

A SURVEY OF FOSTER PARENTS
IN THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

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INTRODUCTION

The research described in this report is a study to gather information about, and learn some of the views of, people fostering children in the care of the London Borough of Camden. The study was carried out on behalf of the Camden Association for Foster Care (CAFC) with the co-operation of the Fostering Section of Camden Social Services Department.

The controlling committee of CAFC is made up of Fostering Officers, Social Workers from each area team and Foster Parents elected each year by the membership of the association. All Foster Parents in Camden are members. The key posts of chair, secretary and representatives to national bodies (like NFCA) are held by foster parents who also have a built-in majority on the committee. The president of the association is traditionally the Chair of Camden Councils Social Services Committee.

The Social Services Department in Camden has long been recognised as a leader in the field of fostering. Around 60% of the children in its care are fostered, which is nearly twice the national average figure. In order to reach this position it has meant a rapid growth of fostering, mainly over the last five years. Concern about the Department's ability to support a growing number of foster parents who are increasingly scattered in location has not unnaturally accompanied this growth. Some of these concerns are investigated here.

The scope of this study has been governed to a large extent by the requirements of those it is being undertaken for. The questions used in the study were all either requested or agreed to by the CAFC committee. It has been viewed as very much their study with myself operated largely in the role of researcher and technical adviser (with the help of the Survey Research Unit). It has also been possible as a member of this association to suggest many of the questions as well as understand the need for answers to others.

Within the above framework it has been possible to look at some aspects of social work support to foster parents, their views of how Camden's fostering operates and suggested changes, satisfaction with financial and material support, some contentious policy issues, as well as gathering basic demographic information.

AIMS

The aims of this research are very basic. To collect information and opinions from a geographically scattered group of people. That the facts and opinions of this group may be known by those who represent them and by others who make decisions which effect them.

The reasons for choosing this particular group are equally basic. I am a Camden foster parent. I am now (although not at the time of starting the research) a committee member of CAFC. My special area of interest in social work is fostering and community placements.

In addition to these reasons it was felt that there was a real need for this research to be undertaken. The CAFC and its committee

has been in existence since 1974. In that time it has never systematically balloted its members on any issues or examined whether it is operating in the best way possible for its members. It does not have the feed-back as to its support from members normally available to an association where people join and leave as they wish. Membership is automatic when you foster for Camden and as the association is funded directly by Camden there is no opportunity to withhold subscriptions and no machinery for leaving. In addition to this although foster parent members of the committee are elected at the AGM each year the restrictions of commitments and the location of many of the members makes it impossible for them to attend and vote.

In deciding on this area as the one to study for this project the first consideration was to identify a real need for this work to be done. This was possible but not in a way that could be well laid out on paper. It was very much a question of observing the problems foster parents appeared to have. Also talking to foster parents and social workers informally over a period of several months with this project in mind. In addition spending 6 months sitting in on the committee meetings as an observer to see the sort of issues that were raised, to compare them with other observations.

Satisfied that the need existed, the other principal consideration was whether the work could be carried out in such a way that the people who gave to the research would receive something in return. Knowing the pressures and commitments of this group, undertaking a piece of work which would just 'take' information from them and

give nothing back would not be reasonable. After further discussion with foster parents and the fostering section about the value of doing some sort of research on fostering in Camden, it appeared that this could be done in such a way as to bring some benefit to the foster parents themselves. It was therefore decided to go ahead and propose the idea formally, having established that the principal aims could be satisfied.

To summarise these aims, they were to undertake a piece of work which:-

- (a) needed to be done and was not just an exercise in research.
- (b) would finish up with information which had practical uses.
- (c) would be of benefit to those who took part.

Within these principles the general aims were:-

- (a) to find out what questions the representatives, decision-makers and planners needed answering.
- (b) to discover the problems and opinions of the wider membership.
- (c) to draw up a picture of the size, type and location of families fostering for Camden.

METHOD

Having decided on the basic aims of the research it was necessary to test out whether access and co-operation was likely to be forthcoming. To these ends contact was made with all those who would be likely to have a say in whether or not the necessary permission to undertake a project would be granted. These included the Principal Fostering and Adoption Officer and the Chairman of CAFC. This was still done by informal discussion and enquiry as it was preferable to present a fairly solid proposal to the full CAFC Committee. This meant being sure of the co-operation of the fostering section and Social Services Department for access to basic information, without which the project would collapse at an early stage.

It was also necessary to have a clear idea of the research method to be used before proposing the project to the Committee. The choice of method was limited by the nature of the population to be surveyed. Preliminary enquiries at the fostering section revealed that there were approximately two hundred families fostering for Camden. That they were spread from as far north as Yorkshire down to the south coast and came from wide ranges of age and class groups and were not all couples, either married or otherwise. There was also a great diversity in the number of children they fostered, for how long and with what other commitments.

This information narrowed the possible down to:-

- 1) Full analysis and grouping of all foster parents followed by selected interviews.

- 2) A sample survey by post on either a selected or random sample of the population.
- 3) A full population survey by post.

The first two methods both had the same problem in common. Because of the enormous diversity among the population in terms of age, length of time fostering, location, type of fostering undertaken as well as the fact that the total population was less than 200. It would be difficult to decide on the criteria for selection which may result in unrepresentative results. In addition it soon became apparent from discussions with people who may wish to use the results that in order to have credibility they would need to come from as many foster parents as possible. In effect as well as compiling information and seeking general views, in order to effect changes desired by the foster parents it would have to act as a referendum. This led to the choice of a postal questionnaire, sent to all foster parents. It would have to be of a manageable length which would depend on how many questions people wanted to ask. This could not be known until after formal approval and discussion with all parties, but limits could be set if necessary on the grounds that people would not respond if the questionnaire was too long.

Discussion with members of the Survey Research Unit at the Polytechnic indicated that the processing of up to two hundred questionnaires of around fifty questions would not present a problem using the computer. They also indicated that it was unlikely that all of the questionnaires would be returned which would further reduce the task. At this stage it was decided to propose to the committee the undertaking of a full

survey of members by postal questionnaire on their behalf with questions submitted by themselves, fostering section and other social workers.

It was June 1982 by the time the proposal was submitted to the monthly meeting of the Committee. (At this time I was not a member of the Committee, but was elected in October 1982). The proposal was accepted and a working party of one social worker, one fostering section administrator, two foster parents and myself was set up to draw together information and formulate suitable questions for the Committee's approval. Each member of the working party contributed questions and suggestions from themselves and colleagues in their respective areas of work. Some were rejected after group discussions on the ground of unsuitability, usually due to being ambiguous, too complicated for a questionnaire or just too loaded. There were in addition objections to questions on class, marital status and earnings which were all eventually removed either by the working party or at the Committee stage.

Up until this time in early June things were on target. It was hoped to have the questionnaire sent out by early October in order that people would not be on holiday when it arrived. We were aiming to get them back and processed before Christmas. This was not to be the case.

The first problem was that of getting the working party all together often enough to complete their task, which took about four meetings.

The trouble being, June and then drifting into July, holidays prevented these already very busy people from all getting together. In the event the task was completed in July but we never did manage to have the whole working party at any one meeting. The next meeting of the Committee (which is always on the first Tuesday in the month) should have been in August. What was not realised was that the practice of the Committee was not to meet in August as too many members were usually on holiday. This meant waiting for approval of the questions to be used until September. At the September meeting the questions were discussed and while there was general agreement on them the Committee did not feel they could give their final approval as this was the last meeting before the October elections to the Committee. The Committee did not meet in October as the AGM and elections were held instead of a meeting. Several new people were elected to the Committee in October including new people in all the key posts. After some hasty lobbying the questions were finally approved at the meeting in early November.

After obtaining the questions the next step was to sort them into groups on similar areas and arrange them into sections, giving a brief explanation to each section on why the information was needed. The material was then properly laid out into the final questionnaire (with a lot of help from the Survey Research Unit). A covering letter was drawn up, explaining the reasons for the questionnaire (see Appendix A). It attempted to assure the respondents that their answers would be treated in confidence and their identities not revealed to anyone. The letter explained it was a joint project and was signed by myself on behalf of CAFC and the Director of the

Survey Research Unit on behalf of the Polytechnic. This explanation was particularly necessary as the questionnaires were to be returned directly to the Polytechnic in pre-paid envelopes. Without emphasising CAFC's involvement it was feared the foster parents may not respond.

The appearance of the finished questionnaire was largely governed by the requirements of data preparation work which would need to be done before the information gained could be processed by computer. It was necessary to code each question and give a further number to the answers listed. In this way the results could be turned into numbers and fed into the computer for analysis. The SPSS programme was used to analyse the results.

The financing of the survey was mainly undertaken by the Local Projects Committee of the Polytechnic. A request for assistance was sent to them early on in the life of the project. Some of the costs, such as posting out the questionnaires were borne by the CAFC.

The questionnaire was printed and ready by mid-December. At this stage it was decided to hold up the posting until Christmas Eve. The reason being it was felt if the questionnaire arrived with people in the days before Christmas they may be put aside in the general rush. By posting them on Christmas Eve it was hoped they would arrive between Christmas and New Year, when most people were still on holiday and perhaps becoming a little bored after Christmas and looking for something to do. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a pre-paid reply envelope.

These reply envelopes were all numbered in the bottom right hand corner. The prospective respondents were informed of this and told to cross out the number if they did not wish to be contacted with queries or further questions should the need arise. Using this system it was possible to retain total anonymity of respondents as the research team only had numbers and not names. The CAFC had the names but did not have access to the numbered questionnaires. It was agreed in advance with CAFC that they would not have access to individual questionnaires and that if the research team wished to follow up a particular case this would be done through CAFC.

It was originally intended to send a repeat questionnaire about one month after the first, to non-respondents. Then a general reminder through the weekly cheque post of the fostering section two weeks after that. Owing to the delays experienced in the summer it was decided not to send the second reminder and questionnaire as time was running short. A reminder was sent out in the cheque post at the end of January (appendix B). It was designed for us by a fifteen year old boy in foster care and had an effect, bringing in several more replies.

As the current payment list of the Fostering Section was the most up-to-date record of foster parents, this was used to send out the questionnaires. Of the 193 questionnaires sent out we received 105 replies. Some of these were simply not completed and had notes saying why and others were not usable as they were incorrectly completed. We were left with 98 which was over 50% of the original sample. These were then put on the computer by a member of the

Survey Research Unit to obtain the basic frequencies using the SPSS programme.

The postmark and date of each questionnaire return was noted on receipt. From this information it is possible to see that 59% of the questionnaires were posted back in the first seven postal days after Christmas. 29% in the following 15 days up to the reminder being sent out, and the remaining 12% over the next 23 days.

34 questions were finally selected by the working party and approved by the Committee. They fell into 7 general groups with the last question (Q34) being an open one for any area not covered in the rest of the questionnaire. (Questionnaire Appendix A).

Q1 to Q6 were concerned with basic demographic information.

Q7, 8 and 9 were specifically aimed at helping the fostering section with recruitment.

Q10 to 13 enquired into the support to foster parents offered by the Fostering Section.

Q14 to 19 were all specific issues of policy and practice which the foster parent members of the Committee wished to take up with the Department.

Q20 to 28 looked at the way the foster children's social workers (who hold the statutory responsibility for the child) perform their

tasks.

Q29 to 31 introduced new ideas from other authorities with the intention (if support among foster parents was large) of taking them up with the Department.

Q 32 was suggested by the administrators of the Fostering Section and Q33 by Committee members planning future support groups.

Q34 was an open question.

FINDINGS

The first group of questions (Q1 to Q6) looked at basic demographic information.

They were asked where they lived in relation to Camden?

LOCATION OF FOSTER PARENTS

	(Q1)	
	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>
In Camden	28	27
Within 30 minutes drive of Camden	20	20
Over 30 minutes drive away from Camden	52	51
	<u>100</u>	<u>98</u>

How long they had fostered for Camden?

Length of time as Camden Foster Parents

	(Q2)	
	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>
Less than 1 year	11	11
1-2 years	30	29
3-4 years	10	10
4-5 years	8	8
5 or more years	39	38
(missing cases)	2	2
	<u>100</u>	<u>98</u>

NOTE

There was a mistake made in the framing of this question with the omission of a category for 2 to 3 years.

How many children they normally fostered.

<u>Usual number of foster children</u>	(Q3)	
	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>
One child	52	51
Two children	22	21
Three children	15	15
Four or more	6	6
(missing cases)	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>
	<u>100</u>	<u>98</u>

Whether they fostered long term, short term or both.

<u>Type of fostering undertaken</u>	(Q4)	
	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>
Long term only	61	60
Short term only	9	9
Both long and short term	25	24
(missing cases)	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>
	<u>100</u>	<u>98</u>

Q5 was included to attempt to compare the ages of people's own children with the age of the child they fostered. The replies about the ages of their 'children' ranged from less than 1 year to 51 years and people had between 1 and 8 children of their own. Q6 asked their own ages and found a range of 25 to 80 for women and 25 to 73 for men. There were a total of 44 non-responses and apart from a marked tail off in numbers at the top of each age group no real pattern could be observed.

Q7 on how people first became interested in fostering was an attempt at helping recruitment but its results are of little value. 9% did not respond, 29% said they just decided to foster and 32% indicated they had become interested in a way other than those listed.

Q8 and 9 were also connected with recruiting and showed that 18% of existing foster parents had introduced a new person to Camden who is now fostering and one in five knew someone now that they would be prepared to recommend.

Q10 to 13 were all concerned with the support foster parents received from the Fostering Section. The answers showed that only 41% had regular contact with other foster parents. This contact was formal (meetings etc.,) in 23% of cases. Informal (not organised) 39% and a combination of both for the remaining 38%. Of the 59% who had no contact half expressed a wish to meet other foster parents.

Support social workers which are supplied by the Fostering Section to help foster parents (not foster children's social workers) appeared to be available in only 40% of cases. Of those who did not have them 1 in 4 felt a support social worker would be of help. Of those who did have them 4 out of 5 were satisfied with them.

On the question of Financial Support the replies were as follows:

How satisfied are you with the Financial Support you receive

	(Q13)	
	<u>%</u>	<u>No</u>
Very satisfied	41	40
Satisfied	41	40
Neutral	10	10
Dissatisfied	7	7
Very dissatisfied	<u>1</u> <u>100</u>	<u>1</u> <u>98</u>

Q14 to 19 dealt with specific issues on which foster parent Committee members wanted to gauge support before taking them up with the Social Services Department. Q14 dealt with income tax liability which has come about due to changes in the tax laws on taxing benefits and other previously exempt income. It was found that nearly half of the members were potentially liable for tax of which 32% already knew they were to be taxed, 42% that they were not, while 26% did not yet know if they would be taxed or not. Q15 and 16 dealt with the issue of housing foster parents. They showed that 18% of the respondents had been re-housed to help with their fostering while a further 15% felt they could realistically increase their fostering capacity if they could be re-housed in the future. Q17, 18 and 19 all dealt with the issue of information supplied to foster parents about the children they cared for. The answers showed that 74% felt written information should be supplied when a child is placed. Only 20% had read the case files of any of their foster children and

82% felt access to case files should be allowed.

Q20 to 28 looked at the way in which foster children's social workers (who hold the statutory responsibility for the child) discharge their duties. Unfortunately this section revealed little of use as in many cases it was either filled in incorrectly or not at all. It was an attempt to gain information on foster children's social workers, not individually but by area teams, to try and identify any particular problems arising from any one of the five social services area teams, with a view to taking them up with the respective area heads. The resulting appearance of the page containing these questions was difficult to understand unless the instructions were read carefully and caused much confusion in the replies.

Q29, 30 and 31 tested foster parents attitudes to new ideas from other authorities with a view to proposing Camden take them up. Q29 sought views on the need to offer training to future foster parents, which is currently done by Derby Council where their scheme is now compulsory for all new foster parents. Asked if Camden should consider a similar scheme 60% said yes 21% no and 14% didn't know. Of those who said yes 42% thought it should be compulsory while 49% did not. Asking if such a scheme were introduced if they would take part as experienced foster parents 55% said they would.

Q31 looked at the controversial issue of paying foster parents a fee (identified as a wage) in addition to allowances for difficult,

disturbed, and disruptive children and young people. Asked if they approved of this type of scheme 87% said they did. Of those who did approve 83% thought Camden should consider such a scheme.

Q32 was a question specifically requested by the administrators of the Fostering Section. They wished to discover people's attitudes to having fostering allowances paid directly into their bank accounts instead of by Giro which is the present method. Apparently a change of this type would save them a lot of time and could save the Social Services Department up to £2000 per annum. When asked 83% of the respondents said they would accept this change.

Q33 which was on foster parent only meetings was included as it was felt by many of the Committee, both foster parents and social workers, that many foster parents were intimidated by the jargon sometimes used by professionals and did not attend meetings and groups because of the presence of fostering officers and social workers. It was also felt that people often didn't say what they really felt when social workers were present in discussion groups. Asked if they would attend foster parent only groups 42% said yes and 42% no with 12% don't know and 4% no replies.

On comparing the location of foster parents with length of time fostering the largest single group living more than 30 minutes from Camden were those who had fostered for 5 years or more. They accounted for 48% of all those living over 30 minutes from Camden. As it was not policy to recruit foster parents outside the borough 5 years ago, this supports the Fostering Section's claim that a

substantial number of their distant, out of borough foster parents, have moved out since beginning their fostering.

Location was also compared with regular contact with other foster parents. It was not surprising that 2/3rds of those living more than 30 minutes away and $\frac{1}{2}$ living outside Camden had no contact while only $\frac{1}{3}$ living in the borough said they had no contact with other foster parents. Of those who had no contact in all groups around half said they would like to meet other foster parents.

On the question of support social workers for foster parents themselves it emerged that while 78% of foster parents living in Camden had a support worker, only 30% of those living within 30 minutes of Camden had one. Of the foster parents living over 30 minutes from Camden only 23% had their own support worker. While not all people want support workers, of those without one living within 30 minutes of Camden 31% expressed a wish to have one and 21% of the people living over 30 minutes away also felt a support worker would be of help.

The length of time people had fostered was compared with whether they had a support social worker of their own. The results show the move towards this type of support for foster parents becoming more popular. Only 27% of foster parents of 5 years or more had a support social worker while 70% of those fostering for one year or less had one, 55% from one to two years fostering and 40% with three to four years.

All the findings in this survey have been limited by the number of responses to the questionnaire. The figures are based on the 98 usable replies received out of a total of 193 sent out. Further restrictions have been placed on its use by the problems experienced with Q20 to 29 where there were many non-responses or incorrectly filled in replies to this section. This has in effect made the whole section unusable.

INTERPRETATION

It is not possible to evaluate or interpret this survey as an homogeneous whole. It started out as a collection of groups of questions each relating to different areas and with relevance to different interest groups. This has been fortunate as the collapse of one section, Q20 to 29, while important in itself, has not destroyed the value of the rest of the questionnaire.

As the different groups of questions are inter-related but separate it is necessary to interpret each group and evaluate it for the specific purpose it was included.

The first group sought basic demographic information and was intended to give the CAFC Committee members basic facts on their membership. It was revealed that only 27% of the respondents lived in Camden. An analysis of the address list used for the survey showed that only $\frac{1}{3}$ of all Camden foster parents lived in the borough. This has major implications for the future planning of the Committee which will be discussed later under recommendations. 60% of all foster parents

have been recruited in the last five years unlike the majority of foster parent committee members, many of whom are founder members of CAFC (F.1974). Half the members foster only one child while two-thirds were long term foster parents who have different needs to the 10% who are short term. All these basic facts will help the Committee in planning courses, discussion groups and functions in the future.

The next group of questions were aimed at assisting the Fostering Section with recruitment. The first was of little use as it appears to have been badly framed and did not include enough of the ways in which people first became interested in fostering, but the others were of use, showing that foster parents themselves are a good potential source of recruiting others.

The questions on support clearly showed a need for increased activity by the Committee and the Fostering Section in bringing together foster parents for mutual support, also some need for increasing availability of support social workers. However this section also showed that 82% of foster parents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the financial support they received. This indicates that the financial policies of Camden's Fostering Section meet with a very high degree of approval.

When looking at Q14 to 19 it must be remembered that they cover specific issues which foster parent members of the Committee needed to gauge support on, before taking them up with the department. The

areas of taxation, housing and access to information are now all under discussion with the department, using the results of the questionnaire to support the arguments. These results showed that 26% of foster parents had not yet been informed if they would be liable for income tax payments on their fostering allowances. That 15% felt if they were re-housed they could realistically increase their fostering capacity. That the issue of more information and access to existing information on foster children has strong support from the membership with 74% wanting written information on a child when the child comes to them and 82% agreeing that foster parents should have supervised access to the children's case files.

Q20 to 28 as has been stated were rendered unusable mainly due to the complicated nature of the layout which displayed them. The value of this section has turned out to be as a lesson in questionnaire design.

Q29 to 31 were similar in nature to Q14 to 19, again on specific issues which Committee members wished to gauge support on. The support shown for the ideas put forward has been strong enough to persuade the department to open discussions on the issue of improving foster parent training.

Q32 on a change to payment directly in the foster parents bank accounts received 83% approval. This should be enough to implement the change, saving money and giving the administrators more time to work on their other tasks. These include supplying a lot of material support to foster parents. Negotiating tax problems with the

inland revenue and dealing with a variety of problems for the foster parents.

Q34 asked if people would like foster parent only meetings with no social workers present. As 42% said they would an attempt will be made to set these up.

The final question asked respondents to write in any other issues, comments or problems they would like to bring to the attention of the Committee. A total of thirty five people used this section. The individual issues covered in these replies were almost as numerous as the replies themselves but can be placed under broad headings.

The first would be criticism of the questionnaire itself. Five replies dealt with this and either suggested additional questions or as in three cases felt their own "exceptional" circumstances could not be covered within the limits of the questionnaire. Two suggested the inclusion of a question on whether people fostered for more than one authority. This question had been included but was vetoed at the working party stage as it is apparently a very sore point with the Fostering Section.

Four replies dealt with the question of adoption. The general view was that respondents would like to adopt their foster children but could not afford to do so as they would lose financial support. These problems have been superceded by a change in government legislation which now allows authorities to pay allowances for

adoption provided the authority concerned submits a scheme to the DHSS for approval. Such a scheme was submitted by Camden at the beginning of this year and was approved in April, making them only the second local authority in London to do so.

Another two replies complained of the situation which still prevails in London where foster parents of one borough have no children while children in a neighbouring borough are awaiting foster parents. This issue of inter-borough co-operation and the need for an all London fostering agency has been under discussion by the London Boroughs Association, the London Regional Fostering Officers Group, The National Foster Care Association and the All London Fostering Federation both independently and collectively for over five years. It is still under discussion but until the problems of standardisation of rates and allowances and what appears to be an attitude of jealously guarding 'their own' foster parents is broken down little progress will be made.

Three replies dealt specifically with complaints against social workers as a group. One stated concern at their apparent increased involvement in politics. The other two of what they saw as the attitudes of social workers in general to their jobs, foster parents and children. Both these also felt the turnover of social workers over the years had not helped their situations. This last point has, at least for the present, ceased to be a problem with few people changing jobs in Camden over the last two years.

Three people made suggestions for CAFC to improve their contact with members, mainly around the areas of small group discussions to be held in local areas. The setting up of informal support networks for foster parents living close to each other. Better contact with distant foster parents.

By far the largest group of replies dealt with Camden fostering practice and in the main specific grievances. One praised Camden unconditionally. Another suggested the appointment of a liaison officer with "fostering experience and a social work background" to deal with grievances. The remaining fourteen were completely negative. The complaints cover a wide area but include not getting the type of child specifically asked for when applying, disagreement with policies of including children in their own review meetings, lack of support in emergencies, lack of information on children, failure to use foster parents with vacancies.

In nearly all these cases there will be a counter argument to be heard from Camden. There are doubtless genuine grievances amongst them and equally genuine misunderstandings. For these reasons they will all be taken up individually by Committee members if the respondents permission can be obtained.

The information gained from the various sections of this survey has been and will be used to improve the service and support for foster parents in Camden. In many instances only time will tell if this contribution has been of use. In attempting to interpret and evaluate these results the main criteria must be whether the

project as a whole succeeded in its principal aims. If the method employed was the one best suited to achieving those aims. Whether it was carried out sufficiently well and improvement could be made. Finally will the results carry with them the necessary creditability mentioned early which would be required to convince planners and decision makers to take note of its findings.

The largest single factor governing all these questions is that of the response rate. The prestige of the survey with its "professional" questionnaire and association with the Survey Research Unit of a large Higher Education Establishment has insured that the findings have been awaited with interest by those in authority. The response by those surveyed has not been so positive. Part of the cause may be lack of time on behalf of the prospective respondents who are often very busy people. No doubt the time delay experienced early on in the project which led to the cancellation of repeat questionnaires contributed to lowering the response rate. Also 50% is not a particularly low response rate for a postal survey, although a higher rate was hoped for early on. Whether 50% will be high enough to obtain the all important creditability to effect desired changes remains to be seen.

The basic method employed (that of a full scale postal survey) was the only one possible given the circumstances of a scattered population of 193 who never all meet in the same place. Therefore the method itself could not be changed given the limits of this project. The original timetable which allowed for a repeat questionnaire was sound enough but it was not possible to stick to it.

As it was not possible to avoid doing work on the project during the summer months the only solution here would be to have started two or three months earlier. The time delay also ruled out a proper pilot study which may well have uncovered some of the problems experienced by many respondents in filling in parts of the questionnaire. These problems are all in the execution of the method chosen rather than the method itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results show some need for change in certain areas. While the changes required in operations controlled by the Social Services Department are a matter for CAFC to recommend. The chair of this association has requested recommendations based on the findings of the survey to be put to the Committee concerning CAFC itself. A full report on this survey including recommendations will be presented at their July meeting but some recommendations on CAFC are outlined here.

- 1) With the realisation that two-thirds of its members live outside Camden, while the vast majority of the Committee's efforts and funds are spent on events inside the borough. A shift in funds and effort needs to be made towards the associations quarterly magazine. This magazine is the only means of communication the Committee has with a large percentage of its membership, possibly even the majority. The possibility of increasing the number of issues to six a year or even twelve should be investigated. The inclusion of reports on the events and meetings which take place in Camden and affect the foster parents should be looked at.

The Committee has long discussed the problems of this publication which has up to now been undertaken by volunteers. It has not been felt in the past that there was sufficient justification for paying a fee to a part-time editor/reporter to take overall responsibility for the magazine. I will submit that as this

publication is the principal link with a large section of the membership this possibility should be re-examined.

- 2) A proposal to change the constitution of the association to allow postal voting for those unable to attend AGM. It can be clearly seen that much of the lack of attendance at this, and other, important meetings is due to the location of members rather than just disinterest which has been the assumption in the past.
- 3) The setting up of a working party to establish the locations of members both inside and outside London with a view to bringing together foster parents for mutual support. In the case of Camden residents this can be done exclusively with other Camden foster parents. For those in Greater London the assistance of ALFF (The All London Fostering Federation) would be needed to contact the local groups in other London boroughs. For those outside London the NFCA (National Foster Care Association) would need to be called upon. As the Association is affiliated to both these organisations and sends two representatives to each from the Committee the testing of reaction to this suggestion should not be difficult.
- 4) Postal communication with members should be encouraged wherever possible. It is no longer realistic to rely on personal contact at functions and meetings to pick up the mood or grievances of members. The attendance at all these occasions is small in relation to the total membership and they are

usually attended by the same small section of the membership (e.g. those living in or near Camden).

Investigation of the setting up of a focal point for members written problems (to be sent to possibly the secretary's home address) could be one solution. The address could then be published in the magazine and the problems which require particular action allocated by the secretary to a suitable committee member. This avoids the discussion of individuals personal cases in Committee which has been the principal objection to taking up individual problems in the past.

- 5) The demographic information uncovered by this survey has come as a surprise to many members. In order that the Committee can be aware of change in the size, location and type of fostering undertaken by its members a record needs to be instigated and then kept up which clearly shows all this information.

Rather than use this survey to start off such a 'data base' it would be preferable to gather this information from documentary sources in the Fostering Section which covers 100% of the membership.

- 6) On the publication of these survey results in the magazine an open letter from the chair could be included. Its purpose could be to both thank respondents on behalf of the Committee and also outline any action either already taken or planned

as a result of their replies.

Many points which arise from the questionnaire have already been taken up and will not therefore be included in the recommendations. Other recommendations may be included before reporting to the Committee but those listed here are mainly matters which require full Committee approval to be accepted and could be considered to call for major changes in its operation.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this report is difficult as it does not mark the conclusion of the project itself. The gathering of information by questionnaire is only the first stage in a piece of work which hopes to effect change and bring benefits to the participants. The problems experienced with the mechanics of this operation while hindering its progress and inflicting some damage on its effectiveness have not prevented it from helping, slowly, to effect those changes.

Useful information about one group has been learned by another. The respondents in the survey stand a good chance of deriving benefit for their efforts. Changes in the practice and operation of the Fostering Section and CAFC Committee are likely to follow. The operation has not just been an exercise in research.

The original aims of the project are on the way to being achieved. Mistakes have been made which will serve to assist future efforts.

There is a need to repeat this project at some stage in the future using the knowledge gained from this effort. If this is done, as it is likely to be, still more benefits may be gained by this group.

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Survey Research Unit

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December 1st, 1982

Dear Foster Parent,

CAMDEN FOSTER CARE SURVEY

The Survey Research Unit is conducting a survey of foster parents in collaboration with the Camden Association for Foster Care. We are interested in your experiences and views in order to help the Association be more effective and to help the Committee in its work.

Please find enclosed a short questionnaire which we hope you will complete and return to us in the pre-paid envelope as soon as possible. Your answers will remain confidential and your name and address does not appear on the questionnaire. No individual information or comments will be released to anyone outside the research team without your prior consent in writing.

However, we may wish to talk to some of you in more detail at a later stage and it would greatly help us if you could indicate now whether you would be willing to be interviewed personally about your views and experiences. For this reason we have numbered all the envelopes. These numbers will be on a list of names and addresses which will be kept by the Association and will not be available to the researchers.

If you do not wish to be interviewed later, all you have to do is delete the number on the envelope. If you do not delete it, we shall assume you can be interviewed later, but will not know who you are. We shall write to you again via the Association. In this way we can preserve absolute confidentiality, since even the Association will not see your questionnaires.

Please may we thank you in advance for your help in this important project.

Yours faithfully,

John Hall *R. Blackwell*

John F. Hall (Unit Director)
Roger Blackwell (C.A.F.C. Committee)

The Polytechnic of North London

CAMDEN FOSTER CARE SURVEY

Please indicate your answers by ticking boxes (☒) or writing in as appropriate. If you do not know how, or do not wish, to answer a question, just leave it blank.

O.U.O.
Serial
(1-3)
(4) BLANK
(5) 1

Q.1	Where do you live? <i>(Please tick)</i> <div style="margin-left: 200px;"> In Camden <input type="checkbox"/> Within 30 mins. drive of Camden <input type="checkbox"/> In Borehamwood area <input type="checkbox"/> More than 30 mins. drive from Camden <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	(6) 1 2 3 4
Q.2	How long have you fostered for Camden? <i>(Please tick)</i> <div style="margin-left: 200px;"> Less than 1 year <input type="checkbox"/> 1 - 2 years <input type="checkbox"/> 3 - 4 years <input type="checkbox"/> 4 - 5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 5 or more years <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <p style="margin-top: 20px;">(If 5 or more) Was this before 1971?</p> <div style="text-align: right; margin-right: 50px;"> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	(7) 1 2 3 4 5 (8) 1 2
Q.3	How many children do you normally foster? <div style="margin-left: 200px;"> One <input type="checkbox"/> Two <input type="checkbox"/> Three <input type="checkbox"/> Four or more <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	(9) 1 2 3 4
Q.4	Do you normally foster ? <div style="margin-left: 200px;"> Long term only <input type="checkbox"/> Short term only <input type="checkbox"/> Both long & short term <input type="checkbox"/> </div>	(10) 1 2 3
Q.5	Do you have any children of your own (including step and adopted children) (If Yes). What are their ages now (in years) <i>(Please write in)</i>	(11) 1 2 3

Q.6 Please give current age(s) in years of: *(Write in)*

Female foster parent

(12-13)

Male foster parent

(14-15)

Q.7 How did you first become interested in fostering? *(Tick one only)*

(16)

Through an existing foster parent

☐

1

T.V. advertising

☐

2

T.V. programme

☐

3

Press advertisement

☐

4

Press article

☐

5

By just deciding to enquire

☐

6

Some other way

☐

7 8 9

Other *(Please state)* _____

Q.8 Have you ever introduced anyone to Camden who is now a foster parent?

(17)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

Q.9 Do you think you may know anyone interested in fostering, whom you would be prepared to recommend?

(18)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

SECTION TWO

This section is concerned with the support you receive from the Fostering Section and other Foster parents.

Q.10 Do you have regular contact with other foster parents?

(19)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

(If Yes). Is this contact:

(20)

Formal (groups, meetings etc.)

☐

1

Informal (as friends, popping-in etc)

☐

2

Both

☐

3

(If No). Would you like to meet other fosterparents in your area?

(21)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

Q.11 Do you have your own (not a foster child's) support social worker? (22)

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

(If No) Do you feel a support worker could help you? (23)

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

If you have a support worker are you satisfied with the level of support they give you (i.e. frequency of visits, availability etc.)? (24)

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

Q.12 A recent article in the social work journal Community Care described Camden as an example of 'exciting and innovative practice' in foster care practice (23)

Do you agree with this view?

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

Q.13 In the same article Ken Dixon (the principle officer concerned with fostering finance at Willing House) was quoted as saying "Finance is an integral part of the support system". (24)

How satisfied are you with the financial support you receive from Camden?

Very Satisfied ☐ 1

Satisfied ☐ 2

Neutral ☐ 3

Not Satisfied ☐ 4

Very dissatisfied ☐ 5

Q.14 Owing to new Tax Legislation many foster parents on Enhanced Payments are now liable to pay income tax on part of their allowances (25)

Do you receive Enhanced Payments?

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

(If Yes) Are you liable for tax? (26)

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

DON'T KNOW ☐ 3

If you don't know have you approached the Fostering Section for help? (27)

YES ☐ 1

NO ☐ 2

Q.15 Have Camden ever re-housed you to assist you with your fostering?

(28)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

Q.16 Do you feel being re-housed now would realistically increase your capacity to foster more children?

(29)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

Q.17 Do you feel that social workers should be compelled by the department to supply you with written information about a child on or before the child is placed with you?

(30)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

DON'T KNOW

☐

3

Q.18 Have you ever read the file of any of your foster children?

(31)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

Q.19 Do you feel you should be allowed supervised access to the case files of the children in your care?

(32)

YES

☐

1

NO

☐

2

DON'T KNOW

☐

3

Gangpunch(77-80)

C F 8 2

CARD 2

Serial (1-3)
Dup

(4) BLANK

(5) 2

SECTION THREE

This section is concerned with the social workers of your foster-children and how they discharge their duties.

When answering the questions in this section please use the same column for each child throughout and put the oldest child in the first column. Please write in or circle code (e.g. 1 ② 3 4 as appropriate).

	1st child	2nd child	3rd child	4th child
Q.20 What is the child's age now (years only) (Write in)	(6)(7)	(8)(9)	(10)(11)	(12)(13)
Q.21 To which Area Team does their social worker belong: 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 (Write in)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
Q.22 How often does the social worker visit?	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
a) every 4 weeks or more	1	1	1	1
b) once in 4 to 6 weeks	2	2	2	2
c) once in 6 to 8 weeks	3	3	3	3
d) less than every 8 weeks	4	4	4	4
(Circle Code)				
Q.23 In each case do you feel these visits are frequent enough?	(22)	(23)	(24)	(25)
YES	1	1	1	1
NO	2	2	2	2
Q.24 Many leading members of the social work profession believe that social workers should treat foster parents as colleagues and not as clients				
In each case do you feel you are treated as:	(26)	(27)	(28)	(29)
a) a Colleague	1	1	1	1
b) a Client	2	2	2	2
c) Neither	3	3	3	3
Q.25 Camden recently introduced a new system for reviews where forms are sent to foster parents and children in advance.				
In each case have you had a review?	(30)	(31)	(32)	(33)
YES	1	1	1	1
NO	2	2	2	2
If YES were the new forms:	(34)	(35)	(36)	(37)
a) sent to you in advance and returned to the social worker before the review.	1	1	1	1
b) sent to you in advance but handed to the social worker at the review.	2	2	2	2
c) filled in at the review.	3	3	3	3
d) not used as far as you know	4	4	4	4
Q.26 If you have had a review with the new forms do you think it's a better system?	(38)	(39)	(40)	(41)
YES	1	1	1	1
NO	2	2	2	2
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	3
Q.27 In each case do you feel you are listened to in reviews?	(42)	(43)	(44)	(45)
YES	1	1	1	1
NO	2	2	2	2
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	3
Q.28 In general do you feel you are properly consulted on matters affecting this foster child?	(46)	(47)	(48)	(49)
YES	1	1	1	1
NO	2	2	2	2
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	3

SECTION FOUR

This section looks at ideas from other local authorities and possible improvements that could be made in Camden.

Derby Council run a compulsory foster parent training course which starts as the vetting begins and continues until a child is placed.

Q.29 Do you think Camden should consider a similar scheme? (50)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

(If YES) Should it be compulsory (51)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

If it were introduced would you, as experienced foster parents, be willing to take part (when possible). (52)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

Q.30 Do you think Camden's present training facilities are adequate? (53)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

Many local authorities now run special schemes for 'difficult to place' children. In addition to normal boarding out allowances they pay a fee which is clearly identified as a wage for taking on the extra problems and work involved with disturbed, disruptive or especially difficult young people.

Q.31 Do you approve of this type of 'Fostering Scheme'? (54)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

(If Yes) Do you think Camden should consider such a scheme (55)

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3

Q.32 The Social Services Department might save a considerable amount of money if they could pay your allowances directly into your bank account. (56)

Would you be prepared to accept this change?

YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	1
NO	<input type="checkbox"/>	2
DON'T KNOW	<input type="checkbox"/>	3
NO BANK ACCOUNT	<input type="checkbox"/>	4

- Q.33 Some foster parents are not keen on joining groups which include Social Workers. This may be because they find it difficult to contribute to discussions where a lot of jargon is flying around, that they don't feel able to say what they really feel, or that their own problems concern a Social Worker and they would rather not air them in the presence of Social Workers. These reasons can often prevent people from gaining the support of others in the difficult task of fostering.

If your committee try and set up foster-parent-only groups to meet regularly and discuss the day-to-day problems we all face. Would you be interested?

YES ☐
NO ☐
DON'T KNOW ☐

(57)

1
2
3

- Q.34 The Committee of the Camden Association for Foster Care is made up of staff from the Fostering Section, Social Workers from each Area Team and Elected Members who are mostly Foster Parents. The Foster Parent members are there to represent all Camden Foster Parents on matters that come before the Committee. In order to do this they need to know your views. By filling in this questionnaire you will help them to represent you.

Is there any subject not covered in this questionnaire which you would like the Committee to look at?

Write here and add an extra sheet if you wish to.

(58-62)

A B C D
E F G H
J K L M
N P Q R
S T U V
W X Y Z

Thank you very much for your help. Please return it in the reply paid envelope to:

Gangpunch(77-80)

C	F	8	2
---	---	---	---

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Many of you have already returned the QUESTIONNAIRE sent out just after Christmas — In order to achieve a useful result for the benefit of our Foster-Parent membership we need more of them completed.
PLEASE can we ask you to return them as soon as possible

