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Challenges in realising the goals of permanency planning for children placed in unrelated foster care: perspectives of social workers and foster parents

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ABSTRACT:

When a child is placed in unrelated foster care by an order of the Children's Court, the social worker should promote the goals of permanency planning, first towards family reunification or by connecting children to other safe and nurturing family relationships intended to last a lifetime. Based on qualitative research conducted through the use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews, this study investigated the perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parents regarding impediments which are being experienced regarding permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care. Purposive sampling was used to select social work participants in the Department of Social Development in the Johannesburg Metro Region managing cases of unrelated foster care. The social work participants in turn invited unrelated foster parents to participate in the study. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze data gathered. It was found that social workers experience a number of pressing challenges when trying to realize the goal of permanency planning, including high caseloads, lack of co-operation from foster parents and their recommendations regarding the validity of the Court order not being approved by the Court. Findings also revealed that unrelated foster parents had a different perspective on what the term 'permanency' means or entails. They were of the opinion that the goal of permanency had already been achieved. The main conclusion drawn from the study was that social workers are experiencing challenges in trying to realize the goals of permanency planning, which in turn leads to children in unrelated foster care remaining in this form of alternative care for longer periods.

KEYWORDS:

Permanency planning; alternative care placements; unrelated foster care; Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005).