A study of the criteria used in foster home placement

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A STUDY OF THE CRITERIA USED IN
FOSTER HOME PLACEMENT

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
SARAH CLARKE VIRGO

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
JUNE 1957
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to specifically thank many persons for their invaluable and untiring assistance; without which the completion of this thesis would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

Thanks to my thesis advisor, Miss Barbara Baskerville, who gave me unselfishly of her time, energy, and knowledge that this thesis might be a reality.

Thanks also to Mrs. Ada B. Harris, Executive Director of the Bureau for Child Care, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Mrs. Edith Johnson, Coordinator of Services at the same agency for their assistance, and good wishes.

And finally, to my parents, Mr. & Mrs. David C. Virgo, whose help, encouragement and love served as a continued source of inspiration for me to achieve my desired goal.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significance

It is of utmost importance that children be given the basic fundamentals necessary to insure normal, healthy development in life; from the aspect of physical health, many antecedent conditions must exist in order to insure the child this fair start at birth.\(^1\) It was with this in mind that the subject was chosen - A Study of The Criteria Used In Foster Home Placement - with special emphasis on the efforts made to insure children a "decent start in life".

Foster family care is provided through the use of supervised boarding homes and, in some instances, wage and free homes. Foster homes are used for a variety of purposes and problems and, with careful selection, may provide services for children needing detention care; the emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded youngsters who have been adjudged delinquents. It is a generally recognized principle that infants are best served in foster families because they require the sustained individual care and affection of a mother person, and are damaged as a result of mass treatment. When it is not possible to return a child to his own home, it may be necessary to place him in a long-term placement where there will be little chance for him to be moved, due to family conditions, and where he can grow and develop a family circle.\(^2\)

This type of care which is provided for the child should be based on a

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consideration of the wishes of his parents, his individual needs, and his family situation. It is necessary to study each child and his family situation in order to determine what kind of care is best suited to his needs.

For many of the children who must leave their own home, foster family care offers the most favorable conditions for normal development. Because of the social and emotional values of family life, foster family homes are the best substitute for their own homes for children who need and are capable of forming new family relationships. However, it must be remembered that every child who must leave his own home and live away from his own family, suffers a profound emotional and social disturbance which can never be altogether compensated. It has been found that children whose own parents are unable to care for them, usually feel that they are unwanted and unloved, and often think that they are in some way responsible for their parents' having to provide for their care outside of their immediate family. These children are always conscious of being different from those children living in their own homes. In addition they may have already been affected unfavorably by those circumstances which have culminated in the need of placement and especially by the attitude of parents who may feel inadequate, ashamed, guilty, and disturbed because of inability to care for their children.

It is for these reasons that every child for whom foster care is necessary shows varying degrees of emotional disturbance, which may be expressed simply as concern or even resentment regarding the inability of his parents to care for him, or in the form of severe behavior and personality disorders.

Foster care can therefore never be a completely satisfying substitute for the child's own home, even though there may be no alternative. The fact that the child must be cared for away from his own parents carries with it implications that affect the child's response to foster care, even in cases of
adoption or where the child's own home has been totally inadequate, as in cases of neglect.

The social case work method should be utilized in determining and meeting the needs of children whose own parents are unable to give them the care they should have. Social case work is the way in which the professionally trained social worker may best help the child through the release of available resources in the immediate environment and capacities in the individual which may give him a fuller and more satisfying life.

The child and the parent should be considered in the light of their individual differences and particular needs.\(^3\)

The objectives of foster care should be to make available opportunities favorable for the maximum development of the child's native capacities and abilities to cope with the life situation which he must face. That the child should receive good physical care and shelter is a minimum requirement for his well-being.

In the past, economic sufficiency and moral adequacy were enough, although at times there has been emphasis on various forms of "matching". Today, however, when a great many of the children in need of foster care are emotionally disturbed or have behavior problems, the psychosocial criteria for a foster home become crucial. If we have established scientific criteria on the basis of which a child is separated from his natural parents and therefore have a differential diagnosis, it now becomes equally important to establish criteria for the family setting, so that a differential diagnosis can be made and so that the child may be placed in a situation most conducive to the achievement

of the treatment goals. The problem here is similar to that found in the study of milieu therapy. Is there some way of determining what is the most appropriate setting, whether urban or rural? As one thinks about this, one sees foster-home care on a continuum which includes other kinds of substitute care. Ideally, if the child's needs are diagnosed, we should then look at all our substitute-care resources to see which should best fit the needs of the child. There seems to be little doubt that as one separates the child from his natural family on the basis of diagnosis, especially in the psychosocial field, foster-care must be seen not merely as maintenance but as a major factor in treatment.  

The Child Welfare League of America has developed a list of fundamental criteria for the selection of foster homes which has been used by many child-placing agencies, including the Bureau for Child Care in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This list will be referred to often, throughout this study.

**Purpose**

The purposes of this study are two-fold: (1) to give the criteria of a good or acceptable foster home and indicate the extent to which the homes in the study met the criteria, and (2) to illustrate some of the methods used and reasons given in placing children in specific homes as determined by the criteria set forth.

**Method of Procedure**

Available material including books, pamphlets, magazines and articles which had special emphasis on criteria used in placing children in foster homes was read.

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The supervisor of the Intake Department at the Bureau for Child Care was interviewed and made available a set of criteria used by this agency as a guide in the selection of foster homes.

The twenty-four cases studied were chosen from the files dating June 1, 1955 through May 31, 1956 (agency's fiscal year). The cases were the entire group of children placed during this period and were still active at the time of the study. This means that the children were still in the respective foster homes and had not been either discharged to their natural parents or transferred to another type of agency. This time limit was used in hopes that these records would be up to date and more accessible for use, and that they would show evidence of many current ideas, policies and practices being used in foster home placement. There were twelve cases of single children placed, three cases where a family of two was placed, and two cases where a family of three was placed.

The agency employs a very detailed, five-page outline stating specific requirements that are used in determining whether a family is qualified to accept and board children. It is this outline that was used as a basis for the schedule.

Scope and Limitations

This study was limited to twenty-four case records taken from the active files of the Bureau for Child Care, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

This study was limited in that this particular agency is only one of many that provide foster home care; and used case records of children placed during only one year of the Bureau's long history of service, which was a very small sample taken from a very large universe.
CHAPTER II

BRIEF HISTORY OF FOSTER CARE AND THE AGENCY

Foster Care

Until 1853, indenture, institutional care and outdoor relief were the chief services available to children in need in this country. It was the pioneer work of Charles Loring Brace that initiated foster home care by means of which a child could be placed in another home when conditions in his own home were so inimical to his welfare as to make removal from the home or giving him up necessary.

It was during the period of his training for the ministry, that the opportunity came to Brace to head a children's mission in New York City. The mission in 1853 was renamed the Children's Aid Society, and almost at once he began to carry out his idea of withdrawing vagrant and destitute children from the streets of the city and transplanting them into suitable homes in another environment. As originally conceived, the plan was based upon the assumption that the child was to carry a share of work in his foster home, that the foster parents would be relieved of some cares, and that the Society would bear the expense of getting the child to the home and returning him if that were necessary.

Other private societies followed the New York Children's Aid. In 1860 an agency was founded in Baltimore for the purpose of finding homes for destitute children. Within three years two other organizations were formed, one in Philadelphia which sought to board Jewish orphans in the homes of relatives or some other wealthy family, and the other in Boston which began rather uncertainly, to place children in foster homes, in temporary homes,
or in their farm school. Other societies were organized in Brooklyn, Buffalo, and Rochester, New York. These societies were for the most part privately financed, although in some instances as in Philadelphia where the society accepts children from local counties, payment for board was made from public funds.

While the pioneering work of developing foster home services for children was privately initiated and directed, it was only a decade or two before a number of states had recognized their responsibilities for the welfare of children and were looking toward other means of care than indenture and institutional. Massachusetts was the first state to make a beginning in that direction when in 1869 it provided a visiting service to all children released from state institutions. This supervision led the way to the state paying board for many of its children who had been placed in private homes.

Pennsylvania's approach was a recognition of the principle of foster home care implemented by the services of a private agency. When a state law, passed in 1883, threw upon the local communities and counties the care of children, no provision was made for adequate service for these children. Fortunately, the Pennsylvania Children's Aid Society had been organized the year before as a private child-placing agency, and it immediately offered to assist local authorities by working with them on a program of boarding or free homes. Many of the larger counties availed themselves of the Society's services, and in such instances payment was made out of county funds for those boarding homes which the agency secured. One of the largest of these child-placing agencies in Pennsylvania is the Bureau for Child Care, founded

in 1927 for the expressed purpose of placing Negro children.

The Bureau for Child Care

To be effective, child care must be based on certain standards and the Bureau for Child Care at its inception had a standard which can be expressed in one sentence: "To stand ready to who ever knocks at its door". This was the promise with which the founder, Syrene Evelyn Benjamin, went to the Juvenile Division of the Municipal Court in Philadelphia and offered the services of this "brand new" agency on March 23, 1927.

Mrs. Benjamin, a former teacher, was one endowed with vision, keen insight, and an understanding of human problems and their needs. She was activated to begin this endeavor by the compelling necessity for increased and better facilities in a large metropolis to serve all children, particularly those who were members of her own race.6

On the same day that Mrs. Benjamin announced the opening of her "home" for children, located at 3855 Haverford Avenue, in Philadelphia, a young boy was committed to her. As Mrs. Benjamin had not expected this, she was evidently somewhat confused and embarrassed. She had not, as yet, named her organization. However, a fellow court representative came forward and suggested the name, "Bureau for Colored Children".

She then accepted the boy in the name of the Bureau for Colored Children and said, "I want my children to know that they too, have a place in time of family distress; when other doors are closed to them, mine will be open". And so it was, the Bureau for Colored Children actually began to function on March 23, 1927, and accepted the first child for care on March 24, 1927.

When Mrs. Benjamin died in 1929, failing to see the realization of many of her dreams, the Bureau continued serving the community with Mrs. Ada B. Carter as the Executive Secretary Pro Tempore. And in the same year, 1929, the Bureau for Colored Children was incorporated and received a Pennsylvania State Charter. This was a big event in the history of the agency and served as a stimulus for those interested persons to continue to help in its development.

True, there were many "trials and tribulations"; finances and staff were limited, but those so dedicated and so fired with determination to help these children would not be stopped. They were constantly looking for more and better ways to serve. And since there was no school for the Negro boy who was just becoming a delinquent; including the runaway, truant, and those involved in petty stealing and malicious mischief; in 1936 the McManus Estate, a ninety-eight acre farm at Pomroy, Chester County, Pennsylvania was purchased by the Bureau to be used as a farm and vocational school for maladjusted adolescent boys. These boys live on the grounds, and are given both the academic and manual training to help them adjust and find gainful employment when discharged.

There was always need for adequate financing of the work which this agency was attempting to do. The Board of Directors was much concerned about this. In August, 1942, the Municipal Court increased board rate for children in foster homes from $4.25 per week to $7.25. It was at this point that the agency felt it needed some help to really begin an evaluation of its services in order that this increase in funds might be put to its fullest use. In so doing it recognized, in an attempt to develop a more adequate budget, that additional funds would be needed. The Board of Directors in 1942,
applied to the Community Fund (now called the Community Chest), to become a member agency in order that its income might be subsidized. They were formally accepted on April 3, 1943.  

Another important landmark in the agency's history was the donation of the present building, formerly the Western Home for Children (Allderdice School), given complete with furnishings and equipment. This building houses the professional offices—including the Intake, Homefinding, Placement, Clerical Departments and administrative offices as well as a Shelter. This shelter is equipped to provide temporary living facilities and care for twenty-two children who are pending placement in foster homes or to be returned to their own homes.  

Throughout the thirty years of the Bureau's existence, one principle prevailed, "to give care to the Negro child and his family when it is needed". Although this has been the basic concept upon which the agency has functioned, the Board of Directors, Executive Director and staff have kept ever before them the premise that coupled with the service is the need for continued re-evaluation of the services being rendered. And so in 1952, there was a study of the operations of the Bureau, which is one of Pennsylvania's largest child-placing agencies.

The study was a voluntary one, requested by the Board of Directors and underwritten by the Community Chest. The Board of Directors "employed" Dr. Phillip Klein, then Research Professor at the New York School of Social

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7Statement by Mrs. Ada B. Harris, Executive Director, Bureau for Child Care, Philadelphia, Pa., Personal Interview, February 21, 1957.

8The Staff, "Bureau for Child Care" (Philadelphia, Pa., 1955) (Mimeographed).
Work. In addition the Board employed Mrs. Alvan J. Martin as resident consultant who collaborated with Dr. Klein in this project, which was completed in February 1954. It was initiated because the problem of the care of children from broken homes had become increasingly more serious in Philadelphia. Out of this study came deductions and conclusions that have affected the entire child-care picture in Philadelphia, particularly at the Bureau.

Conclusions pointed up many needs of the child in care of the Bureau, which in many instances are circumscribed by lack of facilities and resources for Negro children in the area. One recommendation suggested that the agency secure more professionally trained workers, which was done on an inter-racial basis. Soon after this study was made, the Bureau decided to change its name to the Bureau for Child Care in keeping with its change in purpose and the revisions made in its charter. With its new purpose which now reads: "Purpose for which the corporation is formed is for the care, protection and to provide for the welfare of needy children, to provide a shelter and place them in suitable foster homes"; the idea is to serve all children regardless of their race.

Services Offered

The majority of the children live in foster homes where, as members of a family group, they are helped to grow and develop with foster parents who give them love and a feeling of belonging. These children are referred

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9Statement by Mrs. Ada B. Harris, Executive Director, Bureau for Child Care, Philadelphia, Pa., Personal Interview, February 21, 1957.

from many sources—Parents, Department of Public Welfare, School Counselors, other social agencies, individuals in the community and the Juvenile Court. Since it is believed that separation from one's own family brings to all children at some time, and some degree feelings of hurt, deprivation and difference and believing that there is no fully adequate substitute for a child's own family, it's the agency's goal to help each child return to his parents whenever this is possible; but in the meantime see that he is adequately (both physically and emotionally) cared for, usually in a foster home. It is the social case worker's role in the services offered by the agency to study and select these homes as well as supervise children during their incumbency.

The agency also has subsidized homes which are really an extension of the shelter, where children can be placed in cases of emergencies when there is no room in the Shelter. Children are placed in these homes only temporarily, and even when these homes have no children in them, the foster parents are still paid a flat rate simply to have their home available any time of the day or night.

Medical and Dental care are provided by the agency in its own diagnostic clinics which are supplemented by private doctors, hospitals and community clinics.

There are psychological services offered by two part-time psychologists, who test the children referred by the case workers in an attempt to aid in understanding of and planning for the child.

And so, in 1957, under the able leadership of Mrs. Ada B. Carter Harris, The Bureau for Child Care is still "serving the community" and constantly improving its services to meet the ever demanding and ever changing needs of the dependent child, to insure him that "decent start in life".
CHAPTER III

EVALUATION OF THE FOSTER HOMES IN TERMS OF THE CRITERIA

In spite of the desire to preserve or rehabilitate a child's own home for him, foster care in a family or institution is often necessary. When there is marital discord, disturbed parent-child relationship, serious illness, death or other conditions that leave the parents unable to care for their own children in their own homes (or with relatives) even with supplemental services, foster care is required. When the child has special needs that his family cannot meet, foster care may also be necessary, and it is very important that as wise a selection of these foster homes as possible is made for each individual child in order to meet his specific needs.11

Service to the child is the primary focus of any child-placing agency and so it is at the Bureau for Child Care, particularly in finding suitable homes for the children, as this study is specifically designed to show.

As aforementioned, the Child Welfare League of America has formulated a set of criteria for determining the suitability of homes for boarding children. The extent to which this list was utilized will be discussed.

Physical Standards

(1) Physical standards should take into account safety, light, ventilation and heating of the house, cleanliness, sanitation and accessibility. There should be adequate space for separate rooms for children. It should be required that a bed of his own be provided for each child. It is preferable that infants should not sleep in the same room as foster parents and never after the age of two or three.12


### Table 1.
NUMBER IN FOSTER FAMILIES AND AVAILABLE ROOMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Rooms in Dwelling Unit</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Five</th>
<th>Six</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleven</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the number of family members in each of the nineteen homes and the available room space.

The six-room houses were the type most widely occupied by the nineteen families. Fourteen families each occupied a six-room dwelling - seven families with two members; three with three members; one with four members; two with five members and one family with six members.

The eight-room dwelling was the next type most occupied by the families studied. Families with two, four, five and six members respectively each lived in eight-room houses.

The largest house, which has eleven rooms was shared by six persons.

Of the nineteen foster homes studied, each had ample living accommodations, heating facilities and pleasant and comfortable furnishings as was indicated in the records.
There was no evidence of any serious over crowding, or with more than 1.5 persons sharing one room. However, two of the homes had no yard space as a play area for the children, but fortunately were near schools with playground space.

Community Resources

(2) Adequate community resources should include easily accessible and well equipped schools and facilities for medical care, recreation and companionship.

Eleven houses were located in communities where there were elementary schools available. Nine of these houses were located in communities where there are schools within two to seven blocks. One home was conveniently near three elementary schools and one was near two elementary schools. The other eight houses were in communities where children could easily reach school by public transportation, if necessary.

The schools also provide supervised play area for the children in the neighborhood, and give them an acceptable place to play and to meet their friends.

The medical facilities available within the immediate community were not taken into consideration, as these children were all registered and known in city clinics and seen regularly at the agency's own health center. If an emergency arose, they were to be taken to the general hospital of the city.

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Physical Health of Family Members

(3) All members of the family should be in good mental and physical health and free of all communicable disease as ascertained in consultation with the family physician.15

Every member of the nineteen families and everyone living in the houses who came in contact with the children had a clean bill of health from a physician. This is a rigidly enforced agency requirement.

Economic Status

(4) Reasonable economic security on the basis of a regular income adequate to provide essentials of comfortable and stable living should be required. When the family income is not sufficient but where extraordinary qualifications to deal with special problems are present, the agency should be prepared to pay a higher rate of board to cover the special services.15

Financially, the majority of the families were in the middle and lower middle class income brackets.

Even though the average incomes were not too great, there was no indication that these families were in such dire need as to wish to board children solely for the monetary rewards involved, but rather that they could manage with their increased families until their first boarding check was received, which is usually a matter of three months.

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15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.
TABLE 2

YEARLY INCOME OF BREAD-WINNER AND NUMBER IN FOSTER FAMILY
DEPENDENT ON INCOME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yearly Income</th>
<th>Number in Family Dependent on Yearly Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $2,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2000 less than 2500</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2500 less than 3000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3000 less than 3500</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3500 less than 4000</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4000 less than 4500</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4500 less than 5000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5000 less than 5500</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5500 less than 6000</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5000 less than 6500</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aIn one instance, an added amount was received from a foot injury occurring while working.

Moral and Ethical Standards

(5) Moral and ethical standards within the home and appreciation of spiritual values as well as such religious affiliation as may be required by the agency should exist.17

Good religious standards denote a wise understanding of the value and necessity of religious training and education for all children, the ability to give this training and also a wholesome practical religious life within

17Ibid.
the family.

Aside from some specific religious training there must be no evidences of moral degeneracy within the home, such as excessive drinking among family members and lax attitudes concerning sex and other such activities that might prove detrimental to the child, both physically and morally.

Table 3 shows the religious affiliation of the nineteen families studied:

### TABLE 3

**CHURCH AFFILIATION OF FOSTER PARENTS STUDIED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Number of Families Attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Divine Mission</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These three families, although they had no specific affiliations, were attending a church, and agreed to see that the foster children receive adequate religious training and spiritual guidance.

**Family Composition**

(6) The family should be a complete family group with a mother and father except in unusual situations, such as the homes of widows who may have outstanding contributions to make in the care of older children with an
actively interested father. The foster parents should be of suitable age to meet the needs of children in terms of physical strength and flexibility.  

Seventeen of the foster families were complete family groups and two were incomplete families. These two were widows; the husband of one had died shortly after they had filed an application for boarding children, and the other husband had been dead for several years. It was felt, however, that even though these were unusual situations, the families did have something to offer foster children; and that the absence of a father would not hinder a child's development to the point where any "damage" could not be repaired, especially for short-term placement.

Personalities of Family Members

(7) The personalities and relationships of all members of the family should be such as to make for wholesome complete and stable family life. It has been found that in general the foster mother is the dominating figure in homes offered to the placement agency since it is usually she who will decide to take a child into the home, nevertheless the importance of the foster father in meeting emotional needs of many children is not to be overlooked. The family as a whole should be capable of giving the child love, consideration and opportunities for his development and of wanting and accepting him as a member of the family and community life. In their individual dealing with the child, the foster parents should be intelligent, understanding and flexible.

Of the seventeen complete family groups, the records indicated that these foster homes definitely met this qualification and that there was no evidence of any marital discord brought to the agency's attention.

Though personalities differ and are often determined by one's own

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.
background, both family and educational, it was felt that none of the couples had any severe difficulties and personality disorders that would hinder them from working successfully with children.

Motives

(8) The motives for wanting a child should be in no way at variance with the best interest of children. Emotional need on the part of foster parents which may put too much demands on the child and which may not permit them to let him grow up according to his own capacities should be a disqualifying factor.  

Understanding the incentive of foster parents implies an understanding of their behavior in particular and of human behavior in general.

The urge to secure a foster child can be wholesome or unwholesome. Some foster mothers wish to perpetuate normal genuine satisfactions of motherhood which they experience with their own children, now grown to independence. Some seek a mature fulfillment of parenthood, denied them for real physiological reasons. Others, on the other hand may desire to perpetuate early neurotic relationships in their own family or may see in the potential foster child an opportunity to realize their immoderate specifications for love.

There were many and varied reasons given for wanting to board children, but none gave the implication of wanting a child that could be fitted into a desired pattern or mold. However, the fifteen-year old daughter of a foster mother had died during her first marriage and she had been unable to have any more children when she married again, after the death of her first husband, and consequently was very lonely.

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20 Ibid.

21 Dorothy Hutchinson, In Quest of Foster Parents (New York, 1943), p. 10.
The majority of the families, fourteen in number, expressed a sincere love for children; and a desire to help the less fortunate ones. Four families said they were simply lonely; they had no children and wanted them to "bring a little sunshine in their lives". One widow was carrying out the wish of a deceased son, who had hoped to brighten the lives of many children, by opening his home to them.

Attitudes of the Family Members Toward Working With The Agency

(9) The foster family should be willing to and capable of working together with the agency, and of assuming the obligations involved in foster care throughout the period of placement.22

The foregoing is a very important aspect in foster home placement, and should be considered before a home is definitely approved, especially in the worker's evaluation of the home.

Even when the families had admittedly some different ideas on child training, possibly due to their age, background, or even religious affiliations, they all professed a willingness to cooperate with the agency in terms of how the children should be reared.

Foster parents have often been described as staff workers of an agency who share with the social worker the job of rehabilitating children. There are both dignity and validity in this description, but there is also the inherent danger of expecting foster parents to behave in the same disciplined unemotional fashion that is expected of the social or institutional worker.

Sometimes foster parents have to change in order to continue in the job that they have chosen to do. The social worker will realize that just as a change of oneself is threatening to a client, so it is to a foster

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parent. She may have to help the foster parent see that if she is to con-
tinue to work for her agency, she must learn not to smother the child with
love, not to threaten him, not to take sides with him against his teacher,
not to reject his parents. The foster parent may then decide whether the
satisfactions she gains in her role as foster parent make it worth the ef-
fort of disciplining her behavior.

Most parents want to do their job well, and they want all the help and
advice that a social worker can give them. Foster parenthood calls for
all the usual virtues and in addition qualities above and beyond those cus-
tomarily associated with parenthood. There is no special virtue in loving
one's own child; however, to love someone else's child requires really un-
common qualities of heart and mind. Of all foster parents, the boarding
mother is one deserving the greatest esteem. She gives of herself often
regardless of abnormal difficulties, in spite of the fact they are not her
making. It is she who takes and keeps the child whose resentment and pain
at having to be separated from his own parents is almost always projected
upon her. She often has to wait many weeks or months for his trust and confi-
dence, which sometimes may never come. Foster mothers' greatest value lies
in their gift for mothering. All normal motherhood is altruistic but foster
motherhood, when normal, is altruism at its best.

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24Dorothy Hutchinson, op. cit. p. 133 f.
CHAPTER IV

ILLUSTRATIONS OF FOSTER HOME PLACEMENTS

Foster home placement is not a science. It is an art, and a very unpredictable one at times. The chemistry of mixing human beings together is most delicate. Social workers have turned eagerly and hungrily to the social sciences to help them sharpen their tools so they will know better what kind of humans to bring together. There are some rules of varying degrees of helpfulness but in the last analysis the decision is reached by a blending of human intelligence, intuition, experience, courage and luck.\(^\text{25}\)

To this end, the staff at the Bureau for Child Care is constantly striving to "match human beings" with the hope that all will turn out well and in the child's favor.

The following cases will serve to illustrate some of the reasoning, the whys and wherefores as to specific placements. Since it is generally known that all foster homes have to meet the physical standards; be situated in a community with some available resources; and all family members must be free of communicable diseases, and that moral and ethical standards must be "above board"; the illustrations will be confined to those criteria that involve the personalities, motives and any special attributes that will serve more vividly to point up this process of "matching" child to foster home.

This first case illustrates Criterion number 6, which states that the family should be a complete family group, except in unusual situations, such as this was. This case can also serve to illustrate criterion number 7, which discusses the motives behind foster parents' desire to board children.

\(^{25}\text{Jean Chamley, op. cit. p. 186.}\)
Case 1

Billy

Billy, an out-of-wedlock baby of eight months was referred to the agency by his maternal grandmother, who wanted his immediate placement, so that his mother could complete her education.

Billy's mother, a seventeen year old high school student, had been in attendance at a party, without her parent's knowledge, and had been raped by a classmate of hers. It was then that the conception took place. The mother was in no condition, emotionally, physically or financially to care for him. This was a traumatic experience in itself, which was further aggravated by her minister father's complete rejection of her.

Billy's grandmother was the one who decided that foster placement for him might be better for all concerned, thereby allowing her daughter to complete her high school training, before deciding if she wanted to keep him. She further felt that Billy would receive adequate care and that his development would not be thwarted by indifference, neglect and even resentment and hostility, as his mother definitely had ambivalent feelings towards him and could not think too clearly and logically at this point.

And so the question arose, "Which home to place Billy in, and why"? What would an eight-months-old baby want or need that would call for such careful selection of a home? Dr. C. Anderson Aldrich has written several comments on the rights of infants. He says "every baby from the moment he comes into the world is influenced by certain basic needs or drives...The most evident are perhaps (1) the need for physical safety which includes protection from hunger, cold wetness, and other dangers that threaten the life of a young baby, (2) the deep need for warm affection, and finally the need to grow and develop according to his own habit patterns and rhythms".26

26Ibid., p. 1.
It was the case worker's role to find a home for Billy, one where he would, hopefully, make a successful adjustment.

Mrs. A.

Mrs. A., widow, mother of two children and three grandchildren (who lived with her) had applied to accept young children (no older than ten years of age). She was thought to have a sincere and genuine interest in children, and had a good relationship with her own children and grandchildren.

It is interesting to note one of the motives for wanting to board and accept children. Her eldest son, now deceased, who was reared without a father, desired to open his home for other fatherless, or unwanted children. Mrs. A. gave some serious consideration to the idea, and along with her other children decided to apply for foster children.

Financially, she and her family were under no serious strain and had a comfortable life. She was receiving government assistance plus help from her other children. Mrs. A. owned her eleven-room house and was living in a quiet, respectable neighborhood, which afforded adequate educational and recreational facilities.

In determining the suitability of this home, there were two factors that had to be considered very closely before the final approval was given. These were: (1) the fact that there was no adult male in the home to offer any type of male identification, which is quite important in the growth and complete development of children. Another "problem" in the home was the fact that Mrs. A. had some rather "old-fashioned" ideas concerning child-rearing, such as: "children should be seen rather than heard"; and should be made to respect their elders almost to the point of subserviency. She felt too, that girls should not have too much laxity and freedom.

Why then, would this home be approved and the young baby placed there on September 12, 1955? Here was the reasoning behind the placement: Since Billy was a young baby, less than a year old, it was felt that the fact that no man was in the home would not serve as too great a warping factor at this
time and would hopefully create no problems that could not be worked through later, remembering too, that this was to be a short-term placement, possibly no longer than a year and a half. In such a case, this would be an almost ideal placement.

It was felt too, that her love and interest for children would outweigh some of her outmoded ideas, that might prove cramping and frustrating to a growing child, but would not be too detrimental a factor in a young baby's growth. Then too, this would be one of the areas where the social case worker would work closely with Mrs. A. in getting her to modify some of her ideas for the best interest of the child.

The prognosis of this placement was good. This was due largely to Billy's age; the plan for short-term placement; and Mrs. A.'s love for children and acceptance of the case worker who would always be available.

The following illustration serves to point up criterion number 7 which concerns the personalities and relationships in the family, and the ability to give the child love, consideration and understanding - even when problems are presented.

Case 2

Jimmy

Jimmy, born September 10, 1946, was referred along with his brother to the agency by his father, who said Jimmy had gotten beyond his control, was habitually truant from school, and had been charged with burglary and receiving stolen goods.

His mother was dead, and an older sister was trying, unsuccessfully, to keep the family together while the father worked as a food huckster.

Jimmy was taken to a Youth Study Center, and underwent several psychological examinations. He said he hated his father; although he gave him enough food, he never had any spending money or new
clothes, and very often his father would beat him quite severely.

It was further discovered, from his constant seeking of approval that Jimmy was pathetically in need of attention and affection, and that it might be difficult for him to adjust to foster home placement because of the long time he had been without supervision.

Jimmy's basic difficulty was enuresis, which had a deep emotional basis. It has been discovered that many children with enuresis show a passive ineffectual type of personality. In such cases often there is found a severe parent of the same sex. Towards such a parent the child is unable to express his aggression and his psychosexual development is hindered. He clings, therefore, to infantile methods of obtaining pleasure and at the same time, through wetting, expresses his antagonism and resentment. In such cases enuresis is simply a symptom of an unsuccessful personality development. If the parents have completely rejected the child, he is unable to get gratification from them to compensate him for relinquishing the physical pleasure of wetting. As they do not love, he retaliates by hating them, and therefore has no desire to imitate them by being clean. Such children will develop bladder control late in childhood but will show clearer and clearer signs of delinquent personality. This was thought to be part of Jimmy's difficulties also. This bedwetting was further interpreted as his reaction to his varied deprivations. Therefore, he would definitely have to be placed in a foster home where he would receive a warm, accepting attitude and constant support.

Since it was agency policy to keep families together as much as possible in an attempt to preserve family ties, Jimmy was placed in a foster home with his brother, who presented no problem as serious as Jimmy's. However, he could not remain in this home because of his enuresis and the foster parents' inability to accept this, even though they had been forewarned, and had felt that they could help him work through his difficulties.

Naturally, this moving was frustrating to Jimmy. He again felt lost, unwanted, and unloved, particularly since he was separated from his brother of whom he appeared quite fond.

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The problem then was to find another home immediately for Jimmy (the agency's shelter was filled to capacity) where he could find acceptance. It was decided, for several reasons, to place him in the home of Mr. & Mrs. B., which was a subsidized home.

Mr. & Mrs. B.

In the B's home, there was financial security; Mr. B. was a minister and glass-cutter and they owned their home and had very little expense.

There had been no children born of this union; but Mrs. B. had been married previously and had reared a family. She had also been a foster mother for the agency for many years and had worked most cooperatively. She was therefore quite familiar with many problems of children and was always sympathetic and understanding. She had even worked with enuretic children before.

However, their ideas on child-rearing were largely governed by certain, religious beliefs (Mr. B. was a Holiness minister), which could be very limiting in the activities of the child. Nevertheless, Mrs. B. realizing the "changing times" knew of the importance of allowing children to have fun and engaging in some of the activities of their peer group; such as dancing, card playing, and movie-going.

Both Mr. & Mrs. B. felt that children should not be pressured too much concerning religion, especially young children with little or no concrete or definite knowledge as to the meaning.

They were a very warm and cooperative couple, who apparently were enjoying a happy, harmonious relationship.

When told of Jimmy's difficulties and his basic needs of security and love along with some more specific clinical treatment, they readily agreed to receive him into their home. Though they admitted they might not understand all the ramifications of his problem, they would be accepting of him and cooperative in terms of working with the agency in an attempt to relieve some of his problems.

So this was another example of trying to "match" personalities, with the fervent hope that, eventually, this little boy would find a secure, happy
place for himself.

The case of Ricky will serve to illustrate criterion number 8, concerning some of the motives given for boarding children.

There are always many reasons given—from the loneliness of a childless couple or those whose children have all grown up and have left home, those whose hearts are just big enough to want additional children in their home, and those who want and seek companionship for their own children. However, this reason is rarely what it seems, but like the money motive often disguises a more urgent need. Experience shows that the foster child is usually expected to do something not only for their own child but for the foster parents as well. A foster mother may feel that she hasn't done well with her own child, and she may want another chance to prove that she can succeed with a foster child...She may wish to spread the abundance of her mothering to an additional child. She may want a larger family than it is possible for her to have either for physiological or psychological reasons... The purpose of taking a foster child to be a companion to a natural child can be a sound incentive when the foster parents are reasonably mature and satisfied people. 28

Case 3

Mr. & Mrs. G.

Mr. & Mrs. G. came to the agency to apply for foster children. The reason they gave was that their six-year-old son was lonely and wanted a playmate. They had an empty room and would be quite happy to share it with another child. However, they did not want an older boy the feeling being that he might teach their son "bad habits".

Financially, the C's were quite secure. Mr. C. was an attorney for the government, sometimes averaging $6,000 a year. They were buying their own home, which was in one of the city's finest residential sections.

There was a school about four doors away and a Lutheran Church within walking distance. There was also plenty of recreational and play space afforded.

Both of them were quite well educated, formally, and had some definite ideas concerning child training. They felt that parents should set the pace, which requires much patience. They felt that children should share responsibilities according to their ages. There should also be adequate diet, proper and becoming clothes, sufficient rest and recreation, and when necessary, punishment should be suited to the child's need and temperament.

The worker's evaluation of the home placed it in the above average group due largely to the neighborhood, background of the parents and physical features of the home. However, it was felt that a young child who did not have too serious an emotional problem would fare better in this home, than one more seriously maladjusted, perhaps due largely to the social standing of the family.

Here then was an almost perfect situation, who then would be placed here and why?

Again it became the case worker's role to determine, which child would be better for such a situation as this, remembering too, that the most ideal situation can have its drawbacks also. It was decided that five-year old Ricky be placed there, as it was felt that his outgoing personality would enable him to fit in and be more easily accepted than some of the agency's other children. (It must be remembered that this was not an immediate placement as it took some time for the "right" child to come to the agency).

Ricky

Ricky was committed to agency's care because his paternal grandmother, who had cared for him since he was a year old, could no longer do so as her own finances were being reduced. She had been receiving some help for his care from an older son of hers, who was going in the army and would not agree to
continue helping her support him. Therefore, the grandmother had taken the boy to court for financial assistance, with a referral being made to the Bureau for Child Care.

Ricky's physical health was quite good, with no evidences of any serious childhood illnesses.

He is a very alert, chubby little boy; very aggressive and not afraid to talk. Also he has a lot of personality and a very winning way; and talks freely with anyone and apparently feels very comfortable in a conversation with an adult.

Ricky was quite aware of his situation, and when he heard that his grandmother could no longer keep him, he visited all the families in the neighborhood asking them if they could keep him while she worked. However, when he learned this could not be worked out, he finally accepted his grandmother's decision; still telling everyone that he would only be away from his grandmother until she had made enough money to take care of him again.

So Ricky, an aggressive little boy, was in need of a home; one where he would receive more than physical care; a home where his aggressiveness would be curbed, yet where he would not be made too passive to adjust adequately in society. Therefore he was placed with Mr. & Mrs. C. in hopes that not only would he serve as a companion for their son, but would have some of his emotional needs met as well, since it was decided that the couple was definitely capable of working with such an alert and teachable youngster.

So here it was, another example of that "art" called child placement, which is done not only with "wiseness and intuition" but with hopeful prayers that all will be well.

It must be remembered too, that certain children will always need foster parents. As long as natural parents, whether for reasons within or without themselves, fail to care for their own children, foster parenthood through its human concern and individual interest, can offer a truly beneficial way of life to a child.29

29Ibid., p. 136.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to present some of the criteria used in placing children in foster homes and specifically why a particular child is placed in a particular home, by the Bureau for Child Care, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In the brief history of foster home care, the pioneer work of Charles Loring Brace in this field was discussed and the subsequent organization of agencies especially designed for the placing of children, who were destitute and in need of suitable homes in another environment. The Children's Aid Society of New York was the first such agency, followed closely by those established in the Philadelphia area. One of these agencies in this area was the Bureau for Child Care organized in 1927 for the expressed purpose of placing Negro children.

This particular agency has grown and expanded through the years until now it is one of Pennsylvania's largest child-placing agencies and is now doing a wonderful job in helping the neglected and dependent child. It has now changed its purpose to the dedication of helping all children regardless of race; and has therefore made its staff inter-racial.

The criteria for a good foster home, as advocated by the Child Welfare League of America were used extensively as the real framework in which the placements in the study were seen.

The first criterion concerned adequacy of physical standards of the homes, including the heating of the house, its degree of cleanliness, general furnishings, and the amount of space provided for each child. All of the nineteen foster homes satisfactorily met this requirement, as shown in Table 1.

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The second criterion required that adequate community resources be available including schools and facilities for medical care and recreation. Eleven homes were in communities where schools were in close proximity. The children in the other eight homes could easily reach school by public transportation. The same schools also provided supervised play areas for the children in the neighborhood. As for medical facilities, this was no real concern, all the children are registered in city clinics and in cases of emergencies, the foster parents are to take them to the city hospital.

Criterion three states that all family members should be in good mental and physical health as ascertained from the family physician. This is a rigidly enforced agency requirement, as was the case in each of the homes studied.

Criterion four states that there should be a reasonable amount of economic security within the home, at least enough for a comfortable existence. The majority of the families were in the lower middle-class and middle class income brackets, as was shown on Table 2.

It is also imperative that all homes have some moral and ethical standards to share with the children in their homes. There must also be some religious training for the children. Table 3 shows the church affiliations of the nineteen foster families, with the largest number attending the Baptist church and three with no definite affiliation, but in attendance of some church.

The sixth criterion states the need for a complete family group except in unusual cases, such as widows, where an incomplete family would not be too detrimental to a child's development. Of the nineteen foster families studied, two were incomplete families (widows), but both had enough to offer to
compensate for this male deficiency in the home.

In criterion seven, the personalities of the family members were discussed in terms of the relationship with each other and their ability to get along with a foster child placed in their home. It was thought that these families were harmonious within, and thereby able to relate positively with a child placed in their home. At least, they did not have problems so serious that they would be unable to help others.

The motives for wanting a foster child had to be considered as they should be in no way at variance with the best interests of children. There were many and varied reasons given—ranging from sheer loneliness and love of children to a companion for an own child, and even the carrying out a wish of a deceased loved one. None, however, gave the impression that they wanted a child that they could make over and fit into a desired mold.

The final criterion stated that the foster family should be willing to cooperate with the agency in terms of assuming obligations involved in foster care. It was felt that all these families were quite aware of the obligations involved and agreed to work cooperatively with the agency in the best interest of the child.

Cases of three children and three foster homes were used as illustrations in again pointing up the reasons behind foster home placement and why families decided to board children. These include many and varied aspects.

The first case illustrated criterion six, which calls for the completeness of the family group except in unusual cases, as this was. Mrs. A., a widow, had successfully reared a family of her own and was basically a strong person. The child placed with her was an eight-months old baby, who it was felt would make an adequate adjustment for a short-term placement, even though
there was no adult male in the home to serve as a source of male identification.

The second case illustrated criterion seven, which deals with the personalities and relationships of the family members and the group's capacity to give the child love, consideration and understanding, even when a serious problem is present. Jimmy, an eleven-year old boy was enuretic, which was based on an emotional problem rather than a physical disorder. He was in need of psychological treatment and love and acceptance. It was felt that one of the older, more experienced mothers could work better with Jimmy in terms of helping him to resolve some of his difficulties, and make an effective adjustment.

The third case illustrated criterion eight, which concerns some of the motives given by foster parents wanting to board children. In this particular case, a well established couple wanted to board a young boy in their home to serve as a companion to their six-year old son. The five-year old youngster— Ricky, placed with them was active, alert, and out-going, with no deep emotional problem other than the separation from his grandmother who had reared him. It was thought that all concerned would profit by such placement, and that Ricky would make an adequate adjustment.

In conclusion, the writer feels that the Bureau for Child Care is diligently and conscientiously striving to do an adequate and satisfying job in placing children in foster homes, homes where they have a chance to develop, mature, and become worthwhile and contributing citizens.
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Philadelphia Afro-American, April 9, 1955.


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Schedule Used In Gathering Information
From The Foster Parents' Records

Family Composition

Community:
No. of schools available
Churches in neighborhood
Types of recreational facilities

House and Grounds:
Exterior
Interior

Finances:
Income
Expenditures

Family: Foster Father
General description of personality
Family Background
Education
Employment
Religion

Health

Foster Mother (the same as information needed concerning foster father).

Adult and Marital Life:

Family Relationships:

Attitude Toward Children and Ideas On Child Training

Others In the Household including children of foster parents and their attitude towards foster children

References:

Worker's evaluation of the home:

Strength and weakness

Type of problems home is fitted to help. Types of children that could be placed there; and those that could not be placed there.
Schedule Used In Gathering Information

From The Children's Records:

Age at time of the referral____________________

Reasons Given for referral____________________

History of the physical development of the child as given by next of kin or person who is permitting child to be placed in a foster home.

A. Are there any physical disabilities or handicaps?____________________

If so, what are they and how obtained?____________________

B. Are these disabilities causing emotional problems also?____
If so, what specifically are they?____________________

The Emotional Development of the Child:

A. Does he present any unusual type of behavior—over aggressiveness; excessive lying; stealing; constant unrulyness and disobedience?____________________

1. Is he a shy, withdrawn person?____________________

2. How well does he get along with his peers?____________________

B. How does he relate to adults?____________________

1. Is he too dependent for an average child his age?____________________

2. Does he crave attention and approval from adults?____________________

C. Has he any unusual problems that would require expert handling?____________________
If so, explain.____________________

Family Background:

Is Mother living?____________

A. If she is, what is her present situation?____________________

B. If she was contacted, what was her reason for wanting placement for her child(ren)?____________________
(Same Information about the father)
Was long term placement requested, if so why, and if not, why not?

What are the plans for this child—permanent boarding, adoption?

as is decided by family situation

Placement:

Why was this child placed in this particular foster home?

A. What did the worker feel the child needed that this particular home could give him?