

RECRUITING FOSTER PARENTS:

Socio-Economic Characteristics of Foster Parents of Intellectually Handicapped & Non-Intellectually Handicapped Children in Queensland.

INTRODUCTION

Although there have been a number of studies carried out over the years about various characteristics of foster parents, most of them have been undertaken in the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. Very little research has been done in Australia about foster care in general, recruiting foster parents, or about foster parents of intellectually handicapped children. This lack of Australian research raises questions as to whether findings of studies in other countries can be generalised to all foster care situations. It cannot automatically be assumed, for example, that the Australian foster parent population is the same as abroad, and yet for years workers in Australia have tended to rely on overseas statistics as a basis for decisions on foster care.

If foster care is to remain a viable alternative form of substitute care for children, the poverty of research coupled with the chronic shortage of appropriate foster homes for children in need experienced in Queensland¹, must be addressed. Therefore there is a particular need for Australian research which will assist agencies to recruit appropriate people willing to undertake such a task.

One set of variables relevant to recruiting has to do with demographic as well as socio-economic characteristics (Petersen & Pierce, 1974, p. 195). Variables such as age, employment and location of residence are part of a person's decision-making process, and contribute to decisions "to act or not to act" (Engel et al, 1978, pp. 45-47). For example, in the decision to take on foster care, the potential foster parent may be reflecting his age, his economic circumstances, his neighbourhood, his type of residence and other characteristics which, consciously or unconsciously, are part of the process of forming intentions or making a decision.

The market potential for foster care is created by people with the resources to satisfy their needs. A logical starting point therefore in deciding at whom to direct recruiting efforts is the determination of whether people, appropriate and willing to undertake foster care do exist in the community, how many such people

JILL VOLARD

Jill Volard is a Senior Tutor in Social Work, University of Queensland, St. Lucia. She conducted a foster care programme for intellectually handicapped children in Brisbane between 1973 and 1978.

This article reports data relating to the socio-economic characteristics of foster parents of intellectually handicapped children and a group of non-intellectually handicapped children in Brisbane and relates these to recruitment of foster parents for both groups of children.

there are, and the level of economic resources they possess (Engel et al, 1978, pp. 46-47). In fact, the most common variables used for identifying consumer groups are geographic location of the population, age, income, occupation, marital status, family composition, race, religion and education (Boone & Kurtz, 1974, p. 90).

It is probably fair to say that no one single variable would represent whether a person would take up the task of fostering, and each is probably best regarded as a component of a composite for identifying a potential group of consumers (Frank et al, 1972, p. 42). However, the ease of measuring such variables, and the relatively large size of segments makes them a popular means for dividing up a market (Frank et al, 1972, p. 30).

At the very least, some knowledge of the demographic characteristics of foster parents offers clues as to where in the community agencies might locate one group of potential foster parent recruits at whom to pitch recruiting efforts. At the same time, an important decision that agencies must make, is whether they wish to recruit people similar to those already undertaking the task. There could well be other groups in the community equally as willing to foster, who cannot be identified by simply understanding current foster parents.

Another important recruiting limitation is that of understanding socio-economic characteristics. Demographic variables alone cannot locate the most desirable or potentially the most success-

ful foster parents (Boone & Kurtz, 1974, p. 116). The agency should identify these additional criteria and utilise these in deciding viable target groups.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

The Literature

There appears to be a dearth of literature on the socio-economic characteristics of foster parents of both intellectually handicapped and non-intellectually handicapped children all over the world. This is particularly so in Australia. As Petersen and Pierce (Petersen & Pierce, 1974, p. 298) point out, there are only a few discussions on the social characteristics of foster parents from Britain, France and Japan and many of the studies of foster parents completed in the United States tend to omit such data. The three most important studies which draw attention to socio-economic characteristics of foster parents are those of Fanshel, Jaffee, and more recently Petersen and Pierce (Fanshel, 1966, pp. 17-58; Jaffee, 1970, pp. 25-96; Petersen & Pierce, 1974, pp. 295-304).

In relation to intellectually handicapped children, the only study found which looked specifically at the characteristics of foster parents of such children was one carried out by Mabel Rich in the U.S.A. (Rich, 1965, pp. 392-394). Fanshel, also, factor analysed some of his data based on caseworker ratings (Fanshel 1961, pp. 19-22). However, apart from this research, the only other references made to foster parents of "hard to place" children, including the intellectually handicapped, are based on clinical observations by practitioners in the field of adoption and foster care and these relate to psychological rather than socio-economic characteristics (Donley, 1976, p.21; Sawbridge, 1979, p. 22).

THE QUEENSLAND STUDY

The data presented here were collected as part of a broad study designed to collect information about the socio-economic characteristics, motivation, perceptions, attitudes and need satisfaction of people fostering intellectually handi-

capped children and people fostering non-intellectually handicapped children. More specifically, such information was intended to increase the understanding of foster care agencies about foster care and assist in decision-making about:

1. Where to find foster parent recruits.
2. The nature of the foster care task and role.
3. The costs and benefits to foster parents in taking on the task.
4. Where to locate offices, personnel and services.
5. How to ensure that foster parents have their needs and requirements met.

It was also intended to show similarities and differences between the two groups of foster parents.

During 1977-78 an attitude scale and a survey questionnaire comprising seventy items were administered, in face-to-face interviews, to ninety-eight current foster parents of intellectually handicapped children and 182 current foster parents of non-intellectually handicapped children. These foster parents were associated with

either the Queensland Department of Children's Services or the Social Work Unit at the W.R. Black Centre for Intellectually Handicapped Children in Brisbane where the author supervised a field training unit for third and fourth year social work students at the University of Queensland. This Unit had as its purpose the establishment of a foster care and adoption programme for the intellectually handicapped children residing in the Centre (Volard & Forrest, 1977, pp. 11-15).

Families fostering intellectually handicapped children were defined as those families fostering a child attending opportunity school, day training centre, sub-normal school, or too intellectually handicapped to attend any of these. Where the child was below school age, or attending a special centre, families were included who had been told by the fostering agency or a professional psychologist, doctor or educationalist, that the child would potentially have to attend such a school or centre.

An attempt was made to include the total population of families fostering intellectually handicapped children in the Brisbane Statistical Division (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976). The sample of families fostering non-intellectually handicapped children was selected randomly from the mailing list of families registered to receive the State Fostering Allowance at the Department of Children's Services. At the time of selecting the sample, there were 925 names on the list.

THE FINDINGS

On the whole, the findings with regard to the socio-economic characteristics for both groups of foster parents were similar to other studies, as well as to those of the Brisbane Statistical Division. The only statistically significant differences between the two groups of foster parents were on the variables, "place of residence", "income" and "education level". For this reason these findings will be discussed first.



TABLE 1:
DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY DISTANCE OF RESIDENCE FROM THE CITY.
 $(\chi^2 = 23.93156, p < .01)$

| DISTANCE FROM CITY kms. | FOSTER PARENTS OF INTELLECTUALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN (I.H.C.'s) (N = 98) | | FOSTER PARENTS OF NON-INTELLECTUALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN (Non-I.H.C.'s) (N = 182) | |
|-------------------------|---|--------|--|--------|
| | % | Cum. % | % | Cum. % |
| 0 - 5 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 17.0 | 17.0 |
| 6 - 10 | 25.5 | 35.7 | 29.7 | 46.7 |
| 11 - 15 | 8.2 | 43.9 | 20.9 | 67.6 |
| 16 - 20 | 18.4 | 62.3 | 14.8 | 82.4 |
| 21 - 25 | 8.2 | 70.5 | 7.7 | 90.1 |
| Over 25 | 29.5 | 100.0 | 9.9 | 100.0 |

PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The data indicates that foster parents of intellectually handicapped children (I.H.C.'s) lived significantly further away from the city than those fostering non-intellectually handicapped children (non-I.H.C.'s) (see Table 1). Not quite three in ten of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s lived more than 25 kilometres from the city, whereas twice as many of those fostering I.C.H.'s lived 16 kilometres or more from the city.

Another aspect of "place of residence" of foster parents dealt with their perceptions of the locality in which they lived, that is, city versus country. Of those fostering I.H.C.'s who lived more than 16 kilometres from the city, 47.2%

perceived themselves as living in the outer suburbs, 18.2% reported that they lived in a country town, 18.2% in a regional city, and 16.4% on a farm property. In other words, more than half of this group reported living in a rural environment. Of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s, 74.6% reported living in the outer suburbs, 6.7% reported living in a country town, 15.3% in a regional city, and only 3.4% on farm properties. Thus, it would seem that of those living more than 16 kilometres from the city, far more of those fostering intellectually handicapped children perceived themselves living in rural environments than of those fostering non-intellectually handicapped children.

- Several interpretations are possible:
1. Life in rural areas tends to be less hectic than closer to the city, and hence people have more time to cope with the demands of a handicapped child.
 2. People in the country have a greater sense of community than city dwellers and hence a more developed support network exists to help people cope with such a child.
 3. Many of the differences associated with the intellectual handicap would be less conspicuous in country areas where the pace of life is slower and the demand on people to perform in usual and accepted ways may be less.

INCOME

Income was based on the earnings of the breadwinner in each family, as well as for the total income of the household from all sources. From Figure 1, it would seem that more than a third of the breadwinners of those fostering I.H.C.'s (37.1%) had an income of less than \$6,000 per year (at 1978 levels), compared with only 16.3% of foster parents of non-I.H.C.'s. Almost two-thirds of breadwinners in the former group (64.8%) had incomes of less than \$9,000 compared with less than half (43.9%) in the latter, and only 35.2% as against more than half (56.1%) earned more than \$9,000. The mean income for breadwinners among families fostering I.H.C.'s was \$154.61 per week ($\bar{x} = \$154.61, SD = 74.55$) and for those fostering non-I.H.C.'s \$185.86 per week ($\bar{x} =$

Figure 1. Distribution of Income by Breadwinner¹ ($t(141) = 2.45, p.02$)

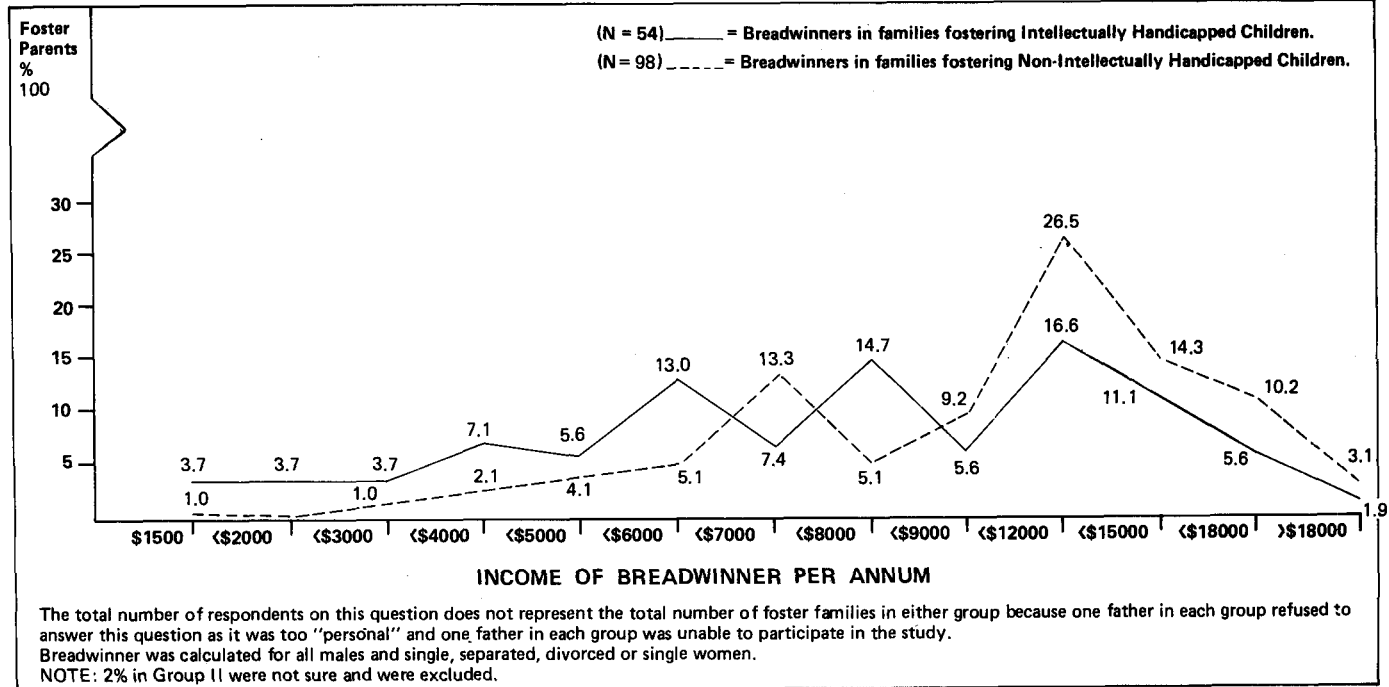


TABLE II:
COMPARISON OF YEARLY EARNINGS BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS OF FOSTER PARENTS AND THE BRISBANE STATISTICAL DIVISION

| YEARLY EARNINGS | I. H. C. 's | Non - I. H. C. 's | B. S. D. 1 |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|
| \$ 9,001 - 12,000 | 16.0% | 21.2% | 15.4% |
| \$12,001 - 15,000 | 28.7% | 20.1% | 12.3% |

1. A.B.S., 1976, op. cit., pp. 980 - 1

\$185.86, SD = 72.17). This is a significant different at $p < .02$ with breadwinners in the group fostering non-I.H.C.'s having a larger income ($t[141] = 2.45, p < .02$).

Therefore, it would seem from the incomes of breadwinners that foster parents of non-I.H.C.'s were better off financially than those of I.H.C.'s.

On the whole, foster parents appeared to have higher incomes than the population of the Brisbane Statistical Division (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976, pp. 980-981). More than two-thirds of foster parents in both groups had total household incomes of more than \$9,000 per annum, which is somewhat higher than for the Brisbane Statistical Division (50.2%). Although the incomes of the largest numbers of foster parents and the Brisbane Statistical Division fall in the categories between \$9,000 - \$15,000, the numbers were higher for both groups of foster parents than they were for the Brisbane Statistical Division (see Table II).

Thus foster parents in both groups, though not affluent, appear to have slightly better than average incomes. On total household income, almost two-thirds had gross annual incomes of well over \$9,000. It should be noted here that at the time of the study, the average Australian income for males was \$10,920 (Labour Bureau of Statistics, 1976, p.48).

EDUCATION

Table III represents the age at which foster parents left school. Although there are no overall statistically significant differences between the two groups, a statistically significantly greater proportion of foster parents of I.H.C.'s (19.4%) than of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s (9.3%) left school before the age of 14 years ($\chi^2 = 5.739, df1, p < .02$).

Given that most children start school

at five years of age in Australia, this would indicate that most foster parents completed at least eight years of schooling, which in most cases would include one year of high school. The figures do not appear too different from those for the Brisbane Statistical Division, although it does seem that more foster parents left school under the age of fifteen than people in the general population, (54.2% of foster parents of I.H.C.'s, 42.9% of foster parents of non-I.H.C.'s, and 32.3% in the Brisbane Statistical Division).

Years spent at school do not necessarily reflect the level of qualifications attained. Thus, school leaving age should be looked at in the light of such information, (see Table IV).

In comparison with the population of the Brisbane Statistical Division, foster parents appeared to be better qualified; 65% of the general population had no qualifications, and fewer had qualifications at any level than did the foster parents. Thus, although foster parents appear to have left school at a slightly earlier age than the general population, they appear to have acquired higher qualifications over time.

AGE

It was found that as a proportion of age range, the largest number of foster parents (38.9% of those fostering I.H.C.'s 30.2% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s) fell between the ages of 36 and 45 years. Although the differences between the two groups of foster parents were not significant, it is perhaps worth noting that there did appear to be more older foster parents over the age of 60 years among those fostering I.H.C.'s than among those fostering non-I.H.C.'s, i.e. over one in nine of those fostering I.H.C.'s and only one in twenty-five of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s.

This finding may be understandable given that young couples with children of their own are likely to find demands of fostering an intellectually handicapped child too great and might also consider seriously the effects on their own children of having such a child in their home. It may also be indicative of the availability of more time (and perhaps patience) to devote to this demanding task.

Figure 2 shows the number of own children in the foster families. It would seem that foster parents of I.H.C.'s tended to have more children of their own than did those of non-I.H.C.'s, i.e. 23% of those fostering I.H.C.'s had five or more children as against 13% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s, with an overall mean of 3.1 children as against 2.7 children. However, neither group had more than seven children of their own.

With foster parents of I.H.C.'s, 37.5% reported that all their children were currently living at home as contrasted with 56.0% in the latter. Of those fostering I.H.C.'s, 19.6% in contrast to 8.0% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s, reported that all their children were grown up and living away from home. This difference is not surprising since there tended to be more older families fostering I.H.C.'s than non-I.H.C.'s.

TABLE III:
DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY AGE AT WHICH THEY LEFT SCHOOL

| AGE LEFT SCHOOL | I. H. C. 's (N = 98) | | Non - I. H. C. 's (N = 182) | | B. S. D. 1 | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|------------|--------|
| Less than 14 years | 19.4 | 19.4 | 9.3 | 9.3 | 5.0 | 5.0 |
| 14 years | 34.8 | 54.2 | 33.6 | 42.9 | 27.3 | 32.3 |
| 15 years | 21.4 | 75.6 | 27.5 | 70.4 | 29.6 | 61.9 |
| 16 years | 13.3 | 88.9 | 14.5 | 84.7 | 19.4 | 81.3 |
| 17 years | 7.1 | 98.0 | 8.8 | 93.5 | 11.5 | 92.8 |
| 18 years | 2.0 | 98.0 | 4.4 | 97.9 | 4.9 | 97.7 |
| 19 years | 2.0 | 100.0 | 1.6 | 99.5 | 1.7 | 99.4 |
| Never attended | - | - | 0.5 | 100.0 | 0.6 | 100.0 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | | 100.0 | | 100.0 | |
| | % | Cum. % | % | Cum. % | % | Cum. % |

1. A.B.S., 1976, p. 81.

TABLE IV:

DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY HIGHEST QUALIFICATION ATTAINED

| | I. H. C. 's (N = 98) % | Non - I. H. C. 's (N = 182) % | B. S. D. 1 % |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| No qualification | 50.0 | 46.2 | 65.0 |
| Bachelor degree or higher | 3.1 | 0.5 | 2.7 |
| Technical/Tertiary Diploma | 20.4 | 18.7 | 7.2 |
| Trade Certificate | 22.4 | 31.3 | 10.4 |
| Inadequately described /not classifiable / not stated | 4.1 | 3.3 | 14.7 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

1. A.B.S., 1976, op. cit., p. 981

This might suggest that:

1. foster parents of I.H.C.'s enjoy parenting tasks more than those of non-I.H.C.'s, or
2. that having had experience with more children of their own, they feel able to cope with the demands of an intellectually handicapped child.

PLACE OF BIRTH

The large majority of foster parents (88.8% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 86.3% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s) were Australian born. These figures do not seem too different from the population of the Brisbane Statistical Division (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976, p.980) where 83.9% were Australian born. Given the desirability of placing Aboriginal foster children with Aboriginal parents (Dyer, 1979, pp.181-187), it was surprising to find that there were no Aboriginal foster families in the group fostering I.H.C.'s and only two Aboriginal families among those fostering non-I.H.C.'s. However, 8.2% of foster parents in the I.H.C. group and 12.1% in the non-I.H.C. group reported having Aboriginal children placed with them.

MARITAL STATUS

As might be expected, the large majority of foster parents in both groups were living as married couples (87.8% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 89.0% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s) and only 12.2% in the first group and 10.9% in the latter had been married more than once. Most of them had been married for a considerable period of time. Only 19.4% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 25.8% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s had been married for less than ten years, and 48% of the I.H.C. group compared with 35.7 of the non-I.H.C. group had been married for more than twenty years.

RELIGION

The religious affiliations of foster parents were similar to the population of the Brisbane Statistical Division (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976, p.981). 35.7% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 28.7% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s were Church of England, and 26.5% in the first group as against 22.6% in the latter were Roman Catholic. Of the remainder, 15.3% of foster parents of I.H.C.'s and 18.1% of foster parents of non-I.H.C.'s belonged to the Uniting Church and the rest in both groups to smaller religious denominations. More than two-thirds (70.4% of those fostering I.H.C.'s, 74.3% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s) reported that religion was important, very important, or the most important thing in their lives. However, only a little over a third (37.8% of those fostering I.H.C.'s; 36.8% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s) reported attending church services regularly each week. Furthermore, 72.4% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 71.4% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s indicated that they never participated in church groups or church-related activities.

Table V shows that one in three foster fathers were blue collar workers and about the same number were white collar workers. The largest occupational group for foster fathers was tradesmen or production workers, (34.7% of those fostering I.H.C.'s, 29.3% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s). This is similar to the population of the Brisbane Statistical Division. More than four out of five foster mothers in both groups were not working in paid employment.

OTHER FINDINGS

Among other variables studied were childhood characteristics of foster parents.

On the whole, foster parents in both groups tended to come from large families, with 26.5% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 21.4% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s coming from families with six or more children. Only 8.2% of foster parents in the former group and 9.3% in the latter group described themselves as an only child and more than half in both groups came from families with four or more children, (60.2% of those fostering I.H.C.'s, 51.0% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s).

They tended to come from suburban environments with 58.1% of those fostering I.H.C.'s and 53.3% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s reporting that up to the age of 15 years they either lived in the outer suburbs, the inner city suburbs or right in the city.

Very few foster parents in the study showed evidence of an impoverished childhood. The large majority in both groups (69.4% versus 69.8%) perceived their childhood as happy or very happy, and 74.5% of those fostering I.H.C.'s as against 78% of those fostering non-I.H.C.'s reported that they had never lived away from home. Only 1% in the former group and 2.2% in the latter were foster children themselves and only 1% in both groups were adopted children.

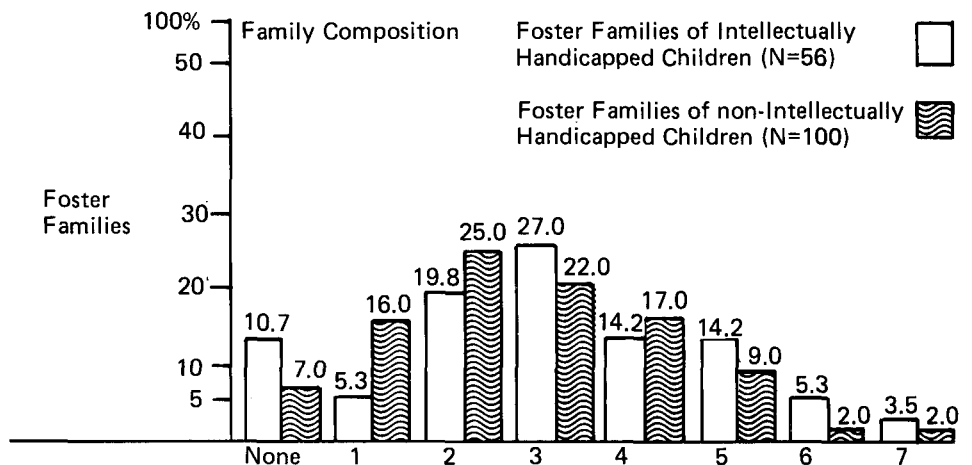


Figure 2. Number of Natural/Own Children Foster Families by Number of Own Children

TABLE V:
DISTRIBUTION OF FOSTER PARENTS BY OCCUPATION

| OCCUPATION | FOSTER PARENTS of I. H. C. 's | | FOSTER PARENTS of Non - I. H. C. 's | | B. S. D. 1 % |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------|
| | MALES N = 43 % | FEMALES N = 55 % | MALES N = 82 % | FEMALES N = 100 % | |
| Professional / Administrative | 16.3 | 3.6 | 14.7 | 2.0 | 19.0 |
| Clerical | 11.6 | 1.8 | 11.0 | 1.0 | 20.0 |
| Sales | 4.7 | 3.6 | 14.6 | 2.0 | 8.7 |
| Tradesmen / Production Workers | 34.7 | - | 29.3 | 1.0 | 29.4 |
| Farmers, Farm Labourers, etc. | 7.0 | - | - | - | 1.5 |
| Home Duties | - | 83.7 | - | 83.0 | - |
| Other | 4.7 | 1.8 | 12.1 | 7.0 | 21.4 |
| Not categorisable / or not stated | 14.0 | 5.5 | 14.6 | 4.0 | - |
| Not applicable ** | 7.0 | - | 3.7 | - | - |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

1. A.B.S., 1976, op. cit., p. 982. ** Retired or on pensions.

On the whole most foster parents seem to have had fairly happy and stable childhoods. It was quite common to hear comments like, "we were a close-knit family", "I had good parents who looked after me", "I had all the love and affection they could give", and "my parents were wise and understanding".

In relation to social activities, foster parents in both groups portrayed themselves as friendly, sociable people. More than three-quarters perceived themselves as having quite a few friends and nine out of ten saw their friends at least once a week. Similarly, about two-thirds saw their parents or parents-in-law at least once a week and more than two-thirds had contact with their siblings each week.

Consistent with these findings was that they appeared to participate in more informal activities such as visiting friends, having family barbecues, and picnics with friends and relatives, rather than participating in more formal activities such as clubs, hobby groups, adult education classes, or going to the movies, theatre and so on.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITING FOSTER PARENTS

(a) Non-Intellectually Handicapped Children

If it is accepted that new foster parents are most likely to be recruited from a cohort similar to those already fostering, recruiting efforts should take the following characteristics into account.

Families between the ages of 36 and 45 years; Australian born; living within 25 kilometres of the city. They would be living as traditional married families with a mean number of 2.7 children. The males would be either blue collar or white collar workers and their spouses would not be in paid employment. They would have middle range incomes. They would have left school by age 15 years. However, they would have received some kind of training after leaving school.

They would largely be Church of England/Uniting Church or perhaps Roman Catholic but few would be members of small religious denominations and they would regard religion as being important in their lives, although not necessarily be regular church attenders.

Target groups would be friendly, sociable people who have quite a few friends and tend to participate in informal social activities with friends and family. They would tend to come from large families themselves, and to have had a fairly stable and happy childhood. They would not have been adopted or fostered themselves.

(b) Intellectually Handicapped Children

New foster parents for intellectually handicapped children would be fairly similar to those of non-intellectually handicapped children on characteristics such as the importance of religion in their lives and religious affiliations, their occupations, their sociability and family backgrounds.

However, it would seem that foster parents of intellectually handicapped children also differ from those of non-intellectually handicapped children in several ways. These differences have implications for locating target groups for recruiting efforts;

1. They tend to live further away from the city in rural environments.
2. A large number leave school before the age of 15 years.
3. They tend to have lower incomes.

As well as these differences, it is suggested that older people with their own children living away from home and families having raised fairly large families themselves are potential targets for recruiting.

This group represents only one potential target market based on existing foster parents. There may, in fact, be other potential foster parents of intellectually handicapped children in the community with different characteristics who have

not yet been reached. Similarly, there may be people in the community with these characteristics who would not foster an intellectually handicapped child, i.e. psychological variables may cut across socio-economic characteristics as bases for segmenting the market. Furthermore, agencies currently restrict the foster parent market on socio-economic grounds, that is, they tend to place children in need of foster care with traditional, middle-income, christian families who are under the age of 45 years and have children of their own. The foster parents in this study certainly reflect these restrictions.

Whether such restrictions are desirable or appropriate is debatable. For example:

1. It seems unlikely that foster care for intellectually handicapped children tends to attract older people to the task. This suggests that such people ought to be allowed to take on foster care tasks and to provide the necessary supports to enable them to carry out those tasks.
2. The desirability of placing Aboriginal children with Aboriginal foster parents, as opposed to non-Aboriginal foster parents, has some considerable face validity. At present the vast majority of Aboriginal children in foster care are placed with white families who fit the criteria of the agency. Therefore, selection criteria should be re-defined to include Aboriginal foster parents. However, it would be naive to imagine that the solution to the current problems in the area of Aboriginal foster care could be solved as simply as that. The problem is far more complex. This is, however, outside the parameters of this paper.
3. Another restriction which could be reviewed is the placement of foster children with married couples who have children of their own. Consideration could be given to broadening the market to include:
 - a. Single people.
 - b. People living in permanent de facto relationships, and
 - c. People living in alternative life-style situations.
 Such alternatives might be preferable, with due care and appropriate support, to committing a child to an "unnatural" institutional existence.
4. There could well be many families in the lower income brackets who are excluded from foster care because they cannot afford the costs involved in caring for a foster child. With appropriate financial

support they might be attracted to take on the task.

5. Similarly to the above, the agency restriction determined by availability of support systems (as in country areas) needs to be addressed.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Although groups in the community possessing the characteristics outlined above may prove to be potential targets for recruiting foster parents for intellectually handicapped children, it is vital for the agency to consider carefully the kinds of families with whom they wish to place intellectually handicapped children. Decisions as to whether such people comprise the most appropriate and desirable target group must be made.

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