is expected to live by but the DHS doesn't always make that possible. I could write a book on this section but instead will give some examples. (1) Foster girl flaunts her body and goads teenage son into bad situation. Result, teenage son gets punished, put into counseling, made to feel resentful while foster girl diddlybops along her way to another foster home with no repercussion. (2) Foster girl has affair with much older man. Result: Foster girl goes to live with grandmother. (No punishment, counseling, nor repercussion.) Foster family - everyone in the family has to live with after-affects in their home where not everyone knows what happened except that the foster child "made" her move. Foster daughter's sister-like relationship with natural daughter is more devastating for natural daughter than for foster daughter. Two years later we are still paying. Foster daughter's doing fine living on top of the world. And I could state many more examples! Every time something happened it was always me and my family who needed the counseling (according to DHS) and not the foster child. Could something be wrong with this? I wonder.
- o Couldn't deal effectively with her suicidal behavior. The girl we had was suicidal and needed intense psychiatric counseling. The fact she was 16, she couldn't be forced to get the help she needed. The state couldn't do anything. A very talented life wasted. She's on the street, state supported, into drugs and alcohol. Very frustrating.
- o Wouldn't do anything but make trouble with my kids and more work for me.
- o Ran away; uncommunicative.
- o Needed help. Problems at school all the time.
- o Stealing, lying, destroying property, setting fires.
- o Too difficult to handle.
- o Found teenage too difficult to handle.
- o Involved heavily with drugs; was not aware initially of this problem.

- o We went into foster care because we were told it would be easier to adopt a child. We were asked to consider adopting two (brother and sister). We felt DHS withheld information relative to the kids special needs. Example: The boy had severe, violent temper tantrums, abused his sister, himself, destructive to property, fondled his sister. It is possible, however, that DHS was not aware of the girl's problems. I cannot think of the medical term. She was withdrawn, borderline between living in real world and fantasy land. She escaped her hurts, problems by regressing into make believe in her room or the bathroom. Would start by twisting, rotation of body and eyes would roll back into the head, face expressionless. Imaginary friends when left alone in her room, insomniac, listless. She was fearful of adoption. As time drew closer to finalize adoption, she regressed into a world of her own, soiling herself often. We felt we could not meet her special needs. The boy had improved drastically if we were firm with him. He tested us each day. We grew to love them "both" very much. Got out of foster care for awhile because we needed time to deal with their loss and our emotions. We've applied to renew our foster care license to enable us to adopt one child, as we first intended.
- o Teens. When troubles will not talk to you. Also drug use.
- o A social worker put ideas in her head that 18 up was the magic number. So, from 17 years on she figured she didn't have to obey our rules seeing she would be on her own soon anyway. Our rules were the same with her as our own daughter. We could not allow her to do as she wanted and still expect ours to obey the same rules.
- o I was personally involved with the child's past. There was a problem with adjusting, also such a change in the child, I guess I was unable to cope. Also fear of the child's actions. Bringing problems to our home. I found it difficult to be a foster parent as the impression I got that no matter what the child is right, the foster parents don't have a chance.
- o Family kept calling and stopping by. I found the child's behavior got worse after contact with family.
- o Not appreciated. Taken advantage of.
- o Brain damaged. Emotionally crippled.
- o Wide range of moods. Constant swinging of moods.
- o The last few children they brought here needed more than foster care.
- o Emotionally handicapped child. No services available to help meet her needs.
- o They are harder to handle with no support.



- o Severe and frequent temper tantrums.
- o Not prepared for child's unexpected behavior.
- o Emotional pressure from child's father.
- o In the near future we expect to have my wife's grandmother move in with us.
- o Child was supposed to see parent during week. Instead it became every weekend, giving me no time to do things with the child as I work at home 40 hours a week.
- o Child was returned to mother before license went through. Never went through with license. Child was a niece. Too close to family -- a lot of problems with mother and grandmother.
- o Lack of space. The need to constantly monitor and/or modify influence on younger children in the home.
- o We adopted our foster child and do not have housing for more children or patience enough to go through any of it again.
- o We don't have money for all the items to pass for inspection for Fire Marshall.
- o My husband dislikes doctors and did not wish to go have a physical.
- o Main reason is we are moving locally. Don't want to subject child to this change. Please keep us contacted. Ready and willing in 1 year.
- o Child returned to mother.
- o The last 5 or 6 times we were asked to take in problem teenagers and we were interested in younger children.
- o Saw one child that had been in too many homes. Hoped we could provide until 18, which happened, and she is still with us.
- o Child unwilling to admit to needing any supportive help in coping with problems -- strong denial system -- was making the rest of the family sick (emotionally). I don't believe a 15 year old child should be given the option of going or not going to counseling when it is determined there is a problem. Getting help -- counseling, Ala-teen, etc. should be a required part of a sick child's recovery.

- o My own children needed more of my attention. They once told me that I was always going someplace with the foster children -- counseling, doctor, visit parents, etc. -- which they resented.
- o We would love to be relicensed and plan to reapply as soon as we can get our new home ready.
- o The two children were a real handful and my husband was more ill than we had perceived when we took the two boys. He was taken ill due to the emotional problems of the children, so we withdrew as foster parents.
- o I am now working and going back to college.
- o No room. Only 1 child placed in home in 3 years and only for 3 days.
- o She just turned 18 and left. We had none of the above problems.
- o I think in some cases you try too hard to put the foster child back with his family. Sometimes this is harmful to the child.
- o My youngest child started school so I went to work.
- o Child united with natural father.
- o Have no room. Adopted the last two children we had.
- o Pre-adoption only.
- o Not given type of child requested -- pre-adoptive.
- o Still have child.
- o Too many social workers on one case in a year and didn't feel they were fair to the child.
- o Young man was confined to my home due to lack of ramp. Had to call for local police help to get him out the house. Transportation provided ranged from inadequate to dangerous.
- o This was a legal risk placement prior to adoption placement.
- o Husband lost a leg in an accident.
- o Put too much strain on family to add a child with problems.
- o We found that our schedule was too busy and we weren't finding enough time for the foster children.
- o My foster children were grown up.

- o No long term care possible, as explained in item #4.
- o My husband and I are planning to have another child. Our home has 3 bedrooms and we feel it would be too crowded. We have two boys now. Our reason not to be licensed is due to housing only and not because of any dissatisfaction with the program or people involved.
- o In the year that we were in the program, we got calls for only older children.
- o We moved within that time.
- o We became legal guardians for the child that had been in our foster care.
- o Retired. I am 73 years old.
- o We both retired after being foster parents for 18 years and at our age thought it best not to do it anymore.
- o I am too sick now for Foster care.
- o We retired because of age and ill health.
- o Ill health of foster parents.
- o 67 year old male. Too old to continue as I am alone.
- o Wife passed away.
- o We adopted our foster child and we also had a new one (baby). Our house was full.
- o Needed more money to have children involved socially. Always had to beg for more money. No respite.
- o We still have a child (19 yrs.). We are thinking it over for another.
- o Much too old to take foster children.
- o I think the people work very hard but I'm a working single man and I'm very fussy with my antiques and things around the house. I do not think it would be good for me or a child.
- o The children needed DHS somewhat more time. I felt DHS only spent time with the children because they were getting paid for it. I felt and know foster children felt some social workers didn't have it in their hearts to deal with the children.
- o When a child had a problem, social worker had child call them. Never discussing problems with family made foster parents feel like they were supplying a rooming or boarding home for child to lodge instead of having family. (Sneaky approach).

- o All the experts say the child should have stayed with us, yet he was given back to his grandmother. We worked hard and showed great progress. The schools will verify. He has slowly gone down hill after returning home. He did not want to go home.
- o Too many services or "additives" for foster child in a normal home environment which my natural children weren't eligible for and went without while the foster child gloated in them to my natural child which caused hard feelings. E.g. thier own special Christmas money handed to them for no reason when you can't always do it for your natural children. E.g. automatic job eligibility for CETA jobs because they're a "poor" foster child.
- o At the time DHS finally decided to send a child to us my wife was already babysitting seven children and our second child was on the way.
- o We adopted our child, which was a blessing for us, and she had a lot of problems. But by taking on more children we feel that it may take away from the time we have with our daughter.
- o My youngest is getting married -- after three natural and three foster girls -- we are ready to do something ourselves.
- o Attempting to obtain job transfer outside the state.
- o We wanted to adopt a girl but DHS moved her after initial steps were taken that she could be adopted by us. She lived with us for over six years and still wishes to be with us. I had a lawyer against the DHS but had no results. The child is now 12 and has recently requested to come back! Do what is in the best interest for the child and not what is going on to satisfy the social workers. Be honest with the foster parents and the children. We waited a long time for the workers to get going on the adoption then they ended up moving the child and told us that she would be adopted very soon. The child has been moved 3 times in 2 years and yearns to come back here and still is not adopted. We have also had 3 boys (brothers) for a few months before their natural mother died of cancer. They were also good boys and we were heartbroken to hear after returning to their father that the DHS split the boys up in different homes!
- o I found that having a foster child only 6 weeks younger than my child was extremely demanding. I had children who were 11, 8 and 18 mos. The foster child was 17 mos. The age closeness was just very, very difficult.
- o Of a beautiful black child we were told, "You would not want your daughter to marry one of them." We now have 4 black daughters and 3 black or minority sons!
- o (Husband died) I am living in my house with my son.
- o Because I never got a child in the 3 years I was a foster parent.

- o Bursitis in right shoulder and osteoarthritis in neck. Due to this problem I could no longer care for a child in this age group and that is the only age I really was interested in.
- o We have never had a foster child. We haven't actually lost interest but just haven't (pursued) the matter. We are looking to adopting children of our own.
- o The reason we became a foster parent was to adopt a child. We wanted to adopt and there was a child that could be adopted in a year, so we became her foster parents for that year instead of waiting for her to become adoptable.
- o Your own children come after the foster child in the eyes of DHS. We even gave up a vacation for a foster child once because I was told the father was to visit the child that special weekend and he never showed up. I was told the needs of a foster child should come first. I never could believe that. I always felt everyone should be treated equal. After the child left and is now in Sweetser. I could not even have her visit me after I had her for 3 years. I never felt that was fair to the girl or myself. We were very close.
- o We have outgrown room for another person. We have enjoyed being foster parents. Some of our foster children still keep in touch.
- o We were specifically interested in one child who we had done things with. Her big sister became her foster parent which solved the girl's problem and we were not interested in unknown foster children at that time.
- o Change in housing. No room for a child.
- o Took a lot away from own family.
- o No cooperation of worker when needed to get help for child.
- o No future in this profession.
- o A no-win situation. Child knew this to be a temporary placement. Therefore, no commitment to changing behavior. Also, DHS worker continually changed approach.
- o Foster child's privileges are beyond natural child's -- creates problems.
- o Child returned to parent.
- o We found the age to be difficult for us to handle. Prefer child under 10.
- o We wanted the license for a particular teenager who left us the day before we got the license.

- o Our foster son who came to us at the age of 10 is now 20 and still with us, not under foster care but as a boarder. The other three that we had have been returned to their mother. My husband has partially retired and we do not want to be so tied down right now. Besides we not only have our former foster son still with us, we still have one of our own children living here also and now we want more time to spend with our grandchildren.
- o Refused to place younger children in our home. We had 2 children and 2 rooms. A teenager was difficult in this set-up.
- o Waited too long for any actual placement and began to lose interest -- felt we must not be needed even though we had gone through process and obtained license. Began to think of changes in our life situation that would have made placement difficult, so we withdrew our names. There was only one possibility of a placement that never materialized.
- o Our children could not accept other children in our house -- they were very jealous.
- o We were offered children older than we expected to care for.
- o Husband died.
- o I was not a foster parent. I had to apply for a license because I had my grandchild for 6 months then returned to her father and mother. Six months later she was again taken from her home and placed in a foster home.
- o Quite simply we are ready to be non-parents at this time in our lives.
- o We put 18 years of ourselves and our money into unappreciated service and unappreciated kids (except for a few).
- o Opened family day care, day care closed now, but courage and patience not good.
- o I feel a foster child should be treated exactly like your own. I don't feel they should be made to feel different. Love is most important.
- o Client wanted to stay with her boyfriends parents.
- o My own child didn't want to share her room and the child we got no longer needed our help. The only child we were offered in the two years was a 14 year old which we had already said we didn't want teenagers.
- o Called and expected to take physically and sexually abused teenager because I was an RN!
- o We raised a foster child from 11-18 years along with our own two daughters. Treated her as our own. She is now on her own (her choice). One of our daughters is now graduated. We have only one to go. Our family is all grown up now and we don't feel at this time we want to start again.

- o Caseworkers overworked. Not enough individual attention. Caseworkers often hard to reach, uncooperative, unresponsive to needs of children and parents. The children I cared for were as much neglected by DHS as by their own parents.
- o Hassles from neighbors and landlord. DHS kids should be provided with food stamps at least, AFDC if possible.
- o This child was a child I had in my school system and had no where to go. My family provided a home for him until he was adopted. Nevertheless, the natural parents are around harassing us and his adoptive parents. I would hesitate to take another child because of this. DHS does not buffer this happening.
- o I have no care to go to the office in Portland and back.
- o License for so many children and get a call to take more without any help from DHS as far as clothing, bedding, medical help. If it suits the DHS worker, they will come out, otherwise you are stuck with no recourse.
- o I wanted younger children and had two emotionally disturbed children. Wanted to keep one, but they wouldn't separate them at the time.
- o We wanted the child we got with no intentions of becoming foster parents.
- o Still have two children of our own and our age is a factor.
- o High risk with "legal risk" adoptive placement - that adoption never happens. This can be devastating to all concerned.
- o DHS worker pulled foster children from long-term stable foster home to return them to a family that did not want them.
- o I took family parenting classes in 1983. Because of problems with a teenage daughter I didn't get my license.
- o I became a foster parent because it was required to receive subsidy for a child. I wanted to adopt (according to the worker), so I was not a foster parent, but rather an adoptive parent who was told that licensing was a necessary formality. I am not interested in foster care, but may adopt again.
- o Our foster children have been quite young (our choice) and now that our children are high school age the big gap in ages was hard on everyone. Also very painful for all of us to part with preadoptive babies.
- o DHS said I could not have any children for at least a year because I adopted the two foster children I have.

- o Because we felt our home would not pass, and the 2 children we had had gone back to Connecticut where they came from.
- o Felt pretty isolated.
- o We felt very rewarded by our dealings with our 19 foster children and their growth and were willing to continue dealing with them, but dealing with DHS was too difficult.
- o We have had to help an older child of my husbands who is in financial difficulties. We have our own business and we have to spend so much time that we don't give a foster child the attention they desperately need. I enjoyed those foster kids we had, but there were a disturbing element - car theft, body lice, pregnancy, drinking, failing school. Maybe later, but things are too hectic now.
- o Mentally and emotionally exhausting.
- o Have applied to adopt a 14 year old from DHS.
- o Social workers different from what they used to be.
- o DHS worker never met the child who was a ward of the state of Connecticut. She lived with us for 8 months and DHS only made 1 visit to inspect the home and worker came to 1 PET meeting. Worker told Connecticut worker child wouldn't make it in Maine. I suspect he felt the situation wouldn't be worth his effort.
- o I always will be my foster son's foster mother, until I die.
- o DHS are not making placement in Rumford area as they want to place children close to their natural parents.
- o If I had my way I would take all kids and give them a home. I love kids.
- o Towards the end of keeping our children, I became bedridden for 3 months. We had to have the children leave. My husband could enforce our 2 to do their chores, but not the 3 foster children.
- o We were only interested because my husband's niece needed a home, subsequently, after entering alcohol rehab in Lewiston she ran away and it was determined after her return that it was inappropriate for her to be with us.



Question #7a: What suggestions do you have for DHS for recruiting foster parents?

- o Be honest about expectations of foster parenting.
- o Better care money. Highlight the good homes and success stories.
- o Pictures of kids distributed.
- o Offer open meetings to meet with prospective families to answer questions they might have. This would need to be publicized to let public know when and where.
- o Don't give false hopes about receiving a child in about 6 months then be 2 1/2 years doing it.
- o A better explanation of their expectations as foster parents. Let them know everything about the child before they are placed.
- o I will not be a foster parent because your social workers switch cases too often and you as a foster parent have to keep starting over with social workers. Keep the same person on a case.
- o Less home visits for the child. More visitation from the social worker.
- o Allow future foster parents the opportunity to adopt children who become available while under their care, if they so desire.
- o Offer more money and better working relation between social worker & foster parent.
- o Make sure they have adequate training.
- o Make sure there's lots of love in the family you put them in.
- o Be more obvious. Have the information available -- bulletin boards, newspapers, etc. -- stating a need.
- o Speak to service clubs.
- o Understanding. Try to help them with more money because I know a lot I paid while I was a foster parent, buying gowns for proms and class rings and I bought a lot of their clothes.
- o Training prior to becoming a foster parent.
- o Better training before placement.
- o Maybe if it wasn't so difficult to get a license, more people would be interested in sharing their family and love with a child less fortunate than their own. Foster parents are your best recruiters.

- o I think that DHS is much too strict for people who want to take care of foster children.
- o Advertising the need for foster parents and giving some of the positive benefits (e.g. watching a child develop his full potential by giving love and patience). The parents can gain much for helping a child, too.
- o More money plus more say in raising the child or children.
- o More advertising to alert the public for the need.
- o Advertise foster parenting to older couples whose children may be grown up and left home and to families where having their own children is not possible. There are so many couples who need the love and have so much love to give these children.
- o Better pay. It's very hard to recruit foster parents because the work goes around how you (are) treated and being tied down.
- o A more thorough screening. I've seen too many going into foster parenting for the money.
- o TV ads by the children in care already.
- o To make the need more public.
- o Intense training and respite care for difficult to place children.
- o Be up front and honest with prospective foster parents.
- o Get to know the foster parents, not (just) on a working basis, person to person.
- o Not let the child see real parents for at least 3 months. Refuse child if parents want control while in your home.
- o Pay more money; be more honest in telling them what's involved; make your rules more for normal living rather than what it looks like on paper; make social workers live as a foster parent to see what is really involved.
- o Have meetings in the area that foster parents live (not 50 miles away in Portland).
- o Less unimportant regulations, education (I didn't need help with my natural children) less concern about windows and doors and more interest in the family.
- o Make the need well known -- contact military community.
- o Release children for adoption, or return them home, as soon as feasible. Give foster parents first choice of adoption.

- o Word of mouth to friends.
  1. They feel it doesn't pay enough
  2. They have to fight all the time for the need of the child.
  3. The foster parents are sometimes not checked enough; they abuse and neglect the child. Some keep them only for the money.
- o Don't expect the foster parents to keep in such strict contact with natural parents.
- o Let the public become more aware that there is a great demand for foster homes.
- o Screen parents more, explain some of the difficulties.
- o Having the processing going much faster.
- o Have more open session with other foster parents to explain what is expected of them. Pay more clothing and board money.
- o Be honest about problems of foster care. Pledge support -- then carry through with it. Aim recruitment efforts towards people equipped to care for children, not who just want free labor or want to do good deeds.
- o Be honest.
- o Please make clear with foster parent the financial income the foster child is expecting. For example, if a foster child had a \$10 allowance a week and the foster parent has 4 or 5 children of their own, it creates a problem in his family because his children never had an allowance.
- o I think DHS should be more concerned with the moral character of the foster parents. They certainly are strict enough with safety precautions.
- o Offer a support system, such as 24-hr. crisis intervention, training sessions, regular support groups for foster children and for foster parents, more money for children with serious problems and professional help.
- o I would have said more money but I read where foster parents are to receive more. That's good.
- o Keep natural parents away from the child if they are under three or up to five years old.
- o Be real!!
- o Advertising probably best by TV, newspaper, etc.

- o Explain everything clearly and be sure they understand all circumstances concerning the child and natural parents.
- o TV ads.
- o Use the media more. Appeal to parents who have one child of their own to take a foster child.
- o Be honest -- our child was taken from one home after many years and brought to ours (initial visit to move was 2 days), no reason given. Child was "ruined" by what had happened.
- o I feel programs should be available for children as soon as they are placed into foster care, so their emotions will not be suppressed, so they will not be like the boy is today.
- o Money.
- o Become engaged in a much much more thorough screening of potential foster parents; specifically up-grade your program.
- o Faster licensing. I started in April, by the time it came through the child you contacted me about was no longer available.
- o Not to try to pawn off the problem children first. Let parents "get their feet wet".
- o Super way to add love to a family.
- o Take the bullshit ad out of the paper.
- o Get out of the protective business! Don't know what they are doing! Hire some non-bureaucratic types, who don't suggest a child be beaten in front of witnesses to prove the point. Come on!
- o Provide security to foster parents that natural parents not harass.
- o Having things clear as to the foster parent's rights with the child. Trying to help better understanding of foster care.
- o Try harder and work with them.
- o Be honest with them, they are just paid babysitters with no say or control or ability to help this child.
- o To try to help the children they could care for (age, problems, etc.). Not to encourage them to take an age or problem they would hesitate about.
- o How about directing recruitment towards couples with "empty nest" eminent.? Lots of women in this position feel they have many nurturing skills that are no longer "needed".

- o Recent board increase helpful.
- o Aim for upper class people. They have the financial resources available to fully do the job.
- o Don't be afraid to use Christian foster parets. Get to know them before deciding their religion is too strict, etc. I know of a wonderful family in Lee that had been refused because of religion. It is so frustrating to see children needing care and knowing of loving homes, but not being able to get them together.
- o Make them aware that they have no rights, that the foster child and DHS worker do not regard foster paretns as anything but a babysitter.
- o Be more honest about expectations of foster parents and what damages some of these children can and do cause.
- o I now work for DHS in Sanford. Biggest complaint I've heard from Food Stamp recipients is that their money should not be counted towards their benefits. Since they lose out on benefits they are discouraged from getting involved.
- o Have parents that are interested meet with other foster parents so they can hear first hand how rewarding it can be. It would be much different than hearing it from a DHS worker.
- o DHS needs to improve its "record". Substitute care workers have a poor reputation in regard to their response time on a foster family problem. They need to spend more time with the family to provide better PR. Also sub care payments need to be raised.
- o The Lewiston office seems to have an abundant supply, but wouldn't make placements outside of the Lewiston areas, as they felt it was better to place children next to their natural parents.

Question #7b: What suggestions do you have for DHS for retaining foster parents after they have agreed to serve?

- o Communicate!
- o Understanding workers who listen to problems, etc. and act accordingly. Reasonable money to care for child -- food, clothing, board.
- o More money.
- o More expense money and possibly have available family services to help foster parents deal with foster children and their own.
- o More information as to how emotionally upset children are actually behaving, rather than blind phrases like "they are really upset at this time."
- o The phone lines are always busy when I'd call. You need another number -- an alternative if you can't reach a specific worker.
- o Don't give false hopes about receiving a child in about 6 months, then be 2 1/2 years doing it.
- o More cooperation between DHS and foster parents (and communications). Listen to the foster parents. When they are having problems the child is not always right. Social workers should keep in better contact.
- o Be fair to them; stop using them as pawns in a chess game. They have feelings too.
- o Offer more money and better working relation between social worker and foster parent.
- o Have foster family counseled.
- o Make sure they really understand what it is to be a foster parent.
- o Make sure there is enough to eat in the homes.
- o Closer contact between the social worker and foster family.
- o Give foster parents more respect, more money and more say in children's future.
- o Offer foster parent group meeting other than at 9 a.m.
- o To help them with understanding them better. In the past what a foster child said, even if it were a lie, they would take sides when you were trying to discipline them. It happened so many times.
- o More support. More respite care. More training. Be more honest about the children being placed.

- o Make sure the foster parents know the department is behind them all the way.
- o I had agreed to keep foster children but we needed extra income so I had to go to work. But if I could continue to work I would continue foster care immediately.
- o Foster parents should be given a total case history when the child comes (if more than very temporary placement). A month after our child came to us I discovered she had a shunt from her brain to her heart and I discovered it washing her hair. I felt the tube. This drains excess fluid and I should have been told. Also, knowing she had no bowel control would have been helpful, although we were told this just before she came. The fact that she had never had discipline or anyone say no to her before would have been helpful. She was 6 years old and screamed from the time we entered the grocery store until after we'd left because she wanted everything in sight. Preparing some ground rules ahead in many areas would have been helpful. After a few weeks I figured out the problem but with difficulty. A few guidelines in how to handle a child with these problems would have been helpful. DHS was very good and I have no real complaints but at the time of a placement they could give clues about problems that may come up and suggestions in how to deal with them.
- o Listen to these people. They seem to be used as baby sitters instead of parents. They take these children to their appointments and make visits to schools and talk with social workers all to no avail. They have no say in the destiny of the children.
- o More understanding case workers. Relief at least once a month. More services for the child.
- o Make available more funding for foster care. Make available more structure in dealing with child's behavior.
- o The major key is support to the parents, i.e. an open channel between the parents and DHS. We had a great worker and she was always there to either back us up or tell us what we might be doing wrong, either way knowing that the child is the major concern.
- o Better pay, more communication between social workers and foster parents, more trust between social workers and foster parents and helping one another instead of destroying one another.
- o I can't say anything wrong against DHS. They always treated me very good.
- o The problems of the child should be available for the foster parent to review and be aware of should they occur again.
- o To contact them more often.
- o Respite care and increase in board rates.

- o Good follow-up and support would help. Understanding that the foster parents are in most cases doing their best.
- o Listen to what we say. Don't assume DHS should have a special love for children for their type of job. Shouldn't be working for DHS if it's not in your hearts. Let the children know you care about them, not just because they're getting paid for it.
- o Work closer with foster parents re: behavior problems of children.
- o (1) more money to take the child out of the home, e.g. to go to a movie, bowling. Our child needed this; we used our own money.  
(2) More say in what the child needs. We said but no one listened.  
(3) Have child stay away from real parents for at least 3 months.
- o Be more fair to them and consider their needs as a family.
- o Personal visits to the foster parent's home every 1-3 months by DHS.
- o Let them be parents!
- o To work together and try to solve differences.
- o Keep up the super work they already do.
- o Training classes, group gathering of foster parents and children. Social gatherings are enjoyable and problem solving. Give foster parents complete charge of teens, if they want it.
- o Better pay.
- o 1. Work together and listen to their point of views also.  
2. We do have some good points at times but don't like to be played for fools.
- o Let the foster parents choose if they want a particular child to live with them. Don't give them one problem child after another. They get discouraged. When they get a child, let the child stay with them. Don't keep moving the child around. Give the child a chance to feel wanted.
- o Don't assume anything. Give plenty of support.
- o Meet half way with them. Let that child really belong to the foster family as well as the DHS.
- o Let the foster parents have more say.
- o Check with them to see if there are problems. Listen to them and do something if they say they have a problem or need help.



- o Insist on foster parents to go through training (psychology of foster kids, discipline alternatives, dealing with schools). Offer respite on regular schedule, e.g., 4 times/year. Have informal meetings with foster parents and children (whole family) to discuss how things are going.
- o If the foster parent is being fair to all in household, she is doing fine, leave her be!
- o I think former foster parents have learned from their own experience from already having foster children and should not have to attend all training sessions. After all, every kid is different; wait until you get the kid then there will be questions.
- o Give foster parents more say as to what happens to the child.
- o Offer a support system, such as 24 hour crisis intervention, training sessions, regular support groups for foster children and for foster parents, more money for children with serious problems and professional help.
- o I'm sorry I cannot give you any suggestions. Each child is different with different problems and it's hard to say what would help retain a foster parent especially if they had a particularly hard child to handle or problems with the parents.
- o Take their suggestions and requests into consideration. Have problem oriented trianing.
- o Make a placement! Provide sufficient support and recognition of the resource the parents are providing.
- o An occasional pat on the back would help.
- o Regular scheduled contacts to keep up on any problems that arise.
- o That the workers do not look down on you. When you ask for extra help it's as if the money is coming out of their pockets. Some people get so much and my foster child got very little.
- o Keep in closer contact with them.
- o My suggestion would be for the court to change the law where it entitles natural parents to know where their child is and be able to come and take them out of the foster home.
- o Be honest - appreciate that although the goal is to return the child to his parents, sometimes that is not the best for the child.

- o We were potential foster parents for at least 2 years after the interview with a social worker. During the interview the social worker stated that foster parents with our interests (physically handicapped) should be able to care for a child. After this contact we never heard from the state except to renew the license. My wife and I feel that our interview was favorable, but that someone had decided that our home was unsuitable for foster care. This is why we did not bother to renew the license.
- o Give me the child I want and pay me for it. Babies - none available, I've been told.
- o Provide 24 hour 7 day per week "hot line" for foster parents.
- o Provide more legal/paralegal support for foster parents.
- o Training in our own county and not so late at night. For us to go to Bangor meant not getting home until midnight. My husband was to be at work at 5:30 a.m.
- o Financial support for family.
- o Foster parents should be given more authority to raise these children as they do their own. Too many of the kids run to the social worker when things should be worked out as a family.
- o Listen to what the foster parent has to say. Caseworkers tend to do more talking than listening.
- o Give them automatic support for runaways. DHS was no help with the kids and police's hands are tied. Kids are forced back to evil, mean, drunken parents by the law.
- o Being of as much help to the foster parents as the child and being fair to both.
- o I would if I could.
- o Listen to us. We care too much to send these children back into the same situations - "mothers rights" be damned. We are the mothers and fathers of these children with love and desire not because we gave birth to them.
- o Let them have more say about foster children. They know them better than DHS does.
- o Extensive contact with social worker for at least the first 6 months.
- o Keep them informed and be consistent.
- o Higher reimbursements.
- o I would rather have a child that had no family.

- o Rewards (increase in allowance) should be given to homes that prove to be good care centers.
- o Give the foster parents more rights and say in the management of the child.
- o What is needed is a much stronger support system.
- o Listen. Repay physical damage claims.
- o Lighter caseloads for counselors so they could have more time for each child.
- o More money for that responsibility and more decision making on my part. I also felt I could not give the proper attention working full-time with 3 teen-age children of my own.
- o Make it harder for the real parents to disrupt his life. Give the child more say and the real parents less. No one wants to love and help a child and see them given right back to the real parents for more abuse and neglect.
- o To provide additional workers to help reduce caseloads. This would give the worker more time to spend with each foster family. These family problems need extra attention and the families look to the worker for support. When workers "dump" children in home and then run to the next emergency, foster parents feel "used".
- o They need a lot of support. They need a lot of training.
- o Be clear and definite in what you say to foster parents. They don't have doctorates in psychiatry or social work. They are just plain folks.
- o To supply them with foster children.

Question #8: What would DHS have to do for you to become a foster parent again?

- o Prove to me that they are truly concerned about the foster child and what happens to him/her.
- o A change in the social worker assigned to our home. Someone I could contact to discuss problems if social worker is not willing to listen. (problems about foster child.)
- o My age is a barrier.
- o I would have to have help from tri-county.
- o Get me a license.
- o Move heaven and earth. Sorry.
- o Discontinue the requirements of interested foster parents having to have a physical. Other than my husband not wanting to have one, we were all approved to become foster parents. When he saw he had to have a physical he said, "no way".
- o Have a few less requirements on what your home has to be like. A child needs love from parents more than they need a mansion to live in.
- o I wouldn't be interested again until my own children are grown.
- o I believe we could handle a baby or very small child at this time, but realize that we might have problems getting licensed again here in our foundation. It is quite cosy.
- o Provide a lot more information about the particular child or children.
- o Help me find adequate housing. Allow me to take a child under 5 years even though I work.
- o My daughters are getting older and I have only 3 bedrooms. I lack space for privacy. I need more bedrooms.
- o Nothing. Have since adopted 2 children through adoption agency and no longer have any sleeping room and could not guarantee enough time to devote to problemed child without neglecting my own, which wouldn't be fair to any one of them.!
- o Ask me! I would have to know more about the child first.
- o Offer enough money so that I could afford to stay at home and give the proper care and time that these children would need and deserve.
- o Using more common sense and understanding.

- o Licensing regulations should be enforced for all foster parents and not to a selected few. We know of instances where licenses are given to pot dealers and pushers and they are allowed to keep their foster kids. We were denied because of a personal family problem that was blown out of proportion by DHS.
- o Do as I asked for. I wanted to work with pre-adoptive children. All I got was neglected and emotionally disturbed children. So after ten years of not getting preadoptive children we got done. Felt bad. We loved all the kids.
- o Ask - But not really interested at this time, as I work full time and don't feel it's fair for these children. My children are grown and gone. Thank you.
- o Acting on some of the above statements, with the child we had we were always wrong. The teachers were wrong. But as it turned out we weren't all that wrong in what we were doing. We did the best we could for 1 year without too much help from the social workers.
- o I really can't think of any reasons. I can't stand the constant flow of social workers, the home inspections (one should do) or the line "if you don't do this or that we will take the child." I think you should put the child first. A child needs love and security, a lot of parents will never give them that.
- o The only way I would renew my license is to get a small child, age 1 - 5. Enclosed is my letter stating why we did not renew our license.
- o I took care of a C.P. quad teenager from late June until August 30th. Yet I received no pay until late September. The strain on my budget was too much. I feel that until DHS alters its payment policy I will never work for them! DHS had served this client for many years yet showed a total lack of understanding of his physical needs. Good common sense (let alone professional training) indicated need for a ramp, hospital bed, safe transportation, etc., yet I had to battle for all these things.
- o Nothing. We are in the process of relicensing
- o I don't know. Undecided.
- o N/A (Buy us a bigger house!)
- o Give foster parents more respect, more money and more say in children's future.
- o To be truthful with you I love children. I've never had any of my own. And I love working with older children or younger, I don't care. If they would help more on their clothes and pay a little more. I loved to be one. I've missed it. I was going to call you and see if I could do it again. I would need a little more help from DHS.

- o I'm afraid there's nothing that can be done. We're burnt out.
- o I don't know.
- o Drop medical exams and approve our application. (If we didn't feel physically or mentally able, why would we want to take someone else's responsibilities and problems?) We'd become foster parents again in a minute if given the opportunity.
- o Just to be relicensed. (We moved.)
- o If I would be able to work at the same time that would take care of school age foster children, because we love children a great deal and through this program we were successful in adopting two girls which we love a lot.
- o We took a foster child for 2 weeks, were talked into keeping for 2 months because he was doing so well. He straightened out to what everyone called normal. Then his mother wanted to try him again. After 5 months everyone could see it wasn't working so back to us he came. He straightened out again and this time his dad wanted him. (His parents are divorced.) By this time the child had occupied 4 years of my life (nearly monopolizing it). Human Services gave him to his father and I gave my license back to Human Services. DHS could do NOTHING to get me back in the program!
- o Would have to bring the age group and the child sex group (requested).
- o Let me raise child like our own in areas of medical care when needed. We've raised 4 of our own and didn't abuse our medical coverage.
- o Make it financially worthwhile. We had 2 foster children at once and the 14 year old's needs were far greater financially. We were being drained of our own resources.
- o I would like to be a foster parent again. However, at this time, I have 2 teenagers and 2 babies and barely room in our house for us, so our home is not large enough to accommodate another person.
- o Better understanding, more trust, being more involved in what's going on.
- o Nothing! I'm 48 years old and we have two married daughters with children plus I still have a 14 year old and an 11 year old at home. I feel I have my hands full.
- o My circumstances have changed and I now spend long periods of time away from home daily and must travel on weekends. If I were able to be at home for the greatest part of the day I would become a foster parent again.
- o I will if I get remarried. It's very hard to do it on a one-parent scale.

- o More money and strong, long look at problems of foster parents.
- o Right now nothing. I just feel it is better I don't. My reasons have nothing to do with DHS but more with my privacy. I am a private person and keep much to myself these days and I work very long hours.
- o I'd like to be a foster parent again. Not right now. Become more involved. The biggest problem I had, I found the social workers didn't seem to care. They were so wrapped up in themselves.
- o Nothing. Not interested. No close relationship with social workers except 1-2 over years.
- o Help me to understand how the courts could give child back to parents without change.
- o Make a lot of changes in the system!
- o Better communication and closer contact with DHS.
- o Send out someone different from Fire Marshall's office when my husband is at home so he can explain things to them.
- o Could not do a thing. If we were aware personally of an abused child, we might consider.
- o Not applicapble.
- o Get it touch. I have a good home and a few more years of loving care to share with another child.
- o Be willing and supportive as to giving us another try.
- o I would probably not do it again because I have found another agency to adopt children from. I have 7 minority race children and might consider adopting even more.
- o Get in touch with me.
- o I have to do my repairs first.
- o If you gave me a child to care for.
- o Get my husband to agree to it.
- o Now that my family has grown, it would be very hard for us to start over again. If I were a younger adult and knew my chances for adopting were easier I would stay with DHS.
- o Finishing licensing us. Contact us again and we will discuss this.

- o The only reason we would become a foster parent again is if we could adopt another child. From birth to 2 yrs. old. It would have to be a case where the parent or parents have already surrendered the child over for adoption.
- o Call and ask. Show me what kinds of support I can expect. Explain what to expect in the foster child/parent relationship. Also, I know that the emergency shelter is needed, but feel strongly that our teenager would have been fine here if it hadn't been so easy for her to run away to the shelter. Given more psychological support we could have developed a very good relationship here. She needed a lot of counseling to deal with a trauma of sexual abuse and of fitting into a real loving family. I needed advice as to how to help her.
- o Would not.
- o Just contact me. I would love to become a foster parent. I was in the process of being licensed, also of selling one home and buying another. I am very interested in being a foster parent. Please contact me.
- o Nothing -- it would have to be an active decision on our part to fill a need or to want to serve in that way.
- o To give me a long term child that I could get close to to give enough money for them to be properly clothed and taken care of. And a lot more understanding of what foster parents are put through.
- o We couldn't do it at our age, also health-wise.
- o have a more coordinated and consistent approach with expectations decided on at the beginning. No changes without consulting foster parents and enlisting their support. Take foster parents assessment of child more seriously. No account of problems we had with our foster child ever went on his record. Therefore, other foster parents weren't prepared and the child received no help.
- o No visiting or contact!
- o Nothing.
- o Just give us our license again and DHS don't contact the foster child and make any arrangement to go anywhere or pick the child up for any reason whatsoever without letting the foster parent know what's going on. I don't let my children go anywhere or with anyone unless they identify themselves or come and meet us and talk with us. We don't like this problem. You should know that even the school system will not take any children on a field trip without letting the parent know in advance and identifying the person in charge and assure the child safely back.
- o Not possible. Only done because of personal interest in this child.



- o Let us have the age that we would prefer to have and not to be asked to take the age available.
- o Nothing. Our life style has changed and we are bringing up a grandchild.
- o I don't think that we would for quite a while. My job involves working with emotionally needy adolescents and I also have 3 children of my own. Too many adolescents are into severe substance abuse, which makes it extremely difficult to impossible to provide any meaningful help.
- o Ask.
- o Work with us to do what is best for our family and the foster child.
- o Do not know at this point -- previous experience with DHS was discouraging.
- o I've already made a renewal application and have not heard anything. I am working now in Washington County, but I am still very interested in being a foster parent.
- o Be more considerate of the age and kind of child that would fit into the foster home.
- o They don't know what they're talking about! (Take foster kids themselves).
- o Nothing. In our circumstance, we are considering care again in the near future.
- o Give you more freedom and understanding with problems at homes with the children.
- o Since the birth of my daughter I dropped my license. But I think I would like to re-apply now again that she is not an infant. The pay before was hard to get by on, especially around the holidays like Christmas, Easter. I would like to have babies and smaller children. Teenagers for me are too hard. I would like to have training on disciplinary procedures and how to help the child with the certain problem he may have. I would also like the social worker to come more often, so they can see how things are going. I enjoy being with children. I really enjoy being able to take them shopping for their new clothes. They enjoy this.

I enjoy having them to be able to share the holidays and other fun occasions with us. It makes me feel good inside to see a less fortunate child enjoying himself. I would like to know more foster parents in my town so I could see how they deal with different problems they run into. I realize these children aren't so adjusted to life as my own, therefore I need more training to understand their special needs.

The pay has increased since I dropped my license. I think this is a very good thing. Before it was hard to get by and do the activities with the child. Now with extra money people can involve the child in more fun activities such as movies, rollerskating, fairs, McDonalds, etc.

- o I have never become a foster parent; I was going through the process.

We just bought a new home with an extra bedroom and also a great location for children. My husband and I are very interested again. Please contact me as soon as possible.

- o I would only become a foster parent if I took a child and was able to bring it up and take care of it and have it as my own without having the child upset and worried that his/her mother or father was going to take the child away at any time.
- o The worker did not give child after one placement left. Do wish for another, but none came. (This is the gist of poorly written comments.)
- o I realize legalities are important, but perhaps the real importance is the child's welfare. Accept the fact that some parents don't "parent" well and only the child suffers.
- o Provide some sort of disciplinary framework for taking corrective action against uncooperative clients.
- o At present we don't have the room. Our daughter is now 16 so she could not share her room.
- o Allow fosters more say in child's outcome. The "for the child's family sake" is a bunch of bull and foster's know when a child will be safe.
- o Listen, clean house. There are a lot of lazy individuals within the department who like to pass the buck whenever possible. The children I care for needed a babysitter more than they did a foster parent. Maintaining a full-time job and a home and babysitting full-time is impossible. My next suggestion is the most outrageous, but you asked.

I've learned a lot through my experience as a foster parent. The most important is that taking care of unwanted children is a big job. I feel that there are too few people spread too thin to get the job done right. Most of the seven kids I cared for were more than just disturbed, they had real problems. I couldn't leave the house for 10 minutes without something tragic happening. It became totally impossible to be a foster parent and work for a living, which in my eyes is the solution. If I could make a living being a foster parent then I would have the necessary time to work with the kids as well as attend all of the classes and meetings.

Perhaps I'm not seeing things quite right, but it seems to me that a few more large family houses with full-time parents would be more effective at meeting the needs of these kids and ease the burden on the caseworkers.

- o Don't hassle me! Let me help the kids who need it! I've been raising kids for years, including my own, successfully.
- o I enjoy it very much and would like to have another one.
- o I don't really know, the heart break of seeing these children returned to a bad situation, the unknown length of time you have with them, the unfairness of it all and the children and the foster parents, just as they learn to trust and fit in with the family, along comes DHS of the natural parent and upsets the child, contradicting the foster parents ideas. The children never really feel secure. There are no guarantees in life, but you could at least be fair and honest with the children and the foster parents.
- o I would still like to have foster children, but would like to be sure of the age limit and if there were a problem as I had with the 2 boys (not separately) to see if its for the best. I understand they were eventually separated because of the behavior problems.
- o We are not interested at the present time. Maybe after our youngest graduates we might be.
- o If I did not have retarded adults, I would like to have more 16 to 21 year olds.
- o Come up with a pre-adoptive placement with minimal risk, in the age and special problem areas that we feel able to help.
- o I wouldn't be interested after the time we had with the social worker.
- o We are presently considering returning to full time foster care.
- o Nothing. I am not in a position to take a child at this time.
- o Reevaluate relationship between daughter and me.
- o Give me credit for being more than a poorly paid babysitter. Get to know me and my family. Don't tell me to love my foster children like my own and expect me to give them to whoever they say like they are unwanted puppies.
- o Nothing.
- o We would like to try again, but I worry about the home inspection. We're still not sure our home will pass. Would like more information on home requirements, what you should have and what's not good. Does DHS help any?
- o Prove to me that I wouldn't be forgotten.
- o Listen. Repay physical damage claims.

- o More money for the responsibility and more decision making on my part. I also felt I could not give the proper attention working full-time with three teenagers of my own.
- o Make it harder for the real parents to disrupt his life. Give the child more say and the real parents less. No one wants to love and help a child and see them given right back to real parents for more abuse and neglect.
- o Agree to bring us a normal child who would be staying with us for a long time.
- o Change their current operation by 100%. Provide more services or transportation to these services for residents of remote Washington County. Provide more contact with the child. Substantially raise their payment levels and clothing allowances. Provide respite for foster parents. The system needs to make allowances for personalities involved and try to match children with a home, instead of just finding a placement quick.
- o I don't think I would have become a foster parent again. I would like to go a step further. I would like to help the foster children and the foster parents. They need someone to listen when they have a problem, not someone that will be back in the office next week. Another big reason for getting done as a foster parent is the kind of foster homes that are being used. Foster children have enough problems without being placed in a troubled foster home. Please try and check on your children and homes more often.
- o Be honest and straight with us. A trust has been broken that will take a lot of healing. Probably would not be able to consider the program again. Our interests and involvements make it impractical for us to consider.
- o Instruct their social workers to get a better understanding of laws pertaining to licensing. It's unfair to ask a person to surrender a license, then reduce the amount of payment, because the home is not licensed. The Department of Mental Retardation in Lewiston did this with us then would not make other placements with us because we were not able to obtain an adult license. The reason we could not get the adult license was because we had minor children. The social worker, should have known what he was doing, and probably did, but was not concerned with anyone except his "client".
- o If we could take a girl, as we miss the one we lost.
- o Change attitude. Apologize for attitude.

Question #9: Any additional comments?

- o I am (deep down) grateful that so many DHS workers do so much for the help of our little ones.
- o Today's children are hard to handle when they are your own. Someone else's make it impossible to arouse interest.
- o Never place family members with relatives. Too much interference.
- o We had good support from our DHS worker. We greatly appreciated her perception of situations and quick understanding in difficult problems.
- o I think that all foster children should be prepared better for being dropped of all support at 18 or graduating from high school. It's a big world out there and you say, go provide. What then?
- o Most of all of the DHS workers were very helpful; sometimes they don't know any more about the child placed than we did but were helpful anyway.
- o We are retiring to Florida in two weeks. Hope these few statements may be helpful to someone else.
- o I am working part time and attending USM in Gorham. I don't feel that I have the time to devote to more children. It wouldn't be fair to them. I used to be at home full time.
- o I am not one of the foster parents who no longer wish to serve. I have been quite happy serving as a foster parent and hope to continue to serve in the future. It has been a pleasure having this foster child in our home.
- o We would still like to be foster parents.
- o Instead of giving more money to foster parents, why not use it to get more social workers, and train them, so we can all work together for the child.
- o We became foster parents to two boys who were in the process of being freed for adoption. We accepted the legal-risk placement to adopt the boys when they became legally free to adopt.
- o I was a foster parent for the Maine Children's home 1970-72. Then had children of my own. Tried to be a foster parent again but was financial unstable. May try again.
- o I was very happy with the help and understanding of the DHS workers.
- o I think more people would open their homes if they were aware of the program.

- o We loved our foster children more than anyone else did and we lived in fear of losing them.
- o If you had help with child of any age. I didn't get that from the case worker in Bangor. What your feelings are didn't matter.
- o We're very sorry it has come to this (being burnt out).
- o Prior to moving the Maine, 1981, we were foster parents in Massachusetts. We had 2 girls, ages 6 & 11 years. The social worker was visiting them every week, left her telephone number at work and home and was always there when needed. The department was very supportive. The social worker took them to appointments if needed. We even went to family counseling with the girls. Our Massachusetts homefinder gave our reference for our application here in Maine. We really didn't see why we had to go through things all over again when we already had been licensed in Massachusetts.
- o We really are interested in adoption of a toddler, 1-3 years of age.
- o We are glad to hear from you. We had no problems with the State. We would like to be licensed again. We had one girl 11 years. She still comes home. We tried getting licensed a year ago. They gave us the run around.
- o For all the time we were foster parents we asked for girls between 3-12 and never had any. All we had was boys.
- o I am thinking about continuing now that we are settled down.
- o We would have continued but they only wanted to place teenagers with us. Two or three younger children would have been much easier for us older folks than today's teens.
- o I was a foster mother for 14 years and had 65 children in that time. I loved it but with lack of trust and communication and more money and help I had to let go.
- o I enjoyed very much being a foster parent but I couldn't do it right now because I have to work so many hours.
- o In the years of our fostering a child we were very pleased with our relationship with Human Services. All of our social workers were so nice to our foster child, helping her in several areas and they still are trying to help as much as they can towards a college degree. She is going to UMO, second year.
- o My husband and I are too old to continue our services.

- o I love kids but I think they're better off and I'm better off if they go somewhere else. I'm just an awfully clean person, and I do not think my kind made good foster parents. However, I'm a big brother and me and that kid have got along well until he grew up and is out on his own. I had him 5 years. I think your people do a great job and you all have my support. If I can help in any other way, let me know.
- o Children really need to feel belonged, even more so in today's conditions. I never met the foster children before they came into our home. One day they showed up. The social (worker) put all their belongings on my kitchen floor, said he had to go and he'd call. That's no way to deal with foster children.
- o Lack of close contact with social workers when having problems (behavior) with children. Make you feel guilty for calling them, like you were responsible for their problems.
- o Not enough support for the foster parents' real children. They should talk to social worker also.
- o I don't have the time or writing stamina to write everything I feel or that has happened to my family since we were foster parents or how we feel now.
- o We would be delighted to hear your response by phone or mail.
- o I may look at the program all wrong. But from my experience with most parents of these poor children it's not worth the time to work with them. The children would be better off adopted, the younger the better. I know many people who would take these children permanently.
- o Our other foster child came to us at 12 years. She was to be adopted within the Department system. Nothing materialized! We finally did adopt her at the age of 18. She has just given my wife a mother's ring and has one for her sister, our natural daughter. She is getting married in August and is now 19 1/2 years old and working after graduation.
- o We have adopted a daughter who is now 13. We took her in at age 3 days old. She is someone to be proud of.
- o I found the staff extremely helpful and understanding.
- o I will never understand why we were such good foster parents and could not be considered as adoptive parents. We were complimented often, but never allowed to adopt.
- o Information on what is available and what it pays.
- o I feel that some rules are too strict.

- o It was child growing up and becoming very hostile and hard to handle. Not DHS fault.
- o Before DHS gives a license it might be a good idea to go to a few of the neighbors (at least 4 homes) and ask them what kind of family this is. Would they make good foster parents, etc. We knew a few had homes that could have been prevented had they been checked properly.
- o Problems are inherent in the system. Too little real concern for children, too much on natural parents. Many of those kids should be made adoptable a lot younger, especially when odds are great that natural parents will never be capable.
- o I think that new foster parents should not start out with real difficult children.
- o State DHS says both husband and wife have to attend training meetings. My husband and I were foster parents for almost 3 years. We feel we had "on the job training" and should have credit for that, meaning DHS should not make the training meetings so difficult to become foster parents again.
- o Prefer a child awarded to the courts so that we may adopt if possible.
- o If any adolescent wants to continue in foster care and he/she has a severe problem, such as substance abuse, problems with the law, emotional disturbance, etc., a therapeutic situation should be mandatory not optional.
- o I work in Massachusetts as a social worker and know it can be very difficult to find good placements for children. I was very surprised that we had so little contact from DHS and not given possible choices about placement.
- o We took a foster child for adoption but didn't work out as child had many problems and would not attempt to become compatible with another child in the home.
- o The only comment is that I don't think the courts of the state are being fair to the foster parent in allowing the natural parent of any child to come in to the home where the child is and take over.
- o In the future I may want to be a foster parent. I will keep in touch.
- o Add the responsibility of checking the dwelling for licensing to the duties of the caseworkers. This would guarantee at least one contact a year without a crisis to deal with. It would also trim DHS salary budget.



- o If the family is to open their lives to a child, it is not for the money. However, if the facts are not made known, the method of dealing with a child is sure to be wrong. Parents, especially foster parents, with other children in the home need the facts!
- o It's too bad you waited until you were desperate before you sent this out. My children are grown, I am a babysitter and no longer interested in foster care at this time.
- o Reapplied for license in late '82, early '83 and the process took so long that in the meantime we had a chance to take a boarder (former foster child) and because no one pushed to get a license through, we neglected the idea.
- o Our foster child is almost 20 years old. She realizes now that we were not all wrong. She is still our daughter in every way. I think maybe you should talk to foster children who are now young adults.

The single biggest problem we had was the attitude of the social worker. We had quite a few different ones.

It seems when we had one that was for only the child, not the whole family circle, it gives the child something to threaten the parents. I realize the state must see these children, but you should maybe screen the foster parents better in the beginning and let us do our job and raise them as we do our own.

All in all she brought us many years of love. We feel she is quite a young lady today due to our love and hard work. She will always be a special part of our family.

- o I resent that because I make barely sufficient living and am not eligible for food stamps, my kids go without if I help someone else. The hassle is cruel.
- o I hope I helped as much as I could. I feel it can be a rewarding thing, but it's also a heart break and can be expensive as the child I had destroyed two walls in our home. I raised four of my own and never had to replace so much.
- o If any way possible, I'll do it again.
- o Try to keep one social worker with the children, if they are liked and trusted by the children.
- o Legal-risk, pre-adoptive placement foster care is very much a commitment and scary with the loss of the child.
- o If a DHS worker is considering returning children home, the foster parents should be forewarned - the home (natural home) situation should be thoroughly investigated to make sure foster children are really wanted.

- o The laws are so restrictive! A state trooper finds a 5 year old girl alone in a shack at 11:00 in the evening - had the Orono barracks call the emergency number -- guy says he'll call someone else and call back -- doesn't call back -- the barracks calls him again -- he can't reach whomever he had tried -- can't help. Meanwhile, the grandfather and uncle tell the trooper the girl is left alone regularly -- the Department isn't there for people. I'm not just sounding off -- my husband is a state trooper sergeant and there are many such stories!
- o The DHS workers do not give any history of the child's problems. they do not tell you the truth. They color a pretty picture and the foster parents have to learn the hard way!
- o I don't think they are correct in assuming that just because you adopted the children, it takes them a year to adjust. Most of the foster kids you adopt are already part of the family.
- o It's not the children and their problems. It's all the stuff you have to go through to become foster parents. And it takes so long. Not that it's anything to hide. Can it be done any faster? We know some people have to be checked and it's good and safety for the children.
- o Our foster parenting ended because of several problems. One very major problem was twice being investigated by DHS from complaints from crackpots - we understood this, but we weren't even told we were being investigated the first time! Also we feel after living with a child several weeks or months we have a lot of input -- they won't listen to this.
- o People that want to be foster parents, genuine loving and warm people, are turned down because of not being able to provide individual rooms. The whole concept as advertised is anyone who would like to care for these children to contact the department. It doesn't say the rich please contact others forget it. The people that contact the department that have a child of their own and still would like to take a child but has only one bedroom should at least be able to provide temporary care. Many people would serve, but it doesn't take much to put them up. Obviously, the people who get involved are the middle class range. They have the money to keep the children fed, bathed and happy by doing special things, but if they have to put money into getting a special bedroom then obviously the money can become important.
- o Only problem was the age of the child. At 16 to 17 he was not allowed to get a drivers license and at 18 he was expected to be independent and self-supportive and the whole responsibility was dumped on me. DHS washed their hands financially and emotionally.
- o I would be willing to help talk to a group of people interested in becoming foster parents and tell them how we helped mold a 12 year old into a 19 year old fine young man.
- o Fortunately, the people involved no longer work for you.

- o Not really.
- o We find DHS not prepared and will not suggest DHS to anyone for adoption.
- o We never passed the home inspection for a license. It would have cost about \$1,000 to fix the wiring and furnace, plus.
- o We have acted as emergency placement for 2 years. We have a placement now and will continue to act on emergency basis.
- o The reason we could not be foster parents is that we are both sick with cancer. We are hardly able to look after ourselves. Sorry.
- o July 14, 1984 -- To Whom It May Concern:

In 1981 I was being considered by the Human Services as foster care for my grandson in custody of the State of Kansas. I was approached by Maine Human Services. They did a home study and my landlord updated some of my apartment. I bought the fire extinguisher and smoke alarm. I passed on all counts. The hearing was scheduled for April 1982. They returned my grandson to his mother, my daughter. They went to Germany, January 17, 1984, to join her husband until June 1985. I therefore was not a foster parent, but when I called the office yesterday the receptionist said you would be interested in the above facts.

- o We only became a foster parent to take a grandson. He wasn't happy with us so we weren't happy with him. He really has a problem.
- o Dear Sir:

For over ten year we dedicated our life, time and effort in caring and parenting foster children in our home. Last September we were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to adopt one of our foster children that we had in our home since the age of 2 1/2. We have decided to dedicate the next several years to our children. We are not saying Never but at this time we need some time with our own. We want to thank each and every case worker that we dealt with over the last ten years. We were always very pleased with the DHS. They helped in every which way they could. We did foster parenting only because we cared for the upbringing of the children and not for the pay.

- o I am no longer a foster parent because the child was returned to mother. We had the child 11 months, only 2 months of money. The Welfare removed the child from the home but we never got help until 2 months before she left.
- o We needed home repairs to satisfy fire inspector and did not have the money at the time to complete them. We have done some at this time. (It was something like \$2,500.)

- o I'd be happy to talk about this. I'm very interested in foster care reform since our own experience!
- o Social worker and state work more with the parents than the children. You want us to give them a natural home environment, yet, we have parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles coming to visit and wanting to take the children out. They come drunk, swear at you and show no respect. Is that a natural home life? What about what we put our natural children through? Why do they have to be subjected to that? These foster children's relatives are strangers to us. There is no healthy environment with that kind of people. These foster children's relatives are strangers to us. There is no healthy environment with that kind of people. These people fill the foster children with lies in about one hour and it takes us weeks to get them back on the right track. We are supposed to treat the foster children equal. But their relatives shower them with goodies while our children are forgotten. How do we make that up to our children? What's fair?
- o I would be interested to know what happened from DHS perspective as to why no placement was every made. Were our original requests too restrictive? Were there few placements made?
- o I truly think if a foster parent is going to do anything good with the children the natural parents should not be able to come into the home and upset everything the foster parent has done. I can't understand how this is with the state and courts but if a child is taken away from its parent for abuse in any way I can't understand why it is so easy for the parents and so hard on the foster parent. I don't think the parents should know where in the state or what school they go to as they can pick them up and the foster parent is home waiting for the child to come home and starts to worry where is the child. I have an idea if the courts and state change the laws so that the foster parent has a child and the natural parents are not able to find out where they are, there will be a lot more people that would open their homes to these children.
- o Dear Sir:

We are writing this in regards to our Foster Care License which we have had for five years. Just recently we decided to give it up and this is why. Our first child came into our home was 10 and he stayed for five years. We spent a great deal of time and effort with him. Helping him in school work, caring and loving him as if he was our own. There was nothing we would not have done for him. But when he reached 15 he wanted to go home and live. This was always his dream. Instead they could not handle him and his mother and father told him that they could take care of him. He was then placed in another home. Did not work out either.

Then we had two more children, difficult to handle. They did not stay. Then a worker came to our house to investigate why the children were not staying. She seems to think that we are too strict. But to us we are not. When we punish the children it is for their own good. What is the sense to take in children and give them a good home, love responsibility and teach them right from wrong, if you got someone telling you that you are too strict. They are not with these children long enough to know their behavior. When they do see them it is only for an hour or so and then they are on their best behavior. Some of the social workers do not have any children and are not married. And we don't believe that they could have done any better than we did.

I also have a Home Day Care license and take care of seven children during the day. Ages 1 1/2 to 12. I am sure any one of these parents would tell you if they were not satisfied.

When a worker came to our home she stated that she would not be placing any more children. She felt that with my day care and my husband's condition that it was plenty. I then told her that she might as well take my license with her with that attitude of not bringing any more children in our home. I also told her that we loved your children just as much as she did (if not more). She then told us to hold onto our license for the child we had. But the more I thought of it the more we got upset. If one child is good for the home why not another. The social workers knew that we would have liked to have a small child 3 or 6 in the Saco area. I also knew if the other child came back he would not stay long because he had 4 months of freedom. Doing what he wanted. And he would not take orders from no one. As far as my husband's condition, he is doing good. Also my license does not run out until August 10, 1984. The only way we would renew is if we could have a child one to 5. Even though I do have a Home Day license, what difference does that make?

- o After working as a foster parent within the current system for fifteen years (if hours were equal, this would amount to a little over 65 years of social working service), I feel that I have collected some constructive ideas that would revolutionize its productivity bringing it from the present to an extremely progressive and productive endeavor. The hit or miss foster parent training or more exactly, lack of training, is not deterring the rapid decline in the current system and many talented people are dropping by the wayside. Eventually, no amount of dollars is likely to resuscitate it. Abuses within the system are daily material for the media nation wide. At one time our social programs were supplemental to strong "hands on" civic responsibility and pride: Mr. and Mrs. "Little House on the Prairie" can no longer take in "just one more". Thus we have an ever growing number of elderly, mentally retarded, developmentally handicapped, abused and neglected children all requiring services that currently

exceed the limitations of the current system. Bold changes must be forthcoming within the next few years starting with a special unit in the Department of Education. Implementation of a carefully constructed renovative program could well save enormous amounts of money, not to mention the incredible upgrading of the social product. Through careful integration of existing state services a totally new public concept of "Professional Parenting" could be created. We have within our state a large unutilized human resource; the good foster parent and potential foster parent. I have a plan whereby "Professional Parenting" can be upgraded from its current form of glorified babysitting to highly specialized, well respected profession. Until it has achieved this status it will continue to attract less than competent people, require extensive screening and monitoring with the really talented people seeking more lucrative and dignified occupations elsewhere. An upgrading of foster parenthood will ultimately reflect on the quality of the product and instead of the foster child producing foster children as if genetically directed, we will eventually see a reduction of sheer numbers requiring services. We will no longer be faced with the teenager who has been in foster care most of his life and now presents himself negatively to us as a young adult with costly anti-social behavioral dysfunctions. His reconstruction can begin the moment he enters foster care and by the time he has reached his teens, while early damage cannot always be entirely removed, it will not have been added to, and he will have learned to deal with it in an acceptable manner. A review of our penal system shows that we have been unsuccessful to date. Professionalizing foster parenting will attract greater numbers of highly motivated, talented people who currently stay away from the system because they find it intimidating, demeaning, ambivalent, and they are unable to call it a profession no matter how many years of service they render nor how many small miracles they have wrought. School teachers are under relatively close scrutiny and must possess at least one degree; yet they only see the child (in a group) for less than twelve percent of the year. A foster parent, on the other hand, sees the child the remaining eighty eight percent. Less than a hundred years ago, if you had a tooth ache you went to the barber and between haircuts he'd pull your tooth. As public demands required, a new profession was born, complete with degree, Dentistry. Out of that basic profession grew many more such as Pedodontics, Periodontics, Prosthodontics, Endodontics, Orthodontics, etc. In every civilized society there must be a continual upgrading of services provided to its people and professionalism must be encouraged. My methods of bringing these changes about could work well within existing structure with only a small administrative staff. As an adjunct to current administrative systems the new PROFESSIONAL PARENT could well be instrumental in the decline of the ever increasing need for new and increased social services. Unfortunately, due to the current system, I cannot produce credentials in this area and have to consider my years spent in the profession as a professional loss. Otherwise right now I would be happiest working towards the plan I have roughly outlined to you.