

Children whose parents foster other children: The experiences of growing up with a foster sibling

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person or material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

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ABSTRACT

Within today's society, many different forms of "alternative parenting" exist, including single parent homes, step-parent homes, grandparent headed households, adoption, and foster-care, all of which are family systems that differ to the traditional nuclear family form. In several of these different family forms there is the likelihood that children who are not genetically related are being raised together as siblings. The current study sought to investigate the experiences of the resident child growing up with a foster sibling. The findings from this study will add to the very limited literature on growing up with a foster sibling in New Zealand and may influence future policy. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted. The study explored whether the lived experiences of adolescent resident children is congruent with the research literature within the field of foster care; and sought to expand the knowledge of this population. There were nine topical areas investigated: parents' motivations to foster from the resident children's perspectives, preparation for fostering, overall experiences of having a foster sibling, the positives of fostering, the challenges of fostering, what resident children felt they gained from fostering, advice to parents and other resident children, resident children fostering when they are adults and the impact of permanence of the foster sibling relationship. A descriptive qualitative analysis was used to investigate the experiences of resident children, and concluded that in contrast to the majority of the literature, resident children overall had positive experiences of growing up with a foster sibling. Implications for families, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER ONE- INTRODUCTION

Issue and context

Within today's society, many different forms of "alternative parenting" exist, including single parent homes, step-parent homes, grandparent headed households, adoption, and foster-care, all of which are family systems that differ to the traditional nuclear family form. In several of these different family forms (adoption, step-families and foster families) there is the likelihood that children who are not genetically related are being raised together as siblings. The changing nature of family structures within today's society means that foster families are not unique in blending biological and environmental influences. Across all family forms, there is a paucity of research on sibling relationships, and this is particularly so in foster care. Even less consideration has been given to resident or biological children in homes where other non-biological children join them.

There are over 51,000 children being looked after by foster families in the United Kingdom (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). In New Zealand, 10,000 children and young people are unable to live with their biological parents because they have been subjected to, or are at risk of, abuse or neglect. These children will spend days, weeks, months, or sometimes years, living with a family (Fostering Kids, 2013).

This introduction will be followed by a literature review of research from the different fields of parenting within New Zealand, particularly focussing on the resident child within foster care.

Background

Within today's society it is becoming common for families to have both biological and non-biological children within the same home. Finch (2007) points out that less than a quarter of the population in England and Wales, live in a nuclear family, consisting of heterosexual couples and dependent children. American statistics for 2007, suggest that 48.4% of families live in a nuclear family, consisting of heterosexual couples and dependent children (Finch, 2007). In New Zealand, becoming a parent can happen in many different ways including families with two parents of heterosexual or homosexual couples, single parents, adoptive parents, kin carers, whangai arrangements, foster care and guardianship.

The next section of this introduction focuses of foster care in general and explores the different types of foster care in New Zealand, such as emergency care, respite care and Home for Life. Following this section, there will be a brief discussion on the alternatives to foster care such as Kin Care and Guardianship.

The broader foster care system

Children come into a foster care environment for many different reasons, including neglect or risk of abuse. These circumstances force children away from their biological families due to the perceived unsafe environment (Kiwi Families, 2013). In the year ending June 2012, Child, Youth and Family (CYF) received a total of 152,800 notifications of vulnerable children; with 41% being police reports of family violence incidents where children were present (Fernandez & Atwool, 2013). The most common finding is emotional abuse,

representing 56% of cases, and these children are also likely to have also been exposed to family violence. Neglect represents the next largest category at 22%, physical abuse represented 15% of children and sexual abuse 6.5% (Fernandez & Atwool, 2013). Statistics from December 2012, presented that 35% of children placed into families, were placed in non-kin placements.

Every child that comes into care is managed according to a care plan, and the aim of the plan is to achieve one of the following goals as soon as possible:

(1) the child returns home to a stable and loving home environment, (2) the child begins living permanently with a member of his/her extended family, (3) the child lives permanently with a non-kin caregiver or they receive the family-like support they need to enable them to leave care and live independently (Kiwi Families, 2013). Depending on the type of caregiving a foster family chooses to offer, a child may be placed with a family for one day, one week, one year, or indefinitely. Foster families are advised to make an informed decision on which type of caregiving suits them the best.

There are different types of care foster families can provide:

- Emergency care
- Respite care
- Foster care
- Home for life

Each type of care involves its own set of responsibilities (CYF, 2010). The different types of care that foster families can provide are explain further below.

Emergency care

There are times when a child has to be urgently removed from a dangerous situation. In these cases, a child may come to emergency carers at very short notice, in the middle of the night, or without much preparation. In emergency care, the child may be with the carers for only a few days, or a longer time while CYF make a plan for the child. If CYF need to spend a while working with the family so the child can return home, carers may choose to become the child's foster carer for a longer period (CYF, 2010).

Respite care

Respite carers welcome children into their home on weekends, school holidays or for short breaks. They give the child's usual carers a much-needed rest, and provide a great break away for the children. Respite carers play a vital support role within the whole care system. Respite carers can become important people in a child's life, a bit like an aunty, uncle or a grandparent role (CYF, 2010).

Foster care

If a child is not safe at home, CYF will work with their family wherever possible, so their child can return home safely and be well cared for.

This is when foster families are needed, who can provide love and care for as long as children need it, and help prepare them to return home. These children have been affected by their past experiences, so foster families need to be able to stick with them if things get tough, be patient and understanding of the effects of abuse, and have a passion for making a positive difference to a young life. A child may be with a foster family for weeks or months, depending on the nature of the issues and what needs to happen to keep the child safe and well cared for (CYF, 2010).

Home for Life

Home for Life is a policy that was introduced by The Ministry of Social Development in 2008-09. This policy aims to get foster children looked after permanently by foster parents, as an alternative to adoption. This allows children to feel they have a secure, permanent home, for as long as they need one, and that they will be loved and valued (CYF, 2010). In 2010, 339 children were given a Home for Life, enabling them to become permanent members of the families who had been fostering them, without being formally adopted (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013). Within the documentation provided by Child, Youth and Family on the Home for Life scheme, it is reported that once a child is confirmed a Home for Life, by legal means, the child is no longer considered a 'foster child'. The scheme aims to provide permanency that does not preclude ongoing contact with birth family—an important feature missing from the Adoption Act 1955, which deems all adoptions to be “closed”, cutting children off from their biological families. Child, Youth and Family provide a support package, for the first three years, for families who have offered a Home for Life to a child. This package includes; initial financial assistance, help with legal

costs, respite care, counselling and other assistance (CYF, 2010). However, the Home for Life scheme and support package is only available to children who have been legally in the care of Child, Youth and Family.

Alternatives to foster care

There are a couple of other options for the short-term care of children who cannot remain with their parents or primary caretakers. These are each briefly described below, along with their similarities to, and differences from, foster care.

Kin Care

Kin care involves children being cared for by relatives (commonly grandparents, aunts or uncles or siblings). Kin care can be informal, without legal interventions, or formal, with relatives applying for parenting orders or guardianship. As the name implies, these are care arrangements that involve family, so in the context of resident children, the children being cared for might be cousins. Kin carers receive less financial support from the state compared to those who foster long-term (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013). The main difference between foster care and kin care, is that kin care involves children being looked after by a relative, where foster parents are un-biologically related to their foster children. Another difference is, that those who parent in this way (kin care) receive less financial support from the government compared with those who foster long-term (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013).

Guardianship

Guardianship ensures that the people involved in the day-to-day care of the child, can be involved in making decisions involving the welfare of the child. Additionally, foster parents may apply for permanent parenting and guardianship orders if there are no more care and protection concerns for the child and if it is unlikely that the child will return to his or her birth home (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013). This allows foster parents to view the arrangement as permanent and to have rights to the day-to-day care of the child. Before guardianship is sought and gained by foster parents, birth parents remain as guardians of children being fostered. Where custody or parenting orders are in place, birth parents are no longer able to influence the daily care of foster children, and have even less influence once guardianship is gained by foster parents (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013). The main difference between foster care and guardianship is that guardianship is seen as a *permanent* arrangement (compared to a short-term foster care arrangement), where foster parents want more rights in terms of making decisions for the day-to-day care of the child. Additionally, when foster parents have gained guardianship, they usually have more capacity to demand assistance from social services such as CYF (Gibbs & Scherman, 2013).

The resident children in the foster home

Understandably, most literature on foster care has focused on the foster child. However, as noted above, many of these alternative family forms, into which children go (temporarily or permanently) have children of their own, created mixed homes (with biologically unrelated children being raised as siblings.) It is those “resident” children –the ones already in the home before the foster

child enters, that is the subject of this study. What is known about the "resident children" already in the home. How does fostering affect them? In the next chapter, the research on resident children in foster homes is critically reviewed, considering both the positive and negative experiences reported from the view of resident children. The chapter will end with a summary of the major gaps in our knowledge, followed by the aims and rationale of the current study.

Methodological Choice

Due to the nature of the topic and the aim to understand the lived experiences of resident children, a descriptive qualitative design was used within this study. The aim of a qualitative descriptive approach (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009) is to describe a rich, straight description of experiences and is purely data-driven, therefore the experience can be described in the best way without interpretation.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter one has provided an introduction to the research, including the issue, context and an introduction to the methodology. Chapter two addresses the factors influencing resident children when their parents decide to foster such as the decision, and the benefits and challenges from the perspective of resident children Chapter three contains the study's methodology and the methods used for recruitment, data gathering and analysis. In Chapter four, the findings, using participant's experiences, are presented and discussed in relation to other research that supports the findings. Chapter five—the final section of the dissertation—includes a discussion of the implications of the research, where

the limitations of the study, and future research are also addressed.

CHAPTER TWO- LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will critically discuss the past and current research applicable to the study. Firstly, the process of becoming a foster family is discussed including the preparation for a life in a family that fosters. The literature review will then critically consider the experience of the foster parents' biological children, and both the benefits and challenges of living with a foster sibling. This chapter will conclude with the rationale of the study.

Initial stage of becoming a foster family

The relationship between foster children and the foster parents' own children, is an area of family studies that has received only minor research focus. For example, it has been found that one-third of foster carers have birth children and when foster children are brought into these placements, they are more likely to "break down" (the term for when the placements are unsuccessful and the foster child is potentially removed and placed within another home) (Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001; Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Thompson and McPherson (2011) assessed the risk factors associated with placement breakdowns, as rated by social workers, and suggested that a family system that includes both resident children and foster children is more complex and requires more parental skills than a family with only one group or the other.

Martin (1993) emphasised that it is the whole family who fosters, and that the involvement of carers' own children should be acknowledged and valued.

When a family makes the decision to become a foster family, there are many

changes that occur in the general family life and dynamics. During the initial phase, a foster service provider will assess the entire household. In this process, the potential foster carers would have to answer questions about their parenting practises, relationships and their experience with children (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). Most importantly, they would get to know the child in care, who will be potentially placed with the foster family, and this process would be different to each individual child depending on the child's previous experience of family life (Hojer, 2001).

All family members, including the resident children, would have to accept visits from social workers, which may not always be organised visits. Watson and Jones (2002) concluded that resident children are not thought to have the same need for training and support as their parents, however, research suggests that possible training needs to occur for resident children, not only the foster parents.

Research suggests that many foster parents are concerned about the effects fostering may have on their own children (Poland & Groze, 1993).

Interestingly, Hojer (2001) found that 76 percent of 366 Swedish foster parents thought their own children were positive towards fostering, although 24 percent of parents stated that they sometimes neglected their children due to fostering. Additionally, another study (Sinclair, Wilson & Gibbs, 2005) reported similar statistics with 73 percent of foster parents, from the United Kingdom, rating their children as having a positive reaction to fostering.

Research evidence (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Cautley, 1980; Kalland & Sinkkonen 2001) suggests that if foster carers have their own children living in their home, that there is an increased chance for the placement to breakdown meaning that it is unsuccessful and the foster child needs to be placed with another family. The risk factor of placement breakdowns occurring in the presence of resident children implies that resident children are pivotal in the success of foster placements. One of the risk factors referenced in the literature is the effect resident children may have on placement outcomes. However little is known about what impact resident children actually have in the success of the placement, or if there are other factors such as the experiences and circumstances of the foster sibling that need to be considered.

On the other hand, Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs (2005) concluded the opposite: that when carers have children already in the home, there is a lower rate of disrupted placements. However, the foster children being placed with the United Kingdom families in the study by Sinclair et al., (2005) were all younger than the resident children and had an easier upbringing, suggesting that the age of foster children and their upbringing circumstances may have played a role. Nevertheless, the impact of fostering on the lives of the sons and daughters of foster parents is largely overlooked in research, and there is a need for their experience and view to be heard.

Preparation of resident children for a life in a family that fosters children

In this section, we will look at research that focuses on how prepared resident children are for a life in a family that fosters. This will involve looking at

resident children's experience of their involvement in the decision and the preparation process.

Involvement in the decision to foster

The decision to start fostering is usually initiated by one or both of the parents. There are a range of motivations that may encourage parents to become foster carers including love of children, the wish to make a contribution to the community or due to contact with other foster carers (Hojer, 2001). As noted above, many researchers emphasise the need for both parents and professionals to involve children in the decision process (Hojer, 2007, Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). However, questions remain as to whether or not resident children's decision or views on fostering are actually considered. In the Swedish study by Hojer and Nordenfors (2004), it was found that 66 percent of the children and young people reported being asked their opinion before their parents started fostering. On the other hand, 22 percent recalled that they did not participate in the decision to foster.

Interestingly, it has been found that the perceptions of children and foster carers did not always align. Poland and Groze (1993) found that 90 percent of the American foster carers reported that they had discussed fostering with their own children, however only 64 percent of children reported that fostering was discussed with them. As seen in this study, while some discussion is happening, parents may be mistaking the discussion with their resident children for their agreement to start foster. Additionally, it is commonly reported that carers' children feel left out of decisions and feel they were not listened to (Martin, 1993; Spears & Cross, 2003). Interestingly, in the Swedish

study by Hojer and Nordenfors (2006), participants reported that they doubted their parents would have considered their opinion on fostering and thought their parents would have chosen to foster even if they did not want to. “My parents asked me if it was ok, and I said it wasn’t, but they didn’t care” (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p. 155). Some studies (i.e. Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006; Spears & Cross, 2003) have also reported that the extent to which foster carers children are involved in the decision depended on their age, where older children were more likely to participate in the decision compared to younger children (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2011). It is unclear however, why older children had a higher chance of being asked their opinion or decisions. Is this due to their developmental age and capacity to understand the process of fostering, or whether there are other reasons parents tend to not ask younger children their opinion and decision.

Resident children’s preparation for fostering

Some studies suggest that the preparation stage can be problematic and that foster carers’ own children feel unprepared. Fox (2001) stated that the children from the United Kingdom foster carers felt uninformed. Additionally, in the study by Spears and Cross (2003), 15 out of 20 young people said they would have liked more preparation. In Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) study, 39 percent of foster carers children reported that they had enough information about foster children before they started fostering, however in contrast, 33 percent felt they did not receive enough information. This shows that an almost equal number are reporting feeling unprepared. Crucially, children who had received information before they started fostering were more likely to say they have a good relationship with the foster child. Therefore, it is crucial for

foster carers children to receive all the relevant information, include the resident children in discussions, and getting agreement from them. It is also about making sure the resident children feel prepared before their family starts fostering.

Experiences of living with a foster sibling

In this section, we'll look at the research on the experiences of resident children whose parents foster. The impact of fostering on resident children will be looked at, with both the positives and negatives considered.

Impact of fostering on resident children

In Table 1 (below) Hojer, Sebba and Luke, from England, (2013, p.10) summarise their results on both the benefits and challenges of being a resident child in a family that fosters other children.

Table 1: Summary of the benefits and challenges of fostering

Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciating their families • Feeling part of a team • Making friends • Becoming more caring and empathetic • Understanding other's misfortunes • Learning to take responsibility
Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing belongings, space and parent's time • Behavioural difficulties e.g. stealing • Loss of innocence • Responsibility and worry • Not telling parent's their problems • Coping with placement ending • Expectations of parents

Benefits of fostering from the perspective of the resident child

Family

In many studies, resident children are asked about the positives of fostering (Part, 1993; Spears & Cross, 2003; Thompson & McPherson, 2011; Hojer et al., 2013). In Part's (1993) study, 43 percent of resident children reported that the companionship experienced from having a foster sibling was one of the best things about fostering. Resident children report the benefits associated with having a new friend with whom to share activities and gaining a new playmate (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). These positive experiences connect to the benefits of having a biological sibling. It is unclear however, in these studies if the resident children were the only children in the family before their parents decided to foster, or whether they had other biological siblings.

It has also been reported that resident children report that family relations can feel closer as a result of fostering (Spears & Cross, 2003; Hojer, 2007).

Additionally, resident children report that they enjoyed coming from a large family, that they were close to their foster siblings, and that they liked being able to help other children (Spears & Cross, 2003; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006).

Learning life skills

According to foster parents, fostering increases resident children's caring and empathic skills; they gain knowledge about life, and learn about others misfortunes (Part, 1993; Watson & Jones, 2001; Younes & Harp, 2007).

Additionally, Swan's study from Canada (2002) stated that resident children have a strong sense of responsibility, caring and compassion, and that this

sense becomes part of their identity. Younes and Harp from the United States, (2007) reported that foster parents believed their children were better people due to fostering. They believed that their children had learnt about different cultures and races and to be open to people from different backgrounds. This finding, however, is from the perspective of the parents who foster, not from the resident children themselves. This highlights the critical point that the resident children themselves need to be asked to gain their perspective compared to the parents' perspective.

Furthermore, Spears and Cross, in the United Kingdom, (2003) found that 15 out of their 20 participants felt that they had gained confidence through their experiences of fostering. Some of these 15 children reported themselves as better at communicating and listening as a consequence of having been raised with foster siblings. In this study a significant number of participants mentioned that fostering made it easier for them to deal with the outside world. They found it easier to make friends and had gained confidence due to the fostering experience (Spears & Cross, 2003). Additionally, Spears & Cross (2003) found that generally those children, who were older than their foster sibling, thought fostering was easier because they lived a fairly separate life from their foster siblings, in terms of having their own space and being able to go out and do their own activities with friends due to being old enough to do so.

Material advantages

The material advantages of fostering were also reported by the participants in the study by Spears and Cross (2003). For some participants, it meant that

their parents were home more. For others, fostering resulted in better Christmas presents, more money, outings and holidays. Overall, the general theme from research suggests that resident children, due to fostering, learn certain life skills such as being compassionate of others situations and being understanding of their foster sibling's circumstances (Spears & Cross, 2003; Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Resident children seem to be proud of these skills they have learnt and reported feeling more competent, better informed and confident compared to their peers (Spears & Cross, 2003; Hojer et al., 2013). *"One gets to know a lot about how people are, and what they have experienced. Why they behave in certain ways. Compared to my friends, I have a totally different perspective."* (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p 68).

Challenges of fostering from the perspective of the resident child

Change in family

Many studies acknowledge the change in family structure and other changes perceived by resident children such as having less personal time, need to share belongings, decreased parental attention, conflicts and stronger house rules (Hojer et al., 2013; Hojer & Nordensfors, 2006; Part, 1993; Spears & Cross, 2003).

Sharing belongings and parental time

One common theme reported in the literature broadly, was loss of parental time and attention. Hojer's Swedish study (2007) mentioned that the problem for birth children was not only the sharing of parental time, but their parents being less accessible. This study however does not mention in what terms resident children's parents were less accessible. It is unknown whether they

were less emotionally accessible, less psychologically accessible or less physically present. From research on biological siblings, it is known that children experience change in the relationship with their parents when a new foster sibling arrives in the home. A child may feel displaced within their family when a new foster sibling arrives (Hojer, 2007). There may be similarities here between the arrival of a new foster sibling and the arrival of a new biological sibling in a traditional family form (Mpofu, 2010).

Differential parental treatment

If the resident children perceive themselves to be treated differently by their parents, this can affect the relationships with their foster siblings (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Children will often take their feelings out on each other, as it is safer than approaching their parents about the issue. Research has consistently found that differential parental treatment often creates higher levels of conflict and hostility between siblings, especially if this treatment is considered unfair (Dunn, 1992). Lemiux's (1984) study from California, found that foster carers were stricter with their birth children and had higher expectations of their behaviour compared to their foster sibling. Additionally, resident children mentioned the unexpected changes of house rules and also felt pressured to be good role models and to be understanding towards their foster siblings, who, it was stressed, had been intentionally abandoned (Kaplan, 1988; Twigg, 1994; Younes & Harp, 2007). Research on differential parenting has been correlated with conflict between siblings and could be linked to siblings competing for attention (Dunn, 1992; Sutton & Stack, 2013).

Sharing their “stuff”

Part (1993) from the United Kingdom reported that the loss of privacy was rated as one of the three worst aspects of fostering. Younes and Harp (2007) study from the United States, suggested that this might be due to children having to share bedrooms with their siblings, in order for the foster child to have their own bedroom. Research suggest that children and young people are really resentful in sharing of bedrooms, as this created less personal space for themselves and there belongings (Part, 1993; Hojer, 2013). Sharing parents' time is on of the biggest impacts on children's whose parents decide to foster (Poland & Groze, 1993). Children who are placed in foster care have in many cases experienced abuse and/or neglect and therefore have greater needs and many demand a lot of attention from foster parents (Hojer et al., 2013). Therefore, resident children are likely to receive a decreased amount of attention and time from their parents who have become foster carers (Hojer et al., 2013; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006; Poland & Groze, 1993; Spears & Cross, 2003).

Poland and Groze (1993) from the United States found that sharing of parental time significantly influenced whether or not resident children liked their foster sibling, and whether they accepted the changes in family structure due to fostering. Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) noted that resident children reported situations where they often had to wait, sometimes in vain, for their parents to find the time to listen to them. One boy, aged 16, who participated in this Swedish study, said that he had to make an appointment with his mother if he wanted her to find time for him (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006). Also noted in the study by Hojer and Nordenfors (2006), twenty three percent of

resident children stated they did not get any time with their parents who fostered other children. Additionally, Thompson and McPherson (2011) noted this to be a major issue.

In contrast, only two out of six children in Sutton and Stack's (2013) United Kingdom study reported competition for their parents' time. However, one girl within the study did mention how she started to misbehave in order to get more attention from her parents. Interestingly, those two children who mentioned a competition for their parents time, both reported being able to solve this problem by discussing it with their parents; *"we spoke to mum and dad and told them how we feel, they explained and told us that they love us, and just because they spend time with the looked after child doesn't mean that were not loved. Just being told that worked"* (Sutton & Stack, 2013, p. 7). Additionally, Sutton and Stack (2013) mentioned that their participants in their study were encouraged to discuss problematic issues with their parents. This may explain the difference in Sutton and Stack's (2013) findings compared to others mentioned above. Parents in this study may have been more open to discussing resident The children in this study also felt that their parents made sure they spent time with their biological children. This open line of communication between resident children and their parents who foster could be key, possibly resulting in more positive fostering experiences.

Foster children's behavioural difficulties

Up to now, most of the literature has been about the changing home environment resulting from the presence of foster children (and the impact this has on the resident children). Another factor not yet considered is that which

the foster children, themselves, bring to the equation. Many of the children who are in need of foster care have come from non-optimal environments that will surely affect the developmental outcomes of the foster children. For instance, many children requiring foster care will have been abused, neglected or abandoned. Not surprising, studies have also acknowledge how difficult it can be to live with children who may have been previously exposed to abuse and/or neglect. The participants (24 percent) in Part's (1993) study said that the worst thing about growing up with foster siblings was the difficult and annoying behaviour, especially the stealing. Having things broken and stealing were also reported as one of the worst things of fostering by Watson and Jones (2002). Spears and Cross (2003) noted that resident children felt that stealing in particular was felt as betrayal of trust, and much resented. In this study, resident children mentioned that their friends sometimes did not want to visit their home, as they were afraid of the foster children; *"fight a lot, and they lie and steal things. They are dishonest, and make things up to be popular"* (Hojer, 2007, p 77).

Several studies (Hojer, 2007; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006; Swan, 2002) found that resident children can find it difficult to talk to their parents about their struggle to cope with the behaviours of their foster sibling. Parents often overlooked or minimised events that resident children found difficult and problematic, such as foster children lying. Additionally, Part (1993) and Spears and Cross (2003) found that resident children felt that their foster siblings got away too easily and that they were not punished for things for which they themselves would be punished; *"If I did what they did, I'd get grounded for the rest of my life... I have to be more strict and mature"* (Spears

& Cross, 2003, p 42). This further highlights the negative impact of differential parenting in the context of foster care.

On the other hand, resident children were also aware that their foster siblings have had problematic experiences before they arrived to their home, and this makes them put up with behaviour. *"It makes me sad when they scream, and when they hit me, but usually I don't say anything, I know they have problems of their own"* (Hojer, 2007, p 78).

Safety

Although there are several perceived positives to fostering such as resident children learning to be empathic, there is a risk that resident children may be exposed to too much information about their foster siblings past experiences including abuse and/or neglect (Hojer et al., 2013). It was reported by some of the children in the study by Hojer and Nordensors (2006) that they had experienced 'terrible things', like a foster child threatening them with a knife and frequent threats of suicide. Some resident children in Spears and Cross's (2003) study mentioned that they had been exposed to issues they did not want to consider such as sexual abuse. Resident children also mentioned that they did not know how to cope with this information. Additionally, foster parents have also mentioned being concerned about how fostering affects their children, with 69 percent reporting this in Poland and Groze (1993) study. Parents have also reported concerns around their resident children becoming less trusting due to the awareness they had gained through their foster siblings experiences (Younes & Harp, 2007).

Growing up fast

Hojer and Nordenfros (2006) they found that 66 percent of resident children said they took responsibility very often for their foster siblings. Interestingly, a gender difference was found with female participants reporting being more responsible for their foster sibling than male participants. This parallels similar findings in the research on biological siblings, which shows that daughters often assume a care-taking role with younger siblings (Sanders, 2004). The term 'taking responsibility' was described by resident children as the same responsibility you would take for a biological sibling such as educating, baby-sitting, help and emotional support (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006). Worry was also commonly reported with resident children mentioning that they worry about their foster sibling having to (unwillingly) move back to their biological family, and possibly be exposed to drugs or alcohol or be treated badly. Female participants worried twice as much as male participants. This study shows how resident children are aware of the different risks their foster siblings have been and still may be exposed too. Additionally, studies have found that older resident children are sometime confused whether they needed to relate to their foster sibling as a peer or a parent figure (Pugh, 1996; Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Pugh (1996) from the United Kingdom questioned whether resident children are at risk of growing up prematurely or having certain aspects of their development distorted. However, this concept can be related to a nuclear family that has an older child who has just received a new younger sibling. An older biological child may experience a similar confusion in roles when a new younger sibling enters the family, as when an older resident child received a new younger foster sibling (Pugh, 1996).

Expectations of parents on resident children

It has been reported that foster parents expect resident children to be good to, and supportive of, their foster siblings. Resident children were often told to let foster children be with them and their friends, even though some of them felt this would be difficult (Swan, 2002; Spears & Cross, 2003; Hojer, 2007). Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) found that some children said that if they failed to meet their parental expectations of supportive behaviour, their parents were disappointed and this was something they wanted to avoid. Resident children were supposed to put their foster siblings' needs before their own, and reported feeling that their own needs were secondary and sometimes felt marginalised within their own family (Swan, 2002). Swan (2002) also described that resident children felt they needed to be perfect and not have problems of their own. Three things are unclear, from this study. Firstly, if this is about resident children feeling they need to make their parents' lives easier because they are already fostering. Secondly, whether their parents expected them to be supportive to foster children or if they needed to put their foster siblings' needs before their own, or thirdly, whether it was about being a good role model to their foster siblings. Expectations for resident children to be understanding towards their foster sibling and to be a good role model are widely reported in the literature (Swan, 2002; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006).

Resident children easing the burden on parents

Resident children are often aware of how important it was for their parents to succeed at their fostering task. Therefore, resident children would try to help facilitate this success in different ways. Resident children would try to be as nice as possible to foster siblings and take care of them to help their parents.

In Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) study, 66 percent of resident children agreed with the statement “I try to be a good and supportive towards my mother/father when she/he is troubled because of my foster sibling”.

Additionally, Swan (2002) found that resident children would try to be as good as they could to not create problems for their parents;

“It would have added stress to my parents if I had also been off the wall, and had all these issues, so I certainly felt this need to be a good kid... If I added any more stress to my parent’s life in terms of them taking care of kids, I guess I thought well maybe it would get to be too much for them... and then they would give up fostering and I certainly didn’t want them to do that...and I didn’t want that responsibility” (Swan, 2002, p 15).

As seen above, resident children did not want to add any more stress to their parents’ lives since they were already taking care of foster children.

A general theme from research suggests that resident children perceived their own problems and their own needs were not as important as their foster siblings’. Another way resident children would try to help their parents was by choosing not to tell them about their own problems (Swan, 2002; Younes & Harp, 2002; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006). This sometimes lead to foster parents being unaware of what was going on in their own children’s lives and also resulted in resident children feeling unseen by their parents:

“I don’t want to talk to my mum about my problems, because I don’t want to make her tired. I don’t dare to ask her to go shopping with me, because if she can’t, I’m afraid she’ll think that she’s not giving me

enough of her time, and then she's have a bad conscience. I feel as is I need to just be out of her way, cause it's hard enough for her as it is. I feel as if I'm a burden for her" (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p 202).

Coping when a foster placement ends

Some studies have found that one of the most difficult things about fostering is when the foster sibling has to leave the family (Watson & Jones, 2002; Sutton & Stack, 2013). The participants in Sutton and Stack's (2013) study mentioned that they tried to cope with feelings such as sadness and loss when placements ended by never getting too close to the foster sibling. One girl in the study by Spears and Cross (2003), for example, felt guilty due to not liking her foster sibling and had learnt to cope with placements ending by not getting too close to foster children: *"You shouldn't get too close to the foster child because you don't know if they are going to stay or go, so you have to try not get to close to them because then it's harder when they go. So yeah, don't be friends with them"* (Spears & Cross, 2003, p. 41). Additionally, it has been noted that resident children are often not consulted or informed about the placement ending which lead to unresolved feelings (Fox, 2001).

The impact of age difference on the relationship

Several studies have mentioned that the age different between resident children and foster children impacts on the relationship. When foster children were younger than resident children, better relationships were reported compared to when they were close in age (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006). When resident children and foster children were close in age, feelings of rivalry and competition were experienced. Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) reported that

relationships were better when there was an age difference between resident children and foster children. The 14-17 year olds in the study talked about how foster siblings close in age to them would try to be like them: *“This is the worst thing, it’s worse than when they say mum and dad. I don’t mind that as much as her wanting to be like me”* (Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p 96).

Similarly, Sutton and Stack (2013) found that resident children in their study wanted foster children to be the same age or younger. They perceived older foster children to be a threat and wanted to see themselves as active helpers to younger children: *“I didn’t want to have someone much older than me cause then I wouldn’t feel as if I was looking after them cause they’re older than me. And then they might end up helping me with something, and I didn’t want that”* (Sutton & Stack, 2013, p. 8).

Advice from resident children

Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) asked resident children whether they had any advice for other resident children and families. Resident children in the study were divided into two groups: those aged 11-14 years and those aged 15-17 years old. Table 2 reports the findings from Hojer and Nordenfors (2006).

Table 2: Advice from resident children

Advice from resident children aged 11-14 years

- “Don’t forget your own children“
- “Do things without the foster children“
- “Be fair“
- “Don’t forget your ‘old family’“
- “Don’t make your children be friends with foster children“
- “Let them handle this on their own“
- “Be stricter with foster children“
- “Punish foster children when they do bad things“
- “Be aware that foster children are lying, don’t accuse you own children“

(Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p 277)

Advice from resident children aged 15-17 years

- “Be nice to yourselves- you deserve it“
- “Be stricter“
- “Don’t be so stressed“
- “Let us be on our own“
- “Treat your own children and foster children the same“
- “Be more patient“
- “Spend protected time with your own children“

(Hojer & Nordenfors, 2006, p 277)

Rationale

The present study was undertaken to investigate the experiences of resident children (those born to parents) growing up with a foster sibling. According to the latest data from Child, Youth and Family (2010) for the year 2009–10, there were 5,500 children in the custody of Child, Youth and Family, with around 3,300 children living with extended family or foster carers (Child, Youth and Family, 2010). In addition, in the two years ending in 2010, 389 children who were being fostered long-term were given a ‘Home for Life’, which meant they were no longer in the care of the State but had permanent homes. The advantage for these children coming out of the care system is that they get to

grow up with the care, security and love they need from people who want to and are able to be there for them (Child, Youth and Family, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, there are studies that report both the benefits and challenges of foster care from the perspective of the resident child. There are key findings present in the literature offering both insight and recommendations. Being involved in the decision to foster is a key finding in many studies. The literature suggests that resident children should be involved in the process and need to understand how and in what ways their life will be affected. Additionally, providing enough information to resident children about the fostering process and about their foster sibling can make it easier for them to understand and cope with difficulties that may arise. It also allows resident children to feel part of the process and be prepared when their foster sibling arrives. Furthermore, having an open line of communication between resident children and their parents is also a key finding within the literature. Being allowed to discuss problems allows resident children to feel their parents care and additionally allows the family to solve and work through problems. Lastly, providing adequate information about when placements are ending is key. Resident children report that their feelings of loss and grief are not recognised, and moving on become difficult when they are uninformed about their foster siblings placement ending.

Despite these findings, there is a lack of empirical research within the foster care field, on the direct experiences of resident children growing up with a foster sibling in particular to the New Zealand population. Within New Zealand there are a lot of foster homes, with over 10,000 children being unable to live

with their biological parents (Fostering Kids, 2013). And while there is a robust body of research focussing on the outcomes and experiences of foster children and some research on the experiences of resident children, there remains a need for more, as well as for research on what it is like growing up with a foster sibling within the New Zealand context. Within New Zealand there is a high percentage of children in foster care. On the 31 March 2014, there were 4043 children nationally in out of home placements (Child, Youth and Family, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to have a study look at the experiences of New Zealand resident children in particular who grow up with a foster sibling. Furthermore, majority of the findings discussed in the literature review were conducted overseas in countries such as The United Kingdom, Canada and Sweden.

Consequently, this study aims to learn more about the experiences of the adolescent resident child already in the home when the parents decide to become a family that fosters. This study also hopes to learn from these adolescents' experiences in order to inform not only professionals in the field, but also other parents who foster, in the hope of having more successful placements for foster children and more positive experiences for resident children.

CHAPTER THREE- METHOD

This chapter highlights the methodology and describes the procedures undertaken for the study, including participant recruitment, data collection, ethical considerations and procedures for data analysis.

Use of Qualitative Methodology

One of the greatest shortcomings in the field of foster care is the lack of empirical research focussing on the impact of fostering on resident children. Study into the experiences of resident children within foster care is a subtopic within the wider field that also lacks empirical research. Therefore, due to the topic being newly investigated, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate in order to investigate the phenomena and to glean more experiential data from participants.

Epistemology

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to describe the data (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009). The epistemology the current study employs is a realist method that reports the experiences, meanings and the reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In using a qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher aimed to describe and not interpret participant's experiences. This approach is data-driven, which allows the analysis of topics to be as accurate to what participant's discussed alongside supporting quotations. This approach aims to reflect on each participant's reality in relation to his or her experiences of growing up with a foster sibling. Through the language (obtained in interviews) the researcher was

able to describe each “resident child’s” individual experience (Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen, & Sondergaard, 2009).

Researcher’s position

My journey of research regarding foster care began out of curiosity when I conducted a previous study on the relationship between birth and adopted siblings. During this study, I investigated different family forms, including foster care. Once this journey began, it became apparent that there were a few aspects that drew me to this research. Prior to this research, I did not have a lot of knowledge about foster care; however, I have since gained some knowledge through my workplace. My intuition was that being a resident child was difficult and adjusting to having another human being, who is not biologically related or born into the family, would be a difficult adjustment on children of all ages, in particular when it is unknown whether this child will be temporarily present in the home or permanently. Emotionally, however, I believe that every child deserves to have a loving home environment and that even though the adjustment for the resident child may be difficult, that the parents’ choice to foster a child, or even several children, and give these children potentially a new aspect of life was extraordinary.

Through the investigation of literature, I discovered both the positives and negatives of creating a mixed home (resident and foster children) and became eager to investigate the outcomes of such a study. Having an awareness of my pre-understandings allowed me to take these into account as I engaged and interviewed the participants. It also allowed me to have a better understanding about how my view may affect the process of describing the topics participants

discussed. Additionally, being aware of my previous assumptions offers me insight into how others might also pre-conceive foster families and their children.

Participants

Characteristics of participants

Participants were adolescents who were raised alongside a foster sibling. The sample consisted of five adolescent participants: two male and three female. All five participants were within their home before their parents decided to foster.

The inclusion criteria for the study were any adolescents (between the ages of 13-18) who spent any time in their own home with a foster sibling (temporary or permanent). The participants had to live in the Auckland area for ease of interviewing; however, an exception was made for one participant who lived outside the area. The interview was going to happen via Skype, however, the participant felt more comfortable filling the questions themselves and returning them via email. Additionally, due to the nature of the research study, it was not possible to involve participants who did not speak English. This research study did not have a budget to enable a translator to be used.

Through the prospective design of the study, and the decision to interview *adolescents* on their experiences of growing up with a foster sibling (as opposed to young adults looking back on their childhood), it was expected that the current study would glean richer data, as the adolescents would have more recent recollections of the experiences of growing up with a foster sibling.

Table 1 summarises age, gender and how old resident children were when their parents started fostering. With respect to participants' family background characteristics, the majority of participants were from families with two biological siblings.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant No.	Current Age (years)	Gender	Participant age when their parents started fostering
P1	13	F	11
P2	15	F	11
P3	16	M	14
P4	16	F	5
P5	18	M	8

Each of the five participants had between one and five permanent foster siblings living with the participants in their homes, all of whom were younger than the resident children. Participant 5, on the other hand, was the only one who had one older permanent foster sibling. For all participants, besides Participant 5, their foster siblings were at least two or more years younger than the participating teens.

Additionally, all participants previously had several more foster siblings within temporary care, where the foster siblings were only with them for a short period of time or in a process of transition. A few participants had previously had up to 19 foster siblings throughout their lives with several coming for respite care as well. The table below shows each participant's current number of foster siblings and also the total amount of foster siblings they have had come through their home.

Table 2: Number of foster siblings

Participant No.	Current number of foster siblings	Total number of foster siblings who have come through the home
P1	1	2
P2	5	5 and many in temporary care
P3	1	19
P4	2	Over 16
P5	0	2 and many in temporary care

The period of time resident children's parents had been fostering varied across participants as well as the age resident children were when their parents decided to foster. As seen in Table 1, Participant 4 was 5 years of age when her parents decided to foster, whereas Participant 3 was age 14.

Recruitment of participants

The process of recruitment was conducted by contacting agencies involved with foster care in Auckland, via email and phone, to inform them of this study and ask if they were willing to pass the flyer on to potential participants (See Appendix D). The agencies who were able to assist with recruitment included *Immerse*, *Lifewise* and *Youth Horizons*. Additionally, a snowball sampling approach (Kragöloh, 2008) was used. This approach involved both the researcher and supervisor spreading information about the study and the search for participants to those we encountered on a daily basis, and then asking those people to also "spread the word". This could be referred to as a "word of mouth" sampling. This recruitment was acceptable for this project due to the small population of potential participants, as well as the small number of participants needed. Participants who had already engaged in the study also "spread the word" to other potential participants.

Interview Questions

A review of research into sibling literature and foster family studies was conducted to aid the construction of interview questions that would guide the exploration of resident children's experiences growing up with a foster sibling. Unfortunately, very little research examining this particular topic could be found; however, from the literature reviewed, a list of areas to explore emerged and aided the question formation (see Table 3).

Data collection

Data was collected via semi-structured interviews, consisting of a series of open-ended questions (see Table 3), which allowed the researcher to use the literature to guide the overall direction of the topics, but still allow the full experiences of each participant to come through in the interviews. By using semi-structured interviews, it allowed other questions to emerge in the discussion between the interviewer and the participants rather than the limited nature of utilizing a fully structured interview (Krageloh, 2008).

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC approval number 14/78) on April 28, 2014 (See Appendix A). A key ethical consideration was the sensitive nature of the topic, combined with the age of the participants (youth), which had the potential to distress some of the participants. To minimise this potential, all participants were informed at the start of interviews that they could stop at any time if it became distressing at all. None of the participants chose to stop the interviews.

Table 3: Sample questions used to stimulate participant discussions

How many foster siblings have you had?
Were your foster siblings younger or older than you?
How old were you when your foster sibling/s arrived?
What did you know about fostering before your parent's decided to foster other children?
What information did you receive before your foster sibling arrived?
Were you involved in the decision to start fostering?
What is it like to have foster siblings?
What do you/ did you do if there are problems between you and your foster sibling?
What do you think are the positives of being part of a foster family?
What, if any, are the negatives?
What, if anything, have you gained from being part of a foster family?
What advise do you have for children whose parents foster other children?
When you are older would you ever consider fostering children? Why? Why not?

As a final measure to address the potentially sensitive nature of the study, all participants were reminded that the Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix B) contained contact details of organisation (i.e. Youthline) that were available to them, should they wish to speak with a professional. Additionally, due to the participants being adolescents, in order to protect their vulnerability, permission was sought from parents first via a Consent Form (See Appendix E). Participants were then asked permission to participate in the study via their own Assent Form (See Appendix F).

The researcher showed sensitivity to the potentially difficult or sensitive nature of the study. This was done through respecting the teens that were

interviewed and ensuring they understood they could stop the interview or withdraw at anytime. The researcher also watched for any signs of distress from participants, throughout the interviews. Furthermore, participants were not identified in anyway within this study in respect of their confidentiality and anonymity. They were also given time to ask further questions regarding the research before and after the interview.

Procedures

When willingness to participate was obtained by participants and their parents, Information Sheets and Consent Forms were emailed out. All but one of the interviews were scheduled with the parent of each participant. One interview was scheduled with the participant via email.

Interview times were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon date, time and location. As part of the procedures for the study, participants were encouraged to come to the Auckland University of Technology, North Shore campus, for the interviews. However, it was essential in this process for the researcher to make participation in the study as easy as possible for the teens and so, for all that had other locations where they preferred to meet (including their homes), the researcher travelled to them to conduct the interviews. In total, four of the five participants preferred to be interviewed within their homes (See Appendix G for Safety Protocol). The fifth interview took place via email. Interviews were digitally audio recorded, downloaded, and transcribed for analysis. To thank the teens for their time, each was compensated with a \$20 iTunes voucher. The interviews took from 30 minutes to 45 minutes, averaging 35 minutes to complete.

Analysis

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to analyse the data that was obtained through semi-structured interviews. The aim of a qualitative descriptive approach is to provide a rich description of an experience or an event. The final product of qualitative descriptive analysis is a description of informants' experiences in a language similar to the informants' own language (Neergaard et al., 2009). The qualitative data refers to a textual form rather than a numeric form. Additionally, this form of methodology is data-driven (Neergaard et al., 2009). This means the study's focus is on the meaning that participants give those facts (Sandelowski, 2000). In using a descriptive qualitative approach, theories and pre-existing knowledge is ignored. Therefore, this approach is more inductive (in contrast to the deductive approach that quantitative approaches aim for).

Overall, qualitative descriptive studies aim to be more descriptive versus interpretive (Sandelowski, 2000). There is an alternative methodology referred to as interpretive description that would have also been a suitable choice. However, this would require an in-depth interpretation that the current study did not aim to do. "The main difference between qualitative descriptive and interpretive description lies in the data analysis, where interpretive description goes beyond mere description and aims to provide an in-depth conceptual description and understanding of a phenomenon, and qualitative descriptive stays closer to the data obtained" (Neergaard et al., 2009, p.g 52). This study sought to stay close to the data, to describe the participants' experiences in the most real and correct way, as they described them without

interpretation. Through this data-driven approach, the participants' experiences are described at a surface level and supported with quotations taken directly from interviews. The data is shared here as participants discussed it, with no interpretation or theory applied. The description of topics in relation to the interviews will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR- FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings from the data analysis. There were nine topical areas: parent's motivations to foster from the resident children perspectives, preparation for fostering, overall experiences of having a foster sibling, the positives of fostering, the challenges of fostering, what resident children felt they gained from fostering, advice to parents and other resident children, resident children fostering when they are adults and the impact of permanence of the foster sibling relationship. These are presented below along with the supporting quotations taken directly from the interviews (shown in italics). Throughout the chapter, some discussion of the findings will occur. A macro-discussion of the overall findings and implications of the study will be covered in the final discussion chapter.

Parents' motivations to foster from the perspective of teen participants

Participants understanding of why their parents decided to foster varied.

"It's a good idea. Giving someone another chance and a new family".

(Participant 1, age 13)

"Mum had a dream about it years ago. She always wanted to do it".

(Participant 3, age 16).

Participants' understandings of why their parents decided to foster included aspects such as wanting to give someone a chance and a new family; parent dreaming about it and always wanting to do it to help others out; and wanting to

do something good for someone else and in the process teaching their own children about cultures and different children's upbringings.

This finding is congruent with the research which suggests parents' decisions to foster are prompted by a range of motivations such as contact with other foster carers, love of children and the wish to make a contribution to the community (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2011).

Preparation for a life in a family that fosters children

For this topic, participants were asked several questions: "What did you know about fostering before your parents decided to foster other children?"; "What information did you receive before your foster sibling arrived?"; "Were you involved in the decision to start fostering?". Below are the responses of what participants mentioned in response to these questions.

The majority of participants reported that they had no knowledge about fostering before their parents decided to foster. The main finding from this topic was that participants talked about generally feeling they were involved in the decision and received basic information before their foster sibling arrived.

"Nothing really, expect that they come and live with you and they will be like your family, and I was looking forward to it because I would be able to like play with her." (Participant 1, age 13)

I didn't know much. I just knew we were getting these kids and they would probably be with us for awhile". (Participant 2, age 15)

In terms of being involved in the decision to foster, four out of the five participants felt they were somewhat involved in the decision to foster, and that their parents asked their opinion.

“Yeah my mum asked my opinion and if I wanted to. Cause I wanted someone to be able to play with.” (Participant 1, age 13)

“Mum came and talked to all of us, my brother and sister, and she said we were getting some new kids. “Is that alright with you?” She told us their names and their ages”. (Participant 2, age 15)

The majority of the participants received basic information about their foster siblings before they arrived. This involved learning their names, ages and possibly why they are coming to live with them. A couple of participants mentioned that they were not aware of how long the foster siblings were going to stay, and one participant mentioned that, if her mum knew they were getting a foster sibling, she informed the resident children and also provided them with information about the foster child, if she had this information.

Interestingly, in the following example, two participants felt that their parents informed them when they were going to start fostering a child and they received the basic information about the foster child. However, both these participants, also reported sometimes getting home and having a new foster sibling in the home without any knowledge of them coming, therefore also being uninformed at times.

“I knew they had a hard upbringing. The basic stuff, their name and age. Sometimes I just get home and then there is a new kid in the house”.

(Participant 3, age 16)

“We just came home one night and mum was like “we are gonna have a girl staying with us for about a week” and then she showed up. I didn’t know how old she was, I thought she would be younger. So I was a bit surprised. I was kind of surprised that she had like no family and she was that old.” (Participant 1, age 13)

In the following example, the participant reported being well informed and knew that her foster sibling was going to be permanent. This participant was also able to spend time with her foster sibling on a weekend basis, before the foster sibling entered her home permanently.

“Like what her name was and before she came to live with us fully, we went to see her. I was told it was going to be permanent so she would be like living with us forever. My mum went just to see her and then after that she came over for a weekend”. (Participant 1, age 13)

Additionally, during the interviews it was clear that all five of the participants had an understanding that their foster siblings had difficult upbringings and some of the participants understood why their foster siblings could not live with their biological parents.

“Her mum wasn’t looking after her properly and they gave her mum a chance and gave her a course to follow, so she could look after ... but she didn’t want to”. (Participant 1, age 13)

“Really sad to think that kids actually live like that”. (Participant 4, age 16)

This finding of resident children expressing that their opinion was asked before fostering and feeling part of the decision, is congruent with the research by Hojer and Nordenfors (2004) who reported that 66% of the children and young people in their study reported being asked their opinion before their parents started fostering. The current study’s finding is also congruent with the research by Spears and Cross (2003) and Hojer and Nordenfors (2006), who reported that the extent to which foster carers children are involved in the decision depended on their age. Older children were more likely to participate in the decision compared to younger children. This may be due to parents feeling that developmentally, older children may have a better understanding and be better able to comprehend the situation.

In Participant 4’s case, she was only five years old when her parents decided to foster. Therefore, she did not feel that she was involved in the decision, and that it was just the way her family home environment was. This could be due to Participant 4 being five, she may have been considered too young to be consulted. However, for Participant 4, she did feel that, as she got older, her mum did check with her and her siblings if everything was okay in terms of their foster siblings. Providing this information and preparation for resident

children may be a key aspect in successful foster placements. As reported by Hojer and Nordenfors (2004, 2006), children and young people were more likely to say they have a good relationship with the foster child if they had received information before they started fostering.

Overall experiences of having a foster sibling

Participants were asked “What is it like having a foster sibling?” and “What do you do if there are problems between you and your foster sibling?” The majority of the participant’s responded positively to these questions.

Participant 5 felt that having a foster sibling was like having an older sister.

Two of the participants mentioned that they enjoy fostering and the process of learning and helping out. Interestingly, Participant 2 expressed getting along better with her foster siblings compared to her biological ones.

“I like it cause I don’t get along with my [biological] brother and sister. It’s a lot easier and you don’t know much about them. You learn about them. I like helping out with them”. (Participant 2, age 15)

“I really enjoy it. It’s good to feel like your doing something beneficial not just for yourself. I enjoy it overall. Putting good things into someone’s life is really beneficial to you as a person as well.” (Participant 4, age 16)

On the other hand, Participant 1 discussed how the relationship with her foster sibling changed once she was permanently staying with them. In her

discussion, it seemed like the relationship changed slightly from a friend to just a sister.

“At first it was really good and she was really kind, but when it was permanent, she wasn’t as kind cause she knew she was staying. But I guess it’s just like a younger sister.” (Participant 1, age 13)

When the resident children had problems with their foster siblings, the majority of the participants felt they had their own strategies in dealing with the problems, or felt confident in expressing their concerns with their parents. The participants also felt comfortable in reinforcing the rules with their foster siblings, for example, sending them to their rooms the same way their parents would.

“They usually just sit in their rooms and think about what happened. We can do that as well and tell them to go to their rooms”. (Participant 2, age 15)

“One child was always screaming and we spoke to mum and he had to get moved along to one of her closest friends. It’s all about communication.” (Participant 4, age 16)

“Well usually if she asks me to do something and I don’t do it, she just gets angry and goes off to her room”. (Participant 1, age 13)

Rules for foster siblings compared to resident children

Participants were also asked about the rules within their home and whether there was a difference between the rules for them compared to their foster siblings. The participants felt that the rules within the home were the same.

“Same rules. We all help out. The older two [foster siblings] need to put their washing away as well and we do it too. I just help out more than them cause I’m a lot older. They like helping too”. (Participant 2, age 15)

“Sometimes they come in and will not be allowed to sleep in the same room. All the rules are the same for me and my two brothers and for the foster siblings. All the rules that apply in the house... rules have always been the same when foster siblings come into our home”. (Participant 4, age 16)

Pretty much the same I think. Wasn’t too different. The older one would get away with a bit more. He wasn’t use to rules and boundaries and stuff.” (Participant 3, age 16)

The above findings from the current study, in terms of the rules for foster children and resident children being the same, are incongruent with the literature. The literature suggests that resident children feel they have stricter house rules, compared to their foster siblings, and also that their foster siblings seem to get away with more (Hojer, 2007; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2004, 2006; Spears & Cross, 2003). However, the findings from the current study suggested that the house rules were the same for both resident and foster children.

Furthermore, the above findings are congruent with that of Spears and Cross (2003) and Hojer and Nordensfors (2006) who reported that the resident children liked helping the foster children. Additionally, the majority of the participants in this study felt that fostering increased their caring and empathetic skills, they gained knowledge about life, and learned about others misfortunes (Part, 1993; Watson & Johnes, 2001; Younes & Harp, 2007). Furthermore, resident children in the current study found they had an increased sense of responsibility, caring and compassion, and role modelling due to fostering (Swan, 2002).

The positives of fostering from the perspective of the resident child

For this topic, participants were asked “What do you think are the positives of being part of a foster family?” All of the participants were able to mention several positive aspects of fostering. Overall, it appeared that the positive aspects of fostering outweighed the challenges (described in the next sub-section) of fostering for resident children.

A common topic discussed in terms of the positives of fostering, involved resident children feeling proud that they were able to help others.

“It teaches you to be accepting of people” (Participant 5, age 18)

“Helping someone who [participant hesitates] so she could have a better life” (Participant 1, age 13)

Participants also mentioned other positives about fostering such as seeing the progress in foster children, getting to know them and also understanding that people come from different families and upbringings.

“Getting to know the children and what they like. Seeing where they come from, from different families. They all have different behaviours and that. Not everyone has got it easy.” (Participant 2, age 15)

“Learning ways to give back in a positive way. Seeing kids progress as they are developing. Seeing mum’s input and when they become more secure. When they realise it’s a safe place and I’m worth something.” (Participant 4, age 16)

Participant 3 discussed how he enjoys having a lot of people in the house.

“The house isn’t boring. Other people in the house. Even if they are annoying, it’s not dead”. (Participant 3, age 16)

One participant in particular, reported the benefits of having a foster sibling similar to those associated with having a new playmate and friend.

“It’s actually quite nice cause it’s quite lonely, cause after she just came for the weekend and then she left, after I was like she’s not here and it’s quite lonely. She kind of brightens it up. Having someone to play with”. (Participant 1, age 13)

These findings on the benefits of fostering from the perspective of resident children are congruent with the research. Resident children from this study reported they had learnt about different cultures and races and to be open to people from different backgrounds. Additionally, they felt they had an increase in their knowledge about others' misfortunes and consequences of different upbringings, similar to Younes & Harp (2007). Some of the participants also discussed the companionship experienced from have foster siblings and this being a positive of their parents fostering. Additionally, Participant 1 in particular reported the benefits associated with having a new friend with whom to share activities and gaining a new playmate, which is a similar finding to what Thompson and McPherson (2011) found. Lastly, three of the participants in this current study reported that fostering was slightly easier because they were older than their foster siblings and lived a fairly separate life from their foster siblings. The findings seem to support the recommendation that only younger foster siblings be placed in families with resident children. Similarly, Sutton and Stack (2013) found that the children in their study wanted foster children to be the same age, or younger. They perceived older foster children as a threat to their 'helping role' within the family, and wanted to see themselves as active 'helpers'.

The challenges of fostering from the perspective of the resident child

This topic was mentioned and discussed by participants in response to the researcher asking, "If any, what are the negatives of fostering". Below are the responses received from participants in relation to this topic.

Foster children stealing

The most common challenge of fostering discussed by participants was foster siblings stealing. Two out of the five participants reported that foster children had stolen from them or their parents.

“A lot of stealing. A lot of the kids tend to steal... The older one use to take my clothes and this and that. Couple of others had stolen little things from mum. I can't stand stealing!” (Participant 3, age 16)

“When she was stealing, it wasn't very nice. And she gets quite angry. She use to steal my lollies, but has stopped now. Mostly lollies and money. Like she would go into my money-box and take my money and spend it on lollies. Then I learnt to hide it. I wouldn't hide money now though, I am trusting her more now”. (Participant 1, age 13)

On the other hand, Participant 1 spoke about a temporary foster sibling she had who would not steal from her, but would steal from her mum.

Interestingly, this participant got along with this foster sibling and thought she was really nice. It was only after the foster sibling left that the participant found out about the stealing. It was interesting hearing how Participant 1's perspective of her foster sibling changed after hearing about her behaviours.

“I thought she was really nice, but after I came home from holiday, she was gone. Every now and then I would hear mum talking about her and she was actually doing a lot of bad stuff I didn't know she was doing. Like taking mum's medicine and stuff like that. She was trying to run

away a lot. She would say she was going out with friends and wouldn't come home until like 12am". (Participant 1, age 13)

From the current study, the most evident challenge of fostering appears to be when foster siblings steal. Similarly to Watson and Jones (2002) study, having things broken and stealing were reported as one of the worst things of fostering. Spears and Cross (2003) also noted that resident children felt that stealing in particular was a real betrayal of trust, and much resented, as also seen in the findings for this current study.

Anger and violence

Additionally, another challenge noted by participants was their foster siblings becoming angry or sometimes violent. The resident children did, however, appear resilient in the face of this behaviour, as seen in Participant 2's comment below.

"One was quite violent and liked the drugs. He would break things. A lot of them were quite disrespectful to mum and dad and I really didn't like that...The older one was always looking for a fight. He would try to be intimidating, but we never got into a fight". (Participant 3, age 16)

"Sometimes we don't get along or if she asked me to do something I have to come with her to go somewhere and she will ask nicely. If I say no she gets quite angry. She gets angry when I don't do what she says".

(Participant 1, age 13)

“When they get angry, they do hit and that. You just get over it. Just tell them off and tell them it’s not okay”. (Participant 2, age 15)

Furthermore, Participant 1 spoke about a temporary foster sibling she had who would cause problems between her and her permanent foster sibling.

“She [the temporary foster sibling] kind of like tried to make us fight each other. Like she would say to [permanent foster sibling] “She’s such a wimp” and things like that so, we would fight”. (Participant 1, age 13)

Additionally, Participant 1 also experienced her permanent foster sibling behaving in an angry way and throwing things.

“She would lie and she would get quite angry and hurt you sometimes. Punch you or kick you when she got really angry. She also use to throw things”. (Participant 1, age 13)

These findings are congruent with the research by both Spears and Cross (2003) and Thompson and McPherson (2011) where resident children in their studies reported incidents of violence between themselves and their foster sibling. In the study by Spears and Cross (2003), resident children talked about their foster siblings getting angry and the real or potential violence them and their parents were exposed to. Although the resident children in this current study reported anger and occasional violence, it appeared that the resident children’s parents were aware of the behaviours and in the case of one participant, they sought to not be bothered by it.

Room arrangements

None of the participants, besides Participant 1, spoke about having to share their rooms or give up their rooms for foster siblings. Four of the participants always had their own rooms and their foster siblings had their own rooms. Participant 1 talked about the challenges of having to move out of her room for a longer period of time than she anticipated, when a temporary foster sibling entered the participants home.

“I moved out of my room, so she could have my room, and shared with mum.... I thought it would just be for a week, her having my room, and then I realised it was gonna be longer. But I got a bunk bed so mum would sleep underneath, so kind of made up for it”. (Participant 1, age 13)

In terms of the findings presented above, only one participant reported having to give up her bedroom for a foster sibling, but despite the imposition, the participant found something positive in sharing with her mum. In many studies, loss of privacy and sharing bedrooms have been rated one of the worse aspects of fostering (Part, 1993; Younes & Harp, 2007); however, this was only an issue for one of the participant in this study.

Age of foster siblings

Unfortunately, not much discussion took place specifically on the ages of foster siblings compared to resident children or its affects. Participant 3, however, did see the challenges of one of his foster sibling being older than him.

“The older one, he was a pain... He was real egocentric and cocky. He was the same age and would try to make everything a competition”.

(Participant 3, age 13)

It is very clear in the research that the age difference between resident children and foster siblings often has an impact on their relationship (Hojer, Sebba & Luke, 2013). For Participant 2, having a foster sibling the same age as himself resulted in frequent incidents of competition and rivalry, as seen above. Pugh (1996) expressed that older resident children are generally less threatened by foster children and more likely to see themselves as contributing to the caring process. Whereas, if foster children were older than resident children, the resident children might feel more threatened and their ‘helping role’ could be compromised. As mentioned by Younes and Harp (2007), resident children report that their position in the family changed when they had an older foster sibling. For example, they (resident children) were no longer the oldest in the family, which they found problematic.

“I didn’t want to have someone older than me cause then I wouldn’t feel as if I was looking after them cause they’re older than me. And then they might end up helping me with something, and I didn’t want that”. (Sutton & Stack, 2013, p. 8).

Placements ending

When participants’ foster siblings had to leave the foster home, it was difficult for the resident children. All five of the participants, however, had different perspectives about how they felt when the placements ended.

Some of the participants spoke about how their reaction to the foster sibling leaving depending on what their relationship was like and also on where they were going next.

“Depends who it is. Sometimes you get a bit over them after a while [participant hesitates] relieved at first and then you kind of miss them”.
(Participant 3, age 16)

“Sometimes it’s really sad. Depends where they are going. If they are finally going back to their parents and everything is good, you feel happy and good about it. If they are being moved around, it’s sad”. *(Participant 4, age 16)*

“Sad. Like Christmas’s and birthday’s... we had them for quite a while... we were good friends and was hard when he had to leave”. *(Participant 2, age 15)*

“Both the siblings at 16 decided to leave with a hiss and a bang”.
(Participant 5, age 18)

Overall, the majority of the participants in the current study reported feeling sad when their foster siblings had to leave. However, if resident children were aware of the circumstances and if they perceived their foster sibling leaving as a positive due to them returning home for example, resident children found it easier. Fox (2001) reported that resident children are often not consulted or

informed about the placements ending, which lead to unresolved feelings, however in this current study it appeared that participants were informed about why their foster siblings were leaving and were able to cope.

Parental attention

A few of the participants discussed the amount of attention they get from their parents compared to their foster siblings. Participant 4 spoke about how her parents gave the resident children and the foster children the same amount of attention. Participant 3 mentioned that his mum was getting better at maintaining a balance now, however it was difficult in the initial stages of fostering.

“More attention on foster kids... Sometimes not the best balance”.

(Participant 3, age 16)

On the other hand, as seen in the comment below, Participant 1 discussed feeling that her mum treated her and her foster sibling the same. However, Participant 1 spoke about being okay if her mum did give more attention to her foster sibling.

“Mum would treat me and her equally. Cause if she [foster sibling] thought I was getting more, she [foster sibling] would get quite angry and upset, and go to her room. And mum would go and see what was wrong and she would scream at mum saying, “I’m not part of this family”, trying to get attention. I’m all good if [my mum] gives her more, cause she needs it”.

(Participant 1, age 13)

The need to share parents' time with foster siblings was reported by some of the participants in this study. Some of the participants in this study felt that there needed to be a better balance of attention, however some of the participants felt that they received an equal amount of attention. Similar to the research, resident children may feel foster children get a lot more attention than them due to their foster siblings previous life experiences (Poland & Grove, 1993; Spears & Cross, 2003).

Resident children's gain from fostering

In this topic, participants were asked; "What, if anything, have you gained from being part of a foster family?" This question is different to above, where participants were asked generally about the positives of fostering. This question aimed to identify what resident children felt they had personally gained through fostering. The responses are discussed below.

The majority of the participants reported developing life skills through fostering and also gaining an understanding about fostering and different upbringings.

"[I've learnt] keeping calm when she does something to you, so you don't get angry back cause it just makes it worse. So just going along with it. Relationship skills... how to get along with her and saying things that would upset her. Helped me get along with my friends." (Participant 1, age 13)

“Learn to deal with things when they come at you. Learnt to be a role model and learnt to deal with your own stuff and grow up a bit”.

(Participant 2, age 15)

“Learning responsibility, learnt about and see ways of taking care of people, seeing how happy it makes mum taking care of others”.

(Participant 4, age 16)

“The experience of seeing what happens to kids when the parents don’t do the correct job”. (Participant 5, age 18)

Overall, the participant’s were able to identify some gains from fostering. These findings are congruent with the research by Spears and Cross (2003), where resident children reported they found it easier to make friends and had gained confidence due to the fostering experience. Overall, the general theme from research suggests that resident children, due to fostering, learn certain life skills such as being compassionate of others situations and being understanding of their foster siblings circumstances (Spears & Cross, 2003; Thompson & McPherson, 2011). In the current study, it seems that the resident children were proud of the skills they have learnt.

Advice to parents and other resident children

Participant were asked; “What advice do you have for children whose parents foster other children?” Some of the participants also gave advice to parents not only to the resident children. Below is a table describing all five participants

advice, which they would give to either parents who foster, or to resident children whose parents are fostering.

Table 4: Participants responses on what advice they would give others

Advice for other resident children	Advice for parents who foster
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Don’t give up cause eventually they will get better” • “Don’t get angry at the foster kids for something that they have done” • “Be patient and calm with them” • “Be observant. Learn from watching the way your parents interact with foster kids” • “If your parents are doing a good job, you should be able to go on as normal” • “Have time for yourself” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To keep a balance between how much time you spend with your own family and the foster kids” • “Keeping the kids at a younger age than their own children is really important, so your own kids have more control” • “Treating your kids the same way and treating your foster kids the same way” • “Parents setting boundaries, being strong and certain, but loving everyone the same”

Within the current study, the idea to ask the participants about what advice they would give others, came from the study by Spears and Cross (2003) and Hojer and Nordensfors (2006), who did something similar. However, the current study asked participants about what advice they would give parents, as well as other resident children. There are some similarities in responses between the current studies findings and those of Spears and Cross (2003) and Hojer and Nordenfors (2006) such as having one’s own space, parents treating their own children and foster children the same and being patient. It is believed that this

advice gives uniqueness to the study and allowed each individual participant to give the advice they felt would be valuable.

Resident children fostering when they are adults

For this topic, participants were asked; “When you are older, would you ever consider fostering children? Why? Why not?” Below is a discussion of the participant’s responses.

Three out of the five participants did not feel that they would want to foster when they are older.

“I don’t know. I don’t know if I would. I don’t think it’s my thing. But I don’t mind helping at home”. (Participant 2, age 15)

“Probably not. I wouldn’t be able to be there enough for them”. (Participant 5, age 18)

“Maybe not foster. But some kind of area I am good at and will be helping people. If I foster and I’m not good with kids, that would be silly. I’m not much of a maternal person”. (Participant 4, age 16).

Participants 1 and 3, on the other hand, felt that they would want to foster children when they are older, although, it would depend on the circumstances.

For Participant 3, he felt it depended on his own children. Interestingly, both

these participants' answers on this question appeared to have been influenced through their experiences of having foster siblings and how they would do it differently.

“Kind of depends, like if I have a house and what job I am doing and things like that. If I was to foster it would probably be quite young, so I could teach them instead of when they are older when it's bad things are already what they are doing and it's quite hard”. (Participant 1, age 13)

“Yeah I probably will. But would probably do it when I have no kids, like when they have already left home. Cause you have to spend a lot of time and energy on the foster kids... helping them out and what not”. (Participant 3, age 16)

Impact of permanence on foster sibling relationship

Lastly, Participants 1 and 4 spoke about what it was like having a permanent foster sibling. Participant 1 discussed how it was to have her foster sibling at the same school and what she told her friends about her foster sibling.

“Told them the truth and they thought it was really cool and they wanted a foster family”. (Participant 1, age 13)

As seen below, on continuing this conversation, Participant 1 spoke about how she would call her foster sibling her sister.

“I always said she was my sister. She got quite upset if I told anyone that she was a foster. She would kind of want to tell them herself. She would get teased about it cause she was a foster, but not many people know now, they kind of forgot”. (Participant 1, age 13)

Additionally, a similar finding is seen in Participant 4’s quote below. She had a foster sibling come into her home as a baby for temporary care. Her family was unsure about how long this foster sibling would stay, but she ended up staying for a long time and became part of the family. The family made a decision together to keep this foster sibling on a permanent basis. Throughout the interview, this participant constantly referred to this foster sibling as her sister.

“We had her for a long time and she became part of the family... she’s my sister”. (Participant 4, age 16).

Interestingly, out of the five participants, one participant struggled to find any negatives about fostering. She felt that the positives of fostering outweighed the negatives.

“The positives outweigh the negatives. If I had to complain... because they are younger, they do annoying things... being more responsible and a role model”. (Participant 4, age 16)

CHAPTER FIVE- DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the lived experience of the resident children growing up with a foster sibling and to see whether these findings are congruent with current research. Descriptive qualitative analysis was done on the five interviews, which highlighted experiences related to nine topics (covered in the previous chapter). This chapter will further discuss of the main findings within the study, alongside supporting literature within the field.

Following this, implications for families, implications for professionals, limitations of the study, and future research aspects are considered.

Overall there are key aspects of the experiences of resident children that require more discussion. In this section, some of the key findings from this study are discussed further such as age. The implications for both parents and professionals will then be discussed.

Age is a factor that needs to be considered when resident children and foster siblings come together. For example, Spears and Cross (2003) found that generally those children, who were older than their foster sibling, thought fostering was easier because they lived a fairly separate life from their foster siblings. Sutton and Stack (2013) also found that resident children in their study wanted foster children to be the same age or younger. They perceived older foster children to be a threat and wanted to see themselves as 'active helpers' to younger children. This finding is present in the current study where the majority of the participants had positive interactions with their younger foster siblings. On the other hand, when foster siblings were older than resident children, competition and conflict were more common.

The age gap between resident children and foster siblings also appears to be a key factor in positive placement outcomes, in particular having the foster siblings be younger than resident children, so resident children can take on a caregiving and role model role. With a larger gap, the resident child might play more of a caregiving role, whereas if they are close in age, they might be more like playmates, however there may also be more competition. Resident children seem to enjoy the caregiving role (and being older than foster children) because they are able to help the foster children (who are younger). The resident children also enjoy their role as 'active helpers' with this being their identity in the family (Sebba et al., 2013)

In the next section the implications for parents and for practitioners will be discussed in terms of the findings of this current study. This study sought to investigate the experiences of resident children growing up with a foster sibling, however this study also aimed to produce findings that could inform both parents who foster and also practitioners in the field.

Psychological Practice

The aim of this research project was to undertake a piece of research directly relevant to psychological practice, and be able to inform psychological practice and practitioners. As outlined in the Introduction (Chapter 1) there is a lack of understanding of the experiences of growing up with a foster sibling. In New Zealand, 10,000 children and young people are unable to live with their biological parents because they have been subjected to, or are at risk of, abuse or neglect. These children will spend days, weeks, months, or sometimes years, living with a family (Fostering Kids, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial that

practitioners in the field are aware of the experiences of *resident children* who grow up with a foster sibling. Practitioners may be aware of the circumstances and upbringing the foster children have experienced, however it is key that practitioners are aware of what it is like for *resident children*, and in particular how practitioners can inform their practice to support resident children more effectively. Therefore this chapter aims to provide recommendations for parents who foster and also for practitioners.

Implications for parents who foster

The findings of the current study offer parents who foster some valuable insights into the experiences of their biological children. For example, the findings suggest that parents should take into account the following recommendations. It is recommended that parents provide early and in-depth discussion with their biological children prior to deciding to foster. Such a conversation needs to be open to questions about the foster placement. It is clear within this study, that the preparation for fostering for the resident children is key, and resident children often report feeling unprepared for fostering. Much more preparation is needed from the parents to ensure resident children *are* prepared, but that they also *feel* prepared for fostering *before* the fostering placement starts. Poland and Groze (1993) found that 90 percent of parents reported that they had discussed fostering with their own children, however only 64% of resident children reported that fostering was discussed with them. This finding suggests that parents may mistake a discussion with their resident children about fostering, for their agreement to start fostering. It is crucial that parents discuss all the processes around fostering with their resident children, including how their lives will be affected, what role they might play, how to deal

with possible challenging behavior, etc. Again, resident children need to be not only informed, but also need to *feel* prepared before parents decide to foster and have the foster sibling enter their home.

Furthermore, alongside the findings of the current study, it is suggested that if parents have an open line of communication with their resident children prior to the foster placement, and also throughout the foster children's stay, the overall relationship with not only parents but also the foster siblings may be more positive and resident children may feel more supported and therefore able to have a more positive relationship with their foster siblings. Additionally, in the current study, participants occasionally took a caregiver role with their foster siblings. It is important that parents are aware of this role that their biological children sometimes play with their foster siblings, and how taking on this role may affect the relationship between the resident children and the foster children.

From this study, it is also suggested that parent's need to be aware of the amount of time and attention they give both their biological children and foster children. Poland and Groze (1993) found that sharing of parental time significantly influenced whether or not resident children liked their foster siblings, and whether they accepted the changes in family structure due to fostering. In the current study, the teens did not feel that their parents neglected them. However, the literature shows that some parents are placing more attention on the foster children, at the cost of attention to the resident children, which can cause the relationship between the resident children and foster children to become impaired (Hojer, 2007; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2004, 2006;

Spears & Cross, 2003). Even though the children in the present study did not feel neglected, parents should be aware of this issue, in order to remain vigilant.

Additionally, it is important that parents are aware that their decision to foster has a profound impact on resident children who are the ones who are often directly affected by the foster children's presence. Some aspects of the placement may not be able to be avoided (such as foster children needing more attention to settling into the home, sharing of spaces, etc.), however parents need to be reminded that what they perceive to be a minor issue, might be perceived as major issues by their own children, which can affect the relationship between the resident children and the foster children.

For example, if resident children need to share or move rooms to allow the foster children to have their own rooms, the resident child may perceive this as a major issue and invasion of privacy and space. Furthermore, behavioural difficulties such as stealing, aggressive behaviour and lying, on the part of the foster children, can be extremely troublesome and disruptive for resident children, which can also affect the relationship between the resident children and foster children. Sometimes resident children can find it very difficult to understand and cope with the difficult behavior that foster children occasionally display (Fox, 2001; Swan, 2002; Hojer & Nordenfors, 2004, 2006). Hojer and Nordenfors (2004, 2006) found that events that resident children perceived as really problematic, such as foster children lying and stealing, were often overlooked by adults and somehow defined as less important than if their children had displayed these behaviours (Sebba et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important that parents not only discuss these issues with their resident children

as they occur, by also for parents to have open communication with their resident children throughout the placement. If parents are able to, it is advised that parents discuss these potential issues (such as behavioural difficulties, stealing, lying, aggressive behavior, etc.) with their biological children *before* the family starts fostering and *before* the foster child enters their home. This way, resident children may be able to cope better with these behaviours and additionally know that they are able to discuss these issues with the parents and work through them together.

Implications and recommendations for social workers and practitioners in the field

Alongside the findings of the current study, it is suggested that social workers also need to be aware of how unprepared resident children can feel during the initial stages of fostering. Social workers are one of the first contacts that parents make when they decide to foster. It is suggested that social workers in this field ensure that they themselves—along with the parents—remain aware of the impact of fostering on resident children, and that resident children also need to be prepared for fostering as much as their parents need preparation.

Just as parents need to work with their biological children in advance of a decision to foster, social workers also need to ensure that resident children *feel* prepared for fostering and also agree to engage in the fostering process. Furthermore, from the current study's findings, it is suggested that agencies and practitioners in this field, look into support groups and preparation groups for resident children whose parents foster. Through such initiatives, resident children could be provided with a support network, beyond their parents, where

they can be informed about all the processes of fostering and how their lives will be affected. Additionally, resident children may benefit profoundly from sharing their experiences with other children whose parents foster (or are thinking of fostering), and provide support to each other. It is crucial that resident children are not kept “in the dark” when it comes to fostering, and also that resident children are considered in terms of issues that may appear minor to professionals, however, are major issues for children themselves.

Recommendations for resident children

Alongside the findings of the current study, it feels appropriate to provide recommendations for resident children themselves whose parents foster. Dealing with difficult foster siblings can be very challenging for resident children. It is suggested that resident children who are having difficulties with their foster siblings behaviours, attempt to inform their parents of the behaviours and how it is affecting them. Resident children often feel that their problems are not worthy of discussion, either because of the circumstances that brought the foster siblings there, or because their parents may already be stressed due to fostering, and the biological children do not want to add to the burden. Hojer and Nordenfors (2004; 2006) found that resident children were perceived by their parents as needing to be more understanding, and were expected to put their foster siblings needs before their own. Swam (2002) also found that resident children felt that their feelings and needs were secondary to their foster siblings. Resident children also felt a need to be perfect, with no possibility for them to fail, or have problems of their own (Swan, 2002). Due to this finding, resident children are encouraged to speak to their parents or social worker

about the issues they are experiencing, to ensure they are receiving support and are able to have a better relationship with their foster sibling.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the number of participants, with only five adolescents being interviewed. While generally considered a small number of participants, on the other hand, five is a suitable number for a small dissertation project of this scope. Nonetheless, in light of the small participant pool, findings of this study may not be generalisable to the broader population of “resident children” growing up with a foster sibling (Kragēloh, 2008).

Another potential limitation was the length of the interviews. It may be that due to the age of participants, interviews averaged only about 30-40 minutes in length, instead of the 60 minutes that was anticipated. Research shows that children can be very succinct in research and therefore, the interviews took much less time. Children and adolescents do not often elaborate as much on some open-ended question, as adults tend to (Waterman, Blades & Spencer, 2001). Gaining information from some participants was difficult for the researcher because due to the age of the participants, they found it hard to elaborate on some topics and were also distracted by technology or other people in the house.

The researcher felt that due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the participant’s ages, they seemed to be less likely to elaborate, unless prompted. The researcher also experienced challenges throughout the interviews, due to not wanting to be too invasive and feeling unsure if topics that were not raised (e.g. the challenges of fostering) should have been further pursued. However

this topic (the challenges of fostering) was raised in the interviews. The data may also have been affected due to one participant having her mum present during the interview, and also some of the participants having their parents nearby. The ability for the parents to hear what the participant was saying may have reduced their degree of honesty and made the participants less forthcoming.

Finally, the data may also have been affected due to one of the interviews taking place via email. Given how different the method of data collection was, this participant was unable to be prompted by the researcher to gain more information. Nonetheless, he was keen to participate, and we did not want to exclude the teen merely on the basis of not being able to conduct a face-to-face interview.

Future Research

This study emphasises the limited research in New Zealand on resident children and how growing up with a foster siblings effects the resident children who are born to the foster parents. Overall, the findings suggest both positive experiences and challenges for resident children growing up with a foster sibling. Nonetheless, there are still gaps in our knowledge on resident children's experiences suggesting that more research may be needed.

Future research could look at interviewing one sibling from each dyad (i.e. a pair of siblings where one is a foster sibling and the other born to the parents) on their experiences growing up in the same home. This could show the interconnected nature of both the resident child and the foster child's experiences, and additional questions could be asked to one sibling about how

s/he thinks the other would respond the question. Such a study, in fact, was conducted by Scherman (1999) who focused on the relationship between birth and adoptive siblings raised together in the same home. However, that study also left gaps in our present knowledge, due to the focus being on the angle of adoption (compared to foster children), with less focused on the experiences of resident children, and it was with adults looking back retrospectively.

The literature suggests that there may be differences in experiences depending on the age gap between resident children and their foster siblings, which may affect the sibling relationship. There is a need for more research on the affects of the age difference between resident and foster siblings, whether the overall relationship (between a resident child and a foster sibling) is affected if the foster sibling is older than the resident child, or vice versa.

Additionally, future research could take a longitudinal look at the sibling relationship in this setting (mixed sibling home), to see if there are changes over time, as both children grow and mature, and as the foster sibling settles into the family unit more fully. Lastly, it could be investigated how the type of foster placement (respite, temporary or permanent) affects the sibling relationship in the home. Furthermore, it would be valuable for future research to replicate this study, but with a larger sample size, to ensure the findings are generalizable to the population in New Zealand and therefore be able to provide further recommendations for professionals in the field.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that resident children have positive relationships with their foster siblings, however, they still reported some challenges to having a foster sibling. Their experiences add depth to the understandings derived from the current and past literature from the different “sibling” fields and from foster care in particular. Through the interview topics, it is evident that the majority of resident children, growing up with foster siblings, had different views on their experiences, including both positives and challenges.

It is important for practitioners, social workers and other people involved with the fostering process, to understand the experiences of resident children, and for these professions to consider the impact of fostering on the biological children, rather than only focusing on the foster child, as is the dominant practice in the literature. This study is valuable as it adds to the New Zealand body of literature on resident children’s experience and hopes to encourage more research in this limited area.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



12 May 2014

Rhoda Scherman
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Rhoda

Re Ethics Application: **14/78 The experience of children who grow up with a foster sibling.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECSecretariat).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until .

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTECSecretariat:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on ;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTECSecretariat is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence.

AUTECSecretariat approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTECSecretariat grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Cc: Luzaan Nel luzaan-nel@hotmail.com

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 March 2013

Project Title

The experiences of children who grow up with a foster sibling

An Invitation

Hello, my name is Luzaan Nel. I would like to invite you to participate in my research. I will be looking at the experiences of growing up with a foster sibling. My interest is in the adolescent biological children, between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, who were already in the home at the time that their parents decided to foster another child. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time during the process. Any participation is much appreciated, as the completion of my research will result in gaining my qualification of a Masters of Health Science (Psychology).

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary purpose of this study is to gain some in depth knowledge into the lived experiences of siblings who are already within the home, before their parent's decide to foster. In order to disseminate the knowledge gained from this study, I anticipate publishing the findings in a scholarly journal, other academic publications or presentations. As stated above, this research is also being undertaken as part of my qualification of a Masters of Health Science (Psychology).

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

Recruitment has been done via foster care agencies. It is most likely that someone you know, through a foster care agency, has told you about the study, and invited you to contact me.

What will happen in this research?

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to allow you to share your story, as you talk about your experience of growing up with a foster sibling and what it was like to have an foster sibling. Interviews will be digitally audio-recorded. This will take place at the place of your convenience and comfort, be it at your house or in the secure, confidential rooms at Auckland University of Technology.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There are no physical discomforts associated with this study. However, there is always a possibility of emotional discomfort when talking about personal experiences. You will be reminded that you do not have to answer any questions that will cause you discomfort.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

To alleviate any discomforts you can bring a support person with you to the interview if you wish, which can be requested on the consent form you will receive. This person will need to sign a waiver of confidentiality. This means they are not allowed to share what is talked about with anyone. You can pause or stop the interview and the study at any time; you will be reminded of this at the interview. In addition, you do not have to answer any questions that would cause you extreme discomfort. If you become too distressed, the interviewer will stop the interview, give you some time to recover, and ask you if you want to stop or continue.

I have included below, contact details of organisations that provide counselling if you have the desire to speak with a counsellor or health professional, below are contacts available to you:

Youthline

Helpline: 0800 37 66 33

Free Text: 234

Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

Website: www.youthline.co.nz

Foster Agency. Key Assets:

09 263 5151
Email: info@keyassets.co.nz

Foster Agency, Immerse:

info@immerse.org.nz

What are the benefits?

You may benefit by telling us your story, being heard, and in the process assist our understanding of siblings who grow up with a foster sibling. Since there is very little literature on the experiences of biological children, the benefits to participants may be in identifying certain factors experienced by resident children. In doing so, the study may help to inform other practitioners, adoption professionals, or others involved in foster care related research, as well as families who are considering or who currently foster. As this research is a requirement to complete the Masters of Health Science (Psychology), the benefit of this research to Luzaan is to successfully gain this qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire research process. This will be stated at the beginning of the interview, so you are fully aware of this and are comfortable. Given the nature of data gathering, self-selected pseudonyms will be used on all transcriptions and interpretive texts. This means that your name will not be identified. No identifying information will be reported in the write up of the study. Although full anonymity cannot be offered because the researcher will be interviewing you, confidentiality will be assured as only the researcher and those directly involved in this study will have access to data. All data and transcripts will be kept in a secure, locked cabinet in the primary supervisor's office.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There are no financial costs to participate in the study. Your only cost will be time. It is estimated that the interviews may be approximately 60 minutes long.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have two weeks to respond after receiving the information sheet. You can contact me by email (whj3717@aut.ac.nz) or my supervisor (contact details below) to find out further information.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

To participate, you need only to fill in and sign the attached consent form. This is the agreement of participation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes. At your request I will send you a summary of the study's findings.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Rhoda Scherman, rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz, 921-9999 ext 7228.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Luzaan Nel, whj3717@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Rhoda Scherman

Department of Psychology

Rhoda.scherman@aut.ac.nz

921-9999 ext. 7228

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form



Project title: **The experience of children who grow up with a foster sibling**

Project Supervisor: **Dr. Rhoda Scherman**

Researcher: **Luzaan Nel**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 31 May 2014
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be electronically recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.

I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): **Yes** **No**

I would like to bring a support person with me to the interview (please tick one) **Yes** **No**

() If you tick YES, your support person will need to fill in a confidentiality agreement that will be provided.*

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's email address:

Participant's cell phone number (or other preferred phone) :.....

Date:

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D: Recruitment Poster



Appendix E: Parent Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Consent Form



Project title: **The experience of children who grow up with a foster sibling**

Project Supervisor: **Rhoda Scherman**

Researcher: **Luzaan Nel**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 31 May 2014
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that I may withdraw my child/children and/or myself or any information that we have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- If my child/children and/or I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- I agree to my child/children taking part in this research.
- I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one):
Yes No

Child's name :

.....

...

Parent/Guardian's signature:

.....

Parent/Guardian's name:

.....

Parent/Guardian's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 April 2014 AUTEK Reference number 14/78

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.



Assent Form

Project title: ***The experience of children who grow up with a foster sibling***

Project Supervisor: ***Rhoda Scherman***

Researcher: ***Luzaan Nel***

- I have read and understood the sheet telling me what will happen in this study and why it is important.
- I have been able to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that while the information is being collected, I can stop being part of this study whenever I want and that it is perfectly ok for me to do this.
- If I stop being part of the study, I understand that all information about me, including the recordings or any part of them that include me, will be destroyed.
- I agree to take part in this research.

Participant's signature:

.....

Participant's name:

.....

Participant Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 28 April 2014AUTEK Reference number 14/78

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix G: Safety Protocol

Researcher Safety Protocol

This document includes suitable arrangements for the researchers safety, which will be put in place if the researcher is required to meet participants within their home or within another public location.

If the researcher is required to conduct a one on one interview within a participant's home the following safety protocols will be followed:

- The supervisor will have a schedule of the researcher's visits for a particular morning or afternoon.
- All interviews will be conducted within daylight hours.
- Suitable contact networks between the researcher and supervisor will be established prior to any interviews.
- The researcher will report to the supervisor when entering and leaving a participant's home.
- When visiting participants in their homes, the researcher will always act in a culturally and socially sensitive way, remembering that s/he is a guest and that it is the participants who are doing the researcher the favour by agreeing to participate and share their homes.
- It is also prudent to outline what the supervisor will do should confirmation not eventuate from the researcher.
 - If the supervisor does not hear from the researcher, when the interview is scheduled to be completed, the supervisor will try and call the researcher. If the researcher does not answer her phone within 15 minutes the supervisor will contact the Police and express her concern.