

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Non-Aboriginal Foster Parents
In Providing Care for Children from Remote First Nations Communities

by

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Abstract

There is research to support the existence of an over representation of Aboriginal children in the care of child and family services agencies in Manitoba. This issue presents many challenges in providing culturally appropriate foster care in order to promote the well-being and self-identity of Aboriginal children in care. The majority of these children are placed in non-Aboriginal foster homes. This study explored the experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents in order to better understand their experiences and the services and supports necessary in providing culturally appropriate care to children from remote First Nations communities. A qualitative research design based on a phenomenological approach was utilized. Significant themes that emerged through the study were the foster parents' motivations to foster and the challenges they face. Other significant themes are their perceptions of the services and supports available to them, and future resources that would assist them to provide care to children from remote First Nations communities. The results of the study indicate that the non-Aboriginal foster parents were culturally receptive and willing to provide culturally sensitive care to children from remote First Nations communities.

The study results suggest that there needs to be further research exploring the motivations, roles, and responsibilities of foster care providers. By gaining a better understanding of their motivations, perceived roles and responsibilities, foster care agencies may be better informed when designing recruitment, retention strategies, and training for foster care providers in cross cultural foster care.

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Chapter 1- Purpose of the Research

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research was to provide a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents, in providing care for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. This research explored the perspectives of non-Aboriginal foster parents in order to better understand their experiences, and the supports and services necessary, to provide culturally sensitive care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. An over-representation of Aboriginal children in care of child and family services agencies presents many challenges in providing culturally appropriate foster care in order to promote the well-being, and self-identity of Aboriginal children in care. “First Nations children have been dramatically over-represented in the Canadian child welfare system for more than 50 years” (Blackstock, 2009, p. 1). “Across Canada, it is estimated that 40% of children in care are Aboriginal, but make up less than 17% of the general population” (Brown, St. Arnault, George & Sintzel, 2009, p. 104).

For the purpose of this research, several terms relating to an individual’s cultural heritage require definition. The term Aboriginal, “is a collective name for all of the original peoples of Canada and their descendants. The Constitution Act of 1982 specifies that the Aboriginal People in Canada consist of three groups-Indians, Inuit and Métis” (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2013, p. 1). The term “First Nation(s)”, came into common use in the 1970s. Many communities have also replaced “band” with “First Nation” in their names. Despite its widespread use, there is no legal definition for this term in Canada” (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2013, p. 1).

In this research study the term Aboriginal is used primarily to identify the children and families of Aboriginal descent. The term First Nations is used to identify the remote communities of origin. The term non-Aboriginal has been used to refer to the individuals who do not have Aboriginal heritage.

There is evidence in the literature to support that placement with an Aboriginal family and home would be the most culturally appropriate placement for an Aboriginal child. However, when this is not possible, the reality is cross-cultural placements. According to Daniel (2011) “transcultural foster placements are on the rise. Addressing racial and cultural diversities within the context of transcultural foster placements is one of the most pressing dilemmas of contemporary child protection practice in Canada” (p. 2230). Findings from this study are intended to help develop support and services to promote culturally sensitive fostering of Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

A qualitative research design based on a phenomenological approach was used. The focus was on a diverse population of caregivers in order to provide an opportunity for them to voice their experiences and challenges. This exploration provides information for child and family services agencies regarding implementing supports and programs through which foster parents may be better prepared to provide culturally appropriate foster care to Aboriginal children and may encourage recruitment and retention of foster homes.

Overview of the Problem

There is a historical, as well as current, over representation of Aboriginal children in Manitoba receiving foster care. According to Ivanova and Brown (2011) “factors that

contribute to the over representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and underrepresentation of Aboriginal adults as foster parents include disease and confinement, residential schools and the 60's scoop" (p. 279). It is evident that there is a long history of this problem rooted in the past experiences and impact of Canada's colonial history with Aboriginal people. These experiences include the residential school system and the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their homes. According to the *Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission* (2001) "the experience of residential schools is one shared by many Aboriginal people all across Canada. That experience was marked by emotional, physical and sexual abuse, social and spiritual deprivation, and substandard education" (p. 6). In Manitoba, the child welfare system 'protected' many Aboriginal children by taking them away from their families. This came to be known as the 'Sixties Scoop', but continued into the 1980s (The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001). These experiences caused a negative impact by detaching these children from their community, culture, language and traditions. According to McKenzie and Morrissette (2003):

The devaluation of Indigenous people is a particularly significant characteristic of the colonial relationship, and in the child welfare system little attention was paid to the ways in which Aboriginal communities had traditionally handled child-care problems. The result was the denial of kinship care patterns and the removal of almost all Aboriginal children to cross-cultural foster and adoptive homes within the dominant society (p. 255).

Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock (2004) point out "this overrepresentation in out-of-home placement is explained statistically by socioeconomic, child, parent and maltreatment

characteristics. These factors may reflect the multiple disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal families” (p. 577). The literature supports placing these children in Aboriginal foster homes. However, the reality is that the majority of these children are placed in non-Aboriginal homes. According to Brown, George, Sintzel and St. Arnault (2009) “a search of the literature on culture and fostering revealed that some benefits to cultural matching in placement includes shared experiences, similar beliefs, practical benefits as well as continuity in care” (p. 1019). According to McKenzie and Morrisette (2003) “despite the evolution of First Nations control over child welfare services on reserves, and the growth of Aboriginal foster homes, including extended family caregivers, many of these children are still placed in non-Aboriginal foster and residential care facilities” (p. 253). According to Blackstock (as cited in Trocmé, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004) “the number of Aboriginal children placed in out-of-home care continues to rise. In fact, more Aboriginal children are placed in out-of-home care today than in residential schools at the height of the residential school movement” (p.579). Brown, Sintzel, George and St. Arnault (2010) point out “the most direct way to promote cultural continuity in fostering is to promote cultural matching in placements. In Canada, recruitment and retention efforts targeting Aboriginal foster parents are needed” (p. 283).

The problem of the current over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system is compounded by the lack of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster homes. Adequate resources and support are necessary in order to increase foster parent retention. Lutz (as cited in Christenson, 2009) indicates that “60% of foster families withdraw from providing services due to a lack of agency responsiveness and support,

inadequate respite care, disrespect for foster families as members of the professional team, and the inability to give input regarding agency services and training” (p. 4).

This study was intended to research foster parents’ experiences and addresses the issues being presented. According to Brown et al. (2009) “a better understanding of the challenges that foster parents experience may be used to promote retention and satisfaction as well as the well-being of foster children in transcultural placements” (p.105). By exploring the experiences of foster parents, child and family services can gain information shared by the participants regarding their experiences of caring for children from remote First Nations communities. Conducting a qualitative study on foster parents’ experiences allows valuable insight regarding the challenges and issues present for foster parents caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. This study may provide data to child and family services, for exploring relevant recruitment, training, support and retention of foster parents.

Summary

This chapter presented the purpose of the study and described the overview of the problem. The issues of the over-representation of First Nations children in the child welfare system as well as the lack of foster homes were outlined. The key terms that are relevant to this study were defined. The significance of the study was discussed. The following chapter will provide a literature review relevant to the study.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature relating to this study, and includes a discussion of the problem of the over representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. This includes: a historical overview of the child welfare system in Manitoba; the residential school system; the sixties scoop; Aboriginal world views of children; best interest of the child concept; kinship care; challenges and controversies of cross-cultural fostering and; the theoretical perspective of attachment theory. Secondly, the problem of the over representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system is compounded by the lack of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foster homes. The problem of the lack of foster parents will be discussed in the literature review and includes: recruitment and retention of foster parents and the need for foster parent training.

Historical Overview of the Child Welfare System

It is relevant to this research to review the history of colonization of Aboriginal people in Canada as it has negatively impacted the relationship of Aboriginal people with the child welfare system. Negative experiences of the past have affected the relationship with Aboriginal people in Canada today. The literature review will provide an examination of the historical background and the impact of Canada's colonial history with Aboriginal people. The historical overview will include a discussion of the colonization process of residential schools as well as the assimilation of Aboriginal people through the sixties scoop and the child welfare system in Manitoba.

The residential school system. Beginning in the late 1800s, the Canadian government set policies and delegated religious organizations and churches to “civilizing” and “educating” Aboriginal children in residential schools far from reserves.

The residential school system was an attempt to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society, forcing children away from their languages, cultures, and societies. The implementation of the residential school system has had devastating effects on Aboriginal people and communities. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001). The residential school system removed Aboriginal children from their homes and communities and they were not allowed to speak their own language or practice their customs and beliefs. According to Sinclair, Bala, Lilles, and Blackstock (2004):

It is now clear that such removal of children from their families and communities was often a highly destructive emotional experience, and that the devaluation of the children's culture and heritage which occurred in such institutions had a very negative effect on their self-esteem (p. 204).

The children that attended the residential schools not only lost their language, culture, beliefs and heritage, but also experienced an absence of parenting, role models, and a sense of family that contributed to a generational loss of parenting ability. According to Bennett and Blackstock (as cited in Trocmé et al., 2004) "Children in residential schools did not encounter healthy parental role models and, as adults, frequently had diminished capacity to care for their own children" (p. 578). This process of colonization and assimilation has affected generations of Aboriginal people. The federal government began to phase out the residential school system through the 1950s although the last residential school did not close until the 1990s.

The negative effects of the residential school system are still present today as seen in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Through the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, survivors of the residential schools experience

can share their painful and emotional truths. According to Justice Murray Sinclair (as cited in *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2011):

And in the end we will ensure that the whole world hears their truths and truth about residential schools so that the future generations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians will be able to hold to the statement that resonates with all of us: This must never happen again (p.3).

Aboriginal communities continue to be impacted by the over representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. This can be traced back to colonialism and assimilation practices such as the residential schools as well as the child welfare system.

The child welfare system. The history of Manitoba's child welfare system dates back to 1887. The Children's Aid Society was established in 1898 and in 1922 the first *Child Welfare Act* was formally introduced. Prior to the mid 1950s, the child welfare system had a limited impact on Aboriginal people. This changed with the migration of Aboriginal people into southern and urban areas and the expansion of the north. All the reserves were a federal responsibility and the provincial child welfare system was not mandated to operate on the reserves. In 1951, the federal government amended the Indian Act (section 88) to allow "all laws of general application... in force in any province" to apply to Indian reserves, but did not provide any funding for providing these services. The result was a patchwork of provincial child welfare services to reserves. Provincial officials were reluctant to intervene except in "life or death" situations. Children in need of alternate care were either placed with another family on the reserve or were sent to a residential school. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

During the 1960s, the living conditions on reserves gained public and political attention. This resulted in the federal government signing a cost-sharing agreement with the provincial government to provide child welfare services to Aboriginal people on reserves. This expansion of child welfare to Aboriginal communities negatively impacted Aboriginal communities. The apprehension of Aboriginal children became the standard operating procedure by the child welfare system. Child welfare workers assumed they were “protecting” Aboriginal children and “acting in the best interests of the child” by taking them away from their families, communities and culture and placing them for adoption with non-Aboriginal families. This came to be known as the “Sixties Scoop” but continued into the 1980s. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001). The sixties scoop illustrates further devastating impacts on Aboriginal children, families and communities. Across Canada, Aboriginal children were taken from their families and communities and placed with non-Aboriginal middle class white families. The impact of the sixties scoop is evident in the literature. In a review of the child welfare system in Manitoba, Bourassa (2010) points out:

The practice of mass removal and placement with non -Aboriginal families continued into the 1980’s. In Manitoba, over 3,400 Aboriginal children were removed from their homes between the years 1971 and 1980. Aboriginal homes and communities were deemed unfit and as such practice of assimilation continued not under the educational system as it had with previous residential school policies but rather under the child welfare system (p.16).

The “sixties scoop” under the child welfare system is an example of the assimilation of Aboriginal people that affected their identity, traditions, beliefs and the loss of parental

skills that is still affecting Aboriginal people and their communities today. This left a profound and negative impact on the Aboriginal communities and led Aboriginal communities to put pressure on the government to stop the widespread removal of adopting Aboriginal children. In 1982 the government ordered a stop to all out of province adoptions of Aboriginal children. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

In the 1970s, in recognition of the serious problems in delivering child welfare services to Aboriginal people, a tripartite committee was established to examine Aboriginal child welfare. This committee included the representation of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood and the federal and provincial governments. The Indian Child Welfare Sub-Committee, as it became known, called for reforms and established the principle that Aboriginal people must be involved at all levels and in all aspects of child welfare services. This committee recommended the development of regional child welfare agencies for First Nation's reserves controlled by band chiefs and council that operated under the existing provincial welfare legislation. Recommendations were made to improve child welfare service delivery to Aboriginal people. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

The 1980s had significant initiatives and changes to the child welfare system in Manitoba. In 1981, Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council signed agreements with the federal and provincial governments transferring child welfare services from the non-Aboriginal agencies that served eight First Nation's bands within the Tribal Council's territory. In 1981 Dakota Ojibway Child and Family Services (DOCFS) became the first mandated Aboriginal child welfare agency in Canada. In 1982, a tripartite agreement was signed

between First Nations Confederacy and the federal and provincial governments, which was referred to as the “Master Agreement”. The Master Agreement outlined the obligations and responsibilities of the various parties, established guiding principles for the operation of Aboriginal services and specified the way in which these agencies are funded. Since the signing of the Master Agreement, there were several Aboriginal child welfare agencies established within the province of Manitoba. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

In 1985, the Manitoba government appointed Chief Judge Edwin C. Kimelman to head an inquiry into the child welfare system that concluded that the system was guilty of “cultural genocide”. Judge Kimelman recommended changes to Manitoba’s child welfare legislation to include “best interests” which would include “the child’s cultural and linguistic heritage” within the 1985 *Child and Family Services Act*. Judge Kimelman advocated for a change in the child welfare system in Manitoba including: standards, resources, support and services to Aboriginal children and families. He also stressed the importance of placement in extended family, cultural awareness, education and also that the province create Aboriginal child welfare agencies. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001).

In 1999, The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry- Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) was created. The overall goal of the (AJI- CWI) was for Aboriginal and Métis families to have improved and culturally appropriate child welfare services. (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 2001). The (AJI -CWI) was a significant initiative to restructure the child welfare system in Manitoba. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry- Child Welfare Initiative (AJI -CWI) (2001):

Is a joint initiative of the Manitoba Métis Federation, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, and the Province of Manitoba to restructure the child and family services system in Manitoba. (AJI-CWI, 2001, p.3).

The vision statement of the (AJI-CWI) is:

A child and family services system that recognized and supports the rights of children to develop within safe and healthy families and communities, and recognizes that Aboriginal and Métis people have unique authority, rights, and responsibilities to honour and care for their children (AJI-CWI, 2001, p.10).

The mission statement:

To have a jointly coordinated child and family services system that recognizes the distinct rights and authorities of Aboriginal and Métis peoples and the general population to control and deliver their own child and family services province-wide; that is community-based; and reflects and incorporates the cultures of Aboriginal, Métis and the general population respectively (AJI-CWI, 2001, p. 10).

Despite all the changes, initiatives and reforms to the child welfare system over the last several decades, Aboriginal children continue to be overrepresented in the current child welfare system. Although there have been some positive outcomes in (AJI-CWI) transfer of care to Aboriginal agencies to offer more culturally appropriate services.

There still remain challenges as documented in the literature. Bourassa (2010) points out:

Aboriginal agencies still experience high staff turnover due to increasing workloads and lack of support systems; funding for staff training and caseloads are insufficient; federal and provincial jurisdictional issues for First Nations

agencies continue to be a major concern; poverty, addictions, lack of affordable housing and funding inequities continue to be overriding issues that affect communities and the process is seen as imposed rather than consultative (p. 47).

The many challenges and issues that face Aboriginal families and children in care are far beyond the child welfare system. Many disadvantages of the Aboriginal communities include: poverty, lack of housing, addictions, lack of resources and require a preventative approach to strengthen and preserve families and communities.

Best Interests of the Child

The problem of the over-representation of First Nations children in care raises many questions in regards to the current child welfare system and the concept of the best interest of the child. The best interest of the child concept is relevant to this research in regards to the child's best interest in providing continuity of culturally appropriate care when the child is in need of protection.

Child welfare statutes in Canada have a statement of principles that is intended to guide the courts and child welfare agencies in the implementation of the law and a definition of 'best interests' that requires consideration of a number of listed factors when making a decision about a child, such as the decision that a court is to make if a child is found to be in the need of protection. There is some overlap with the direction provided by the declaration of principles and the definitions of the best interests of the child are: respect for the family and support of families, continuity of care, consideration of views of children, the paramountcy of the protection of children from harm. (Bala, 2004, pp.16-17)

These principles demonstrate the importance of continuity of care for children, a

preference for children continuing to remain with their own family, community and if necessary a stable foster or adoptive family. In regards to best interest of the child concept, it is not easily defined. According to Bernstein and Reitmeier (2004):

Using this phrase has great political and symbolic appeal, but in practice it tends to give decision-makers a significant amount of discretion. Child protection legislation in most jurisdictions makes reference to the following factors as constituting the ‘best interests’ of the child: the child’s level of development and needs, and the appropriate care to meet them; the child’s cultural and religious background or ties; the child’s family relationships; the importance of continuity for the child and the effect of disruption of that continuity; and the child’s wishes (p. 89).

In Manitoba, *The Child and Family Services Act* (1985) outlines the considerations regarding best interest of the child which states “The best interest in the child shall be the paramount consideration of the director, an authority, the children’s advocate, an agency and a court in all proceedings under this act affecting a child, other than proceedings to determine whether a child is in need of protection, and determining the best interests of the child all relevant matters shall be considered, including

- (a) The child’s opportunity to have a parent-child relationship as a wanted and needed member within a family structure;
- (b) The mental, emotional, physical and educational needs of the child and the appropriate care or treatment, or both, to meet such needs;
- (c) The child’s mental, emotional and physical stage of development;

- (d) The child's sense of continuity and need for permanency with the least possible disruption;
- (e) The merits and the risks of any plan proposed by the agency that would be caring for the child compared with the merits and the risks of the child returning to or remaining within the family;
- (f) The views and preferences of the child where they can reasonably be ascertained;
- (g) The effect upon the child of any delay in the final disposition of the proceedings; and
- (h) The child's cultural, linguistic, racial and religious heritage (section [2]1).

The best interest of the child concept has been criticized in the literature regarding the definition itself as to what is the best interest of the child. In the document *Best Interests of the Child* (2009) by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children argue that "the vagueness and lack of precise definition of the best interest of the child can allow manipulation by those with power to decide and impose what they think is in the best interests of children" (p. 8). In regards to the best interest of the child for Aboriginal children there remains controversy regarding the importance of preserving the child's Aboriginal heritage and cultural identity. Kline (1992) presents "best interest of the child ideology manifests the basic tenets of liberal ideology. In child welfare cases, this has served to portray the apprehension and placement of First Nations children away from their families and communities as natural, necessary and legitimate, rather than coercive and destructive" (p. 423). This has caused devastating effects on First Nations communities as seen in the residential school and the child welfare system. In the

document *Best Interests of the Child* (2009) by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children states “Canadians will never forget that the best interest of the child was used at one time to justify taking Aboriginal children from their parents and placing them in residential schools” (p.9). Kline argues that “child welfare law has become a new modality of colonialist regulation of First Nations in the post second world war period” (pp. 423-424).

In considering the best interest in the child concept with Aboriginal children, cultural heritage is an important factor regarding placement decisions for Aboriginal children. Sinclair et al. (2004) point out “there is now widespread agreement that if the parents of an Aboriginal child cannot adequately care for a child, there should be a preference for placing the child with members of the child’s extended family or with other members of the child’s community” (p. 233). This view is relevant to this research and is acknowledged in the problem statement and purpose of this research. While this research study is congruent with this view, the problem is compounded by the lack of Aboriginal and kinship foster families and homes. This underrepresentation of Aboriginal foster homes has necessitated the placements of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes. This research study addresses what are the best interests of the child when placed in a non-Aboriginal home to provide culturally appropriate care to maintain cultural self-identity and connections to their cultural heritage.

Aboriginal Worldview of Children

A discussion of the Aboriginal worldview of children is relevant to this research study in regards to cross cultural foster placements and the differences of Aboriginal worldview with that of the Euro-Canadian world view. These differences in worldviews

are important to acknowledge as there have been conflicting cultural issues regarding children and child rearing practices dating back to past history of colonization and assimilation practices and policies such as the residential school system, the sixties scoop as well as the current overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. According to Sinclair et al. (2004) “children are gifts from the Creator and are nurtured within flexible and extensive extended family systems” (p. 207). This Aboriginal world view of children, family relationships and child-rearing differs from non-Aboriginal world views and may result in cultural conflict regarding child rearing practices. Sinclair et al. (2004) point out one difference “Aboriginal parents respect their child’s individuality and allow the child greater freedom to develop naturally, whereas non-Aboriginal parents tend to direct and control their children” (p. 210).

In regards to socialization of children, Aboriginal practices differ from non-Aboriginal methods. Sinclair et al. (2004) discuss Aboriginal children are socialized by “learning through example to display feelings only at appropriate times and in private for the public display of emotion is considered to be a source of discomfort to the viewer. This emotional self control is often mistaken for indifference by non-Aboriginal peoples” (p. 210). There are differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views of family relationships and extended family in child care practices. According to Sinclair et al. (2004) “an Aboriginal child may be cared for by several households of an extended family with the natural parents’ understanding that the child is receiving the same love and care that they would provide while in the care of relatives. This contrasts with the non-Aboriginal emphasis on the nuclear family as the basic unit of child care provision” (p. 210). These differences in world views may be interpreted negatively by non-

Aboriginal people when unfamiliar with Aboriginal cultural beliefs, practices and traditions and pose cultural conflict regarding child rearing practices.

There are differences in discipline practices as discussed by Sinclair et al. (2004) for example, “the use of humour and teasing in many tribal groups to shame and humiliate a child into good behaviour. This may be interpreted as emotional abuse by those unfamiliar with Aboriginal ways” (p. 210). Another difference in world views of child rearing practices between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures is presented by Sinclair et al. (2004):

Aboriginal children are considered by their Elders to be at one with nature, they are allowed great freedom to search for their enlightenment. The directive approach of non-Aboriginal schools conflicts with this nondirective approach, and many Aboriginal children have difficulty achieving goals set in the formal Canadian classroom, causing them to become discouraged with school (p. 210).

These differences in views regarding child rearing practices have implications for child welfare practice, in regards to cultural awareness of Aboriginal ways and world views. Sinclair et al. (2004) point out “when viewed by social workers not knowledgeable of and sensitive to the child rearing practices of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal approaches to child care could be constructed as neglectful, or even emotionally abusive, and as reasons for intervention” (p. 210). An understanding of these differences in worldviews provides insight into the cultural diversity of people and provides information of cultural self-identity of Aboriginal communities.

Kinship Care

The literature supports that kinship care placement with an Aboriginal family would be the most culturally appropriate placement for an Aboriginal child. According to Brown et al. (2009) “some benefits of kinship care include continuity of identity and family knowledge, access to relatives in addition to the primary caregiver(s), continuity with community ways and traditions as well as familiarity with the foster family prior to placement” (p.1019). However, when this is not possible and kinship care is not available, the reality is cross cultural placements. According to Daniel (2011) “research indicates there are an under-representation of foster parents from racialized groups and an overrepresentation of children from racial groups. For example, approximately 45% of foster parents report caring for children from a different racialized background than their own” (p. 2231). This issue presents challenges in providing culturally appropriate foster care in order to promote the well-being and self-identity of Aboriginal children in care.

According to Brown et al. (2009) “much of the literature emphasizes the need for foster children to maintain their sense of cultural identity and connections in spite of a transcultural foster placement” (p.121). There is evidence to support that kinship care has positive outcomes when children must be placed in care. This is consistent with the Aboriginal views of kinship. According to Hart (1996) “First Nations in Manitoba, and elsewhere in Canada, are clan-based, made up of groups of people which were often linked together through clan systems, based on kinship” (p. 60). Exploring all extended family options that may provide a stable home for children entering foster care should be considered. According to Brown et al. (2009) “children in kinship care experience less disruption and change during the placement process and have a greater sense of

belonging. Kinship foster children experience fewer placements than those in non-kinship care and also have a more well-developed cultural identity” (p. 106).

Some negative aspects of kinship care have been identified in research studies. According to Rubin, Downes, O’Reilly, Mekonnen, Luan and Localio (2008) “other evidence raises concerns of safety for children in kinship arrangements given the greater risk of continued and often unsupervised access to abusive parents and a greater likelihood that the child’s new relative caregivers share similar problems as offending parents.” (p. 551). However, Rubin et al. (2008) conclude “children placed in kinship care had fewer behavioural problems 3 years after placement than children who were placed in foster care. This finding supports efforts to maximize placement of children with willing and available kin when they enter out-of-home care” (p. 550). Further studies support the positive outcomes of kinship care. Winokur, Crawford, Longobardi, and Valentine (2008) found that “children in kinship care had significantly fewer placements than did children in foster care, and they were less likely to still be in care” (p. 338). These study findings largely support the positive outcomes for children in kinship care.

While kinship care, or placement in Aboriginal homes, would be preferable to maintain Aboriginal children’s cultural heritage. The problem of the over representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system is compounded by the problem of the lack of Aboriginal, as well as non-Aboriginal, foster homes. Brown (2008) points out “recent data have suggested that child welfare caseloads have been increasing in the US and Canada, and available placements have not kept pace with demand” (p. 539). There is evidence that it is necessary to recruit and retain foster parents.

A comprehensive research study in 2001 reported that foster parents resign from service due to a lack of resources and supports provided by child welfare agencies, dissatisfaction with agency services and policies, and a lack of training provided by the agency. The study also reports better foster parent retention rates for families who received adequate services, support, communication, and training from the agency” (Rhodes, Orme & Buehler, as cited in Christenson, 2009, p. 3).

The recruitment and retention of foster homes is relevant to this study to meet the need and provide continuity of care to children requiring foster home placement. This study explores the needs, supports and services of foster parents. Exploring the needs of foster parents may promote future recruitment and retention of foster families. In regards to the placement of Aboriginal children, greater Aboriginal kinship homes are necessary.

Challenges and Controversies of Cross Cultural Fostering

Due to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the Canadian child welfare system and the underrepresentation of Aboriginal foster homes cross cultural fostering is common. This presents challenges and controversies regarding placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes with a different cultural background than their own. Not only are the foster parents responsible for the daily care of foster children, some with special needs, they are required to provide culturally appropriate care to First Nations children. Brown et al. (2009) discuss “much research on the challenges for parents of transcultural placements focuses on the challenge of meeting the cultural needs of the children to promote the development of their cultural identity” (p. 107). This presents a challenge to the non-Aboriginal foster parents who do not share the same cultural views, customs beliefs and traditions. Daniel (2011) discusses “significant

challenges for foster parents concerns their knowledge, practice and comfort in meeting the unique needs of foster children who come from racialized groups” (p. 2231). This research study focuses on non-Aboriginal foster parents’ perceptions including the challenges they face in providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. As well, in this study there is an examination of the services, supports and resources that are available as well as future resources to address the challenges of providing culturally appropriate care to increase self-identity of the Aboriginal children in their care.

There are controversies regarding the foster placement of children with families of different cultural values, beliefs and traditions. Brown et al. (2009) point out:

There are multiple reports, both historical and contemporary about damages to a child’s sense of self as well as connections with birth family and community that are associated with chronic and serious health and social problems which result from attempted assimilation (p.120).

It is clear from this point of view that the need for education on cultural awareness is necessary for non-Aboriginal foster parents providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

While sources in the literature support placement of Aboriginal children with Aboriginal families as the most culturally appropriate foster placement, the reality is that there is a lack of Aboriginal foster home placements. The recruitment and retention of Aboriginal foster families is necessary to provide the most culturally appropriate foster placement. One intent of this research study was to explore the supports and services necessary to provide non-Aboriginal foster parents with the education, training and

resources to provide culturally sensitive care to children from remote First Nations communities when it is not possible to arrange an Aboriginal placement for the child.

The history of distrust of the child welfare system which exists with Aboriginal people from past experiences such as the residential school system and the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities presents challenges as well as controversies to cross cultural fostering. Controversies regarding the placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes are identified in the literature, Based on the recognition that all children have the right to maintain their cultural heritage. As recognized in Article 20 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which provides that “due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background” (Sinclair et al., 2004, p. 211). The preference for Aboriginal children to be placed in Aboriginal homes has been and still is the view held by First Nations communities. Sinclair et al. (2004) discuss “First Nations communities recognize that their children are the future and that the transmission of their culture and heritage to future generations is central to their survival as distinct communities” (p. 211). The preference to place Aboriginal children within their own community and culture is supported in the literature. The practice of cross cultural fostering has been controversial to Aboriginal people and communities as the placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes has often been emotionally damaging to these children. According to Sinclair et al. (2004) “the separation of Aboriginal children from their families and communities results in cultural separation and has often had profound long-term psychological consequences. Aboriginal children in care of non-Aboriginal caregivers often grow up in a state of

dislocation in terms of their culture, family and community, lacking any clear sense of identity” (p. 211). This suggests further research in the recruitment of Aboriginal foster families and kinship care families within their communities to maintain their cultural heritage and self-identity. Sinclair et al. (2004) point out “there is a tragic history of emotional disturbance, despair and high suicide rates among Aboriginal adolescents who have been taken into child welfare agency care” (p. 212). This study explores the needs of non-Aboriginal foster parents and when Aboriginal placement is not possible, cross cultural foster placement, including services and resources to provide care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities respecting their cultural beliefs, customs, traditions and self-identity, and thus may promote improved outcomes for Aboriginal children in care.

Attachment Theory

Concepts of attachment theory provide a theoretical perspective and are pertinent to this research study as the continuity of care is important in the attachment of children to their caregivers. “John Bowlby pioneered the concept of attachment in the 1940s, and used the term ‘attachment bond’ to describe a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with a mother or permanent mother substitute in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment” (Centre for Parenting and Research, 2006, p. 2). Much has been published in the media regarding the tragedies of children in foster care with multiple placements. “Reports of disruption rates in traditional foster care range from 38% to 57% during the first 12 to 18 months of placement, with percentages increasing with time spent in foster care” (Smith, Stormshak, Chamberlain & Whaley, 2001, p. 200). These placement disruptions affect the continuity of care, and the attachment of children to and from their

caregivers. By exploring the experiences and challenges foster parents face, they may be supported by utilizing concepts of attachment theory in order to further understand the child's behaviour.

Although attachment is universal to all humans, it is important to recognize that the majority of work on attachment theory has been based on Western studies. More information is needed about the applicability of attachment concepts in different cultural contexts, especially in traditional cultures where children are encouraged to form attachments with many caregivers" (Centre for Parenting and Research, 2006, p. 2).

It is necessary to recognize that culture plays a role in understanding attachment concepts within their cultural contexts. Research suggests that children may be attached to multiple caregivers. In a literature review Daniel (2011) reports "several studies found that a placed child's wellbeing or self-concept can be supported or enhanced by maintaining close contact with their extended family and cultural heritage" (p. 2231). Long and Sephton (2011) discuss attachment and point out "a number of authors arguing that the collective nature of many Aboriginal families, coupled with the emphasis on independence and autonomy in child-rearing can influence the way in which Aboriginal children express attachment in their relationships" (p. 100). Carriere and Richardson (2009) argue:

Connectedness may be described as a form of attachment that implies a broader grounding in a person's total environment than does attachment to one or two central figures. For these reasons connectedness may be a more appropriate term

and framework for assessment than attachment in working with Indigenous children and families (p. 57).

This point of view is relevant to this study's application of the theoretical perspective of attachment theory when applied to Aboriginal children. However, it is important in the view that children form attachments with their caregivers but need to remain connected with their cultural heritage. Harden (2004) points out "attachment in foster children suggests that they are more likely than non-foster children to have insecure and disorganized attachments. Many have experienced compromised prenatal environments, maltreatment prior to foster care, or multiple moves while in foster care" (p. 43).

Attachment disorder is defined as a "developmental condition in which the individual is unable to form normal and needed emotional bonds with caregivers and others. This has been shown to result in serious, negative, long term effects on social and emotional development. If the disorder is the result of certain early childhood experiences, such as trauma, abuse, inconsistent caregiving, or similar factors, the condition is known as reactive attachment disorder" (Barker, 2003, p. 32). These factors are often reflected by behavioural problems in children, such as being emotionally needy or distant. There are four types of attachment categories, which include: secure, insecure-anxious/avoidant, anxious-resistant and disorganized. Avoidant attachment is defined as a "form of insecure attachment first observed in children who show less distress than other children when left alone but seem as anxious when in the presence of their caregiver as with others. Such children avoid eye contact with parents and other caregivers or ignore their efforts to interact" (Barker, 2003, p. 34). Other concerning

behaviours can be linked to a child's past relationships and attachments. These early disrupted attachments may later lead to emotional and developmental behavioural issues. Resistant attachment is defined as a "form of insecure attachment seen in children who seem angry at their caregivers after any separation but obstruct the caregivers' efforts to provide reassurance and comfort" (Barker 2003, p. 369). According to Smith et al. (2001) "placement disruption has been linked to problems of attachment and emotional and behavioral problems in children" (p. 200). By understanding the effects of past relationships, attachment theory may provide a perspective to better understand children's behaviours and needs; however, recognition of a child's cultural context must be acknowledged such as connectedness to family, community and environment. According to Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) "in Aboriginal cultures this would imply exploring extended family connections, clan and kinship systems and their influence and role in parenting". (p.72).

Recruitment and Retention of Foster Parents

The problem of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system is compounded by the problem of the lack of Aboriginal, as well as non-Aboriginal foster homes. The literature supports that it is necessary to recruit and retain foster parents. Brown (2008) points out "recent data have suggested that child welfare caseloads have been increasing in the US and Canada, and available placements have not kept pace with demand" (p. 539). The issue of recruitment and retention of foster families is relevant to this study. This study is intended to explore the lived experiences of foster parents and focus on their motivations to foster as well as their challenges and the supports and services to assist them with cross-cultural fostering. Exploring these

factors may lead to increased knowledge to promote recruitment and retention of foster families. There is some research on the needs of foster parents, Brown and Calder (2000) found:

Five themes as perceived by the foster parents themselves. These themes include: (1) good working relationships; (2) cultural sensitivity; (3) harmonious and stable family relationships; (4) adequate payment for services; and (5) a range of personality characteristics and parenting skills (p. 729).

In studying the needs of foster parents, services and supports may be targeted in order to recruit and retain much needed foster families.

This study explores the needs, supports and services as perceived by the foster parents to increase the understanding of these needs and promote programs that address these issues in order to promote recruitment and retention. The needs of foster parents are generally consistent with existing literature. According to Twigg (2009) “the four needs of foster care givers is the need for support, the need for recognition, the need for addressing financial concerns and the need for training” (p.173).

The need of foster parent support is addressed in the study’s interview guide, to explore the foster parent’s perceptions of their support needs to provide culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The need for recognition of foster parents is documented in the literature. According to Rhodes, Orme and Buehler (2001) “research suggests that retention of foster parents is influenced by training, communication between foster parents and caseworkers, foster parent input and agreement with case planning and access to social services” (p.88). This study is consistent with the literature in regards to exploring and learning from the lived

experiences of foster parents needs in regards to recognition of their direct experience and knowledge in providing care to children in cross-cultural fostering. The need for adequate payment of services and addressing financial concerns identified in the literature is relevant to this study as this factor may decrease the retention of foster parents and may contribute to the problem of the lack of and shortage of foster homes. These areas of exploring foster parent needs are relevant to this study as they relate to recruitment and retention factors of foster parents to the much needed foster placements.

This study is focused on hearing the perspectives of the foster parents lived experiences and thus give them recognition in having their voices heard in regards to their support, needs for their complex role as foster parents in cross-cultural fostering. The need for foster parent training is supported in the literature. Buehler, Rhodes, Orme and Cuddeback (2006) point out “some evidence shows cultural awareness training is useful for practicing foster parents. In a national study of current and former foster parents, those who planned to continue fostering were more likely to have received in-service training in fostering a child of a different race or culture” (p. 539). Exploring foster parent training needs are relevant to this study. Not only are there challenges of meeting the daily care of the foster children but there is the factor of maintaining their cultural needs to promote culturally appropriate child care. Recruitment and retention factors contribute to the problem of this research study in regards to the lack of and shortage of foster homes as documented in the literature. Shortages of foster placements are discussed in the literature and have several concerning factors and negative impacts in relation to children in foster care. Aitken (as cited in Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2002) discusses:

The impact for children in care is significant: placements are made in less than ideally-matched settings; children with long-term needs may be temporarily placed in short-term resources while awaiting a vacancy in the long-term resource; increased breakdowns of placements lead to an increased need for replacements; children's placement needs may increase as treatment is delayed; attachment disorders develop with increased disruptions in care (p. 7).

This study is focused on obtaining data from the lived experiences of foster parents regarding retaining foster parents.

Barriers to obtaining foster parent training are identified in the literature. Twigg (2009) discusses "ongoing training is also hampered by many factors such as a lack of resources, scheduling problems, transportation issues especially for those fostering in rural areas, and a lack of priority given to training by the foster care system" (pp. 178-179). These barriers to obtaining training are relevant to this study in regards to exploring the perceptions and lived experiences of current foster parents' supports and services available to them and future resources that would assist them to obtaining training to address their needs in providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Gaps in the Literature

Gaps in the literature exist regarding what promotes and supports successful foster parenting, and significantly less research data on foster parents' experiences. According to Brown and Campbell (2007) "success in foster care has been described in various ways and from different perspectives. Studies have defined success from the viewpoints of child protection systems and caseworkers. And while researchers

recognize the importance of foster parent and child perspectives, relatively few studies have represented them” (p. 1010). This research study was intended to explore foster parents’ personal perspectives on cross cultural fostering and their experiences.

In regards to retention of foster parents’, there are also gaps in the literature. According to Brown (2008) “several studies have examined the challenges of foster parents and the factors that contributed to placement disruption. However there were relatively few studies based on the perceptions of foster caregivers themselves” (p. 539).

In regards to transcultural placements, there are areas that require further research. According to Brown et al. (2009) “although there is considerable literature on the transcultural parenting experiences of adoptive caregivers in the United States, very little data on foster parent or foster child experience exists” (p. 106). This study adds to the knowledge of foster parents’ experiences of cross cultural placements, and the supports and services required to increasing placement success, and promoting improved outcomes for children in care.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the literature related to this study. A discussion of the historical as well as current overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system was presented. Aboriginal worldviews of children and child rearing practices and the best interest of the child concept relating to Aboriginal children were discussed. Kinship care and the challenges and controversies of cross-cultural fostering were presented. The theoretical perspective of attachment theory relating to this study was reviewed. A discussion of the literature on recruitment and retention of foster

parents and foster parent training was included. Finally, gaps in the literature were identified. The following chapter will present the study methods and procedures.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used to conduct this study. This includes a discussion of the research paradigm, qualitative design, phenomenological approach, the conceptual framework of empowerment approach and the strengths perspective. This chapter further discusses the sampling method, recruitment procedure, data collection and analysis. Strategies used to ensure study rigor and validity in qualitative research include: triangulation; member checking and; clarifying researcher bias are discussed. Ethical considerations relevant to the study are also presented.

Research Paradigm

This research study design follows the naturalistic paradigm in studying the experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parenting Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. In his article Frey (1994), Lincoln and Guba argue that “the naturalist paradigm believe that realities are multiple, constructed and holistic. Knower and known are interactive and inseparable” (p.554). The rationale for choosing this paradigm is its holistic approach, and consideration of the contextual influences that contribute to an individual’s situation. By utilizing a naturalistic paradigm, the researcher works collaboratively with clients, acknowledging their unique situations.

According to Frey (1994) “the relationship between researchers and research participants should be viewed as a partnership” (p. 564). A collaborative approach works well with a naturalistic paradigm and social work practice as it provides and respects the participant’s point of view. According to York (2009) “the naturalistic paradigm is useful in developing helpful and culturally appropriate intervention activities with special

populations and clients from different cultural backgrounds” (p. 122). According to Frey (1994) “in the final analysis, naturalistic researchers believe that research ultimately should empower, not disempower, those who participate. Sustained interactions between researchers and participants as partners in a social action research program best guarantees achieving this goal” (p. 566). The research study works collaboratively in partnership with the foster parents to explore their personal experiences, and utilize their expertise in the field to further empower these individuals by acknowledging their contributions.

Qualitative Design

This research study used a qualitative research design. According to Patton (1980) “qualitative data consists of quotations from people and descriptions of situations, events, interactions and activities. The purpose of these data is to understand the point of view and experiences of other persons” (p. 36). This research study explores the foster parents’ lived experiences through interviews describing their experiences with fostering Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. Patton (1980) points out “qualitative measures describe the experiences of people in depth. The data are open-ended in order to find out what people’s lives, experiences, and interactions mean to them in their own terms and in their own natural settings” (p. 92). Qualitative research worked well in this study as it provides data regarding the individual’s viewpoints of their experiences of foster parenting. The qualitative data may provide information for child and family services agencies regarding implementing supports, through which foster parents may be better prepared to provide culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children, and may serve to promote recruitment and retention of foster families.

For the purpose of this qualitative research design, the use of open ended questions in a structured interview was the method of data collection. The data were collected through one-on-one, face-to-face structured interviews with the participants. All the participants answered the same questions. According to Patton (1980) “the evaluator using a qualitative approach to measurement seeks to capture what people have to say in their own words” (p. 22). This study utilized a qualitative research design to capture the study foster parent participants’ lived experiences of caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Phenomenological Approach

Creswell (2007) defines a phenomenological study as one that “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 57). A phenomenological approach was selected for the research study to provide exploration of the lived experiences, and to further understand the common or shared experiences of the phenomenon of non-Aboriginal foster parents caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

The experiences and challenges faced by foster parents can provide child and family service agencies with valuable information for improvement in practice and programs. According to Creswell (2007) “it would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon” (p. 60). Through a phenomenological approach, and the use of open ended questions, the experiences of foster parents are explored, analyzed and ultimately may lead to improvements in practice. The information obtained from the research study may provide greater insight

to promote best practice with cross-cultural placements, and thus may serve to increase improved outcomes for Aboriginal children in care from remote First Nations communities. The conceptualization of this phenomenological study was influenced by concepts of the empowerment approach and strengths perspective.

Empowerment Approach

An empowerment approach was utilized through a collaborative equal partnership with the study foster parent participants to explore their lived experiences.

Empowerment is defined as “the process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources, and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals” (Barker, 2003, p. 142). The focus of the empowerment approach used in the study is derived from social work empowerment theories. According to Robbins, Chatterjee and Canda, (2006) “social work empowerment theories are practice-oriented empowerment theories that include analysis of oppressive structures as well as empower strategies” (p. 110).

Concepts of the empowerment approach are relevant to the intent of this research study to work collaboratively in partnership with the participants identifying their experiences, challenges and assessing their support needs. According to Robbins et al. (2006) “assessment should identify the personal goals, strengths, and talents of clients as well as the resources in their communities” (p. 116). This study explores the areas of personal motivations to foster, focusing on their strengths to meet the challenges of cross-cultural fostering and the necessary resources to provide culturally sensitive care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Working collaboratively in an empowerment approach throughout the study is relevant to the research to address the power imbalance within the social worker and client relationship. According to Robbins et al. (2006) “social workers must carefully attend to power dynamics within the helping relationship because there are usually power differentials between worker and client in relation to their relative social positions and the vulnerability of the client” (p. 117). This study’s further goal was to explore foster parents’ support systems including the challenges they face and identifying the barriers that exist to access the resources available to them. By having their voices heard and identifying the power blocks and the challenges in a collaborative approach may promote empowerment of these individuals’ personal strengths in their complex role of cross-cultural foster care providers. Robbins et al. (2006) discuss “an empowerment approach requires that practitioners engage in empowering roles; empowerment involves not only the desired outcomes but also the process of helping itself” (p.116).

An empowerment approach supports and the literature acknowledges that foster parents require a collaborative supportive relationship with social services, to promote empowerment by acknowledging their experiences in providing culturally sensitive foster care. The research process provided a means to empower the foster parents by giving voice to their perspectives, and to hopefully apply the knowledge to developing programs of services to better prepare and support non-Aboriginal foster parents providing culturally appropriate care. Robbins et al. (2006) point out:

The essence of the worker/client relationship is one of dialogue, trust, collaboration, informality, genuineness, open communication, sharing of power and equality. The helper is not perceived as an expert, but rather as a collaborator

in the search for solutions that cover the range from personal to structural or societal change (p. 116).

This study focused on the concepts of empowerment by exploring the lived experiences of the foster parents through the interview questions to encourage dialogue of the issues of the social problem of the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system, and the lack of culturally appropriate Aboriginal foster families. The study also examined the challenges in regards to cross-cultural fostering and the support systems as perceived by the foster parents giving them a voice to encourage personal empowerment.

Strengths Perspective

This research study is congruent with concepts of the strengths perspective, through the view that the foster parents possess strengths to overcome the challenges in caring for children. Saleeby (1996) discusses “the strengths perspective demands a different way of looking at individual’s families and communities. All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes” (p. 297). This research acknowledges foster parents are the experts on their knowledge based on their personal experiences fostering children. According to Saleeby (2006):

The strengths perspective demands that practitioners ask what useful qualities and skills or even motivation and aspirations these clients have, how they can be tapped in the service of change, and in what more salubrious ways these individuals can meet their needs and resolve their conflicts (p. 302).

Through this research study the foster parents' motivations, challenges, support services and resources were explored through the interview process. According to Robbins et al. (2006) "the strengths perspective is based on the assumption that people are most likely able to grow and develop when their strengths are recognized and supported" (p. 18).

Through this research study, utilizing a strengths perspective emphasized the foster parent's personal experiences and acknowledged and validated their strengths. Healy (2005) points out "the strengths perspective emphasizes the importance of partnership between worker and service worker and service user" (p. 161). The research study worked collaboratively with the foster parents in exploring their lived experiences and acknowledging their experience promotes collaboration between worker and client.

In regards to the strengths perspective, there are some weakness and concerns regarding the strength perspective documented in the literature. Healy (2005) points out:

the strengths perspective is inconsistent with core components of the social work role in some contexts of practice. For example, in contexts such as statutory child protection work, mental health risk assessment and corrective services, social workers have a statutory, and an ethical obligation to assess the risk the clients present to themselves or others (p. 168).

However, for the purpose of this research the strength's perspective provides an approach to acknowledge the foster parents strengths and capacities in providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Sample Selection and Size

The study participants were non-Aboriginal foster parents providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities and were recruited from a

First Nations child and family services agency through a purposive sampling approach. All of the study participants were currently fostering Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. According to Creswell (2007) “the concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). For the purpose of this study, a criterion based purposive sampling strategy was utilized. A criterion based purposive sampling approach was thus an appropriate method to use in this study to explore the lived experiences from the perspective of the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of cross-cultural fostering. According to Creswell (2007) “it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 128).

In this study, inclusion criteria consisted of participants that were non-Aboriginal foster parents currently caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The study participants resided in Winnipeg and the surrounding area of rural Manitoba, however, the children were from remote First Nations communities.

Recruitment

The process of recruitment was through a First Nations child and family services agency where I am currently employed as a front line social worker. The invitation letter to participate in the study (Appendix B) was sent out by the administrative assistant to all non-Aboriginal foster parents. The potential participants were selected, and there were no letters sent out to any foster parents who were part of

the caseload of the researcher. The administrative assistant was provided with the list of foster parents on the researcher's caseload to ensure none were contacted for the study. Eighty letters were sent out to potential participants and eight participants were recruited. There was an 11% response rate to the invitation letters to participate in the study. The reason for potential participants deciding to decline participating in the study is not known as they did not communicate their reasoning with the researcher.

The participants were advised in the letter that their participation in the study would be confidential. Access and provision of services were not affected whether foster parents participated in the study or not. The letter also indicated their social worker, foster care worker, other participants, or anyone else affiliated with the agency, would not be aware of their participation in the study.

The invitation letter to participate in the study provided the potential participants with a brief summary of the study, the goals, interview process, and the data collection process. The participants were asked to contact this researcher and set up a time and date to meet to participate in an approximately one hour long tape recorded interview. Prior to the interview being conducted the researcher sent a confirmation letter to the participants including a scheduled date and time convenient to the participant. The location of the interview was chosen by the participants. This letter also stated that the interview would remain confidential, and at no time during the study would the participant be identified (Appendix C).

Data Collection

For the purpose of this study and consistent with phenomenological research, data were collected through face-to-face structured interviews with the participants.

Exploration of the phenomena in this study was initiated with the face-to-face interviews. Field notes and observations were written after the interviews regarding the participants and the dynamics of the interviews. This process enhanced the understanding of the participants' responses and context of the interview. The interviews were completed in the participants' home, or a location of their choice, and all the questions were read through verbally with the participants (Appendix D). The researcher also asked for verbal permission to take notes and tape record the interviews, in order to accurately collect the data from the interviews. The interview questions consisted of five broad open ended questions (Appendix E). According to Creswell (2007) "open-ended questions focus attention on gathering data that will lead to a textural description and a structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants" (p. 61). The use of open-ended questions encouraged a dialogue between the foster parent participants and the researcher to explore their shared experiences of cross cultural fostering.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the interviews were analysed using content data analysis. The information data taken from the interview were in the form of an audiotape. The data consisted of approximately ten hours of in-person interviews, which were transcribed verbatim. The process of data analysis began with the verbatim transcription of the study participants' interviews, observations and field notes. According to Creswell (2007) "in the open coding phase, the researcher examines the text (e.g., transcripts, fieldnotes, documents) for salient categories of information supported by the text" (p.160). Through this process of open coding data analysis the qualitative

data were interpreted by the information provided from the participants' personal experiences. Transcripts of the data were read and hand-coded according to the interview questions and patterns that emerged. Each data code was then sorted into categories through a cut and paste process according to the responses from the interview questions. According to Padgett (1998) "coding qualitative data is a process of identifying bits and pieces of information (meaning units) and linking these to concepts and themes around which the final report is organized" (p. 76). The responses were organized under the interview question number in an attempt to reach the most common themes presented by the study participants. This researcher then read through all the interviews multiple times highlighting and identifying recurrent themes that presented through the interviews to ensure capturing the essence of all the study foster parents' experiences. This rigorous process of examining the transcribed interviews and identifying significant phrases provided this researcher with the common themes being presented. The most common themes being presented were then listed and supported by direct quotes from the participants to clearly represent their experiences.

For the study, data were analysed for thematic content, however, saturation of the data was not achieved based on the limited sample size. Creswell (2007) points out "using the constant comparative approach, the researcher attempts to 'saturate' the categories-to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category" (p. 160). The researcher interviewed all the participants who responded and no further responses to the study were received to continue interviewing to attempt to reach saturation of the data in the study. Each interview brought forth some new themes,

however, the most common themes from the participants in the study emerged throughout the interviews and were chosen to best represent the essence of the participants' experiences. The study results are supported by direct quotes to present an accurate description and interpretation of the participants lived experiences of the phenomenon of providing foster care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Validity of the Design

For this study, strategies to validate the interpretations of the data were utilized. Creswell (2003) discusses "validity strategies in qualitative research available to check the accuracy of the findings which include triangulation, member checking ... and clarifying research bias" (p. 196). In this study these validity strategies were utilized to strengthen the accuracy and credibility of the findings and enhance the validity of the study.

Data Triangulation

Throughout the research study, multiple sources of data were utilized. These included: face-to-face transcribed interviews, field notes, observations, and relevant literature examining the foster parent studies and perspectives. Creswell (2007) defines triangulation "researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigations, and theories to provide corroborating evidence" (p. 208). This process of triangulation was used when analysing the data in order to present the participant's responses in an accurate description of their lived experiences. According to Creswell (2007) "typically this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 208). The process of corroborating evidence

from different sources was utilized in this study through the use of multiple sources of data to enhance the validity of the study.

Member Checking

The member checking method was utilized during the interview process. According to Creswell (2007) “in member checking, the research solicits participants view of the credibility of the findings and interpretations” (p. 208). In this study, the researcher sought verbal verification to capture the participants’ views and to confirm that their responses were understood. This process to validate the accuracy of the findings was used by the researcher during the face-to-face interviews. During the interview process the researcher restated the information to the participant to determine accuracy. The researcher checked the understanding of the phenomenon by utilizing techniques such as reflecting and summarizing for clarification to have a better understanding of the experiences they were describing. However, member checking was not done reviewing the written transcribed results in a subsequent meeting with the study participants as this was not agreed upon with the initial interview and was not stated in the invitation letter to participate in the study. The study findings provided an accurate description of the lived experiences and were confirmed by member checking throughout the interview process.

Researcher Bias

To address personal bias in the study, bracketing was utilized as a process to identify the researcher’s personal experiences, views and perceptions on the phenomenon being explored. Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2007) defines epoche or bracketing as “the first step in ‘phenomenological reduction,’ the process of data analysis in which the researcher sets aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best

understand the experiences of participants in the study” (p. 235). Prior to and during reviewing the transcribed interviews, the researcher bracketed all personal viewpoints and experiences in the margins of the transcribed interviews. Bracketing personal viewpoints and experiences in the margins of the transcribed interviews provided a process of identification of the researchers experiences with the topic discussed.

Bracketing the personal experiences on the topic being discussed provides the researcher more awareness of these personal viewpoints and assists with identifying researcher bias. In addition, the researcher used the participants own words to decrease personal bias throughout the process of data analysis and phenomenological description.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics of qualitative research were applied to the research study including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and privacy. According to York (2009) there are “three major ethical issues in research ethics-privacy, self-determination, and protection from harm” (p. 102). Shaw (2003) points out “the ethics of qualitative research design pose distinctive demands on principles of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, social justice and practitioner research” (p. 9). The participants of the research study were provided with an informed consent outlining the purpose of the study, adequately describing the project, advising the participant that confidentiality will be protected as there will be no identifying information shared about them in the study, and that all data will be destroyed on the completion of the study (Appendix D). The researcher worked collaboratively with the participants and respecting their confidentiality and rights to privacy. The participants’ social worker, foster care worker, other participants, or anyone else affiliated with the agency, were not

aware of the participation of the study. Confidentiality was protected as there was no identifying information in the study and the anonymity of the participants was maintained through the use of pseudonyms. The research study also occurred on a voluntary basis protecting human subjects of research. The participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice or consequence.

This research study addresses the ethical considerations of qualitative research in human services research. The research study was approved by the University of Manitoba Research and Ethics Board outlining the research process, and following the ethical considerations that apply to qualitative research in human services research.

The potential participants were informed that their rights to privacy were protected. The study's intent was to provide data that would help to demonstrate greater insight to programs, which would be more suitable to the needs of foster parents who are experiencing the same challenges. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were tape recorded in order to accurately capture the responses. All data containing information were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home, and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. No other persons, other than the researcher and the research advisor, had access to the data gathered.

To address the position of power in the foster parent and social worker relationship, personal caseload, current foster parents were excluded as participants in the study. According to Barratt (2002) "while social services departments say that foster carers are appointed as colleagues of social workers, the responsibility for their payment rests with social workers who also decide whether to place children with them. Thus,

there is an imbalance of power in the structure of the relationship” (p. 173). Therefore, it was essential that the participants were in no way exposed to the power imbalance, which may exist in the foster parent and social worker relationship. The researcher worked collaboratively with the participants maintaining an equal relationship. According to Long and Sephton (2011) “the interviews were a form of collaborative enquiry where participants were fully informed of the purpose, process, and intended outcomes of the study and were active subjects in the research process” (p. 102).

In regards to the agency context of ethics in research, the agency maintains the integrity of professional practice by adhering to strict guidelines ensuring that staff act in a professional and respectful manner with regards to working relationships with clients. All information regarding children and families are held in strict confidence. The agency provides child protection services to First Nations children and families in a respectful and culturally sensitive manner that protects children, while respecting the child’s family and community of origin. Through this study, additional knowledge and insight was gained into how social services agencies can better meet the needs of foster parents and children in foster care in the future.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and design of the study. The concepts of the empowerment approach and the strengths perspective were presented. The methods of data collection and analysis were discussed. The strategies for ensuring validity such as triangulation, member checking and preventing researcher bias were examined. The ethical considerations required for the study were presented. The following chapter presents the study findings.

Chapter 5 - Study Findings

This chapter presents the study findings which are organized under specific themes that relate to interview questions and information shared by the participants during their interviews. These themes provide the shared experiences and perceptions of the participants, and serve to provide the essence of their experiences. The study findings are supported by direct quotes from the foster parent participants.

The major themes identified in regards to the foster parent motivations to foster included: helping children get a better education; helping children who are disadvantaged; providing children with a better life and; not having children of their own. The major themes identified regarding the challenges included: family visits; the need for more information on the child and; school system resources. The major themes identified regarding the supports and services available in providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities included: the lack of available resources and; social work support. The major themes identified regarding additional resources to assist the foster parents included: increased cultural resources; foster parent group support and; increased community resources. The major themes identified are represented by a percentage ranging from the highest to the lowest to further substantiate the amount of participants' responses to the significant themes in the study findings.

Foster Care Participants

To preserve the anonymity of the participants, limited demographic information was presented in this study. Based on the demographic information collected from the participants, a total of nine participants were interviewed, seven were female and two were male. During the interview process, one participant disclosed that they were of

Aboriginal descent, and due to this fact this interview was not transcribed for the study. This left a total of eight participants. The majority of the participants were female and five out of the seven participants shared that they cared for their children with the assistance of a male spouse. One out of the eight shared caring for the children with the assistance of a female spouse. In these cases, the invitation to participate in the study was addressed to both caregivers in the home. The participants were non-Aboriginal foster parents; however, their cultural backgrounds were not shared during the interviews. Data were collected on the number of years of experience the participants had as foster care providers. Foster parents' years of experience ranged from one year to forty years of providing foster care. In order to ensure confidentiality, the participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Foster Parent Motivations

This section presents and discusses the participants' motivation providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The foster parents in this study presented a genuine caring for children. They verbalized this throughout the interviews by discussing their motivations of wanting to help children. Through analyzing the data from the interviews, five common themes emerged regarding participants' motivation to foster children. The themes are discussed in further detail, and supported by direct quotes from the participants. The themes included: helping children get a better education; helping children who are disadvantaged; providing children with a better life and; not having children of their own.

Helping children get a better education. The theme of helping children get a better education was verbalized by 60% of the foster parents in the study. The foster parents in this study identified the importance of education as a common theme. They shared knowledge that providing an education provides a foundation to obtaining greater opportunity and life chances. For example:

Just being able to help out these young children get a better education for them, not see them go through what their parents went through. (Ken)

For the most part they want to learn, they want to do better in their life, they want to have a better life, and they just need the chance to do that. (Debbie)

It's amazing what they have been taught, what they have learned. They have come a long way. (Leanne)

So, I'm working on getting him the help and the supports that he needs in order to get through his school years, just teach them to be contributing members of society. (Jane)

As, well, probably you may or may not provide them with some skills they may not have had a chance or opportunity that they would have had otherwise.
(Brooke)

Many educational issues brought forth were providing these children with opportunities to increase their skill base and improve their abilities and quality of life.

Helping children who are disadvantaged. The theme of helping children who are disadvantaged was verbalized by 50% of the foster parent participants. For example:

They come from hardships. They come from situations that are very hard on them and then they come into a home where they see love and nurture and caring for

them. What motivates me is that I am constantly blessed by having these children. (Suzanne)

Well, the first thing of course, I love kids otherwise I wouldn't be here doing what I'm doing but for me, most important, the stuff that some of these kids have gone through is horrific. So my big thing is I love to show them that there is another world out there. (Leanne)

I enjoyed working with Aboriginal children. What motivates me is that I have been fostering northern children for years. They are so caring and they appreciate you. I find them much more trusting of us and I have had no trouble with eighty to ninety percent of my foster children. (Lilly)

I know that some come from hardships, and have had devastating things done and perhaps in some ways that cannot make them forget but help them overcome it. (Brooke)

These statements reinforce the theme of the foster parent's motivation, to help children that are disadvantaged and have faced difficult situations and events in their lives.

Providing children with a better life. The theme of providing children with a better life was verbalized by 20% of the foster parent participants. This was presented in the study group of foster parents willing to open their homes, and to provide care to children who are in need of care. Their genuine caring for children was evident by their statements showing their commitment to care for the children from remote First Nations communities. They presented an understanding of the hardships these children have faced, and a willingness to assist them to overcome these adversities by providing a nurturing, caring environment. For example:

The positive I guess are the children, you learn with them. Sometimes they come into your home and they start talking to you, and start talking to you about the things that they have gone through in life, and you explain to them how to turn those negatives into a positive, and when you actually see that it is working it feels really good, it really does. (Debbie)

It gives you the sense of good feeling as well as knowing you are providing them with a safe, loving home. (Brooke)

Not having children of their own. Another theme that emerged regarding motivation to foster was foster parents not having their own children. This was verbalized by 20% of the foster parent participants. For example:

We don't have children of our own so I figured we were meant to care for somebody, so we had to care for these children. (Ken)

What motivates me is that all my kids are grown and I had space. At first it was very difficult because these kids came from a different background from what I know. It wasn't ideal at first but now I'm getting accustomed to them and they are getting accustomed to me. (Jill)

The reason I went into fostering is I didn't have any children of my own. (Jane)

The foster parents, without children of their own, made it apparent in their statements, that they demonstrated a willingness to take on a foster parent role.

Foster Parent Challenges

Through content data analysis from the interviews, common themes emerged regarding the shared experiences of the challenges the foster parent participants have experienced. These themes included: family visits, the lack of information on child's history, school system resources and northern community disadvantaged.

Family visits. The theme of family visits emerged in 90% of the study participants' interviews. The significant theme of family visits was presented by the foster parents as negative experiences with subsequent negative child behaviours following the visits. The importance of the family connections for these children was evident in their statements, however, they presented that were faced with challenging behaviours following the family visits. For example:

The negative aspects, I guess the meetings with their parents, it's always a hard thing to get the meetings with them being that they are so far away. Always seeing behaviours after the visits. Everything gets negative with the kids for one or two weeks until they settle back into our home and then we wait for the next meeting. (Ken)

I guess the biggest challenges are going to be the families of these kids, then there's phone calls and interfering and 'you're stealing my kids'. After the visit the children came through the door their faces were hanging. (Leanne)

I understand that family is important, I get that, and family is a great thing, but sometimes family is not so good, sometimes they're just not. (Debbie)

After the visits I see more outbursts, I see more bad behaviours. They withdraw into themselves not like the way they are right now, happy and bubbly, doing things. When they come back from a visit they will usually sit and read a book, or they will just watch TV. They are very nonresponsive or sometimes they can get very verbal, and it's very hard sometimes just to see that change in them from the time that they leave to the time they come back. (Suzanne)

I did have these children in my home and the agency continued to think that they should have a relationship with their mom, their mom was doing some not so wonderful things and in the end if I tried to say that maybe it needs to stop and these kids need to get their bearings first and decide which way in life that they wanted to go, but I wasn't supported with that. So, the visits continued, I do find it hard. (Brooke)

When the kids return from the visit I find them, well confused, really confused because the family had made them feel so bad that they were doing something wrong coming here. What happens is the parents' badger these kids and they get so confused they don't know what to do. It was hard, it was really hard. So I think that's a big one, negative I mean, sometimes with families. (Lilly)

After the visits it carries back to the school and my attention is needed more than before they went to the visit, because everything here is on a calm level, so yes it has been a negative aspect. (Jane)

The foster parent participants verbalized the challenges they faced with family visits and the negative behaviours demonstrated by the children following the visits. They spoke of the behaviour changes they experienced with the children after the family visits such as negativity, outbursts, withdrawal and confusion. They identified the theme of family visits as a negative aspect and a challenge of their role as foster parents.

Lack of information of the child. The foster parent participants verbalized the need for more information regarding the children in their care. This lack of information theme was identified by 70% of the participants. They presented as a group requiring this

information to be able to provide appropriate care, as well as address the issues presented with the children. For example:

Be honest with us and put whatever the problems are, how this child grew up in the home so we can work with that and we will work with it. (Leanne)

In more things that could help us, I would say that we need some sort of liaisons up there to really monitor and tell us what is really going on with these kids and the real reason some kids are coming into care. I think that perhaps in the communities they need to have someone in those communities who is better at representing not just community, but the child as well. I think there has to be some sort of liaison that knows the families where these kids come from.

(Brooke)

More communication would be more helpful. More support and more communication. (Suzanne)

Resources, I mean really, communication is your best thing so from remote communities, you know we need a really good report when we get these kids, to really know what happened in their life and nothing sugar coated or whatever, it's so much easier to work with these kids, to deal with their issues, find out what's happening. (Ken)

We have to know exactly what is happening so when they do come here we can say "so and so has a problem with this" or "so and so loves this so let's get into art", we got to have that open communication, we have to have it in the letter that comes with them. (Jane)

Communication is the most important to me and then once we know the real issues we can find the things here, but I can't when somebody doesn't put that that down on a paper because they think that maybe the child might come into the home and we don't want to put a stigma with him for that, then we never know that there is that issue, then we can't work on it. (Debbie)

I asked do either of them have any allergies or medical issues that I need to be aware of? About a month later I was told about the asthma. (Lilly)

The study participants shared that there was a lack of information on the children's history to prepare the foster parents to provide for the children's emotional and physical needs. The participants expressed the need for greater communication with the communities regarding the children and their history to be better prepared to deal with their needs, and provide the necessary supports.

School system resources. The school system emerged in the analysis of the data as both a challenge, and as a resource. They spoke of the challenges of the school system, as well as the challenges for the children from northern communities, who are adapting to the city school environment. The challenges of school system resource emerged in 50% of the foster parent participants interviews. For example:

I guess the school system sometimes depending on where they are would be a really hard negative experience too. Whether they are getting support over there. (Leanne)

That's another thing to bring them from a remote community and then throw them into a predominantly white school and the structure and everything is sometimes too much for them, way too much. (Jill)

I've heard a lot of teachers say that Aboriginal foster children are nothing but a problem, they just cause trouble and I see it as I see a lot of non-Aboriginal people who aren't foster children causing a lot of havoc as well. (Debbie)

The foster parents in this study presented an awareness of the challenges of change from a remote northern community to city living as a challenging transition for these children. Some foster parent's identified there were positive resources within the school system.

For example:

Where the children are attending is fantastic for that and there is a lot of Aboriginals there and they do lots of cultural things. (Leanne)

They take Aboriginal stuff at school, the school does provide it, and they have the caring circle every week. I'm glad the school started that. (Lilly)

It appears that the foster parents experience with the school system was dependent on where the children attended school, and if the cultural activities were available to them. It was evident throughout the study that there are both negative and positive experiences in the school system.

Northern communities disadvantaged. The theme of the northern communities being disadvantaged was verbalized by 30% of the foster parent participants in the study during the interviews. For example:

I understand that the people up north don't have the resources, and don't have the type of life that we do have here. (Lilly)

I know it's harder for them that's why sometimes things break down up north I think it's because they don't have all the chances in life that we do up here. If maybe the parents had better resources, had better homes. (Brooke)

I think if they put more money into the north to help people in the north maybe they'd have less problems. (Jane)

The study foster parent participants identified the disadvantages of the northern communities, they verbalized their concerns such as lack of housing and inadequate resources.

Foster Parents Available Supports and Services

This section presents the study participants' perceptions of the supports and services available for the foster parents in providing culturally appropriate care to children from remote First Nations communities. This section also presents the foster care providers' views on the support and services in place to provide care to children from remote First Nations communities. Through analyzing the data from the interviews, the common themes emerged regarding the services and supports available, these themes included: the lack of supports, finding their own resources and supports, incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home and social worker support.

Lack of available resources. A recurrent theme identified throughout the participants' interviews included the response of the lack of available resources. This theme was presented by 80% of the foster parent participants. They stated they did not have supports available to them to provide culturally appropriate care. For example:

I did take a culture program, however, I really don't think there is a lot out there of support. As for training and so forth, we take the basic training that would apply; suicide prevention, ADHD, FASD; that applies to all kids, not just Aboriginal kids. (Brooke)

I don't see any service or supports. We've never been told of any programs to go to or anything like that. Anything I know I've looked up online. (Ken)

Services, nothing, no never used, I do my own things with the kids. (Suzanne)

I haven't had any services. (Jill)

I haven't had any come my way, but that could also be the fact that in all honesty

I haven't also asked. (Debbie)

If they want it I'll find out where ever it is, something that they can go to, they don't like the sweat lodges but like the Aboriginal dancing. (Lilly)

I was hoping to find resources for the children to teach them their culture, beliefs and practices, but they never offered any such help. (Jane)

The foster parents verbalized their experiences regarding a lack of supports and services available to them to provide cultural awareness to the children in their care.

Incorporating aboriginal culture in the home. The theme of incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home was verbalized by 40% of the foster parent participants.

For example:

Absolutely, we have cultural here, we cook cultural here, and they are involved with everything now, because that's another shock if you don't. That's my personal opinion. (Leanne)

We do talk about Aboriginal rights and non-Aboriginal rights and stuff. The kids talk about us as a whole, as one, and that's a good thing, we're not separated, we're all the same. (Debbie)

Anything I can help them with culturally I try to find something. I get respite workers that are Aboriginal so they can take kids to different things. My respite

workers are usually Aboriginal people so that they can take kids to cultural things that they deal with and the kids are able to go to it. Such as sweat lodges, Aboriginal traditions and pow wows. (Lilly)

I want him to get to know his language, traditions and his mom wants him to be a drummer, maybe he will get an invitation to go to the drumming, we have gotten one every year. I am going to take him back to see if he is interested. (Jill)

The study participants demonstrated cultural awareness as presented through their responses. They spoke of Aboriginal dancing, sweat lodges, sharing circles, Aboriginal culture, traditions and language. They presented an understanding that children require exposure to their cultural traditions and cultural beliefs to maintain their cultural identity. They identified that incorporating Aboriginal culture, traditions and food helped the children feel more connected to their Aboriginal heritage, traditions and beliefs.

Social worker support. The theme of social worker support emerged through 40% of the foster parent participants. In the study participants shared that their social worker supports them. For example:

My social workers have been really good with supporting me with most things. (Lilly)

I think it really depends on your social worker, that's what I find it boils down to.

The most resource is the social worker person who is attached to your child's care; they are the ones who will go on a limb to find out the resources. (Brooke)

I think I really feel sorry for social workers that have to handle these kids because

I feel they don't have all the answers when these children come to them, they

don't know everything and they do their best to wrap their heads around it and give us that information. (Jill)

I'd have to say I'm lucky, all the workers I've had no problems with anybody. If I phone, I get responses right back, I love the program that I am on, the structure of it, I think they are great and myself I can't complain, I've had a great experience. (Jane)

The study findings were consistent regarding support from the social worker. The foster parents in this study generally felt supported by their social workers. They spoke of open communication with their social workers regarding seeking out resources for the foster parents and the children, and being able to work cohesively with them. They also stated that they felt that they received assistance from their social workers. The participants felt their social workers worked collaboratively with them to assist them in providing care to children from remote First Nations communities.

Foster Parents Additional Resources

Through analyzing the data from the interviews, common themes emerged regarding the additional resources they would like to see that would assist them in caring for children from remote First Nations communities. These themes included: increased cultural resources, foster parent group support, and increased community resources.

Increased cultural resources. As presented in the interviews, 60% of the foster parent participants shared that increased cultural resources are needed. For example:

I would like them to get to know, again, their culture. (Jill)

We've never been told of any cultural programs to go to or anything like that. Anything I know I have looked up online, we need more cultural resources to find out about Aboriginal culture. (Ken)

I think you have to just kind of be open and understand their culture. My foster care provider does let me know if there is anything going on and we try to join in when we can. (Brooke)

It would be good if they would do the sweat lodge, make it to their level of understanding. Offer a good resource library with anything from health issues to FASD to all their traditional teachings that there is to learn about their culture. (Jane)

The foster parents acknowledged that there is a need for cultural support and services focusing on educating foster parents about Aboriginal culture to be better prepared to foster a cultural awareness for Aboriginal children in their care. They spoke of sweat lodges, and a resource library regarding traditional Aboriginal teachings to increase their understanding about Aboriginal culture.

Foster parent group support. The common theme of foster parent group support was identified by 40 % of the foster parent participants. For example:

For me more getting together with other parents, who have children from First Nations just to sit and talk so I can learn more about what's going on because I don't ... have an Aboriginal background, except for some of the things I've learned at school and learned through the agency. (Suzanne)

Just being able to meet different foster parents that are doing the same thing that you do, like a foster parent drop in or resource or something like that. (Jane)

Like the picnics, where other foster parents got together and we talked about, you know, this thing or that thing, or you know, they haven't heard about what I've gone to, or I've never heard about something they went to and we exchanged information (Lilly)

Like a drop in centre where we sit for coffee or just you know, talk about different things about the kids, that kind of stuff. (Brooke)

The foster parent participants verbalized a need for greater support from other foster parent families who are facing similar challenges. They verbalized that this would give them an opportunity to share their experiences with other foster parents and would welcome the opportunity to hear what other foster parents are experiencing and exchange information in regards to providing culturally sensitive care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Greater community resources. In regards to community resources, 30% of the foster parent participants identified resources that would assist them in fostering children from remote First Nations communities. For example:

I think really that Aboriginal children, they need more places to go. There's really no community centres where they can go around here and just hang out and be with other people their age so they get bored and they get into trouble right because there's nothing to do. (Debbie)

We have the foster network, I've never had to reach out. We do a lot in the house like cultural cooking. The supports I think, foster network is good, but if you're not a person that sort of reaches out, then it should be offered in a different way and I don't know how (Leanne)

I think it needs to start at the community level and then works its way down as well that will also give the social workers, foster families and perhaps they can also zoom in on what is actually needed for not only that child but every child that comes into care. (Brooke)

The foster parents identified the need for community resources. Such as community centres, the foster network and meeting the needs for the children in their care at a community level.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study. Demographic characteristics of the study participants, though limited to preserve confidentiality and anonymity in the study, were provided. The study foster parents presented as a group of individuals who genuinely care for children. They were motivated by wanting to help children, provide a better life and education for the children in their care. They were aware of the disadvantages these children face, and were open to provide culturally sensitive care to children from remote First Nations communities. They faced challenges by experiencing a lack of supports and services to provide cultural awareness, a lack of information on the child's history, as well as the challenges of family visits. They were willing to incorporate Aboriginal cultural in their homes. They provided information regarding the resources that would assist them such as greater community resources, foster parent group support, greater communication with the service agency, and a collaborative relationship with their social worker. The study foster parents viewed these factors as important aspects in providing care to children from remote First Nations communities.

The following chapter will present a discussion of the study findings and significant themes, relevant literature and the theoretical and conceptual perspectives.

Chapter 6 - Discussion of the Findings

This chapter presents a discussion of the study findings. The discussion of the study findings will be presented in reference to the study's significant themes, relevant literature and theoretical and conceptual perspectives. The study results will be compared to other relevant studies regarding the needs of foster parents. The theoretical perspective of the attachment theory in relation to the study findings will be presented. The empowerment approach and the strengths perspective relating to the study and implications for social work practice will be presented. The discussion of the findings will include the motivations of non-Aboriginal foster parents in caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities, relating to the recruitment and retention of foster families. The discussion of the challenges of cross-cultural fostering will include the study findings' significant themes of family visits, disadvantaged northern communities, best interest of the child, the school system resources and lack of initial information on the child. The study findings theme of incorporating Aboriginal culture in a non-Aboriginal home relating to cultural receptivity and foster parent training will be examined. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study will be presented.

This study's results were consistent with some of the results of other studies on foster parents' perceptions regarding successful foster placements. According to Brown (2008):

foster parents indicated that they needed the right personality and skills, information about the foster child, a good relationship with the fostering agency, individualised services, community support linkages to other foster families, supportive immediate and extended families, as well as self-care skills (p. 538).

The participants shared their experiences that they required detailed information on the children. They also spoke of a collaborative working relationship with the agency and their social worker as a supportive resource. They verbalized the need for group support of other foster families. Some of the participants found support through immediate and extended families. Self-care skills were not discussed by the participants in this study.

The study results are also consistent with the results of other studies describing the needs of foster parents. Brown and Calder (2000) point out “The need for cultural sensitivity, including openness, awareness, and respect for cultural differences, is apparent in the literature on training needs of foster parents, recognizing the high overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care” (p. 739). The foster parents in this study demonstrated that they were open to and possessed an awareness to foster cultural sensitivity with the children in their care. They were willing to attend training and receive supports and services to increase their knowledge of Aboriginal customs, traditions and culture, but they felt there were limited resources to obtaining this training.

There were also some differences between the existing literature and the needs identified by the study participants. Financial payment for services was a need identified in the literature, but not by the foster parents in this study. This may be due to two reasons, a limited sample size and a hesitancy to disclose information regarding financial payment concerns. According to Brown and Calder (2000) “the need for foster parents to have adequate payment for their services has received considerable attention in the literature. Measuring the actual costs of providing care, however, has been difficult because of the many direct and indirect costs involved” (p. 741). Financial payment was not discussed by the foster parents in this study however, some participants did speak of

out of pocket funds they used to provide the children with things that were not covered by funding.

In a further study, Brown (2008): presents foster parent needs included “understanding by others, financial support, a good relationship with the school, helpful social workers, professionals with experience with disabilities, information about particular disabilities, medical care, culturally-specific services for Aboriginal children, transitional support and respite were helpful (p. 541). Several of these factors were also apparent in the study participants’ responses, and were viewed as important aspects in providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. With the exception of financial support, the foster parents in this study acknowledged that a good relationship with the school was essential. A collaborative working relationship with social workers was important for support and resources. The need for culturally specific services was identified by the participants in the study, to increase knowledge and cultural awareness. Respite workers were mentioned by only one participant in the study. Support workers were mentioned, and were seen as a helpful support as they drive the children to appointments and activities.

Motivation to Foster

One of the purposes of this study was to gain an understanding of the motivations of the non-Aboriginal foster parents in providing care to children from remote First Nations communities. The most common motivation expressed by the study’s participants was that they had a genuine desire to nurture children.

By gaining an understanding of the foster parent’s motivation, improvements to future recruitment and retention efforts of foster parents may be gained. This is in

response to the need for more foster parents to provide care, and retain them to continue to foster to meet the demand. According to Rodger, Cummings and Leschied (2006):

To provide a foundation for understanding the motivation of foster parents, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors need to be considered. Intrinsic motivation is conceptualized as being forces inherent within the individual, such as values. Extrinsic motivation reflects environmental expectations and/or rewards such as respect and work that is consistent with personal values are related to job sustainability and satisfaction (p. 1130).

All of the study participants expressed intrinsic motivation. According to Arnold-Gillis, Crase, Stockdale and Shelley (1998):

Much of the research has grouped reasons and motivations for fostering into categories. Some of the stated motivations for fostering can be categorized into five main areas: childlessness, altruism and social conscience, identification with deprived children, wanting a larger family, and wanting to nurture children (p. 718).

All of these reasons and motivations for fostering were observed in this study. Foster parent motivations can be applied to the knowledge for future recruitment and retention, and to promote satisfaction with the foster parent role. Exploring the foster parents' motivation in this study demonstrated that they were motivated by intrinsic factors, such as helping children who are disadvantaged, providing a better life, helping them get a better education, and the love of children. This was best summed up by a study participant:

The experience has been awesome because it gives you the sense of good feeling as well as knowing you are providing them with a safe, loving home. The love they do bring into your home is amazing and some of them that you never thought would open to letting themselves be loved are amazing as well. For a child to receive love I think is the most gratifying gift you can give because maybe they would never have had that opportunity. (Brooke)

Attachment Theory Discussion

The study findings were congruent to the concepts of attachment theory. The foster parent participants identified challenges of the negative behaviours following family visits. These behaviours can be linked to a child's past experiences and attachments. Consistent with the literature, early disrupted attachment may later lead to emotional and developmental behavioural issues. These negative behaviours are identified in the literature on attachment theory. According to the *Centre for Parenting and Research* (2006) "many foster care givers report disturbed reactions to visits from parents, such as sleeping problems, hyperactivity, anxiety or a general worsening of children's behaviour" (p. 4). The foster parent participants identified negative behaviours such as being withdrawn, increased anxiety and negative attitudes following the family visits.

Understanding concepts of the attachment theory is important for foster care providers. According to the *Centre for Parenting and Research* (2006) "by understanding the link between a child's attachment history and their behaviour, carers may be better able to modify their expectations and perceptions in order to build healthy new attachments with these children" (p. 1). By exploring the experiences and challenges

foster parents face, they may be supported by utilizing concepts of attachment theory in order to further understand the child's behaviour. According to the *Centre for Parenting and Research* (2006) "research suggests that continuing contact with birth parents after a separation, particularly the transition to foster care, may well help the child come to terms with the separation and could play a crucial role in preparing the child to accept a new caregiver" (p.4).

Attachment theory concepts may provide a perspective to better understand children's behaviours and needs; however, recognition of a child's cultural context must be acknowledged. According to Neckoway et al. (2007) present:

attachment theory has a central role as a model that informs social work practice with Aboriginal parents even though the applicability of the model for working with Aboriginal peoples has not been established. This raises the question whether Aboriginal parenting practices are congruent with the attachment theory (p. 65).

The author's Neckoway et al. (2007) question "the relevance of attachment theory to Aboriginal parents who do not adhere to the mother-infant dyad as the sole contributor to the child's sense of security" (p. 65). This view point is relevant to this study in regards to considering the child's cultural context and attachments to extended family and community. As mentioned in the literature review, the majority of work on attachment theory has been based on Western studies. Consideration of the children's cultural context, attachments to birth families and communities must be considered. Research suggests that children may be attached to multiple caregivers such as is seen in kinship care where attachment goes beyond the nuclear family to extended family and community. The document *Best Interests of the Child* (2009) by the Canadian Coalition

for the Rights of Children discuss “consideration should be given to other models of attachment theory that look beyond the nuclear family” (p. 44). Exploring extended family connections such as kinship care are necessary to address the best interests of the child in maintaining the child’s culture, heritage and connection with their family and community.

Empowerment Approach Discussion

The empowerment approach was utilized in the research study by working collaboratively with the study participants through the interview process acknowledging their lived experiences and their knowledge in regards to caring for Aboriginal children in cross-cultural fostering. The study findings theme of a collaborative approach with the social worker was consistent in the study. The empowerment approach has implications for social work practice and is supported in the literature. Gutiérrez (1990) “presents five techniques to help individuals through the empowerment approach. These techniques include: 1) accept the client’s definition of the problem, 2) identify and build on existing strengths, 3) engage in power analysis of client’s situation, 4) teach specific skills, 5) mobilize resources and advocate for clients” (p. 151). In accepting the clients definition of the problem this study focused on what the participants lived experiences and views were in regards to the challenges they faced with cross-cultural fostering. According to Gutiérrez (1990):

by accepting the clients definition, the worker is communicating that the client is capable of identifying the situation. This technique also places the client in a position of power and control over the helping relationship, and does not preclude bringing up new issues for exploration (p. 151).

The use of open ended questions in the interview process encouraged open dialogue for conversation regarding their experiences and the challenges they face.

In regards to identifying and building upon existing strengths, this study acknowledged the participants strengths and their role of a foster care provider. Their complex role includes caring for the children's physical and emotional needs, working with the foster care agency as well as, the birth families and dealing with issues such as the lack of information on the child. All of these themes were identified in this study. Gutiérrez (1990) points out "by identifying and building upon existing strengths, the empowering practitioner gets in touch with the client's current level of functioning and current sources of individual or interpersonal power" (p. 151). The foster parent participants identified the current and lack of the supports and services that were available.

While the research study did not provide all the mentioned empowerment techniques such as engaging in a power analysis of the client's situation, teaching specific skills, and mobilizing resources. However, the study did provide accepting the client's definition of the problems they encountered caring for Aboriginal children in cross-cultural fostering. The study also identified existing strengths through an empowerment approach and strengths perspective by acknowledging their strengths in their complex role of foster care provider. In regards to a power analysis of the client's situation the study worked collaboratively with the participants in a mutual respectful manner, however, there still remains the larger power imbalance of foster parent and social service agencies that goes beyond the study to larger societal power imbalance dynamics. While this research study did not teach skills to foster parents it did identify some of their

cultural educational needs that may direct future foster parent training. It is the hope of this researcher that the study findings serve to provide information and identify foster parent's needs and promote support, services and resources available to promote empowerment by better preparing non-Aboriginal foster parents in cross-cultural fostering.

Strengths Perspective Discussion

The strengths perspective was utilized throughout this study with the foster parent participants. The researcher utilized a collaborative approach throughout the interviews that promoted mutual respect and facilitated an equal partnership, recognizing and valuing their lived experiences and perspectives in regards to providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The strengths perspective is supported in the literature. Healy (2005) discusses "one of its key strengths is that it provides social workers with a framework for promoting respect for client's capacities and potential" (p. 169). The study findings acknowledged that the foster parents who were interviewed demonstrated the strengths to overcome the challenges of cross-cultural fostering.

Disadvantaged Northern Communities

The study findings presented that the foster parent participants demonstrated an awareness of the disadvantages of the northern communities contributing to the over representation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. The foster parents recognized that the children came from hardships and that the communities lack the support and resources. They identified factors such as poverty and lack of adequate housing. The study findings are consistent with the literature in regards to the poor

socioeconomic conditions of the northern communities adding to the problem of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system. The issues of poverty are well documented in the literature, Sinha, Trocmé, Fallon and MacLaurin (2012) discuss:

Existing research documents strong links between poverty and child maltreatment, particularly neglect, and outline multiple mechanisms through which poverty may contribute to maltreatment. These include difficulties in providing the safe environments, appropriate child care and other assets that foster healthy child development. In addition, poverty may lead to an accumulation of negative life experiences that contribute to increases in risk factors such as depression, low self-esteem, or substance abuse which may, in turn impact parenting (p. 3).

The foster parents presented an understanding of the disadvantages of northern communities as a cause of disruption and breakdown in families. They verbalized an awareness of the lack of resources to assist the northern communities to improvements to provide care to children. The foster parents spoke of resources, improved housing, lifestyle, opportunities and financial assistance as suggestions to assist northern communities to decrease the disadvantages.

According to *Children and Families First: Manitoba First Nations Early Intervention and Prevention Services* (2010):

risks of maltreatment are greatly influenced by poverty and social and economic conditions in which children and families live. There are great inconsistencies in

social and economic conditions among First Nations and between First Nation and non-First Nation communities (p. 1).

The study findings common theme of the disadvantaged northern communities is consistent with the literature regarding the issues of overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in care due to factors such as: poverty and poor socioeconomic conditions influencing child maltreatment. The study foster parents verbalized their understanding that the poor socioeconomic conditions of the northern communities contributed to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system.

Best Interest of the Child

The best interest of the child concept is relevant to the study findings. The principles of the best interest in the child concept include the importance of continuity of care for children and respecting the child's cultural and religious backgrounds and the appropriate care to meet their needs, and a stable foster family when in need of protection.

The study findings support that the foster parents are willing to provide culturally appropriate care and seek out opportunities for the children to participate in cultural activities and events and act in their best interest to provide cultural connections to their Aboriginal heritage and cultural identity. The underrepresentation of Aboriginal foster homes has necessitated the placement of Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal homes. Literature supports that the best interest of the child should be a preference for placing the child with members of the child's extended family or with other members of a child's community. The literature supports the best interest of the child to remain with their family if possible. Mosek (2004) discusses "families should be supported, children

should only be removed as a last resort and returned to their families if and as soon as practical, and children's views on their placement should be heard and be influential" (p. 324). This view of the best interest of the child supports preserving the family through supports and promoting family reunification. However, family reunification is not always possible due to individual circumstances. Mosek (2004) points out "the goal of this process is family reunification that is not always achieved and at times is regarded as incompatible with the best interests of the child" (p. 341). The question is raised what is the best interest of the child when placement in a non-Aboriginal home is necessary. Cultural receptivity of the foster parents and incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home may provide continuity of care and promote the best interest in the child while in cross-cultural foster care.

Family Visits

The study findings' common theme of family visits was presented by the foster parents as a challenging aspect of fostering Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. This presents a problem due to the importance of family connections and reunification of children to their parents and communities. This also presents a learning opportunity for foster parents in their role and responsibility, and presents an opportunity for education. The role of the foster family has become more challenging. This challenge is supported in the literature, Hudson and Lavasseur (2002) present:

it has moved from what the literature has termed exclusive foster care to inclusive foster care, in which the foster parents are expected to include the family of origin in the life of the child as much as possible and thereby include the birth family in the lives of the foster parents (p.855).

The challenge of family visits is also discussed by Twigg, (2009) “the fostering paradigm shifted from exclusive to inclusive fostering, setting out expectations that foster carers would be ready and able to work with the biological parents of the children in their care” (p. 172). The inclusion of the birth family visits is consistent with Aboriginal views of the child being connected to family, extended family and community. The non-Aboriginal foster parents require education and awareness of Aboriginal values, culture and knowledge to encourage cultural connections of the children to their communities. According to Sinclair et al. (2004) “child welfare agencies are putting forward plans of care that involve long term foster by non-Aboriginal foster parents, but allow for continuing visits with parents or other relatives and contact with members of their community” (p. 238). Foster parents now have additional responsibilities incorporating biological family contact and visits. This has caused additional stress to the foster parents however, is a necessary component to maintain their cultural self-identity and cultural connections.

The foster parents in this study found that the children displayed negative behaviours following visits with their birth parents. According to Buehler et al. (2006) “supporting relationships between foster children and their birth families is one of the most complex and potentially demanding aspects of the foster parent role” (p. 545). This aspect of the foster parent’s role was verbalized as a challenge to the foster parents in this study, due to the subsequent behaviours the children demonstrated following family visits. Supporting foster parents in the challenges of family visits is supported in the literature. Mosek (2004) presents:

Mutual and open discussion of central issues regarding identity, loyalty, separation, attachment and reunification need to be held on a regular basis. All participants should be actively involved in decision-making processes that concern goals, tasks and achievements. All involved are therefore empowered to take an active and influential role in the foster care situation (p.340).

The implications of these findings for social work practice are on the importance of family contact, and supporting the foster parents in this difficult aspect of the foster parent role.

School System Resources

The school system as a resource was identified by the foster parents in the research study as both a positive and negative experience for the Aboriginal children in their care. They identified resources offered such as cultural activities and weekly sharing circles. However, they also identified negative aspects with the school system such as a lack of support, unfamiliar structural environments and negative perceptions of teachers adding to the challenging transitions of Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The study findings are consistent with sources in the literature regarding the challenges foster children face in the school system. According to Ferguson and Wolkow (2012):

The experience of being taken away from their families to an unfamiliar place of care with strangers is in its self traumatic. The uncertainty of new surroundings and relationships, and the anxiety of separation from familiar, albeit adverse circumstances. To exacerbate the situation many experience further upheaval and instability as a result of repeated placement changes (p.1143).

This literature is consistent with the study findings in regards to promoting the continuity of care, providing the foster parents with support in order to retain the foster parents, prevent placement disruptions, necessitating the move to another foster home. These moves may have negative implications for foster children in regards to their educational needs. The study findings of the negative school experiences causing trauma, anxiety of separation and placement instability all add to poor educational outcomes. This issue is documented in the literature regarding foster children in the school system. According to Vacca (2008):

Many foster care children are subjected to many obstacles during their education in public school. Most of these children move from school to school because they frequently change foster homes. When they arrive in a new community, they are greeted by their new school with delays in registration, inappropriate classroom placement and, if they are in need of special education or remedial services, there will be a significant delay in the implementation of these services. These blocks to the education of the foster child are compounded if the school staff has a negative perception about the child because of his or her previous academic and social history. (p. 1085).

In this study, providing a better education was identified as a motivating factor by the foster parent participants in the study as well as poor information management was identified as a challenge. These findings were also concurrent in the literature. The study findings as well as the literature regarding foster children in the school system warrant further exploration of the specific needs of foster children in the school system to promote more positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal children in foster care.

Lack of information on the Child

The lack of information on the child on initial placement was identified as a challenge to the foster parents in this study. It was viewed as a challenge to provide care to the children without detailed information of the history of the children in their care. While it remains unclear as to the reasons for this lack of information, there is evidence in the literature supporting this challenge. Craig-Oldsen Craig and Morton (2006) present “there are rules and restrictions about confidentiality and what information agency staff can share, even with fellow team members such as foster parents” (p. 276). The need for information about the child is apparent. Craig-Oldsen et al. (2006) discuss “agencies need to revisit their procedures around sharing information to ensure that they are not counterproductively restrictive. Foster parents should have complete access to the information that is relevant” (p. 276).

Farris-Manning and Zandstra (2003) also discuss the lack of information on the child “ongoing challenges identified by the Canadian Foster Family Association (CFFA) include training, access to information about children in care, support, adequate compensation, and feeling value or recognized as a member of the team” (p. 9). The need for information on the child and access to information about the children in care was evident in the research study as well as represented in the sources within the literature as a challenge.

The lack of detailed information presents implications in regards to providing appropriate care to children, and it is also a challenge to foster parents in trying to determine the needs of a child, and having the ability to cope with a child’s physical and emotional needs. Brown (2008) points out :

another important policy issue concerns information that foster parents can access about the foster children in their care. While there may be privacy reasons for withholding information about a child in care from the foster parents the need for foster family safety (including the safety of the foster child) should be a high priority (p. 552).

It is evident in this study as well as previous studies that the information on the child is essential in addressing the needs of foster parents to provide continuity of care.

Incorporating Aboriginal Culture in the Home

Incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home was a theme identified by the foster parents in the study. These foster parents are providing care to children from a different cultural background than themselves. Not only is the foster parent role a difficult one, they are also trying to meet the children's cultural needs. They presented as a group of foster parents open and willing to participate in cultural activities, and to incorporate cultural beliefs, traditions and customs in their homes. They demonstrated an awareness of the children's cultural heritage as important to the child's wellbeing and cultural identity. Sources in the literature support culturally receptivity foster parents in promoting children's cultural development. Coakley and Orme (2012) discuss:

within the confines of the cultural receptivity theoretical framework, culturally receptive foster parents are willing to seek training, support and services that increase their transcultural parenting abilities. The increased ability to parent children of different cultures in a socially appropriate manner translates to their becoming more culturally competent as well as receptive to ongoing participation in culturally stimulating activities (p. 530).

The foster parents in the study demonstrated cultural receptivity by their willingness to seek training, attend cultural activities and participate in cultural and traditional ceremonies and encourage the children to participate and embrace their cultural heritage. They presented as a group willing and open to becoming more culturally competent to promote the children's cultural development. Coakley and Orme (2012) point out "cultural reciprocity research has implications for social work practice, particularly in foster parent training" (p. 530). Foster parent training was identified as a need by the study foster parent participants. Barriers to obtaining this training were discussed in the literature review and included lack of resources, scheduling problems, transportation issues. Challenges of providing foster parent training are identified in the literature. Twigg (2009) discuss the challenges of providing foster parent training include:

finding adequate training materials, competent trainers, and a mechanism for providing training that is responsive to such things as schedule conflicts and fostering in rural and remote locations. On-line programs, chat rooms, and distance education facilities could be used to overcome some of these challenges (p. 181).

These identified approaches have implications for social work practice and child welfare agencies to promote cultural training and programs to address the culturally appropriate care for Aboriginal children and meeting the needs of foster parents.

Social Worker Support

Support from the social worker emerged as a common theme through the interviews. This finding is consistent with the literature. Studies on the needs of foster

parents include the support of the social worker as a necessary element. MacGregor, Rodgers, Cummings and Leschied (2006) present:

In order to understand how to support and retain foster parents, current research on the strengths and deficits in support of foster parents need to be understood. These supports can be classified as both intrinsic (emotional) and extrinsic (tangible) support (p. 353).

Through the findings of this study both intrinsic and extrinsic support was identified by the foster parent participants. They verbalized the need for open communication with the agency and their social worker. There is evidence in the literature that foster parents require support from the agency in caring for children. “Foster parents have reported a lack of recognition and respect for their expertise by social service agencies and a general lack of support by the social service system” (Fees, Stockdale, Crase, Caspers-Riggins, Lekies & Arnold-Gillis, 1998, p. 349). Children in cross-cultural foster placements may require specific attention to their cultural beliefs, customs and traditions. According to Daniel (2011) “developing support groups for foster parents involved in the transcultural foster placements, providing specialized training, improving communication, facilitating discussions with other professionals or members from other cultures are all ways that social workers can support foster parents” (p. 2239). These are all interventions that may be implemented to assist non-Aboriginal foster parents to provide care to children from remote First Nations communities.

In regards to extrinsic support the foster parents spoke of the need for additional training, resources and supports regarding their responsibilities as foster care providers. This included more information on resources and services needed for caring for children

with challenging behaviours and meeting their cultural needs. According to MacGregor et al. (2006) “foster parents need positive agency relationships, emotional support, and a variety of concrete supports to be motivated and satisfied with fostering and to increase the likelihood of retention” (p.354). As evidenced in this study and congruent with literature and research, social worker and agency support is an essential component to recruit and retain foster parents. It is imperative to provide foster parents with both intrinsic and extrinsic support through a collaborative approach respecting and valuing their expertise and working together to increase the continuity of care for the children. This collaborative approach has theoretical foundations supporting the empowerment perspective and is supported in the literature. Gutierrez (1990) presents “the interaction between worker and client should be characterized by genuineness, mutual respect, open communication and informality” (p. 151). This study acknowledged the challenges the foster parents faced and worked collaboratively with the foster parents to identify the supports and services they require to empower them to provide culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Foster Parent Group Support

The study findings included the theme of foster parent support group as a resource which would benefit the foster parent participants to provide assistance for them caring for children from remote First Nations communities. This group work is supported by the strengths perspective to identify their strengths and encourage empowerment of the individual, as well as the group. This approach expresses confidence in the member’s strengths and accomplishments of the challenges they face in fostering children, and

providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. According to Drumm (2006):

mutual aid creates the conditions in which people can support and assist one another with their personal goals. Being able to recognize and empathize with others, to listen to others and express one's self, and see the commonalities with other group members empowers participants to interact more effectively in their various social arenas (p. 21).

The group experience provides a forum for validation of their experiences and challenges with foster care. Having their voices heard, as well as having others facing many of the same concerns and issues, bonds them together and thus may empower them as a group. According to Robbins et al. (2006) "group work helps people speak about common experiences, receive social support, and see the connections between the personal and the political" (p.117). Group work is supported by the empowerment perspective in the literature. Gutierrez (1990) discusses "in the context of empowerment, mutual aid, self-help, and support groups are formed by people experiencing similar problems, who then focus on providing emotional and concrete support" (p. 151). In the study the foster parent participants verbalized the group support as a resource that would assist them to get together with others who share the same challenges. Literature supports the involvement of individuals in support groups. Gutierrez (1990) discusses group work where "they can provide the context for developing group consciousness, by involving clients in dialogue with others who share their problems" (p. 151). The study findings' common theme of foster parent support groups are consistent with the literature on the empowerment and strengths perspective of group work support.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is found within its qualitative research design and phenomenological approach to provide exploration of the lived experiences of foster parents caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. It explores their experiences and the supports and services perceived by foster parents as beneficial and necessary in providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children, promoting well-being and self-identity in cross-cultural foster placements. The experiences and challenges faced by foster parents can provide the child and family service agencies with valuable insight and information, to improvement in practice and programs. It is through qualitative studies that the lived experiences can be further understood, and promote improved outcomes for Aboriginal children in care from remote First Nations communities.

Further, the strength of this qualitative study is that it gives non-Aboriginal foster parents an opportunity to share their experiences providing care to children from remote First Nations communities. By gaining an understanding of the foster parents' experiences, foster parent programs can use this information to possibly develop a better framework for providing resources necessary to promote culturally sensitive approaches to Aboriginal children in care.

A limitation of this study is due to the relatively small sample size of non-Aboriginal foster parent participants. The study is based on the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents, and the findings may not be suitable to form any generalizable conclusions. Polit and Beck (2010) point out "the goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of

human experience through the intensive study of particular cases” (p.1451). This study did provide a detailed description of the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Summary

This chapter presented the discussion and analysis of the findings of the study. A comparison to other relevant studies regarding the similarities and differences of this study was provided. The discussion of the study findings were presented in reference to the relevant literature and included the motivations of non-Aboriginal foster parents in caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The attachment theory, empowerment approach and strengths perspective were discussed in regards to the study findings. A discussion of the challenges of cross-cultural fostering included disadvantaged northern communities, best interest of the child, family visits, school system resources, lack of information on the child and incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home. Social worker support and foster parent group support were presented. Finally, strengths and limitations of this qualitative study were discussed. The following chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The participants in this study provided valuable information on the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents providing care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. The study participants shared common motivations for providing care to Aboriginal children. Their motivations focused on intrinsic factors such as helping disadvantaged children, making a difference, providing a better life and demonstrated a genuine caring of children.

The participants also demonstrated a knowledge base surrounding the issues and challenges faced by Aboriginal children from remote northern communities. They shared experiences and challenges including being aware of the disadvantaged northern communities, the disruption in the children's behaviours with family visits, the school system and their perceptions of the lack of information provided on the children's history. In general, many of the needs identified in other studies were acknowledged by the study foster parent participants.

In regards to family visits, the foster parent's role and responsibility expectations must be clearly defined during the recruitment and orientation process. Inclusive foster care which includes the family of origin in the child's life as much as possible, to maintain family connections and promote reunification of children to their birth families and communities. Though these visits may be challenging to the foster family they are a necessary component to maintain the child's cultural connections and self-identity. These challenges of their complex role and responsibilities may be supported through social worker support of the foster care providers through emotional and educational supports.

The participants of this study provided valuable information regarding the supports and services that would assist them in fostering Aboriginal children. Some examples of this were shared in the study findings such as, a resource library, increased contact with other foster parents, and more available cultural activities that would be suitable for the children's age group. They shared their experiences of incorporating Aboriginal culture in the home, the lack of supports, the need to find their own supports, and the support from their social worker. Social worker support is an essential component to promote foster parent retention and role satisfaction. Both intrinsic and extrinsic support is necessary to support foster parents in their complex role as a foster care provider. Social workers may support foster parents through additional training, resources, services and supports needed for caring for children with challenging behaviours and meeting their cultural needs. Also, adequate information on the child is required in addressing the needs of foster parents to provide continuity of care.

The participants of this study provided insight and information regarding additional resources that would assist them in fostering Aboriginal children, and promote culturally sensitive foster care. They shared their experiences regarding increasing community resources, foster parent support group, greater communication with the service agency, and increased cultural resources.

To conclude, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents and the supports and services necessary to provide culturally appropriate care. The acknowledgement that placement with an Aboriginal family would be the most culturally appropriate in terms of continuity of their cultural heritage and self-identity. As supported in the literature, political ideologies and views of

the dominant society have negatively impacted Aboriginal people throughout history through policies including the residential school system and the child welfare system. There remain conflicting cultural issues regarding child rearing practices dating back in history to colonization and assimilation practices and policies which contrasts with non-Aboriginal world views which place emphasis on the nuclear family as opposed to the Aboriginal view of extended family and community. This has caused generational trauma and distrust with Aboriginal people and has minimized their efforts for self-direction of child welfare services. The best interest of the child definition requires further research to be explored regarding a child's cultural context respecting their rights of cultural heritage. Greater emphasis on preserving the family through supports is necessary. In regards to placement for an Aboriginal child, preference should be made to place the child with extended family members or in their community. Placement with a non-Aboriginal foster family only when necessary who are receptive to provide culturally sensitive care to promote and maintain their cultural heritage and self-identity. To end, the participants in this study have contributed valuable information that informs child and family service delivery and practice, in regards to supporting culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Exploring the experiences of foster care providers caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities contributes to the information to child and family services to improve service provisions. Though the results of the study are not generalizable, there is little research available exploring the experiences of foster care providers with Aboriginal children. This study suggests that there needs to be further

research conducted exploring the experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents, as it can provide information from a broader sample of research of non-Aboriginal foster parents providing care to Aboriginal children. This will provide additional insights for consideration, and a deeper understanding of the experiences of foster care providers. This information may then be used to develop appropriate supports and services for non-Aboriginal foster parents to provide culturally appropriate care.

Further research exploring the cultural needs of children from remote First Nations communities is also recommended. The participants in the study voiced a need for Aboriginal supports and resources, which may allow foster parents to maintain the cultural connections for Aboriginal children in care. The study findings support collaborative relationships with foster parents and child and family services agencies, so that they may provide foster care services in a culturally sensitive manner.

Further research exploring the motivations, the roles and responsibilities of foster care providers is recommended. By gaining a better understanding of their motivations, perceived roles and responsibilities, foster care agencies may be better informed when designing recruitment, retention strategies and training for foster care providers.

To conclude, Buehler et al. (2006), presents an inspiring message “the idea that it takes a village to raise a child is especially true for foster children, and successful foster care involves more than just competent foster families” (p. 549). The findings of this research study served to explore the “village” of experiences, services, supports and resources necessary for non-Aboriginal foster parents to provide culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities.

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Appendix: A

Summary of the Research Project

An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Non-Aboriginal Foster Parents in Providing Care for Children from Remote First Nations Communities.

The purpose of this research is to provide a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents in providing care for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. This research will explore the perspectives of non-Aboriginal foster parents in order to better understand their experiences and the supports and services necessary in providing culturally sensitive care to children from remote First Nations communities. An over-representation of Aboriginal children in care of child and family services agencies presents many challenges in providing culturally appropriate foster care, in order to promote the wellbeing, and self-identity of Aboriginal children in care.

This study will use a qualitative research design based on a phenomenological approach. This study will focus on a diverse population of caregivers in order to provide an opportunity to voice their experiences and challenges. This study will provide information for child and family services agencies regarding implementing supports and programs, through which foster parents may be better prepared to provide culturally appropriate foster care to Aboriginal children, and may encourage recruitment and retention of foster homes.

Appendix: B

Invitation Letter to Participate in the Study

Dear Foster Care Giver(s):

You are invited to participate in a graduate thesis study focused on Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Non-Aboriginal Foster Parents in Providing Care for Children from Remote First Nations Communities. There is research to support the existence of an over representation of Aboriginal children in the care of child and family services agencies in Manitoba. This issue presents many challenges in providing culturally appropriate foster care in order to promote the well-being and self-identity of Aboriginal children in care. This study explores the experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents in order to better understand their experiences and the services and supports necessary in providing culturally appropriate care to children from remote First Nations communities. By obtaining such information, the social services field would benefit from gaining a further understanding of the experiences non-Aboriginal foster parents experience while caring for children from remote First Nations communities. You have been invited to participate in this study because you have direct experience providing foster care to children from remote First Nations communities. No further information about you has been divulged to the researcher or the agency.

The researcher is a graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. Please be advised that you are under no obligation to participate in this study. Access and provision of services will not be affected if you participate or do not participate in the study. Further, your participation in the study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Please note that there are no potential risks to you the participant, or third party as a result of participating in the study.

Please be assured that your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Your social worker, foster care worker, other participants, or anyone else affiliated with your agency will not be aware of your participation in the study. Further, your confidentiality will be protected as there will be no identifying information shared about you in this study. The interview will take place in your home or a location of your choice.

The study will be approximately one hour in length. You do not have to prepare for this interview as the study is interested in your experiences and thoughts regarding caring for Aboriginal children from remote First Nations communities. With your permission, the interviews will be tape recorded in order to accurately capture your responses. All data containing information will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. No other persons other than the researcher and the research advisor will have access to the data gathered. Please be advised that if any child abuse and or neglect are reported I am required under the Manitoba Child and Family Services Act to report what has occurred in the interview process.

Upon completion of the study, a summary of the research findings will be available to you by fax, email or mail no later than one month after the interview. You will be asked the preferred method of delivery on the consent form at the interview.

If you would like to participate, or have any further questions regarding participating in this interview, please call the researchers' personal cell or email the researchers' personal email account (contact information is listed below).

Thank you for taking the time to read the letter inviting you to participate in the research study.

If you are interested in participating in this valuable study, please contact the researcher, Trisha Fox, at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@xx.xxxxxxxxxx.xx.

It is the request of the researcher that your response is received by May 27, 2013.

Sincerely,

Trisha Fox

Graduate Student,

University of Manitoba, Faculty of Social Work

Appendix: C

Confirmation Letter to the Participants

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study focused on the exploration of the lived experiences of non-Aboriginal foster parents in providing care for children from remote First Nations communities.

I look forward to meeting you at the date and time we agreed upon on the phone as follows:

Date:

Time:

Place:

The interview will take one hour of your time. A tape recorder will be used to ensure your responses are captured accurately for the study. Everything that you say in the interview will be kept confidential and at no time will your name or identity be shared with anyone or your Agency.

Once again, I appreciate your participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Trisha Fox

Cell: (xxx)-xxx-xxxx

Email: xxxxx@xx.xxxxxxxxx.xx

Appendix: D

Consent Form

Research Project Title: An Exploration of the Lived Experiences of Non-Aboriginal Foster Parents in Providing Care for Children from Remote First Nations Communities

Researcher: Trisha Fox, B.A., B.S.W.
MSW Graduate Student-University of Manitoba

Research Advisor: Professor Don Fuchs
University of Manitoba- Faculty of Social Work

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research is to provide an exploration of the lived experiences of Non-Aboriginal foster parents in providing care for children from remote First Nations communities. It is anticipated that the findings from this study will bring additional knowledge and findings to contribute to First Nations child and family services agencies, and for Aboriginal children in care.

The researcher is a University of Manitoba graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work and is employed as a front line social worker in the child welfare system.

Please be assured that your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Your social worker, foster care worker, other participants, or anyone else affiliated with your Agency, will not be aware of your participation in the study. Further, your confidentiality will be protected as there will be no identifying information shared about you in this study. Please be advised that if any child abuse and or neglect are reported I am required under the Manitoba Child and Family Services Act to report what has occurred in the interview process.

This one time one-on-one interview will be approximately one hour in length. With your permission, the interviews will be tape recorded in order to accurately capture your responses. All data will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Upon completion of the study, a summary of the research findings will be available to you by fax, email or mail. You will be asked the preferred method of delivery during the interview process.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project, and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal or professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

The research has been approved by the University of Manitoba's Research and Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Researcher: Trisha Fox, B.A., B.S.W.

MSW Graduate Student-University of Manitoba

Cell Phone: (xxx)-xxx-xxxx

E-mail: xxxxxx@xx.xxxxxxxxxx.xx

Research Advisor: Professor Don Fuchs

University of Manitoba- Faculty of Social Work

Telephone Number: (xxx)-xxx-xxxx

E-mail: xxxxxx@xx.xxxxxxxxxx.xx

Human Ethics Secretariat: Margaret Bowman

Telephone Number: (xxx) - xxx-xxxx

E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.xx

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix: E
Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experience being a foster care provider, in particular, what have the positive aspects been fostering children from remote First Nations communities and what motivates you to provide care to these children.
2. Tell me about your challenges as a foster parent and if any, what are the negative aspects of fostering children from remote First Nations communities.
3. As a foster care provider, tell me about the supports available for you as a foster parent in providing culturally appropriate care to Aboriginal children.
4. Tell me about some of the services and supports you have found beneficial in providing care to Aboriginal children from First Nations communities.
5. What would you like to see in regards to resources which would assist you in caring for children from remote First Nations communities?