

Child, Youth and Family Services



Foster Families Survey Results

May 2012


Newfoundland
Labrador

Child, Youth and Family Services

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Executive Summary

Newfoundland and Labrador, like many other provinces and territories, is experiencing a critical shortage of foster homes. This shortage of foster homes has resulted in a reliance on staffed living arrangements to care for children and youth in-care who could otherwise be placed in a foster home if one was available.

In 2008, when child, youth and family services and programs were under the Department of Health and Community Services, Dr. Ken Fowler was contracted by the department to complete a provincial review of the Children In-Care Program. This review included key informant interviews and recommendations about how to strengthen the foster care program in Newfoundland and Labrador. In key informant interviews held with foster families, some indicated that they were closing their homes due to burn out, lack of supports and resources for both children and foster families, and a prevailing sense that foster families did not feel part of or valued by the foster care system.

In an effort to further define the issues affecting foster parents and to address the shortage of foster homes in this province, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services partnered with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association and the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency to conduct a survey that would provide a demographic profile and needs assessment of foster parents across the province.

The survey was carried out between November 2010 and February 2011. A total of 365 foster parents responded to the survey for a response rate of 78 per cent. Respondents were comprised of 275 non-relative foster parents, 80 relative/significant other foster parents, and 10 respondents who indicated they were both. The majority of respondents had been fostering between 1 to 10 years and on average they had 1 to 2 children/youth placed in their home.

The most frequently used services by foster parents were child care, respite (overnight and hourly), and financial support above the basic foster care rate. These same services were also rated by respondents as being the most important of all available services.

Overall, 60 per cent of respondents described fostering as positive, enjoyable and rewarding; over 25 per cent reported that fostering has been challenging, stressful and frustrating at times; 10 per cent indicated it has been both positive and negative; and 3 per cent identified the experience as having been negative/difficult.

Foster parents identified the three biggest challenges they face in continuing their role as a foster parent as challenges related to the needs of children and youth, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, and to foster parents themselves.



Despite the challenges almost 75 per cent of respondents indicated they would recommend fostering to a relative or friend and between 70 to 80 per cent of respondents felt that they were valued, part of a team, and supported by their social worker in the role of foster parent.

Overall, the findings of this survey provided a clear picture of the services that are most important to foster families and identified strengths of the system, as well as gaps that need to be addressed. These findings will inform future program and policy development as well as assist with the ongoing efforts to recruit and retain foster parents.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Foster care is an integral part of any child protection system. Foster homes provide a safe, nurturing, family-based environment for children and youth who, for a variety of reasons, cannot reside with their parent(s). In Newfoundland and Labrador there are two types of foster homes:

- non-relative (regular) foster homes, in which foster parents are approved to care for any child/youth in the care or custody of a Child, Youth and Family Services Manager, and
- relative/significant other foster homes, in which foster parents are approved to care for a child/youth with whom they have a significant relationship.

About 80 per cent of children and youth in-care in this province are placed in either a non-relative or relative/significant other foster home setting.

Newfoundland and Labrador, like many other provinces and territories, is experiencing a critical shortage of foster homes. The shortage of foster homes in this province has resulted in a reliance on staffed living arrangements to care for children and youth in-care who would otherwise be placed in an available foster home.

Research indicates that recruitment and retention of foster families is impacted by a number of factors: changing complexity of the needs of children coming into care, change in the work roles of women, rise in costs for foster parents, increasing expectations on foster parents, insufficient support for foster families, lack of clarity and value for the role of foster families, and attrition as foster parents age (Kinship Care Report, Alberta, 2006).

Foster parents today require skills and expertise that go beyond meeting the day-to-day needs of a child or youth. In addition to the role of protecting and nurturing children and youth, foster parents are also required to deal with a range of complex issues experienced by children and youth in-care; to work closely with the birth families that may be experiencing mental health, addiction and/or other significant issues; and to collaborate with social workers and other professionals.

Over the years, foster parents in this province have expressed concern to the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association and the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services about the level of support and services they receive and require to be effective in their role with children and youth in-care. In 2008, when child, youth and family services and programs were under the Department of Health and Community Services, Dr. Ken Fowler was contracted by the department to complete a provincial review of the Children In-Care Program. This review included key informant interviews and recommendations about how to strengthen the foster care program in Newfoundland and Labrador. In interviews held with foster families, they indicated that they were closing their homes due to burn out, lack of supports and resources for both children and foster families, and a prevailing sense that foster families did not feel part of or valued by the foster care system. Overall, there was a

sense of dissatisfaction amongst foster parents which is a significant recruitment issue as research shows that existing foster parents are the best recruiters of new foster parents.

Based on the findings of this review, Dr. Fowler made a number of recommendations about the foster care program which included; providing foster parents with enhanced financial remuneration, dedicated training and education programs, as well as developing a treatment foster care program. Based on these initial findings, it was determined that a more in-depth study of the foster care program was needed.

In 2010, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services partnered with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association to conduct a survey that would provide a demographic profile and needs assessment of foster homes and parents across the province.

The survey was developed to assist the department in exploring ways to:

- strengthen the level of training and supports for foster families;
- address gaps in the current service delivery model; and,
- identify the areas of the province that have the best potential for the recruitment of new foster families.

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services contracted the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency to adapt and deliver a foster care survey given its expertise in data collection and analysis. Foster parents participating in the survey were assured that their responses would be kept confidential as the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency would only provide information that is non-identifying.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

In November 2010, foster parents were informed in writing that the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services was conducting a foster care survey and their participation in this survey was encouraged. Foster parents were assured that participation was voluntary and that the information collected would be confidential as the survey was being conducted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency. Foster parents were also informed that they could advise the department or the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association if they did not wish to be contacted about the survey.

Prior to implementing the survey with all foster parents, a pilot was completed in early November 2010 by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency with the board members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association. Based on the responses from the pilot, adjustments were made to the survey.

The survey was carried out via telephone interviews between November 2010 and February 2011. All active foster parents in the province were eligible to participate



and every effort was made to provide participants with a convenient time to respond. On average, the survey took 15 minutes to complete.

In two communities in Labrador, Sheshatshui and Nataushish, the survey was carried out by a surveyor from Statistics Canada who spoke Innu Aimun. The interviews in Sheshatshui were administered in person as opposed to telephone interviews as this was the preferred delivery method in that community.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency compiled all data resulting from the survey and provided the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services with only non-identifying information. All data will be retained by the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency for the department to reference, as required, in the future.

The Social and Economic Spatial Analysis Unit within the Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency completed spatial flow mapping to illustrate the home community of children and youth in-care in relation to where they are currently placed in their foster home. This unit also completed a spatial analysis comparing demographic information from foster parents to the demographic information of the province as a whole to indicate which communities would provide the best opportunities to recruit new foster parents.

3.0 FINDINGS

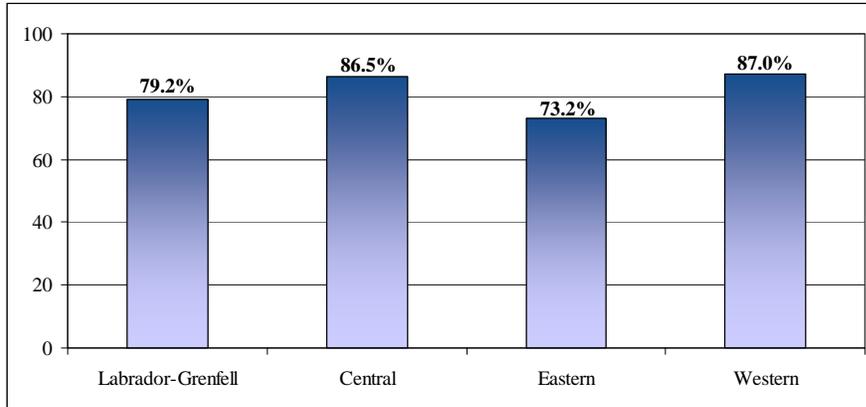
A summary of the survey findings is presented and illustrated using tables and figures in the following categories:

- Demographic profile of respondents
- Profile of children and youth residing in the home of the respondents
- Training and educational support
- Experience with the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services
- Experience with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association
- Overall experience as a foster parent

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 365 foster parents responded to the survey: **Figure 1** outlines the number of respondents by region.

Figure 1: Respondents by Region



The overall provincial response rate was 78%.

Respondents were comprised of 275 non-relative foster parents, 80 relative/significant other foster parents, and 10 respondents indicated they were both. Of these foster parents, 74 per cent were full time, 19 per cent were respite and 7 per cent indicated they were both. **Figure 2** outlines the type of foster home and **Figure 3** outlines whether the home is full time or if it provides respite care.

Figure 2: Type of Foster Home

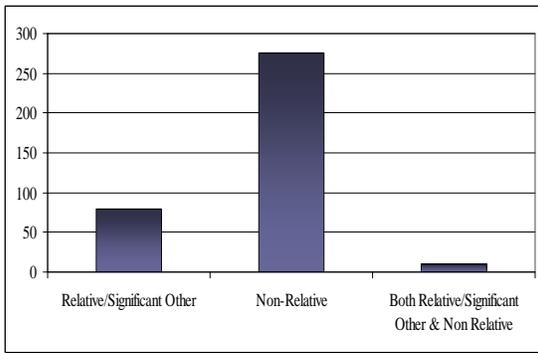
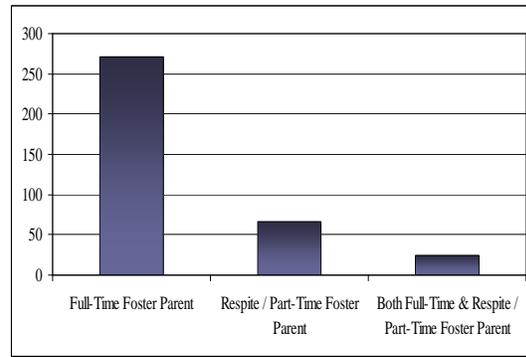


Figure 3: Status of Foster Home

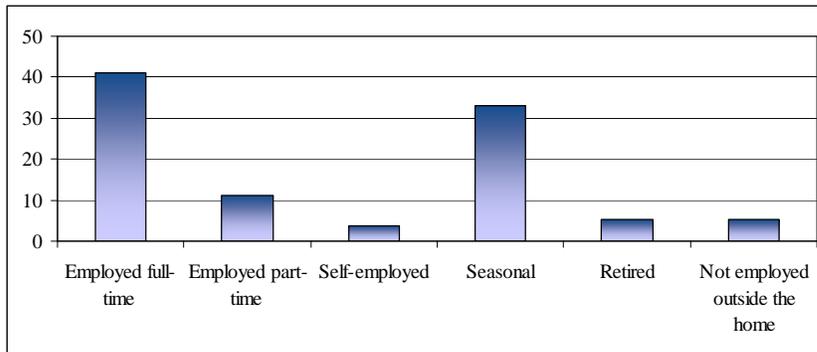


The survey was completed primarily by female foster parents, with 83 per cent of respondents being female and 17 per cent being male. Of foster parents surveyed, 73 per cent were married, 9 per cent were in a common-law relationship, 7 per cent were single, 8 per cent were divorced or widowed, and 3 per cent were separated. In terms of ages, 85 per cent of foster parents were between the ages of 30 to 60; 5 per cent were between 20 to 30 years old and 10 per cent were between 60 to 70. With regard to ethnicity, 80 per cent of foster parents were Caucasian and 20 per cent were Aboriginal.

The majority of foster parents surveyed had children of their own: 66 per cent of these children were 20 or older; 14 per cent were 15 to 19 years old; 9 per cent were

10 to 14 years old, and 11 per cent of children were age 9 or under. The survey also identified that the majority of foster parents work outside the home in either a full-time, part-time or casual capacity with only 10 per cent not working outside the home or retired. The average annual income of foster parents is \$50,000 to \$60,000 with over 40 per cent having an annual income of less than \$40,000. **Figure 4** provides an overview of the employment status of foster parents.

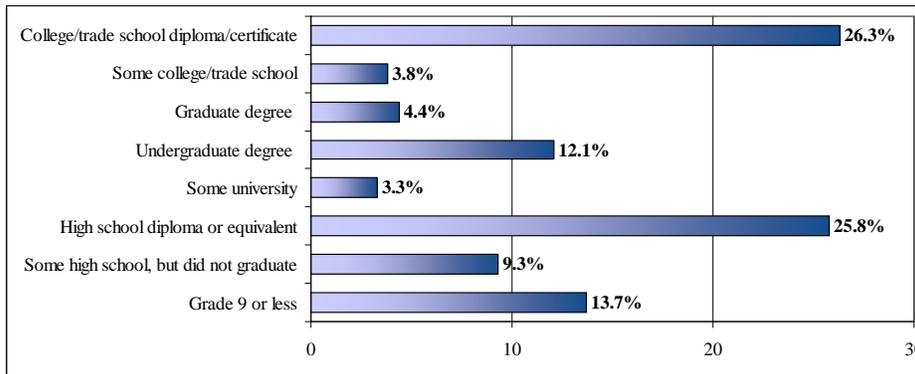
Figure 4: Employment Status of Foster Parents



Almost 90% of foster parents are employed outside the home.

The education level of foster parents ranged from grade nine or less to a graduate degree. **Figure 5** provides an overview of the education level of foster parents.

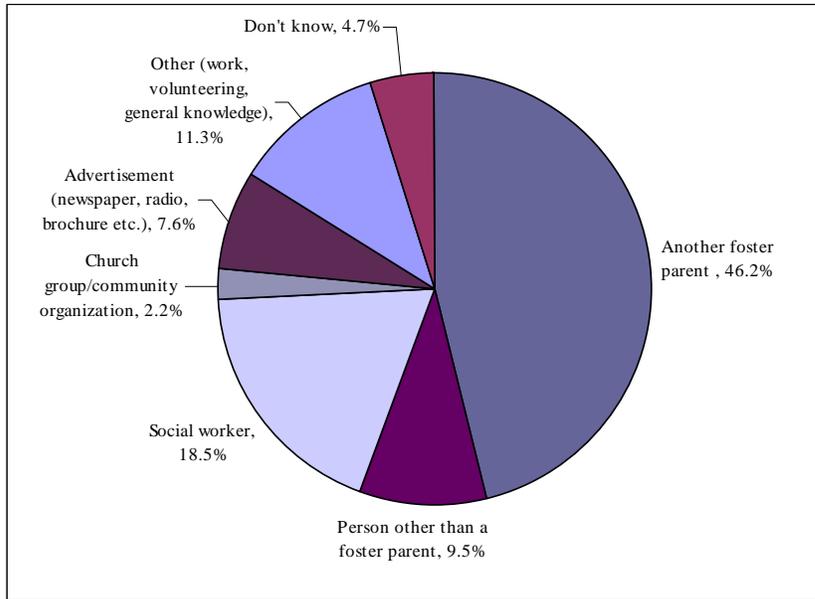
Figure 5: Education Level of Foster Parents



76% of foster parents have a high school education or higher.

Non-relative foster parents were asked how they first heard about fostering, with many indicating they heard about fostering through another foster parent. Foster parents also cited the primary reason for becoming a foster parent was a desire to help children. **Figure 6** presents responses on this issue.

Figure 6: How Foster Parents First Heard About Fostering

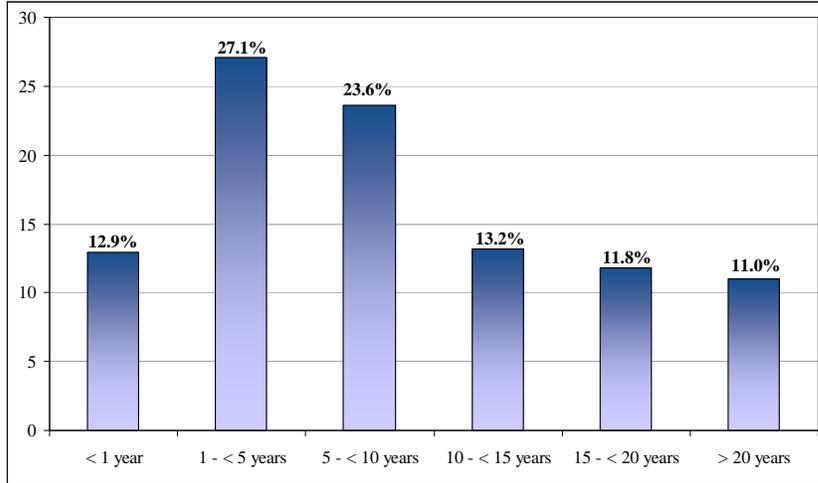


46% of foster parents heard about fostering from another foster parent.

Relative/significant other foster parents were not asked how they heard about fostering as they are typically identified by the parents/family of a child or youth given the significant connection to that child or youth. The relative/significant other is then approached by a social worker who assesses their willingness and ability to provide care to the child.

The majority of respondents had been fostering between 1 to 10 years while 36 per cent were fostering more than 10 years. **Figure 7** provides an overview of the length of time respondents were fostering.

Figure 7: Length of Time Respondents Were Fostering



36% of foster parents have 10 or more years experience.

At the time of the survey, most foster parents had between 1 and 3 children placed with them for an average of 1.4 children. A total of 20 per cent of homes did not have anyone placed with them, but this can be attributed to the fact that 18.4 per cent of homes are respite only and would not have a full-time placement. Some respondents reported that throughout their fostering history, they had up to 6 children/youth at any give time, but the majority of respondents never exceeded 3 children or youth.

The average number of children in a foster home is 1.4.

3.2 Profile of Children and Youth Placed with Respondents

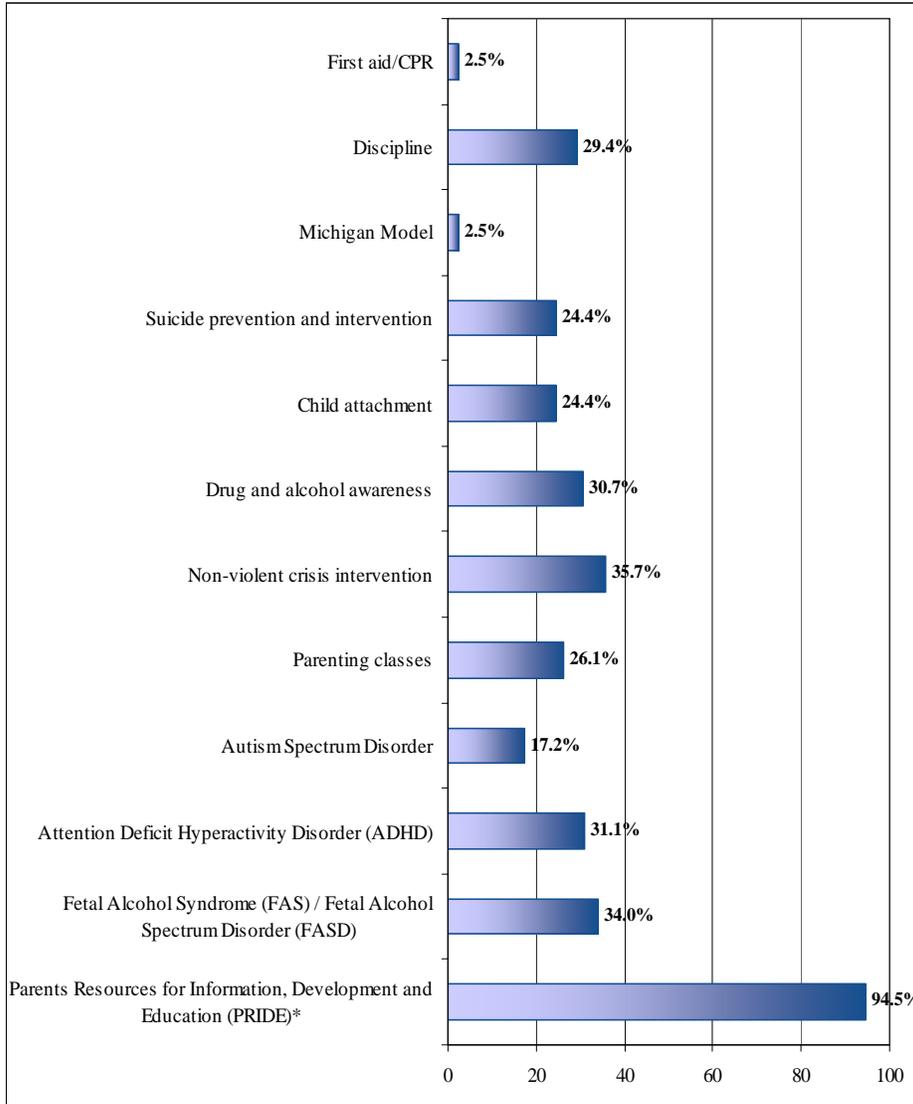
There were 523 children and youth, ranging in age from infancy to 21 years old, placed in homes of foster parents responding to the survey. Of these children/youth, 62 per cent resided in a foster home outside of their community; 23 per cent resided with a relative/significant other foster parent, and 77 per cent resided with a non-relative foster parent. Foster parents indicated that 42 per cent of children and youth in-care required a level of support on a daily basis that was typical for their age; 32 per cent needed some additional support, and 26 per cent required significant support. **Table 1** provides a profile of these children and youth.

Table 1: Profile of Children and Youth In-care						
Gender (%)	Male 55.9	Female 44.1				
Age in years (%)	< 1 5.7	1 – 4 26.4	5 – 9 23.4	10 – 14 26.1	15 – 19 15.5	20 – 21 2.5
Ethnicity (%)	Caucasian 66.7	Metis 2.5	Innu 16.7	Inuit 9.4	Other 2.7	
Care Status (%)	Voluntary 5.2	Interim 4.6	Temporary 19.3	Continuous 62.3		

3.3 Training and Educational Support

The majority of respondents (88 per cent) indicated that they felt training and educational programs were important in fulfilling their role as foster parents. Approximately 55 per cent of respondents felt that existing training opportunities were sufficient and over 30 per cent of respondents felt that additional training was needed. Although 88 per cent of respondents felt training was important, only 65 per cent of respondents indicated that they had actually completed training or educational programs related to their role as foster parents. **Figure 8** outlines the types of training in which 65 per cent of foster parents have participated.

Figure 8: Training or Education Programs Attended by Foster Parents

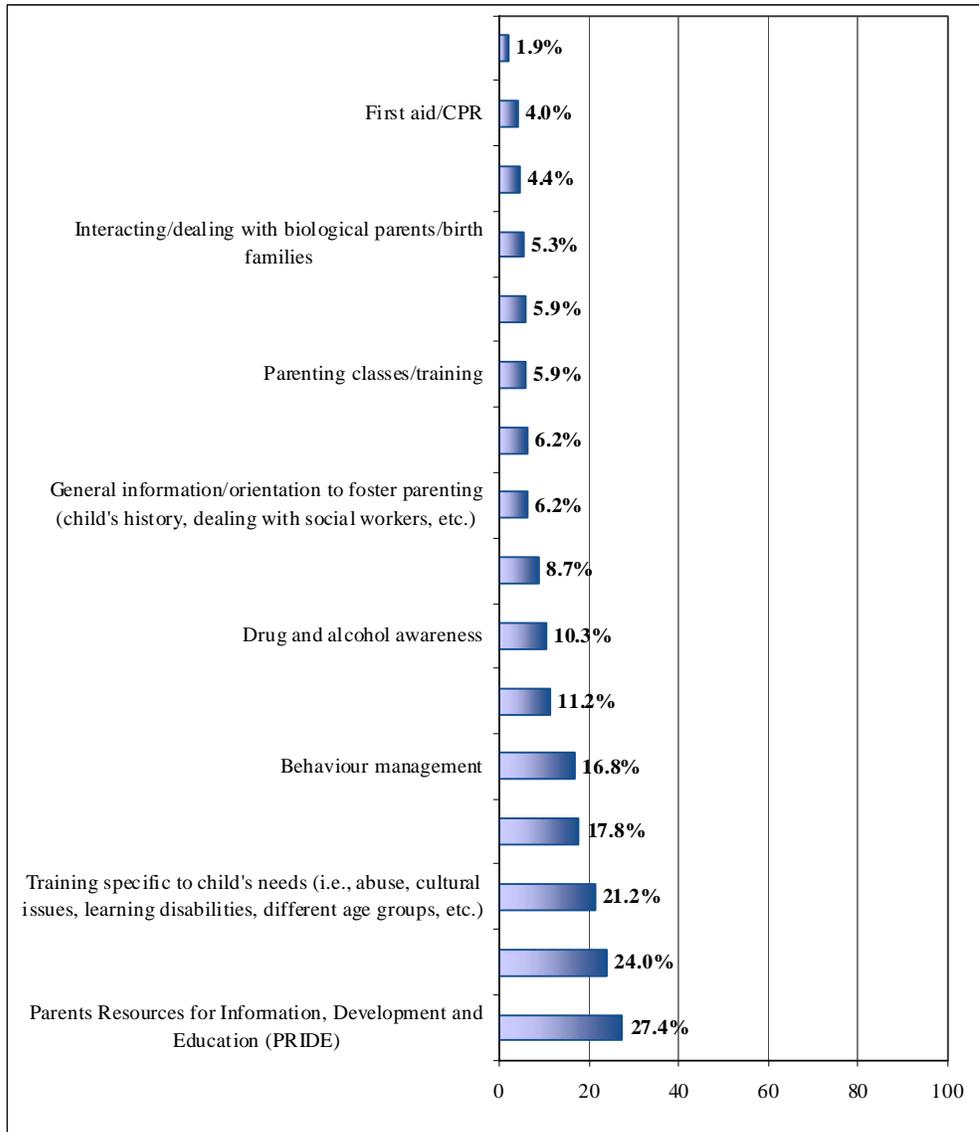


65% of respondents have completed training and/or educational programs.

*PRIDE is required training for non-relative foster parents

Figure 9 illustrates the training or educational opportunities that 88 per cent of respondents identified as being important in fulfilling the fostering role.

Figure 9: Types of Training/Educational Opportunities Important to Fulfill Foster Parent Role



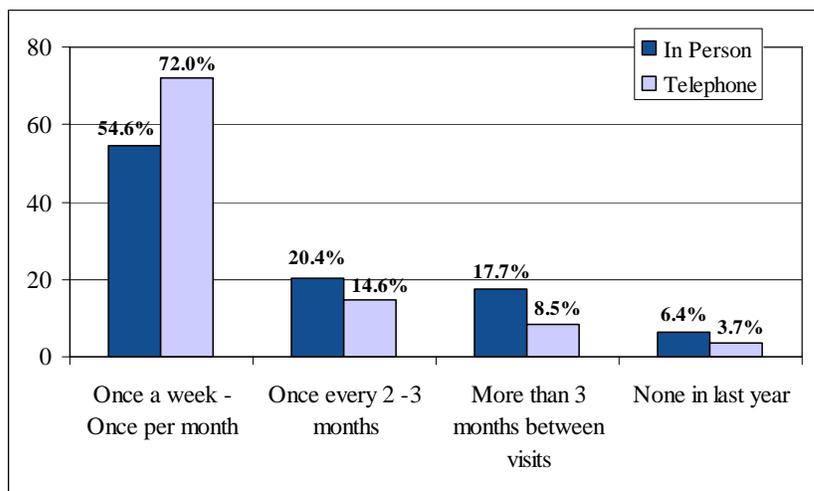
88% of respondents feel that training and educational programs are important to fulfilling their role as foster parents.

3.4 Experiences with Child, Youth and Family Services

Regular Contact

The majority of foster parents indicated they had between one to three social workers in the past year. Of these foster parents, 55 per cent had an in-person meeting/visit with their social worker at least once a month or more often; 20 per cent every two to three months; 18 per cent had more than three months between visits; and 6 per cent did not have in-person contact with their social worker in the past year. Approximately 72 per cent of respondents had weekly or monthly telephone contact with their social worker; 16 per cent had telephone contact every two to three months; 9 per cent had more than three months without telephone contact; and 4 per cent indicated they had no telephone contact in the past year. **Figure 10** provides an overview of in-person and telephone contact between foster parents and Child, Youth and Family Services.

Figure 10: Level and Type of Contact Between Foster Parents and CYFS Social Workers

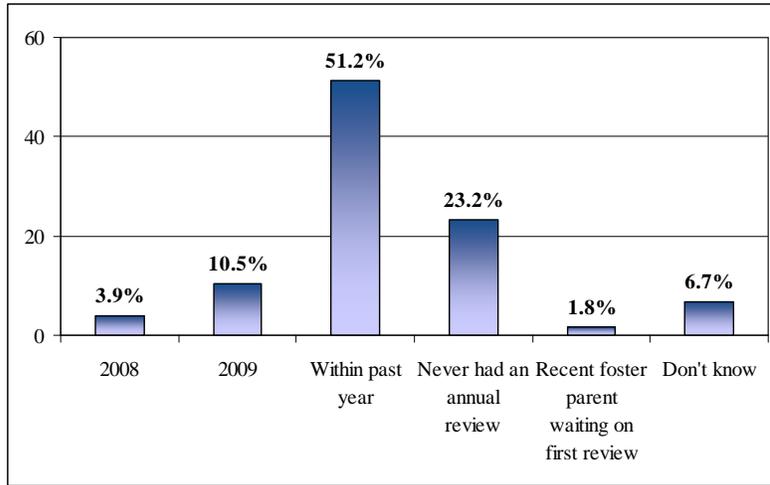


The majority of foster parents had telephone or in-person contact with their social worker at least once per month.

Annual Reviews

Respondents who were non-relative foster parents were also asked when they had their last annual review completed. Relative/significant other foster parents were not asked this question as the assessment and annual review requirements are different for this group who have a pre-existing relationship with the child or youth and are often part of the extended family. Over 50 per cent of non-relative respondents had a review completed the past year; however, the remainder indicated the length of time ranged from never to three years previous. **Figure 11** provides an overview of when the annual review was last completed.

Figure 11: Date of Last Annual Review on a Non-Relative Foster Home



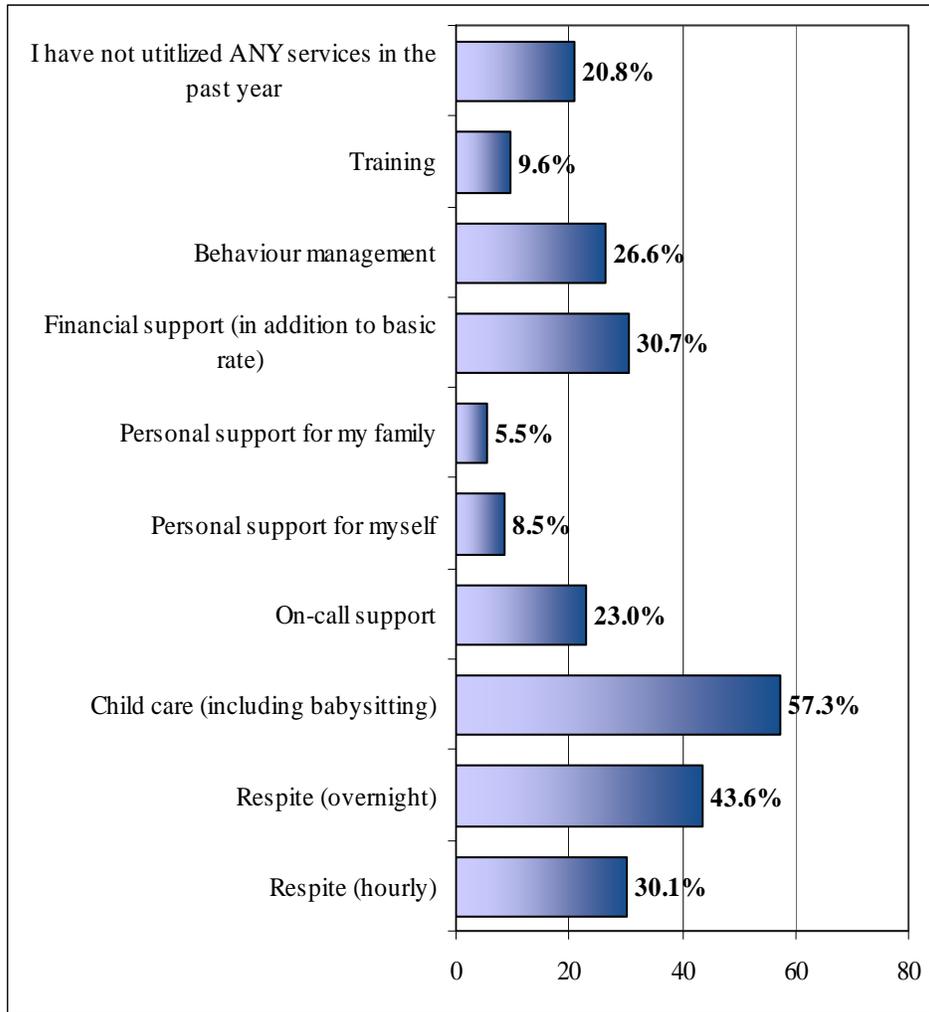
More than 50% of foster parents had an annual review completed in the past year.

Services Provided

The most frequently used services by foster parents were child care, respite (overnight and hourly), and financial support in addition to the basic rate. These same services were also rated by respondents as being the most important of all available services. Other services used included on-call support, personal support, behavior management services and training. Approximately 80 per cent of respondents received services in addition to the basic foster care rate and 90 per cent of these respondents were satisfied with the level of service they were receiving.

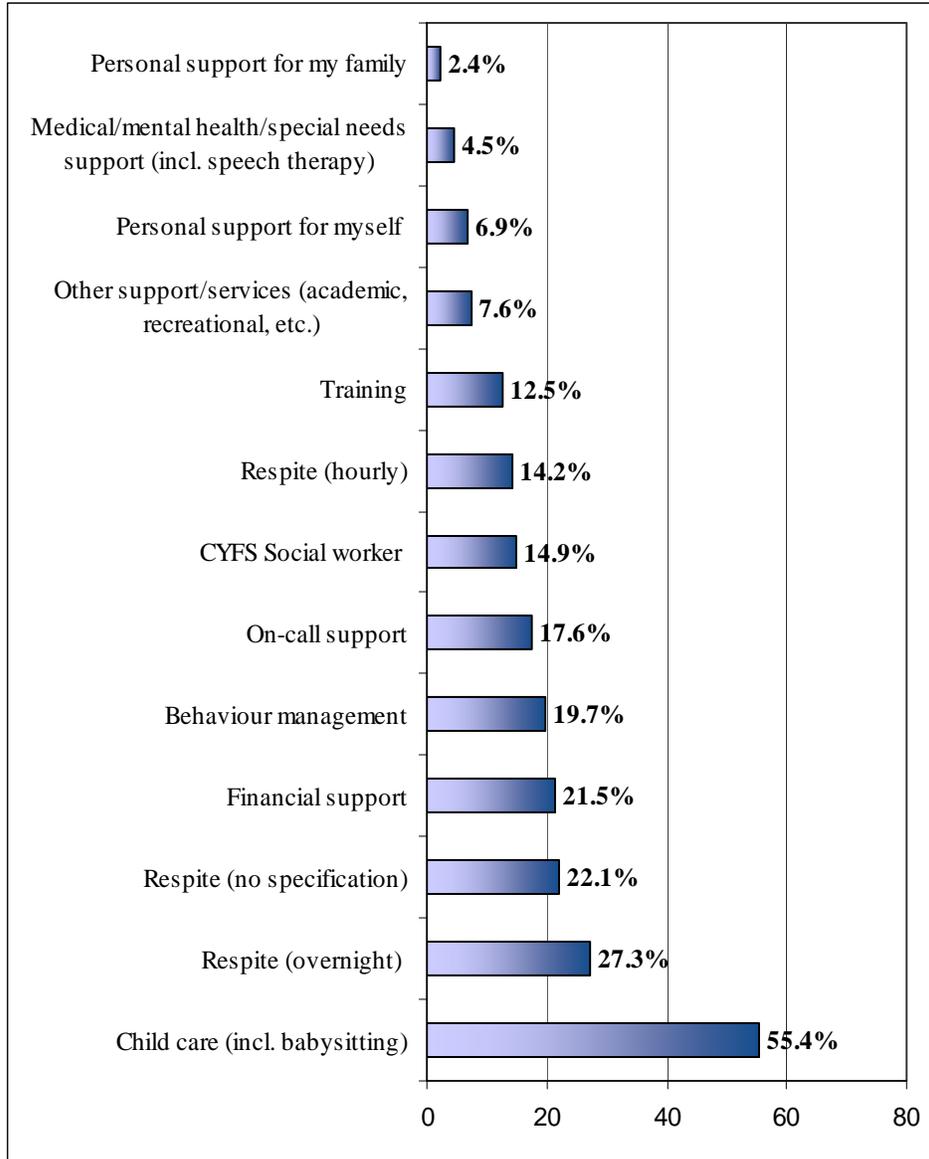
Figure 12 gives an overview of the services respondents utilized in the past year and **Figure 13** outlines the services available to foster parents which they indicated are the most important.

Figure 12: Services Utilized by Respondents in the Past Year



90% of respondents were satisfied with the level of support they were receiving.

Figure 13: Existing Services Foster Parents Rated as Important



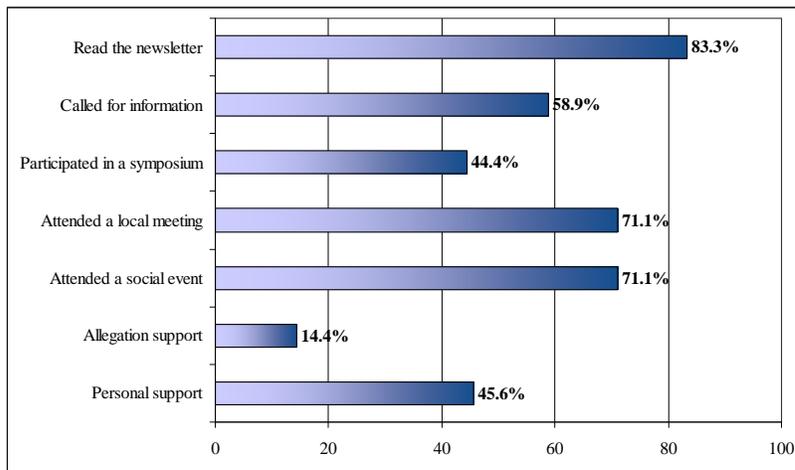
Respondents were also asked to identify if they felt there were services that they needed that were not available to them. Approximately 71 per cent of respondents indicated that there were no other services they required whereas 26 per cent indicated there were additional services that they needed to fulfill their role as foster parents. Of this group, almost 50 per cent indicated they needed more training in a variety of areas; 33 per cent indicated they needed more social work support/contact during and after regular work hours; 17 per cent indicated they needed more child specific supports and services; 15 per cent indicated that they needed more respite

and increased financial support; and a small percentage also referenced child care and personal support.

3.5 Experiences with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association

Almost 80 per cent (291) of respondents were familiar with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association (NLFFA). Of the 291 respondents, 89 per cent were on the Association’s mailing list and 31 per cent utilized services that the Association provided. **Figure 14** outlines the types of services offered by the Association that respondents have typically utilized.

Figure 14: Services of Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association Utilized by Respondents



Almost 80% of foster parents are familiar with the NLFFA.

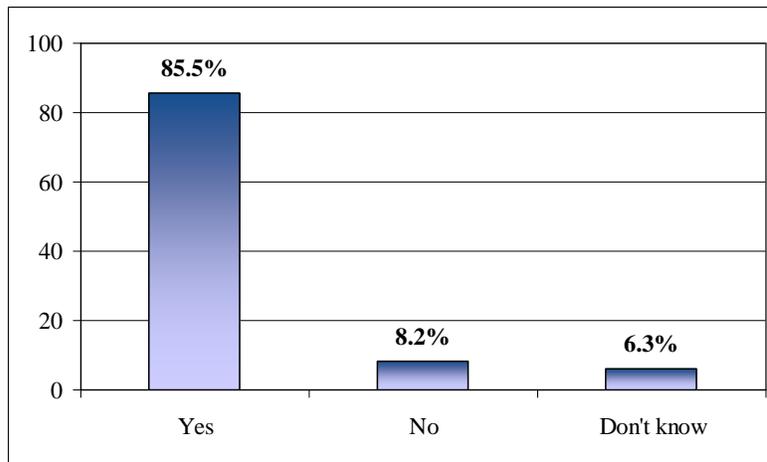
73% of those familiar with the NLFFA were satisfied with the services being provided.

Approximately 73 per cent of respondents who were familiar with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association were satisfied with the services being provided while 21 per cent indicated that the Association should be more involved with orientation of new foster parents, training, and services like counseling and transportation. Respondents were also asked about whether they felt that membership in the Association should be mandatory and 53 per cent indicated they felt it should be mandatory; 37 per cent indicated it should not be and 11 per cent did not know. The majority of respondents who felt that membership should be mandatory did so because they felt it was beneficial to all foster parents and it provided a collective voice. The respondents who felt it should not be mandatory primarily indicated it should be a personal choice. A small percentage indicated they did not have enough knowledge about the Association; and they were not satisfied with the services provided, or the services provided were not necessary/useful for them.

3.6 Overall Experience as a Foster Parent

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their overall experiences and future plans on being a foster parent. One question explored their intention to continue fostering with almost 86 per cent indicating they intended to continue in their role as foster parents. See **Figure 15** for responses on this issue.

Figure 15: Foster Parents Intention to Continue Fostering

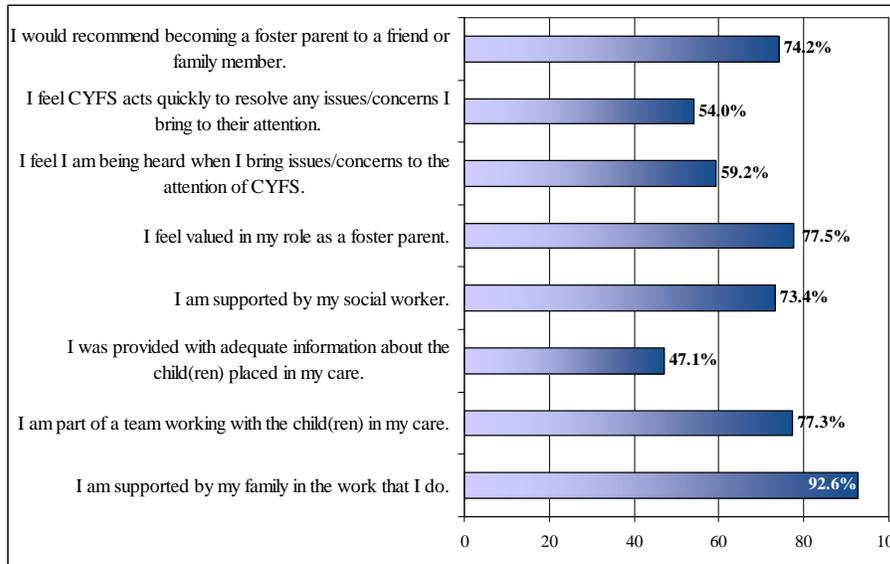


Almost 86% of foster parents plan to continue fostering.

Overall 60 per cent of respondents described fostering as positive, enjoyable and rewarding; over 25 per cent reported that fostering has been challenging, stressful and frustrating at times; 10 per cent indicated it has been both positive and negative and three per cent identified the experience as having been negative/difficult.

About 75 per cent of respondents indicated they would recommend fostering to a relative or friend and between 70 to 80 per cent said they felt valued, were part of a team, and were supported by their social worker in the role as foster parent. Foster parents were less satisfied with the pre-placement information they were provided and the time it took to have issues resolved. **Figure 16** outlines respondent reactions to their experiences as a foster parent.

Figure 16: Experiences as a Foster Parent



About 75% of respondents indicated they would recommend fostering to a relative or friend.

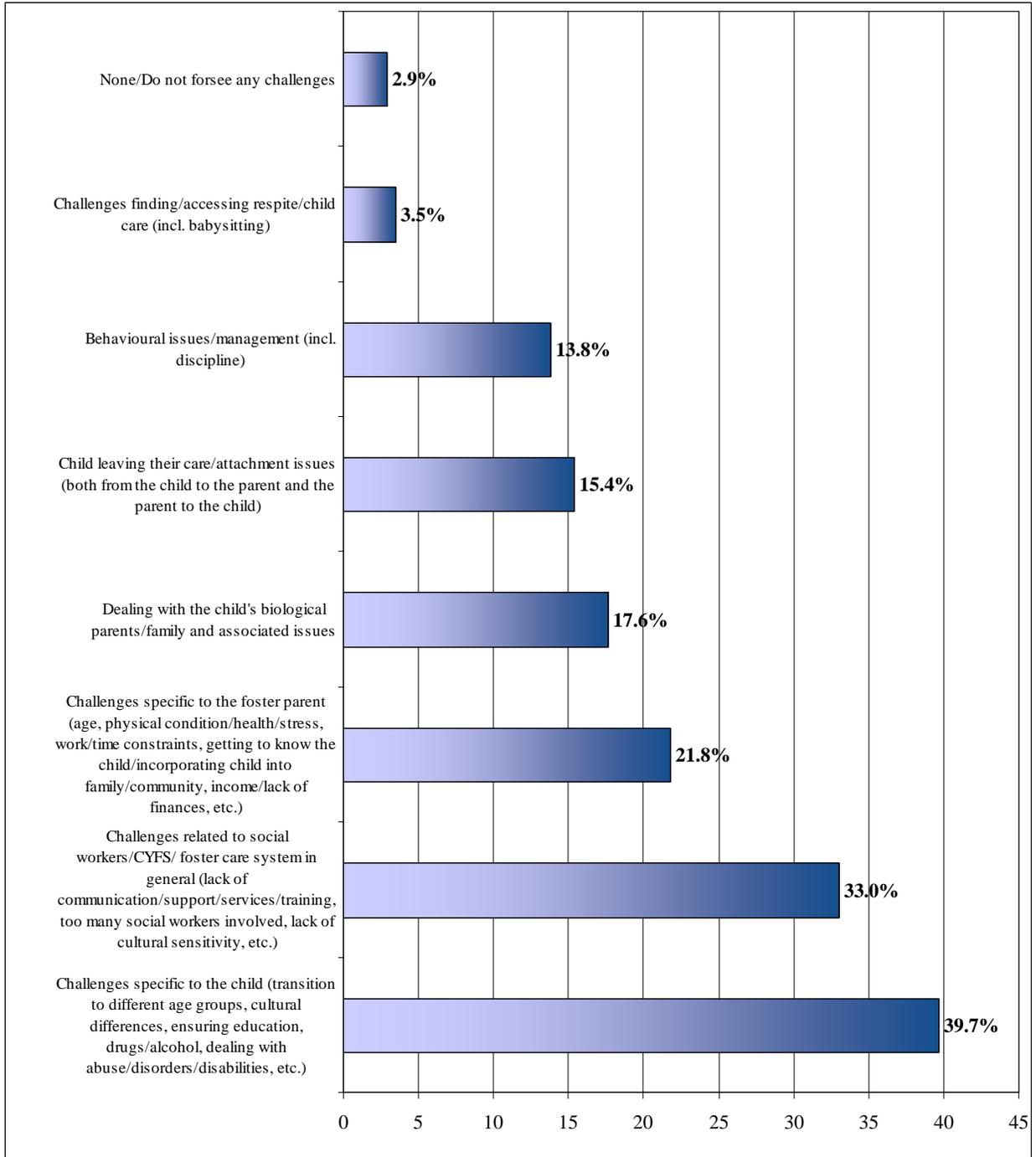
Between 70% to 80% said they felt valued, part of a team and supported by their social worker.

Foster parents were also asked to identify the biggest challenges they face in continuing their role as a foster parent. The top three challenges identified:

- dealing with issues specific to the child (i.e. transition to different age groups, cultural differences, ensuring education, drugs and alcohol, dealing with abuse, disorders or disabilities, etc.);
- issues related to the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (i.e. lack of communication, supports, services and training; too many social workers; and lack of cultural sensitivity); and
- challenges related to foster parents (i.e. age, physical condition, work/time constraints, getting to know the child, incorporating the child into the family, lack of finances).

Figure 17 outlines all the challenges faced by respondents in their role as foster parents.

Figure 17: Challenges Faced by Foster Parents



4.0 ANALYSIS OF TRENDS AND KEY FINDINGS

4.1 Response Rate

The Newfoundland and Labrador Statistical Agency was provided with the contact information for 465 foster homes, 365 of whom responded to the survey resulting in a response rate of 78 per cent. This high response rate supports the conclusion that foster parents were very interested in completing the survey and providing the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services with feedback regarding their experiences with the foster care program.

4.2 Response by Type of Foster Home (Non-relative versus Relative/Significant Other)

At the time the survey was administered, about 64 per cent of foster homes surveyed were non-relative and 36 per cent were relative/significant other. Of the 365 respondents interviewed, 75 per cent were non-relative foster homes, 22 per cent were relative/significant other foster homes, and 3 per cent were both. Non-relative foster parents were over represented in the survey, which may be attributed to the fact that relative/significant others may see themselves more as family to the child or youth they are caring for than as a foster parent. As a result, they may not be as motivated to reply to the survey.

The analysis did show that responses to the survey were similar regardless of the type of foster parent. The most significant differences between the two groups:

- relative/significant other homes were not as familiar with the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association; and,
- relative/significant other homes utilized less overnight respite and child care than non-relative foster parents.

Both groups ranked respite and child care as some of the most important services for foster parents, but the percentage of relative/significant other foster parents who ranked them was lower. Relative/significant other foster parents also rated training and increased access to social workers much less important than non-relative foster parents. These differences may be attributed to the fact that relative/significant other foster parents have pre-existing knowledge of the child and most likely the family. The relative/significant other foster parents already have an established relationship with the child; and with 50 per cent of relative/significant other respondents being grandparents, there is a higher likelihood that they may be retired; thus, not needing child care. Grandparents may also be more reluctant to send their grandchildren for overnight respite, or they may rely on family members to assist with child care.

4.3 Training and Education

Approximately 65 per cent of respondents had completed training as part of their role as a foster parent. In particular, 72 per cent of non-relative foster parents and 26 per cent of relative/significant other foster parents had completed Parenting Resources Information Development Education pre-service, or PRIDE.

All non-relative foster parents are required to complete PRIDE as part of their final approval, which suggests that 28 per cent of these respondents were not fully approved at the time of the survey. However, when the survey was administered, there was a provision in policy that provided for an emergency approval of a non-relative foster home to facilitate the placement of a child. The survey results also indicated that 25 per cent of relative/significant other parents had completed PRIDE despite the fact it is not a requirement in policy.

Furthermore, 88 per cent of foster parents indicated that they felt training and educational programs were important in fulfilling their role as foster parents, with the majority being non-relative foster parents. Clearly non-relative foster parents feel educational and training opportunities are more important to their role as foster parents, which may once again reflect that relatives identify themselves more as being family than being a foster parent to the child/youth. It may also be a result of the fact that relative/significant other foster parents are only approved for a specific child(ren)/youth whom they are connected to as opposed to a non-relative foster parent who may potentially care for many different children with differing needs.

Over half of respondents (56 per cent) felt that the training they had already completed was sufficient, while 32 per cent felt that they required additional training including training on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, discipline and behavior management training specific to the needs of the child.

4.4 Contacts with CYFS

The Department of Child, Youth and Family Services' Protection and In-Care Policy and Procedure Manual (2011) indicates that social workers shall have, at minimum, monthly face-to-face contact with foster parents and that foster home approvals shall be reviewed annually. Over 50 per cent of respondents indicated that they had weekly to monthly in-person contact with a social worker and 72 per cent indicated they had weekly to monthly phone contact. Over 50 per cent of respondents had an annual review completed within one year and 23 per cent indicated no annual review had been completed.

While these findings indicate that provincial standards were being met in little over 50 per cent of cases, this does represent significant improvement from the findings of the Clinical Services Review in 2008. In 2008, the Department of Health and



Community Services contracted with external consultants to review and evaluate the clinical services provided to children, youth and their parents through the Child, Youth and Family Services program. The evaluation was based on a review of 400 files across seven program areas including foster care.

The Clinical Services Review (2008) found that in 90 per cent of the foster home files reviewed, contact with the caregiver (foster parent) was either undocumented or below the required standard and only 12.5 per cent of foster homes had an annual review completed within one year. The creation of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, including a new organizational structure, quality assurance initiatives and the development of the new Policy and Procedure Manual will further enhance compliance to provincial standards and ensure foster parents are visited and foster homes are reviewed on a regular basis.

4.5 Support and Services

The most frequently used services by foster parents were child care, respite (overnight and hourly) and financial support in addition to the basic foster care rate. Child care was the most frequently used service by both non-relative and relative/significant other foster parents. Respite and financial support were the next most frequently used services, but relative/significant other foster parents used 22.4 per cent less overnight respite. The utilization of hourly respite and additional financial support was similar for both groups.

Non-relative foster parents also rated these frequently utilized services as the most important services with child care being first followed by respite and financial support. Relative/significant other foster parents also rated child care and respite as the most important services, but prioritized behavior management services slightly over financial support. The percentage of relative/significant other foster parents who felt child care and respite were important services was smaller compared to non-relative foster parents.

Respite was deemed another necessary service for foster parents as it helps to prevent burnout and allows them to devote individual time to their own family especially if the child/youth placed in their home requires intensive support. Dr. Fowler in his 2008 report *Children In Care in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Review of Issues and Trends with Recommendations for Programs and Services* referenced other research to show that insufficient respite was a key factor impacting retention of foster parents. The need for respite is further supported by the fact that survey respondents indicated that almost 60 per cent of the children and youth in their home required additional support not typical of a child/youth of that age with 25 per cent indicating significant support was required.

Financial support was another important service identified by respondents, which holds true for foster parents in other jurisdictions. Given that the average foster

home income is \$40,000 to \$60,000 and 40 per cent of homes have an annual income of less than \$40,000, financial support is a key priority area for respondents. Dr. Fowler also identified financial support as a significant issue for foster parents in his 2008 report and recommended a new financial structure for the foster care program. In 2009, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced a significant increase to the basic foster care rate, which was introduced over a two-year period.

4.6 Overall Experience of Fostering

Almost 75 per cent of respondents indicated they would recommend fostering to a relative or friend and between 70 to 80 per cent of respondents felt that they were valued, part of a team, and supported by their social worker in the role of foster parent. These findings are significant from recruitment and retention perspective as research indicates that foster parents are the best recruiters of new foster parents (Barbell & Sheikh, 2000: CWLC Webinar by Ian Matheson March 2011).

Feeling valued and being part of a team also contributes to foster parent recruitment and retention. Dr. Fowler's report included factors that contribute to high attrition rates for foster parents, such as inadequate support, consultation and disrespect for foster parents as partners and team members.

Although the majority of foster parents felt valued and part of a team, almost 50 per cent did not feel heard when they brought issues/concerns to the attention of Child, Youth and Family Services. These foster parents also felt that their issues and concerns were not resolved quickly enough. Another area of concern was the provision of inadequate placement information about the child/youth placed in their home. Each of these factors can also impact the overall recruitment and retention of foster families. Continued support to foster families is critical in order to ensure a sense of value, partnership, and particular emphasis should be placed on sharing information and resolving issues/concerns in a timely manner.

The new Protection and In Care Policy and Procedure Manual introduced on June 30, 2011, included enhanced policy on information sharing with foster parents, and introduced the concept of the In-Care Planning Team, which includes foster parents in collaborative planning for children/youth in-care. It is anticipated that enhanced policy in conjunction with the new organizational structure of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services will address many of the issues regarding information sharing and response times to the concerns and issues brought forward by foster parents.



5.0 CONCLUSION

In Newfoundland and Labrador, over 80 per cent of children/youth in-care are in a foster home setting. Currently the numbers of approved homes cannot meet the placement demands of children and youth in-care and as a result, children and youth who could be matched with a foster home may have to be temporarily placed in a staffed living arrangement. A key goal of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is to recruit and retain more foster families so children and youth requiring a foster home can be matched with an approved foster family.

Overall, the findings of this survey provided a clear picture of the services that are most important to foster families and identified strengths of the system, as well as gaps that need to be addressed. These findings will inform future program and policy development as well as assist with the ongoing efforts to recruit and retain foster parents.

6.0 REFERENCES

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