ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS FOR

SIBLINGS IN FOSTER FAMILIES:

A GRANT PROPOSAL

By

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May 2015

This project proposes the development of and funding for modules that could be used in a training program or curriculum for prospective and experienced foster parents to help prepare and support their children for the fostering experience. This project aims to provide tools to help foster parents and agency staff assess and support families' abilities, resources, and willingness to strengthen relationships between their children and the children who will be placed with their families. A literature review details the demographics of children in family foster care and foster families, the impact of fostering on children whose parents foster, and current and proposed interventions to support foster families regarding the impact of fostering on their children. A host organization is recommended to develop and disseminate these resources, and potential funders are identified. Actual submission and/or funding for this project were not required for the successful completion of this work.

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS FOR SIBLINGS IN FOSTER FAMILIES: A GRANT PROPOSAL

A THESIS

Presented to the School of Social Work

California State University, Long Beach

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Social Work

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May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to "my tribe," my nine nieces and nephews: Monét, Malaikah, Kiana, Delilah, Josiah, Jobe, Xylia, Viola Blue, and Ayden. Though they are too young to understand what this means now, I hope that one day they are able to read this when they are in college and know that their auntie did this for them! I love them to the sky and hope that the completion of this thesis will inspire them, as they have inspired me.

My family has grounded me throughout this process. Though at times it was difficult to separate myself and dedicate time to writing, they have given their unconditional love and support. To my mother, Rebecca Felix, thank you for your ear, your heart, your patience, your nurturing, and for guiding me to this helping profession. You are my rock and I do not know how I could have done this without calling you every other hour to tell you how overwhelmed I was feeling. To my father, Richard O. Felix, Jr., thank you for teaching me how to be patient, empathetic, and how to be an advocate. Dad, your "precious" did it! Thank you for calling me almost every day and asking how my day went and reminding me "not too work too hard." To my oldest sibling and only sister, Reshyna Felix-Lopez, thank you for being the first from our family to go to college and pursue a social work degree. You have exemplified what it means to be mother, wife, and professional social worker. I do not get to tell you enough, but I love and admire you sister! To my only brother, Richard J. Felix (Ricky), I feel like our

relationship has gotten stronger and, despite the circumstances, I am ever so grateful that it has happened. As your baby sister, I have looked up to you, from student government in middle school to being a dedicated family man. Though the pieces of our family's puzzle seem out of place, I believe in you and have complete faith that we will get through this, together.

To my beloved grandma, Cruz Sambrano, and aunt, Vera Gonzalez, I know you are watching over me. Thank you for teaching me how to be a strong, loving, confident, and independent woman. I miss you and I know you would be proud!

A special thank you to my significant other of 8 years, Jorge Samia, thank you for taking this journey with me since my undergraduate program. Together, we have grown since we were teenagers in high school to professional young adults. From here on, I am looking forward to seeing what our future brings!

To the inspiring professionals whom I have been privileged to meet during the course of this project, Cynthia Stogel, Foster Care and Adoption Program Director at Children's Bureau, and Dr. Eshele Williams, thank you for having faith in this project and sharing your wisdom! This also includes the CSULB School of Social Work Faculty, who have made returning to school memorable and enriching.

To Ventura County Human Services Agency, staff, and families, thank you for giving me a platform to speak about the foster care system and families that foster. I will forever treasure the teachings and relationships I gained in my early career as a professional child welfare social worker.

To my brilliant thesis advisor, Dr. Eileen Mayers Pasztor, thank you for "sharing your teachings and experiences with the next generation." I am grateful that our paths

crossed at a time when I was looking for an opportunity to make an impact for children and families. And to my committee, Dr. Jo Brocato and Dr. Thomas Alex Washington, thank you for supporting the vision of this project!

Also, thank you to my fellow social work peers and my dear friend, Elsa Renteria. You all have gone through this experience with me and cheered me on the entire way!

This thesis is also dedicated to foster parents and all their children, and to CWLA and NFPA with the hopes that this project will help support their ongoing commitment to these families.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Families experience changes as part of the family life cycle. However, transitions that lie outside of a typical family life cycle, such as foster care placement, can have short- and long-term repercussions on the well-being of those involved (Drapeau, Simard, Beaudry & Charbonneau, 2000; Hojer, Sebba, & Luke, 2013). Transitions within a family are challenging; creating disruptions, role changes, and reorganizations within family systems. Similar changes also occur when families experience the transformation to a family who fosters; there will be many changes in family relations and general family life (Hojer et al., 2013).

"Foster care is a peculiar bridge between the public domain of state care and the intimacy of child care" (Martin, 1993, p. 16). Though foster care may be the preferred model for the support of children unable to live with their own families, it also carries risks (Hojer, 2007; Martin, 1993). Often times, foster parents are characterized by social workers and researchers as "emotional surplus persons" who have much to give to unhappy and neglected children (Andersson, 2001, p. 236). Foster parents have "many expectations tied to their ability to give abused and neglected children, or children from imperfect homes, a safe and loving second home for shorter or longer periods of time," which also includes working towards solving the children's possible emotional and

behavioral problems, as well as creating a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives (Andersson, 2001, p. 235).

Over time, the need for and development of foster parent training has been recognized in the field of child welfare (Martin, 1993; Pasztor, 2009). In the late 1990s, it was believed that "nothing can prepare them (foster parents) for the impact of living with someone else's child" (Martin, 1993, p. 16). Foster care training programs are generally focused on foster parents, not on the children in the foster family (Andersson, 2001; Martin, 1993; Younes & Harp, 2007). The impact of fostering on the lives of children in families that foster continues to be underestimated, poorly understood (Martin, 1993), and largely, overlooked both in research and in practice (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013). However, a review of existing literature reveals that this sub-population has become an issue of national concern (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Thompson & McPherson, 2011).

A major challenge in examining existing research and practice knowledge is that there is no consistent terminology used to identify the sons and daughters of foster parents. As a result, "these individuals have been referred to many things, including: biological children within a therapeutic foster family, children who foster, foster parents' own children," among others (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014, p. 101). Further, research has lumped together both biological children and adopted children of foster parents into one category, irrespective of how each relationship might experience fostering differently.

Children in families that foster are often viewed as part of the family system rather than as distinct individuals with their own strengths and needs. "Each fostered child and each carer's child is an individual and their characteristics will influence how

fostering is experienced and the relationship between them" (Hojer et al., 2013, p. 19). Historically, children have been viewed as receivers of care rather than active and competent social agents. For children in families that foster, this view presumes that they are passive actors during the fostering experience (Hojer et al., 2013; Martin, 1993). The literature emphasizes that it is the whole family who fosters and children in families that foster should be included and acknowledged as part of the caring system rather than treated as peripheral to the parenting role of adults (Hojer et al., 2013; Martin, 1993). Studies have also shown that the placement and/or removal of children can create role confusion within family systems (Hojer et al., 2013; Sutton & Stack, 2013). Martin (1993) suggests that children in families that foster are both peers and quasi-carers at the same time. For, they are often expected to be willing and able to cope with and adjust to the fostering experience (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2013b; Hojer, 2007; Martin, 1993).

Too often many children in families that foster are unprepared for the changes connected to fostering (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Younes & Harp, 2007). Thompson and McPherson (2011) conducted a comprehensive literature review of the impact of fostering on foster parents' birth children. The study included positive examples of the fostering experience, in which children reported that they gained confidence, became better at expressing their feelings, and enjoyed having siblings who could share activities. Alternatively, concerns were also identified; such as, having to share possessions and bedrooms, not being able to get their parents' attention, and having less time and resources because additional children were living with their families. Pasztor (2009) also identified trauma that occurs when foster parents are not prepared to

take precautions and prevent physical or sexual abuse among foster and birth siblings. Overall, the literature presents seven themes regarding the experiences of children in families that foster: positive experiences, loss, conflict, transitions, coping, sharing, and trauma (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Pasztor, 2009; Thompson & McPherson, 2011).

Literature dates back to the 1960s documenting the need for foster parents to have information and training to help them prepare their children for the fostering experience and address the needs of their children; involve children in the training process and provide opportunities for them to meet other children in families that foster; and bring awareness to how family life and children's realities will be altered (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Mullin & Johnson, 1999; Pasztor, 2009; Younes & Harp, 2007). However, interventions to address those themes have been more difficult to apply.

Purpose of This Project

This project proposes the development of and funding for modules that could be used in a training program or curriculum for prospective and experienced foster parents to help prepare and support their children for the fostering experience. This project aims to provide tools to help foster parents and agency staff assess the families' willingness, abilities, and resources to strengthen relationships for siblings. Thus, this is a hybrid model integrating information, support, and assessment. The project was inspired by the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) Board of Directors. Recognizing the need to respond to NFPA members' requests for assistance in this area, they created an ad-hoc board committee to identify issues and seek resources (NFPA Director, personal communication, October 3, 2014).

There are cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives for the project which are designed specifically to help prospective and experienced foster parents: (a) know research findings regarding the positive and negative experiences of children in families that foster; (b) feel prepared to support the children in their families through conflicts or transitions connected to fostering; (c) understand that they are not alone in the fostering experience and feel comfortable seeking support from experienced resource parents and agency staff; (d) be proactively involved in preparing and supporting children throughout the fostering experience; and (e) learn skills to help assess that the fostering experience is safe for all children in their families and meets the children's emotional, social, educational, and cultural developmental needs.

Definition of Relevant Terms

The terminology and definitions used for this project include:

Adoption: "A social, emotional, and legal permanency process in which children and youth who will not be raised by their birth parents become full and permanent legal members or another family" (Mallon, 2014, p. 401).

Children in families that foster: Children who are living with their parents when their families become licensed, certified, or approved to foster; this could include birth children or children who were legally adopted (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2009).

Family foster care: A planned, goal-directed service in which the care of children takes place in an agency-licensed, certified, or approved family. The goal of family foster care is to provide opportunities for healing, growth, and development leading to

healthier children and families, with safe, nurturing, and relationships intended to last a lifetime (National Commission on Family Foster Care [NCFFC], 1991).

Family foster care worker: "…routinely makes critical decisions about foster family applicants, foster families, and foster children and must ensure that foster homes are safe and nurturing environments in which the well-being of foster children can be enhanced" (Cuddeback, Buehler, Orme, & Le Prohn, 2007, p. 93).

Foster family constellation: Members include "birth/natural parents, adult adoptees, former foster youth, foster parents, legal guardians, adoptive parents, and mentors to foster youth" (Celia Center, n.d., para. 7).

Foster parent or resource parent: These terms are used interchangeably and refer to parents whose homes are certified, licensed, or approved by public or private child welfare agencies to provide family foster care services (CWLA, 2009). For the purpose of this project, the term foster parent(s) will not include relatives or kinship caregivers or adoptive parents. Further, in some studies, especially those from other countries, the term "foster carer" is used (Hojer et al., 2013, p. 4).

Foster sibling: "A person below the age of 18 years who had been placed in foster care and was living with the child (or children) of their foster carers, to whom they were not biologically related" (Thompson & McPherson, 2011, p. 51).

Kinship care: The full-time protecting and nurturing of children by relatives, members of their tribes or clans, or non-related extended family members (NCFFC, 1991). CWLA differentiates between kinship care and family foster care and recommends that because of the difference between inherited roles and acquired roles the groups should not be trained together (2013a).

Siblings: Children living in foster families, including children by birth, adoption, and children placed through foster care (CWIG, 2013b).

Strengthening relationships: Providing information, support, and assessment to prospective and experienced foster parents with the aim of strengthening relationships for the siblings, (i.e., the aim of this project).

Relevance to Social Work and Multiculturalism

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) explains that its "…primary mission in the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in poverty" (2008, para. 5). Child welfare is a core social work service of which family foster care is a major component. When relatives are not available, child welfare agencies turn to foster families to give abused and neglected children a safe and nurturing second family. Children of foster parents must be recognized as an integral part of that healing life experience; every effort must be made to ensure that their needs are addressed.

This project aims to meet the six major principles of the NASW Code of Ethics: the importance of human relationships, dignity and worth of the person, competence, social justice (advocacy), service, and integrity (2008). By participating in this program, prospective and experienced foster parents may gain the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen the quality of relationships in their families. It is also hoped that they will be advocates for all children in their care and for themselves in seeking supports that meet the needs of all family members. In addition, foster parents' children may be more likely to experience positive relationships, be active members of their families' contributions to

their communities, and have a sense of self-esteem. Lastly, having positive experiences with child welfare workers might help the children of foster families grow up to become advocates for an improved foster care system and the needs and empowerment of all children in the foster family constellation.

This project also has multicultural relevance for both ethnic and sexual minority children and families. "Disproportionality is the level at which groups of children are present in the child welfare system at higher or lower percentages or rates than in the general population" (Summers, Wood, Donovan, 2013, p. 1). Foster parents, their birth and previously adopted children, as well as the children placed in their care represent socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, educational, gender, age, and sexual diversity.

Research has repeatedly documented the overrepresentation of children from certain racial and ethnic groups, including African Americans and Native Americans, in the child welfare system when compared with their representation in the general population (CWIG, 2011; Summers et al., 2013). According to McRoy (2014), children of color (predominately African American and Latino/Hispanic) are disproportionately represented in the United States foster care system. Further, children of color frequently experience disparate and inequitable service provision often due to a lack of cultural competency. The lack of adequate bilingual services through both systems is an obvious barrier, but so are risk assessment instruments that are racially or culturally biased and a general failure of staff to understand cultural differences. Misunderstandings can lead to inappropriate and harsher treatment (Green, 2002).

Cultural sensitivity reaches beyond ethnic minority children but also, affects sexual minority children as well. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and

questioning (LGBTQ) youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are often poorly served and in urgent need of sensitive, appropriate and culturally competent child welfare services (Gallegos et al., 2011). Best practice guidelines for working with LGBTQ youth in child welfare systems and their families have been available, but have yet to be systematically incorporated into training curricula for child welfare workers and foster and adoptive parents in most states (Elze, 2014). It is the commitment of this project to ensure that the information, supports, and assessments developed will be sensitive to and considerate of both ethnic and sexual minority youth and their families.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review is organized into the following sections: demographics of children in family foster care and select other variables; demographics of foster families; research on the impact of fostering on children in families that foster; and training, information, and supports for foster parents regarding the impact of fostering on their children.

Demographics of Children in Family Foster Care and Select Other Variables

Children in families that foster are exposed to children who come with a wide variety of characteristics and previous experiences when they join their families. This includes differences in respect to age, ethnicity, gender, heath, mental health, educational challenges, and trauma histories.

Number of Children in Family Foster Care

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the population of children living with foster families in the United States was at its highest since the Orphan Train Movement of the 19th century (NCFFC, 1991). Over the last decade, the number of children in foster care in the United States declined by almost 25% between 2002 and 2012, from 523,616 to 399,546 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2013, 2014a). However, in recent years the decline has slowed down, with a slight increase from

397,000 in 2012 to 402,000 in 2013. Of these children, 28% were placed with relatives and 47% were placed with foster families. Although there are indications of a long-term, downward trend in the number of children who need foster families, (CWIG, 2013a; NCFFC, 1991; U.S. DHHS, 2011) there is still a serious shortage of families who have the willingness, abilities, and resources to foster (County Welfare Directors Association of California & Legal Advocates for Permanent Planning [CWDA & LAPP], 2007; Pasztor & McNitt, 2014).

Ethnicity

The average length of stay also declined from 31.3 months to 22.4 months among all race/ethnic groups over this period (U.S. DHHS, 2013). Trends indicate that the percentage of African American children in care decreased between 2003-2012, while the percentages of White children, Hispanic children, and children of other ethnicities increased. Reductions among African American children in care represent the most dramatic decrease among all major non-Hispanic groups (African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and White). Accounting for nearly 74% of the overall decline between 2002 and 2012 from 17.4 to 9.6 per 1,000 children in the general population (U.S. DHHS, 2013).

Age and Gender

Trends also reflect a decrease in the median age of children in care from 10.9 years in 2003 to 8.5 years in 2012 (CWIG, 2013a). Additionally, numbers continue to consistently show a slightly greater percentage of boys (52%) than girls (48%) in foster care (U.S. DHHS, 2014b).

Health, Mental Health, Education, and Trauma History

The literature dates back to nearly 40 years ago, documenting the ever-changing characteristics of children entering the foster care system. Many children enter foster care suffering from insufficient prenatal and health care, poverty, homelessness, exposure to alcohol and other drugs, learning problems in school, in addition to physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect (Pastzor, Hollinger, Inkelas, & Halfron, 2006). Children in the foster care system are at much greater risk for emotional and health problems than their peers (Buckles, 2013; Greeson et al., 2011; National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], 2014; Younes & Harp, 2007). As such it is estimated that between one half and two thirds of the children entering the foster care system present emotional or behavioral problems significant enough to warrant mental health treatment (Healey & Fisher, 2011). Additionally, children in foster care experience deficits in school functioning and severe academic skill delays at an extensive and disproportionately higher rate than their same-age peers (Healey & Fisher, 2011).

Literature on children in foster care describes the recurrent exposure to interpersonal trauma perpetrated by caregivers during a child's early life and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure as complex trauma (Greeson et al., 2011; NCTSN, 2014). Complex trauma may disrupt many aspects of a child's development, their ability to form attachment bonds, and influence how they view the world as a safe/unsafe place (NCTSN, 2014). Greeson et al. (2011) report that those with complex trauma histories compared to youth with other types of trauma were found to have significantly higher rates of internalizing problems, posttraumatic stress, and clinical diagnoses.

Demographics of Foster Families

Child welfare agencies strive to place children and youth in the least restrictive setting, preference being with kin or foster families that are licensed, certified, or approved depending upon jurisdictional requirements. In practice, when kinship placement is not available children, are then placed with licensed foster or adoptive families (CWDA & LAPP, 2007; Sutton & Stack, 2013). However, little is known about the families who serve as a critical, national resource in the child welfare system (Orme et al., 2004). Research indicates that there is no national strategy for collecting data on foster parents (Berrick, Shauffer, & Rodriguez, 2011). Existing knowledge of the number and characteristics of current foster parents is based on studies that are dated, include non-representative samples, or are based on case stories publicized in the media (Barth et al., 2008; Berrick et al., 2011). Although no national data on exists on the demographics of foster families, there is ample research on the worsening traumas of children in care and the implications it has for children in families that foster, as well as their parents (Berrick et al., 2011; Center for Adoption Support and Education [C.A.S.E.], (n.d.); Phagan-Hansel, 2012; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Wallace, 2007).

Foster parents face unique challenges in caring for children in the foster care system. With training and licensure, foster parents are expected to be the "calm in the storm," to mend and restore, and asked to carry on a range of tasks to support the needs of the children in their care (Phagan-Hansel, 2012, p. xiv). The expectation of foster parents is to accomplish such tasks within the limits of protecting the confidentiality of the children in their care. Foster parents report that they felt alone, misunderstood, and with little opportunities for support (Phagan-Hansel, 2012).

Research on the Impact of Fostering on Children in Families that Foster

Children in Families that Foster

Although the research has increased in recent years, existing knowledge and practice interventions in foster care have focused almost exclusively on children in care and foster parents; leaving out a valuable member of the fostering team, children in families that foster (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Sutton & Stack, 2013). The transformation to become a foster family results in dramatic changes in family relations and general family life (Hojer et al., 2013). The impact of fostering on the children in families that foster has been largely overlooked both in research and in practice (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Twigg & Swan, 2007). Though research on this subpopulation has been less than consistent, it has more recently become an area of international concern with studies published in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Sweden (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Twigg & Swan, 2007).

The growing interest about the experiences of children in families that foster is reflected in the increase in the number of articles produced each decade, from the 1980s (n = 7), 1990s (n = 16) to 2000s (n = 21; Serbinski & Shlonskly, 2014). Studies reviewed the experiences of children in families that foster among other factors, including: impact of foster care on their psychological, educational, and social well-being and relationships with parents and siblings (Younes & Harp, 2007); the impact of fostering on their everyday life (Hojer, 2007); how they adapt to fostering experiences (Sutton & Stack, 2013); and analyzed the association between support and conflict processes within the foster family (Denuwelaere & Bracke, 2007).

Foster care continues to be the most common form of placement setting for children in out-of-home care (Khoo & Skoog, 2014; Sutton & Stack, 2013; Twigg & Swan, 2007). Family-based care, such as family foster care, is believed to contribute to children in care's healthy growth and development (Sutton & Stack, 2013); provide a healing experience (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014); and a sense of normality (Hojer, 2007). Although one of the most common reasons given by foster parents for resigning is the effect it may be having on their own children. Sutton and Stack (2013) point out that little is still known about the experiences of children in families that foster (Twigg & Swan, 2007). Reseach conducted in this area (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Sutton & Stack, 2013; Thompson & McPherson, 2011) reveals a number of both potential, benefits and stressors that children in families that foster may encounter while fostering. In Hojer's (2007) study, participants presented a mixed picture of the changes connected to fostering; 29% had positive, 34% negative, and 23% had neutral or ambivalent experiences.

Relationships

The interpersonal relationships formed between children placed and children in families that foster can be similar to a sibling relationship, with mixture of positive and negative emotions (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014). Significant correlations have also been found between the presence of biological children and the failure of foster care placements (Sutton & Stack, 2013). Hojer (2007) explored the experiences of current and former children in families that foster (n = 684) in Sweden. Forty-seven percent of participants were in complete agreement that their foster sibling felt like a "real sibling" (p. 76). Although the majority reported having a very good relationship (41%) or a rather

good relationship with their foster siblings (34%), participants recognized that a "good relationship" was not a gurantee for an uncomplicated fostering experience (Hojer, 2007, p. 76).

There can be negative emotions that arise as a result of the sibling-like relationship that forms between children in families that foster and the children who join their families (Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014). Additionally, literature on sibling relationships has also addressed the impact this relationship can have on a child's psychological development (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Children's temperament, age, and gender are other factors to consider when understanding relational dynamics; this includes the relationship between foster siblings (2011) and how children in families that foster react to the fostering experience (Sutton & Stack, 2013). Findings suggest that an age gap of less than two years is a protective factor that allows for the development of peer relationships between children in families that foster and the children who join those families (Sutton & Stack, 2013). Ideally, children in families that foster should remain the eldest upon the addition of new children (2013).

Positive Experiences

Sutton and Stack (2013) used a convience sample (n = 6) to explore how children in families that foster adapt to their fostering experiences. All participants experienced some positive and negative changes within their daily routines when fostering and felt included within the fostering team. Companionship was cited as the best part of fostering in multiple studies (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Twigg & Swan, 2007).

Studies have also shown that children in families that foster report feeling as though fostering influenced their personal development and growth; such as gaining better communication and listening skills, greater confidence, and becoming more caring, responsible, and empathetic (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Twigg & Swan, 2007). Commensurate with previous studies (Twigg and Swan, 2007), 83% of participants in Sutton and Stack's (2013) study revealed that they had an increased awareness of social issues, and considered fostering or pursuing a career in the helping profession as a consequence of fostering.

Loss

For children in families that foster, the presence of new children placed there may create a feeling of distance between and among family members, resulting in a perceived loss of family closeness (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Having to care for additional children, parents' previous patterns of time and attention are altered. As such, the arrival of a foster sibling could likely be similar to the sharp change experienced by biological siblings in the parent-child relationship when a new sibling arrives (2011). Children in families that foster are left feeling as though they are displaced and need to reconfirm their role within the family.

Transitions of children in care, entering and exiting the foster family home, can hinder children in families that foster abilities to feel as if they have a set place within the family and can affect their developing sense of identity (2011). That is why agencies that adhere to the *PRIDE Model of Practice* to develop and support resource parents as team members in child protection require both prospective and current foster families to

complete a family map (eco-map) and family clock documenting how roles, relationships, and tasks will change with the addition of every new child (C. Stogel, personal communication, November 17, 2014). Overall themes presented in the literature related to loss include: personal space, belongings and privacy; parental time, attention, and accessiblity; role and identity formation within the family; and emotional loss when children left the families were also cited in multiple studies (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Thompson & McPherson, 2011).

Conflict

Reasons for restrained family life and sources of conflict were associated with placed children's childhood experiences (Hojer, 2007). Findings of Hojer's (2007) study revealed that children placed were viewed as having no experience with basic house rules; such as, informing parents of your whereabouts when you leave the home, being on time for dinner, or how to socially interact with family members. Lies and "storytelling" were also cited as sources of conflict and examples of behavioral difficulties (Hojer, 2007, p. 77). Participants in this study also reported feeling uncertain about trusting and believing what placed children shared about their experiences prior to their placement with foster families.

Serbinski and Shlonsky (2014) recognize that children in families that foster also struggled with their foster sibling's challenging behaviors. Such behaviors include aggression, anger, attempted suicide, attitudes, bad tempers, bullying, drug and alcohol use, self-harm, selfishness, swearing, yelling, and stealing. Furthermore, of the studies presented in previous reviews of research, nearly all included frequent accounts of challenges connected to living with children who may have previously been exposed to

neglect and abuse (Hojer et al., 2013). The result of persistent difficulties between children placed and children in foster families has been noted as one of the reasons why placements disrupt.

Transitions

The settling-in period of placements can be an equally difficult period of adjustment for both children in families that foster and children in care (Sutton & Stack, 2013). Feeling as though they are unfairly expected to abide by higher expectations than the children placed, children in families that foster can feel overlooked by their parents during this period. Younes and Harp (2007) identify jealousy, anger, and resentment as feelings experienced by children in families that foster when children are initially placed in their families. For children in families that foster, the arrival of new children may create anxiety around their perceived role within the family and the need for a new or re-established role within the newly formed group (Sutton & Stack, 2013). Wallace's (2007) anecdotal article referenced her professional direct clinical experience with foster parents and personal experience as a birth child of foster parents. The author described the common phenomenon of children in care transitioning in and out of foster families, and how life for children in families that foster can feel like a real-life emotional rollercoatser.

Coping

In many cases, children in families that foster report feeling like they were left to cope with feelings of uncertainty on their own (Hojer, 2007). Results from Hojer's (2007) study indicate that foster parents did not always understand or acknowledge their

own children's difficulties experienced while fostering. Rather, children in families that foster were expected to cope and adjust to the changes as part of the fostering experience.

Studies suggest that children in families that foster felt obligated to support their parents' decision to foster and wanted to protect their parents from too much emotional stress while fostering (Hojer, 2007; Twigg & Swan, 2007). As such, children usually grew accustomed to "standing back", as a way to let children placed be the first priority of their parents and often avoided telling parents about their own problems (Hojer, 2007, p. 78). Findings illustrate that children in families that foster coped with the impact of fostering independently (Thompson & McPherson, 2011); this includes patterns of partial seclusion, silence, isolation, and early maturation (Twigg & Swan, 2007).

Sharing

As shown in other studies (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Twigg & Swan; 2007; Younes & Harp, 2007), participants in Hojer's (2007) study experienced less time with their parents and less parental attention while fostering. Of which, 19% cited sharing parents' time as the worst consequence connected to fostering. Though children in families that foster were aware that fostering was a demanding activity, their everyday lives were affected by not only sharing parents' time, but also due to the fact their parents were less accesible as a result.

Trauma

Much has been written about the previous experiences and characteristics of children entering the foster care system, including experiences of care deficits, dysfunctional parenting, abuse and/or separations (Hojer, 2007; Pasztor et al., 2006; Younes & Harp, 2007). The earlier life experiences that placed children had on their

foster families are described as difficult and troublesome; and affects their "behavior and capacity for social interactions in different ways" (Hojer, 2007, p. 76). Children in families that foster experience trauma and stressors through exposure to the previous experiences of the children in care and as a result of being raised in a family that fosters (Wallace, 2007).

Placement Breakdown

Although the overall numbers of children in foster care have varied over the years, the use of foster care placement as out-of-home care has been a stable part of the child welfare system since its foundation (Khoo & Skoog, 2014). "One problem shared by child welfare systems across the western world is placement breakdown – the unexpected, unplanned and sudden termination of a child's placement, whether in foster care or in an other care arrangement" (Khoo & Skoog, 2014, p. 256). Research on the phenomenon of placement breakdown dates back to the 1960s (Khoo & Skoog, 2014). Historically, related literature has been based on the examination of social work case files and has focused on identifying risk factors associated with breakdown (Unrau, 2007). International research has shown that older children, the presence of behavior problems, and previous moves within the foster care system are associated with significantly higher risk of placement breakdown (Khoo & Skoog, 2014).

Moreover, research has also shown that foster parents with children of their own, living in the home, have an increased risk of placement breakdown (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Thompson and McPherson (2011) report that of placements that failed in nine months or less, 56% cited problems between the children placed and the foster parents birth children as the reason for termination. However, the literature

suggests that further research is needed as to how placement breakdowns are impacted by the age and characteristics of the children in families that foster (Khoo & Skoog, 2014).

Khoo and Skoog (2014) examined the connection between foster parents' caring experiences and their experiences of placement breakdown using data from semi-structured interviews with foster parents (n = 8). Participants had varied experiences as foster parents (one to thirty years), experienced one or more placement breakdowns, and all had biological children. Findings of this study showed that foster parents' depict placement breakdown as a long series of events preceding the time the children actually leave their care. Foster parents described how their families' everyday lives were often and significantly impacted by the placed children's previous experiences and behavioral difficulties. In light of these concerns, foster parents viewed the placed children as being part of their families who, in many cases, grow up as siblings to the other children in the family. In other circumstances, the authors found that foster parents initiated placement breakdown as a result of the negative impact the placement had on their birth children. One parent described her birth daughter's experience of placement breakdown as "the person hurt the most …she felt like these really were her own sisters" (Khoo and Skoog, 2014, p. 264). This anecdote did not address any hurt or trauma to the child who had to leave.

Training, Information, and Supports for Foster Parents Regarding the Impact of Fostering on Their Children

While state agencies have a range of standards related to hours and topics by which foster parents and family foster care workers are trained, there is currently no national strategy for training foster parents (Pasztor, 2009). Furthermore, there are few

foster parent training programs that provide information, supports, and assessment regarding the impact of fostering on siblings and sibling relationships (E. Williams, personal communication, October 1, 2014).

Rather, programs are more likely to include a singular module related to the foster family as a whole; which may or may not contain some information and support for foster sibling relationships. Developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education, the Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) training program was specifically designed to provide licensed mental health professionals with the necessary clinical skills to provide quality clinical services to adopted persons, birth families, prospective adoptive parents, adoptive families and kinship families (n.d.). TAC was developed in response to research findings which show that "children with traumatic experiences of abuse, neglect, and abandonment and challenging behavioral and emotional responses are ate greater risk of presenting with adjustment problems within their adoptive families" (para. 3). Examples of TAC's modules include the following subject areas:

Adoptive and Birth Families (Module 8 of Training for Adoption Competency (TAC)*:* "Discusses the types of adoptive families and the clinical issues that different types of adoptive families may experience" (C.A.S.E., n.d., para. 42).

Adoptive Family Formation, Integration, and Developmental Stages (Module 9 of TAC)*:*

> Discusses the phases of adoptive family development and the normative challenges in adoptive family development; clinical issues that impact adoptive family formation and integration; the developmental stages for the adopted

> person; factors that contribute to adoption instability; clinical skills in working with adoptive families to prevent disruption/dissolution, support adoptive parents in their parenting roles, help adoptive families cope with stress and promote healthy family development. (C.A.S.E., n.d., para. 43)

The Child Welfare League of America has created a competency-based program to develop and support foster parents as team members in child protection, known as the *PRIDE Model of Practice*. It provides agencies with specific guidelines to recruit, assess, train (27 hours of pre-service) and select foster and adoptive parents, and to provide another 60 hours of in-service training for foster parents. The model uses pre-service training around specific competencies to help prospective foster and adoptive parents make an informed decision if they have the willingness, abilities, and resources to bring children who have experienced trauma into their families. Managing the Fostering Experience is addressed in the pre-service curriculum as well as in Module 9 of the Core (In-Service) Training; six hours): "Examines the effect of placement on one's family by devoting one session to exploring ways to help foster families manage changes, transitions, and challenges presented by the fostering role…" (CWLA, 2013b, para. 4).

Studies recommend that foster families with children by birth and/or adoption be cognizant of the positive and negative implications of fostering for all children in the family and the foster family constellation as a whole (Hojer, 2007; Mullin & Johnson, 1999; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Wallace, 2007). However, there is a short supply of foster parent training programs that incorporate information and supports for sibling relationships in foster families (Mullin & Johnson, 1999; Thompson &McPherson, 2011; Younes & Harp, 2007). With increased information, supports, and assessment tools the

foster family constellation is likely to develop a more realistic understanding of the fostering experience, be better prepared to recognize and manage stressors or challenges within the family, and promote health family functioning.

As a way to inform future research, policy and practice about the transition into foster care, Mitchell, Kuczynski, Tubbs, and Ross (2010) used survey data collected from 20 children (ages eight to fifteen years) who had been in foster care for 6 to 36 months. The authors underline the value of learning about children's views for they have specialized insider knowledge and are experts of their own experiences. Findings illustrated two main themes about advice for foster parents during the foster care transition: foster home orientation and relationship building. Participants suggested that foster parents make efforts to familiarize the child with the physical home, the people and pets, rules, responsibilities, and the benefits of family living as a way to support their transition into the foster family. Advice on how to foster a relationship between placed children and foster parents included engaging in activities unrelated to the actual transition process; such as discussing their likes and dislikes, sharing experiences with one another, eating comfort food, or participating in physical activity. Lastly, having a social support network was also identified as a vital resource while transitioning into foster care (Mitchell et al., 2010).

The impact of fostering on the family unit, specifically on the children in the family and their contributions made to the fostering team, must be recognized and addressed in the recruitment and training process (Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Sutton & Stack, 2013). Research consistently supports the thinking that the needs of children in families that foster should be addressed. Younes and Harp (2007)

argue that attention to this area it critical to the retention rates and success of foster care. The authors also propose that policy changes are needed to ensure that supportive services to foster families are awarded the same degree of attention and resources involved in recruitment and related training programs (Younes & Harp, 2007). Though foster care agencies and foster parent associations have made efforts to address the aforementioned, a review of existing literature by Twigg and Swan (2007) reveals a scarcity of published materials about these programs and any research studies designed to measure their effectiveness.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

This chapter includes five sections, beginning with the target population for the project. The second and third sections identify the recommended host organization and the strategies for identifying and selecting potential funding sources. The fourth section explains the criteria for the funder selection and the description of the selected funding source. The chapter concludes with a discussion of resources utilized to develop the grant problem statement.

Target Population

The main target population for the modules would be a national organization such as the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), which disseminates training programs nationally and beyond to help agencies prepare, assess, select, and support prospective or experienced resource parents. The second target population would be the actual public and private foster care agencies that would use the programs. The third target population would be foster parents, their children, and family foster care workers who may benefit from the cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives met by this program.

Host Organization

The recommended host organization for this project is CWLA. Headquartered in Washington, DC, CWLA is the nation's oldest and largest coalition of membership-

based, private and public child welfare agencies serving vulnerable children and families. Founded in 1920, CWLA cites its expertise, leadership, and innovation on policies, programs, and practices helping improve the lives of millions of children and families both across the United States and in other countries as well.

CWLA's mission statement reads: "CWLA leads and engages its network of public and private agencies and partners to advance policies, best practices and collaborative strategies that result in better outcomes for vulnerable children, youth and families" (CWLA, 2013c, para. 1). Their vision includes the idea that all children will be raised in a stable, safe, loving and secure family (CWLA, 2013c, para. 1).

Also, the National Foster Parent Association has created an ad-hoc board committee on sibling relationships in foster families (Clements, personal communication, October 3, 2014). The NFPA should be invited to be a collaborative resource to program development, testing, and dissemination.

Strategies for Identifying and Selecting Potential Funding Sources

A range of methods were used to identify potential funders for this project. Internet search engines were used as the primary source of examination of funding sources at national, state, and local levels. Searches included agencies, organizations, and foundations that have historically funded training programs or curriculums involving foster parent education and training; specifically addressing the impact of fostering on children in families that foster and issues involving foster care. Terms such as "Child Welfare," "Curriculum," "Foster Care," "Foster Children," "Foster Parents," "Foster Parent Training," "Birth Children," "Siblings," and any other words related to the grant content were utilized in the search. Additional websites used for identifying resources

included: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Foster Care to Success, Google, and Grants.gov.

The grant writer also conducted a Foundation Center (FC) search at La Pintoresca Branch Library located in Pasadena, CA. The FC's mission is "To strengthen the social sector by advancing knowledge about philanthropy in the U.S. and around the world" (Foundation Center, 2015, para. 3). The FC maintains databases of free funding information on more than 108,000 foundations, corporate donors, and grantmaking public charities in the United States through Funding Information Network locations, including the Pasadena Branch Library. This search provided information about potential funding sources and allowed for specification regarding their compatibility to the proposed grant through the use of key terms, (i.e., purpose, areas of interests, and geographic priorities).

Criteria for Selection and Description of Selected Funding Source

Selection of funding sources accounted for eligibility and mandatory requirements, areas of interest, funding opportunities, restrictions/limitations, and grant achievability. In addition, other considerations included organizations that have open applications, submission grant cycles, geographic priorities, and the amount of available funding. Attention was given to government agencies and foundations that have historically funded and supported programs for children in the foster care or foster parent training and education programs. Four organizations were examined for grant selection: American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, Stuart Foundation, and Jason Hayes Foundation.

In 1954, the American Legion created the Child Welfare Foundation as a separate 501 (c)(3) corporation. Headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana the mission is to provide

other nonprofit organizations with the means to educate the public about the special needs of children across the nation (American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, 2008). Since its inception, this foundation has awarded over $11 million in grants to nonprofit organizations, including Big Brothers/Big Sisters, CWLA, and the National Foster Care Coalition. Though its past grantees include this project's host agency, the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation was not selected due to the grant cycle opening after the completion of this project.

Over the past 20 years, the Ira W. DeCamp Foundation has funded three major program areas: community-based health care, foster care, and workforce development (Ira W. DeCamp Foundation, 2015). To date, the Foster Care Grant Program has awarded $955,000 in funding to support programs that address one or more of five specified areas; including neighborhood-based services that are family-centered and holistic, addressing the needs of children as well as parents. Due to this foundation's geographic concentration being only the New York metropolitan area, it was not selected as a potential funding source for this anticipated national project.

Headquartered in San Francisco, California since 1985, the Stuart Foundation has partnered with public and private child welfare agencies to systematically provide resources and services to children and youth in foster care (Stuart Foundation, 2009). The foundation has since contributed over $250 million to programs that seek to transform the public education and child welfare systems so that all youth can become "self-sustaining, responsible, and contributing members of their communities" (para. 1). Focus areas that guide the foundation's work in child welfare include: safety, permanency, well-being, educational opportunities, and youth, family, and community

engagement. Upon review of this foundation's grant application process, it was determined that a letter of inquiry was required and proposals were accepted by invitation only, making this project ineligible for the foundation's available funding opportunities and, also, the focus was specifically in California and Washington.

Jason Hayes Foundation

The Jason Hayes Foundation was identified as the most fitting potential funding source for the project. Headquartered in Medford, Massachusetts, the foundation was created in 2005 in loving memory of Jason Hayes by his parents, sister, and cousin (Jason Hayes Foundation, n.d.a). The foundation provides funding opportunities for services that support and enrich the lives of children and young adults (ages 5-18) who have experienced early childhood trauma (n.d.d). This foundation was selected because it specifically awards grants to programs and organizations that actively reach out to and provide training for parents, educators, staff, siblings, and other professionals who are in close contact with and provide support for the special needs of this population; including children who are or have been in the foster care system. Additional funding opportunities are awarded through scholarships to attend specialized camps, grants to non-profit specialized camps, outreach and supportive services for transitional age youth, and online resources for foster families and other professionals (n.d.d).

Since its inception, over 40 grants have been awarded to "like-minded" organizations (Jason Hayes Foundation, n.d.b, para. 4) such as Adoption and Foster Mentoring, Mass Advocates for Children, and Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (n.d.c). Although applications are accepted throughout the year, it is strongly requested that submissions be completed between the months of October 1 – December

16 for consideration of funds. Grants are awarded on a first come, first serve basis to those organizations that meet their criteria. After a thorough review of the Jason Hayes Foundation mission, grant program eligibility and application guidelines, it was determined that the proposed project met all specified criteria; in addition to having objectives and goals that are consistent with the foundation's mission. This, then, would be the foundation to be approached for possible funding of this project.

Resources for the Grant Problem Statement

The grant problem statement presents the rationale for a grant proposal that funds the development of modules that could be used in a training program or curriculum for prospective and experienced foster or resource parents to prepare and support their children for the fostering experience. The desired outcome of this grant is to facilitate the creation of uniform national modules that could be used in addition to current training programs or curriculums that prepare and support family foster care workers, foster parents and their children. A variety of resources were used to develop the grant problem statement, including peer-reviewed journals, scholarly articles, international publications, databases, and websites. Consultation was also obtained from child welfare professionals who are working with the issues of sibling relationships in foster families on a daily basis.

Key information was reviewed from international publications such as the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education, scholarly articles in the British Journal of Social Work, and government organizations such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Child Welfare Information Gateway. Of the multiple resources used to gather information on fostering and the impact on children in families

that foster, only a few are named. Through a review of resources, potential funders can become more informed of how this project aims to address the need for uniform foster parenting training programs or modules that support and strengthen relationships for all involved.

In addition to being one of the largest publishers of child welfare training materials, CWLA, the recommended host organization for the grant proposal, is also the nationally recognized standard-setter for child welfare services. CWLA provides programs, publications, research, conferences, professional development, and consultation to agencies in hope that the quality of services provided to children and families are improved each year (CWLA, 2013c). Developed in 2013, CWLA's *National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare* is one example of their continuing efforts to provide families, communities, and other organizations with tools to create the greatest opportunities for all children and youth to succeed and flourish (CWLA National Blueprint Writing Team, 2013).

Other resources presented by CWLA include curricula to train foster and adoptive parents, kinship caregivers, social workers, and child welfare managers in the many aspects of working with and supporting abused and neglect children. These include the *PRIDE Model of Practice* to develop and support resource parents as team members in child protection, and *Kinship Care Traditions of Caring and Collaborating Model of Practice.* It is hoped that this project will enhance CWLA's current resources by supplementing the above programs with evidence-based or informed modules that help support sibling relationships.

CHAPTER 4

GRANT PROPOSAL

Introduction

This chapter includes five sections, beginning with a needs assessment underlining the significance and value of the proposed project. The second section describes the project's goal and objectives, followed by an overview of implementation plan and staffing needs. The fourth section presents the outcomes and evaluation process. The chapter concludes with the budget narrative; the line item budget is in Appendix A.

Needs Assessment

Historically, the impact of fostering on children in families that foster has been overlooked both in research and practice (Hojer et al., 2013). Children whose parents foster have been documented to be uninformed, unprepared, unsupported, and excluded from family-related discussions. They also have been shown to have difficulty understanding and coping with the fostering experience. In total, seven themes have been identified in those studies: positive experiences, loss, conflict, transitions, coping, sharing, and trauma (Hojer, 2007, 2013; Pasztor, 2009; Thompson & McPherson, 2011).

Outlined in national and international literature reviews is the need to improve training programs and supports for foster parents and their children (Hojer, 2007; Hojer et al., 2013; Serbinski & Shlonsky, 2014; Sutton & Stack, 2013; Thompson & McPherson,

2011). Hojer (2013) identifies ways that foster parents could support their children while fostering which includes: involving them in the decision to foster; informing them about fostering and about each child who joins the family; and by creating a space where they can have honest dialogues about their experiences. With such supports, children are able to gain a better understanding about fostering and their role, adapt to family system changes, cope with conflict, and seek ongoing support while fostering.

The desired outcome of this project is to fund the development of modules that could be used in a training program or curriculum for prospective and experienced foster or resource parents to prepare and support their children in their families' fostering experience. In fact, the National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) Board of Directors has recognized the need for such a program. In response to members' requests for assistance in this area, they created an ad-hoc board committee to identify issues and seek resources (Ad-hoc Committee Chair, personal communication, October 3, 2014).

Goal and Objectives

This project proposes the development of and funding for modules that could be used in a training program or curriculum for prospective and experienced foster parents to help prepare and support their children for the fostering experience. The project is designed to have separate modules for prospective and experienced foster parents and their children, (i.e., school age and teens). The project would be utilized as a tool to help foster parents and agency staff assess the families' willingness, abilities, and resources to strengthen relationships for siblings.

Foster care agencies and other stakeholders, (i.e., foster parents, their children, and family foster care workers) would be trained with the resource when possible.

Together, the modules would be used as a supplemental resource to further the knowledge and skills of the aforementioned parties. By meeting the cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives of this project, participants should be able to develop the knowledge and skills that support the strengths and needs of sibling relationships in foster families.

The modules are intended to be used as a vital resource by all foster care agencies in trainings, workshops, and other support programs that recruit, prepare, train, and support foster families. The modules would help members of the family foster care constellation develop a better understanding of the unique experiences of children in families that foster. With CWLA's credible and extensive publishing history of child welfare books, curricula, magazine, and scholarly peer-reviewed journal, it is anticipated that resources it develops would be valued, respected, and accessible.

The cognitive, affective, and behavioral objectives outlined in Chapter 1 would be met through sessions for two groups of foster families. Group A would be prospective foster parents and their children, divided by ages nine through 12 years, and 13–17 years. Group B would include experienced foster parents and their children, ages divided similarly.

Group A would participate in three, two-hour sessions within a month. Two of the sessions would have the parents and children in separate groups; while the parents are meeting, the teens would be in one group and their younger siblings would be in another. The third session would bring the parents and children together to share their ideas, expectations, and strategies for having a positive fostering experience. Agencies would

use this resource as part of their preparation and assessment program for licensing, certification, or approval.

Group B would be comprised of experienced resource families, those who are already licensed, certified, or approved but between placed children. For this population, however, there would be four, two-hour sessions. Three of the sessions would have the parents and children in separate groups; while the parents are meeting, the teens would be in one group and their younger siblings would be in another. The fourth session would bring the parents and all the children together to share their ideas, expectations, and strategies for having a positive fostering experience. Separate modules would be held for prospective and experienced foster families; as the needs and experiences of both groups are distinct.

The seven themes presented in the literature regarding the experiences of children in families that foster will be discussed in the modules. Project developers would have discretion to determine how the content is developed into modules, as well as how the modules would best be utilized and integrated with current training programs or curriculums. The proposed resource is intended to be flexible and adaptable to best meet the needs of foster care agencies and, especially their resource families (parents and children together).

The resource materials or modules for both groups will include special guidelines or indicators. The focus would be on issues that, when raised by any prospective or experienced resource parents or their children, might indicate the need for individual family exploration, discussion, or intervention. These next steps would be taken by agency staff responsible for resource family assessment, development, and support.

Staffing

The staff for this project includes the following positions: a full-time Project Manager/Curriculum Developer, a full-time Curriculum Developer, two Master of Social Work (MSW) interns, a Project Assistant, and a Project Evaluator.

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting: In addition, there would also be a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of a diverse group of experienced resource parents, former young people whose parents fostered, former youth in foster care, and social workers experienced in family foster care. This group will be a unique representation of members within the family foster care spectrum. Selected through CWLA's network of member agencies and organizations, members will be representative of families from across the nation who express interest in this project's purpose. The committee will convene four times during the project year via audio-visual technology; (i.e., Go to Meeting). As committee members, they will advise, collaborate, consult, and provide feedback on all tasks throughout this project. It is anticipated that content provided by the PAC will be unique contributors to the creation of modules that are realistic, effective, and meet the strengths and needs of siblings in foster families.

The NFPA would be invited to have a representative of its ad-hoc *Children in Families That Foster* committee to participate in the PAC. Diversity should reflect geographic, ethnic, and sexual orientation as well as public and private agency perspectives. It is hoped that CWLA's Director of Training and Models of Practice would be the supervisor of the Project's Manager and should have a seat on this committee.

Implementation Method

The projected timeline for the planning, development, field testing, evaluation, revision, and dissemination of the modules is 12 months. The following describes the tasks and deadlines of each step:

Months One-Two

1. Recruit Project staff
2. Advertise and interview for positions of Project Manager/Curriculum Developer, Curriculum Developer, Project Assistant, and Project Evaluator
3. Select Project staff
4. Collaborate with Universities to recruit graduate-level MSW interns
5. Confirm MSW interns
6. Convene Project Advisory Committee (PAC)
7. Collaborate with NFPA
8. Discuss project goal, objectives, and work plan
9. Brainstorm, consult, and identify potential module areas
10. Calendar future meeting schedule

Month Three

1. Plan the evaluation process
2. Develop research design; including instruments, data collection, and data analysis
3. Determine and fulfill requirements for Institutional Review Board approval for both modules
4. Conduct an updated literature review

5. Recruit and select field test agencies

6. Develop the module for prospective foster parents and their children

7. Integrate feedback from PAC and information gathered from literature review

8. Develop the module for experienced foster parents and their children

9. Integrate feedback from PAC and information gathered from literature review

Month Four

1. Complete development of both modules

2. Field test the modules

3. Conduct Level 1 evaluation

Months Five – Six

1. Analyze Level 1 data

2. Discuss results with staff and PAC

3. Revise modules based on Level 1 feedback

4. Prepare for open-enrollment training of foster care agency staff who want to learn how to implement the modules (trainers, family development specialists/home study workers)

5. Recruit and select agency-based sites for open enrollment training

Month Seven

1. Revise modules based on Level 1 feedback

2. Prepare for Level 3 evaluation

Month Eight

1. Conduct Level 3 evaluation

2. Develop marketing and dissemination plan

5. Review Level 3 evaluation outcomes with PAC

Month Nine

1. Revise modules based on Level 3 evaluation

Month Ten

1. Edit and produce the modules through CWLA's publications department

Month Eleven

1. Implement the open-enrollment training for the modules

Month Twelve

1. Review project goal, objectives, process, achievements with PAC and staff
2. Advertise, market, disseminate modules on CWLA website, conferences, etc.

Evaluation

By definition, evaluation is "an attempt to find out the value, merit or worth of something" (Hogan, 2003, p. 421). Designed in 1959, Kirkpatrick's four-level model continues to be the most popular and often cited model of evaluation utilized by businesses, higher education institutions, and organizations to evaluate training (Praslova, 2010). This model is designed to clarify the meaning of evaluation and offer guidelines on how to design training program evaluations. Referred to as "simple and practical" by the literature, Kirkpatrick's model consists of the following four levels:

Level 1 Reaction: A measure of how participants feel about the various aspects of a training program, including the topic, speaker, schedule, and so forth; a measure of customer satisfaction to assess whether participants are motivated and interested in learning.

Level 2 Learning: A measure of the knowledge acquired (i.e., concepts, principles, or techniques), skills improved, or attitudes changed due to the training.

Level 3 Behavior: A measure of the extent to which participants change their on-the-job behavior because of the training; learning transfer.

Level 4 Results: A measure of the final results that occur due to training; productivity gains (Kirkpatrick, 1996, p. 55-56).

For this project, a Project Evaluator from an external agency or university will be contracted to oversee all aspects of the evaluation design and process. The Project Evaluator will be responsible providing feedback to Project staff regarding data analysis and results. Utilizing Kirkpatrick's model, the Project Evaluator will create evaluation instruments to measure or assess the effectiveness of the modules during field testing. Evaluation becomes increasingly difficult, complicated, and expensive as it progresses from the Level 1, Reaction, to Level 4, Results. As such, given the implementation timeframe of this project and amount of the available funding, this project will incorporate criteria from Kirkpatrick's Level 1 and 3 in the evaluation process.

The first phase of the evaluation process will be conducted between Months Four and Six. The goal of the Level 1 evaluation is to measure participants' satisfaction regarding various aspects of the modules. During Month Four, at the conclusion of each session, participants will be asked to complete a short "meeting opinion form." The information gathered from this questionnaire will measure: 1. If participants felt the information presented in the session was helpful, for example "I can use the information when I go home" and 2. If participation in the session was a good experience, for

example “I felt welcomed by the facilitators.” There will be a more in-depth Level 1 evaluation at the conclusion of all the sessions. In addition to being quick and easy to administer, another advantage of reaction evaluations or “customer feedback” is that participants and Project staff are also provided with an opportunity for immediate feedback (Hogan, 2006; Pasztor, 2009).

There will be three versions of this instrument. Each will be modified to meet the developmental, mental, and emotional needs of subgroup participants (i.e., adult prospective and experienced foster parents, school aged children in families that foster, and teens). Using reaction criteria guidelines, the aim is to: 1. Elicit participants’ affective reactions and utility judgments; 2. Written to be quantifiable; 3. Include a section for additional comments and/or suggestions; and 4. Be collected confidentially to seek honest feedback. Potential disadvantages of this method include: lack of discussion, framing of questions may lead to omissions of vital data, and possibility that responses may be rushed due to time limitations (Hogan, 2006). Results will be analyzed during Months Five-Six. Feedback provided by this evaluation will be used to revise the modules.

To allow enough time for a change in behavior to take place, the second and final phase of evaluation will occur during Months Seven through Nine. Project staff will begin to prepare for and conduct the Level 3 evaluation during Months Seven and Eight. Feedback and outcomes from this evaluation will be used to revise and prepare the final draft of the modules prior to its actual publication during Month Nine. During the Level 1 evaluation, the Project Evaluator would have designed the questionnaire to include a section for participants to indicate their willingness to participate in the subsequent Level

3 evaluation process, (i.e., Do you wish to participate in future evaluation processes regarding your participation in this session today? If yes, please provide your name, telephone number, or email. By doing so, Project staff will be permitted to contact you regarding the outcomes and benefits associated your participation in this project). Three months after the Level 1 evaluation is completed, interested participants will be contacted by Project staff to complete a survey or interview by telephone or email correspondence. For example, participants may be asked if the information learned in the modules continued to be of help to them.

Budget Narrative

The total annual budget of this project is $348,818 which includes requested foundation funds and in-kind support from participating agencies or organizations. See Appendix for the project's line item budget.

Staffing

Project Manager/Curriculum Developer: Under the supervision of the recommended host agency's Director of Training and Models of Practice, the full-time Project Director/Curriculum Developer will have administrative responsibilities and oversee all aspects of the project's planning, module development, field testing, publication, and dissemination. Other duties include coordinate and facilitate meetings, develop and collaborate with the Project Advisory Committee, and collaborate with all Project staff. This position is responsible for fiscal management of the project and reporting to the funder, as required. Qualifications require the MSW degree with at least 10 years of experience in curriculum or program development plus supervisory experience in family foster care services; a DSW or Ph.D. (social work) is preferred. The

salary for this position is $85,000 per year, with cost benefits calculated at 24% to equal $20,400.

Curriculum Developer: This will be a full-time position that requires a LCSW or a MSW. Candidate must have a minimum of five years supervisory experience, four years of experience of program curriculum or development, and experience working directly with prospective and experienced foster families and the children in their care. Working in collaboration with the Project Director, the Curriculum Developer will be responsible for consulting with the PAC, working with the Project Evaluator, planning and developing the modules, organizing field testing, and preparing modules for publication. The annual salary for the Project Developer is $80,000, with cost benefits calculated at 24% to equal $19,200.

Project Evaluator: This position will works primarily with Project Director/Curriculum Developer but also with the other Project staff and PAC, as well. Specific duties include: designing the evaluation method, creating the instruments, developing the data collection and analysis processes; and providing results to the Project staff and PAC. The Project Evaluator would receive an honorarium of $10,000 and this would be on a contractual basis.

Project Assistant: This position will provide administrative support through the project's planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Requirements for this position include at least a high school diploma or an associate degree, with five years administrative support or clerical experience in a child welfare setting. Related responsibilities include to organize, manage, and oversee all communication and correspondence with project stakeholders (i.e., Project staff, PAC members, field test

agencies, open enrollment trainings) that are essential to effective and efficient facilitation of the project. Other duties include tracking project deadlines, organizing a variety of regular and special committee meeting, composing administrative correspondence and drafts such as memos, letters, reports, presentations, agendas, meeting materials and minutes. This is a full-time position with an annual salary of $30,000 and benefits calculated at 24% for a total of $37,200.

Two Master of Social Work (MSW) Interns: These positions will be part-time equivalent (PTE), working a maximum of 20 hours per week. Each intern will be assigned to work with either the Project Director/Curriculum Developer or Curriculum Developer. The interns will participate in PAC meetings, assist in research and data collection, record keeping, coordinate field testing tasks, and other project related tasks. Correspondence with the Project Advisory Committee and field testing agencies will also be managed by the interns. Each intern stipend is $1,000 per academic year, totaling $2,000 for the two MSW Interns.

The host agency staff would contribute to the project, as follows: The Director of Training and Models of Practice would be needed to supervise the Project Manager and oversee the integrity of the project, at 10% time. The Publications staff would need to provide editing and productions support at 10% time for two positions, totally $16,000.

The total cost of salaries and fringe benefits for FTE staff equals to $279,800.

Direct Program Costs

Office Materials/Supplies: This category of expenses will account for the cost of paper, pens, folders, file cabinets/organizers, postage, etc. Up to $300 per month may be used to cover associated costs, totaling to $3,600.

Phones: A total of $1,440 will be used to provide FTE staff with cell phones for project business, email, and other project-related correspondence. The cost of two cell phones is estimated at $60 per line each month. As an alternative, staff could also opt to use their personal cell phones and receive a reimbursement.

Staff Development/Resources: Approximately $2,000 of the project's budget will be used towards staffs' participation at conferences or trainings, such as the National Foster Parent Association annual conference and the CWLA annual national advocacy conference.

PAC Meetings: The committee will convene four times during the project year via audio-visual technology; (i.e., Go to Meeting). As committee members, they will advise, collaborate, consult, and provide feedback on all tasks throughout this project. It is anticipated that content provided by the PAC will be unique contributors to the creation of modules that are realistic, effective, and meet the strengths and needs of siblings in foster families. A resource such as "Go to Meeting" might be utilized to minimize in-person meeting expenses. The cost of this resource is $40 per month for 12 months, totaling to $480.

Marketing/Printing/Publication: Approximately $3,000 will be allocated to the costs of marketing, printing, or additional publication expenses not covered by in-kind support. MSW interns and the Project Assistant will be responsible for creating flyers, update bulletins, and other materials to advertise and promote awareness about the project and its development.

Travel: Project staff could be expected to travel to an array of locales to administer the field tests and open-enrollment training. Approximately $12,000 will be

used for appropriate, project-related travel expenses, such as costs is air, food, lodging for Project staff and MSW interns.

Miscellaneous: Other expenses (i.e., gift cards or other incentives for participants) not covered by the aforementioned areas may utilize funding from this category; not to exceed $1,000.

In-Kind Support

Affinity agencies/organizations would be invited to utilize in-kind support to cover associated costs of field testing and opening enrollment training. During field testing, selected agencies would be invited to provide Project staff with materials and resources needed to administer and evaluate the modules. This may include: agency offices for testing site, parking, reserved training rooms, tables, chairs, poster or white boards, markers, a computer with a projector screen, etc. If possible, sites might also provide refreshments for participants and volunteers for child care. Similar resources will also be requested from the in-kind supports of identified agencies during scheduled open enrollment trainings for interested agency staff. Approximately $5,000 in-kind support will be provided by affinity agencies for each field testing and open enrollment training, totaling $10,000.

Indirect Costs

Administrative overhead: Calculated at 15% of direct costs, totaling to $45,498.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS LEARNED

Introduction

The final chapter is organized in three sections, detailing the grant writer's reflections on the grant writing process and its challenges and limitations, and implications for social work policy, practice, research, and advocacy.

Grant Writing Process

The vision to develop a project designed to strengthen relationships for siblings in foster families came about during the grant writer's first meeting with the thesis advisor. When asked about a vision for the thesis project, the writer acknowledged wanting to create project that not only would be a learning experience but, also, would have a meaningful impact. The thesis advisor shared that the National Foster Parent Association was seeking help for such a project and, also, that CWLA should find it valuable. With professional experience in the child welfare field, the grant writer was immediately drawn to the idea and eager to embark on such an innovative project.

A literature review of the demographics of children in foster care and foster families, the impact of fostering on children in families that foster, current training, and supports for foster families was conducted to further the grant writer's knowledge. The information gathered from the literature review was instrumental. Not only did it further

the understanding of the need for this intervention, but it also helped frame the purpose, objectives, and structure of the proposed project.

Recognizing that national organizations such as CWLA and NFPA are committed to training, advocacy, and support for resource parents, it seemed appropriate to recommend CWLA as a host agency to receive potential funding, and to invite the NFPA to join on the Advisory Committee. Having identified a target population and host agency, the next step involved researching and identifying a potential funding source. The grant writer utilized internet search engines, government websites, and foundation search databases to become informed about available funding sources. Specifying key terms and other criteria allowed the grant writer to filter through various, related resources and foundations that were aligned with the mission and the goal of this project. Geographic priorities, missions, and funding cycles had to be reviewed to identify the best possible funding opportunity.

Once a potential funder was identified, the grant writer learned how to integrate and conceptualize the various factors necessary to develop a project that aims to be cost-effective, strengths-based, and has the potential for future sustainability. Key lessons learned include becoming educated about the wide array of funding possibilities and developing a better understanding of how foundations operate, especially regarding eligibility requirements. This experience has strengthened the grant writer's research and writing skills. In addition, the grant writer has been humbled by the opportunities that are inherent in working at the MSW graduate level.

During the early stages of the literature review, a limitation uncovered was that the experiences of children in families that foster had only recently become a national and

international area of study in social work research and literature. As a result, there were scarce studies available. The grant writer utilized databases, government publications, and other internet resources to gather existing information related to this area. In doing so, the grant writer encountered a challenge due to the variance in terms by which foster parents' children are referred to. However, the grant writer was able to find literature and thematic reviews from international sources, in which the majority of relevant studies were appropriately identified and described. As a result, the grant writer became easily familiarized with the names of researchers associated with this area, such as Hojer, Twigg, and Serbinski, to name a few. In summary, the challenges and limitations encountered during the grant writing process highlight the need for future research in this area. Children in families that foster have a significant and influential role in the fostering experience.

Implications for Social Work Policy, Practice, Research, and Advocacy

By definition, "Social workers help people increase their capacities for problem solving and coping, and they help them obtain needed resources, facilitate interactions between individuals and between people and their environments, make organizations responsible to people, and influence social policies" (NASW, 2015, para. 32). In practice, social workers are advocates, lobbyists, administrators, grant writers, clinicians, brokers, and direct service providers. Social workers are flexible in their ability to having interchangeable roles; this facilitates their ability to meet clients where they are, with respect to their strengths and needs.

While no federal or state polices need to be created relating to the specific focus of this project, fostering agencies should have policies on relating to the issues raised in

this project. These agencies should mandate best practices, which would require staff that do family assessments (home studies) and pre and in-service training for foster parents address these issues. This could include, specifically, requesting that foster families use the family map/family clock as described in the *PRIDE Model of Practice*. Younes & Harp (2007) made specific recommendations regarding agency policies to support foster families during times of transition. Many agencies combine the preparation and assessment of prospective foster and adoptive parents. Other agencies do not and, therefore, it might be helpful to look to the adoption field for research and recommendations regarding the impact of adopting on children and families who come together through adoption. However, in a recent article titled, "Let's Get it Right," (Duehn, 2014) which focused on interactional methods in assessing adoptive families and in post adoptive services, there was no mention of the impact of adoption on birth children.

The paucity of research indicates the need for much more, especially in the United States. In fact, a Level 4 evaluation of the modules developed in this project would also be essential. Lastly, the child welfare community should join with national organizations such as CWLA and NFPA and advocate for attention to the issues addressed in this project. In summary, while this project was definitely a considerable amount of work, it must be remembered that the real work is done by the foster parents and the children in their families… those who come by birth and those who are placed with them. It is hoped that this project can come to life and will result in real positive differences in the lives of children and families affiliated with agencies and use the resources developed by this proposed project.

APPENDIX

LINE ITEM BUDGET

LINE ITEM BUDGET

Expenses	In-Kind Support	Amount
STAFFING		
Project Manager/Curriculum Developer FTE		$85,000
Curriculum Developer FTE		$80,000
Project Assistant FTE		$30,000
Fringe Benefits for FTE @ 24%		$46,800
Project Evaluator Honorarium		$10,000
MSW Interns @ $1,000/Academic Year		$ 2,000
Director of Training & Models of Practice		$10,000
Publications Team		$16,000
TOTAL SALARIES AND FRINGE BENEFITS		**$279,800**
DIRECT PROGRAM COSTS		
Office Materials/Supplies		$3,600
Phones (2 @$60/per line x 12 months)		$1,440
Staff Development/Resources		$2,000
PAC Meeting ($40/month x 12 months)		$480
Field Testing	$5,000	
Open Enrollment Training	$5,000	
Marketing/Printing/Publication		$3,000
Travel (Air, Food, Lodging)		$12,000
Miscellaneous		$1,000
TOTAL DIRECT PROGRAM COSTS	**$10,000**	**$ 23,520**
INDIRECT COSTS		
Administrative Overhead @ 15%		**$45,498**
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS	**$10,000**	**$348,818**

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