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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.

A report on a study project presented to

The Department of Social Work
School of Human and Community Development
Faculty of Humanities
University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work

by

Tinyiko Constance Mantsho
May, 2015

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this submission is my own original work and that all the fieldwork was undertaken by me. Any part of this study that does not reflect my own ideas has been fully acknowledged in the form of citations. No part of this thesis has been submitted in the past, or is being submitted, or is to be submitted for a degree at any other university.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the university library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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Signed this 6th day of May, 2015.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter provides an overview of the statement of the problem relating to the placement of children in unrelated foster care and the realization of the goals of permanency planning. The chapter also provides the rationale for the researcher undertaking the study. Furthermore, the chapter describes the purpose of the study, provides definitions of the key concepts, summarises the limitations of the study and the organization of the report is outlined.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Fernandez and Barth (2010) are of the view that the provision of out-of-home or alternative care, which includes unrelated foster care (where a child in need of care of adults that they are not related to), should be for the well-being of the children and therefore the goals of foster care should be that of safety, stability and permanency and they should be given priority. This is because "erratic, insecure home environments and a lack of continuity and consistency in caregiving are also associated with poor developmental outcomes" for children in foster care (Harden, 2004, p. 32).

Given the rise in the number of orphans in South Africa, the system of related foster care (where children concerned are placed in the foster care of relatives) was established to ensure the care and protection of the children in need. According to Mokomane and Rochat (2010, p. 56) "fostering has for generations been part of the African system of child care and many people don't see a problem with that". The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) also made provision for traditional and indigenous systems of foster care to be practiced provided that they protected the needs and rights of children.

Children found to be in need of care and protection, such as abused and deliberately neglected are frequently placed in unrelated foster care when time-limited services provided to the biological parents for reunification fail (D'Andrade, Frame & Berrick, 2005).

According to Testa (2004) permanency and support services are vital to ensure long term success of unrelated foster placements. In light of the overwhelming number of children being placed in related foster care, personal work experience suggests that social workers managing cases of unrelated foster care seem to be falling short of rendering intensive family reunification services. Apart from undermining the opportunity of the children concerned being reunited with members of the family on a permanent basis; children are remaining in unrelated foster care without permanency planning being prioritised.

The implementation of the foster care system in South Africa and the different countries around the world has been met with challenges of foster care children re-entering the system and also the children ending up existing the system without permanency planning being made. These challenges experienced within the system of foster care have led to different studies being undertaken to investigate the challenges experienced by social workers. In South Africa however, there has been interest in conducting studies and investigating the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its contribution to children entering the foster care system. The conclusions of most of the studies conducted recommend the placement of children with relatives and in alternative care such as children's homes. Such studies includes those conducted by Kruger (2006), Foster (2004) and Foster and Williamson (2000).

1.3. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY:

The Department of Social Development has been at the forefront of providing foster care services within South Africa and has employed social workers to supervise foster care placements and render family reunification services. The Department provides these services through the implementation of the Children's Act (No 28 of 2005, as amended).

As an employee of the Department of Social Development and statistics produced by social workers within the Department of Social Development at the end of every month,

the researcher noted that many children found in need of care and protection and placed in unrelated foster care are never placed in permanent care. Different permanent care options for children in unrelated foster care include adoption, permanent foster care and reunification with biological caregivers. These permanent care options are not being realised. For example, unrelated foster parents are not willing to adopt foster children in their care even though they have taken responsibility for the care of the children concerned for a long period.

Family reunification services and foster care supervision services are not rendered once the child placed in foster care is discharged from the legalities of the Children's Act at the age of 18 years. Instead they are usually left to create their own safe and secure environment because they do not receive any emotional or financial support from the unrelated foster parent(s) or the State.

According to Myers (2011) foster children who are discharged from the child care system do not fare well as they have an increased risk of being homeless, become incarcerated and experience mental illnesses. Taking into consideration the challenges foster children face when being discharged from the child care system, it shows that the goals of foster care as described by Jenson and Fraser (2011) of protecting the child from harm, family preservation and promoting child development through ensuring permanency would not have been realised. Carr (2006) is therefore of the view that social workers should ensure that they undertake their responsibility of protecting children at risk through placing them in foster care and providing support services to the families of these children. This might reduce the risk of the children being left on their own after being discharged from the system.

Most children spend long periods in unrelated foster care without the goals of permanency planning being realised. According to James (2004, p. 601) these children can experience "a decreased likelihood of reunification, greater severity of behaviour problems and more time in residential care". This lack of permanency planning could lead to "the development of avoidant and disorganised attachments as well as less emotionally engaging behaviours" for the unrelated foster children (Howe, 2009). The author therefore suggests that there is a need for safe and secure placements in caregiving environments through permanency planning.

For this reason something needs to be done to ensure the protection of foster care children, especially when considering permanency placements. Allen and Bissell (2004) state that the protection of foster care children is done firstly by the courts which play a key and often overlooked role in achieving safety and permanency for children in foster care. The authors also state that policy makers also contribute to the protection of foster care children through developing policies which consider what is in the best interest of the child.

Schofield and Ward (2011) are of the view that long-term foster care has much been a neglected area of social work practice and research. Harden (2004) therefore recommends that policy makers and social workers should ensure that children in foster care have safe and stable family environments through ensuring that the child receives a permanent home. Permanency planning is viewed as playing a vital role in ensuring that the goals of foster care are met.

The need for permanency for children in foster care is also seen through looking at the foster care developments in recent years. Mokomane and Rochat (2010, p. 9) report that there has been a "rapid uptake of the foster care grant and the growing popularity of fostering as an alternative care arrangement over all other arrangements; the continued low rates of uptake among more permanent care arrangements such as adoption and more recently an emerging trend towards decreases in such forms of permanent care". These developments place more emphasis on the need for the realization of the goals of permanency planning.

Fernandez and Barth (2010) highlight that the increasing challenges posed by foster care have led to the development of research studies to build a knowledge base of how child welfare interventions work to benefit children. According to Swann and Sylvester (2006, p. 309) the "growth in aggregate foster care caseloads has resulted in larger workloads for individual caseworkers, which is problematic because the mistreatment of foster children is often blamed on the ever-growing number of cases the average caseworker must manage".

The high numbers of foster care children within the foster care system places enormous work pressure on social workers because foster care placements need to be supervised and monitored by the social workers on a regular basis. These children need to be provided with a safe and secure environment in order for them to develop well as they have been identified as children in need of care and protection according to the Children's Act. It is assumed that the foster parents do not provide them with support because they do not feel the need to be responsible for them as they are not their own children.

The researcher is of the opinion that exploring the perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parents regarding reasons why the goals of permanency planning are not proving to be viable might assist the Department of Social Development in finding solutions to the challenges that are experienced during the process of making permanency plans for children in unrelated foster care. The findings might also assist the unrelated foster parents to exercise more rights and responsibilities towards the children in their foster care.

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The primary aim of the study was to explore social workers' and unrelated foster parents' perceptions of the challenges experienced when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care.

The first objective of the study was to investigate the nature of social work services being rendered in respect of unrelated cases and the reasons why this is so. The second objective was to explore social workers' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not being reached. The third objective was to investigate foster parents' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not being reached. The fourth objective was to explore what unrelated foster parents think are their rights and responsibilities with regard to permanency planning. The fifth and last objective was to establish what measures can be put in place to improve the permanency placements for children in unrelated foster care based on the perspectives of the social workers and unrelated foster parents.

1.4. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study adopted and followed a qualitative approach as a type of research design. Purposive sampling was used to select participants to take part in the study. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule as a research tool and interviewing was used as a method of data collection. Thematic content analysis was used in the study to analyse the data coming forth from the interviews.

1.5. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS:

Permanency placements

Permanency placements in this report refer to the legal placement of a foster child in the permanent care of a foster parent though the Children's Court. The type of permanency placement can be that of adoption, permanent foster care and family reunification.

Unrelated Foster Care

The term is used to describe a placement of a foster child through the Children's Court with a family where there are no blood ties.

Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005, as amended)

It is the legislative policy which provides guidance on the care and protection of children in South Africa.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT:

This report is divided into five chapters. Chapter One has provided an introduction to the study. Chapter Two covers relevant literature related to foster care. Matters focused on this chapter include pertinent definitions; practice and policies regarding foster care within South Africa as well as the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter Three provides a description of the research methodology, discussion of the research design, sampling procedures, research instrumentation and tool, methods of data collection and

analysis as well as the ethical considerations observed in the study. Chapter Four presents an analysis and discussion of the research findings. The last chapter, Chapter Five, provides the main findings as well as the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

2.1. INTRODUCTION:

Foster care is a child care placement system practiced all over the world. The system exists with the purpose of providing such children with safe and secure environments with which they are nurtured to develop well and become responsible adults. The foster care system has become a policy structure in South Africa, which has been used for the care and protection of vulnerable children within the communities in the country. Permanency placements for children in the foster care system is one of the goals of the Children's Act (No 28 of 2005), which provides guidelines as to the application of the process of foster care placements.

The literature review that follows focuses on a number of relevant issues namely: current trends in practice of foster care, both internationally and in the South African context. Theoretical frameworks forming the basis for the development of the foster care system in different countries is also discussed.

Definitions of the foster care system; debates regarding whether foster care is indeed in children's best interests and the roles which policy development and foster parents play in foster care system are also highlighted. The chapter further discusses the different types of foster care placements and permanency planning options for children in need of care and protection. In addition, the chapter explores the different contributing factors, which are stated to play a role in children entering the system of foster care. Lastly, the chapter outlines a theoretical framework underpinning the study.

2.2. DEFINING FOSTER CARE:

An understanding of the foster care systems requires one to first look at how the system has been defined. The definition of foster care has been changing throughout time as new information into the care and protection of vulnerable children is always added and different conditions in society, which are constantly changing.

According to Vogel (1999 cited in Strijker, Knorth, & Knot-Dickscheit, 2008, p. 106) a *placement* is defined as "when a child stays in the same care facility for at least 30 days, regardless of any brief stays in the home situation during placement".

The *foster care system* itself has various definitions, which includes information related to the provision of care to children. The first definition is provided by Swann and Sylvester (2006, p. 311) who define foster care as "a social service program that provides temporary, substitute, out-of-home care to children whose families cannot provide them with a safe and nurturing environment".

Strijker, et al (2008, p. 109) provides another definition where foster care is defined as the process of "temporarily rearing a child in a nuclear family, which does not include the biological or adoptive parents of the child". The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) defines foster care as a twenty-four hour substitute care for children outside their own homes. These two definitions provide a context of time within the foster care system.

The New South Wales (NSW) Department of Community Services also provides a definition which outlines the age to which foster care caters for. It defines foster care as "care for children and young people aged 0-17 years, which is provided on a short or long term basis by authorized carers in their own homes, or in a home which is owned or rented by an agency who are reimbursed for expenses" (The NSW Department of Community Services, 2007, p. 2).

The system of foster care in South Africa is practiced according to the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005, as amended). In terms of Section 156 (1) (e) (i) of the said Act if a Children's Court finds that a child is in need of care and protection, the Court may make

any order that is in the best interests of the child concerned, which may be or includes placement in foster care with a suitable foster parent.

A foster parent is defined as a temporary caregiver of children in the system of foster care (Dougherty, 2001). In the legal context the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) defines a foster parent as a person who has foster care of a child by order of the Children's Court, and includes an active member of an organisation operating a cluster foster care scheme and who has been assigned responsibility for the foster care of a child.
Foster care in South Africa focuses on "the placement of a child who needs to be removed from the parental home, into the custody of a suitable family or person willing to be a foster parent" and "the process is done by the order of the Children's Court" (Johnson, 2005, p. 7).

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997, p. 66) views foster care as being child-centred and "a cost-effective, family-centred and community-based way to care for children whose parents are unable to do so adequately".

Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004, p. 76) state that "the primary goal of foster care is to ensure the safety and well-being of vulnerable children and the foster care system is expected to meet these goals while simultaneously facing a decrease in the number of unrelated foster homes". Strijker, et al. (2008) also state that foster care has a purpose of ensuring the provision of a safe and stable environment for children in need of care and protection to grow up at.

South Africa and other countries in the world have considered the definitions of foster care and its goals as well as purpose in the development of a foster care system, which would ensure the care and protection of vulnerable children.

2.3. TYPES OF FORMAL FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS:

According to Fernandez and Barth (2010) the different kinds of foster care placements being practiced around the world are kinship care, treatment foster care and shared

family care. Jager (2011) highlights that other foster care placements include the short and long term care, permanent care and respite care.

In terms of the Children's Act there are two main types of formal foster care in South Africa, namely foster care where the child concerned is placed in a family environment where the adults are related or unrelated to him/her and cluster foster care. Cluster foster care means having groups of children living with a "trained" foster parent who is employed by a non-profit organization in line with the cluster foster care programme of the Department of Social Development.

The type of foster care placement in which the child is placed depends on the circumstances of that specific child. According to the South African National Council of Child and Family Welfare (1987, cited in de Jager, 2011) differentiating factors are firstly whether a child is placed in foster care through a Court Order; secondly it is whether the child is in related or unrelated foster care; thirdly it is whether the child is physically and psychologically well or it is a child who has special needs and lastly whether it is a short or long term placement. Even though there are differentiating factors on the types of placements for foster children, there is also the consideration of whether the type of placement will be in the best interests of the child according to the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005, as amended) as it is the guiding policy for foster care placements.

Richter, Manegold and Pather (2004 cited in de Jager, 2011, p. 3) are of the view that "foster and adoption care is to be encouraged because family-based care in a child's home community generally offers the best opportunities for positive psychosocial development".

2.4. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CHILDREN BEING PLACED IN FOSTER CARE:

Children enter the system of foster care due to different circumstances and they are unique to each and every child around the world. However, there are circumstances which are commonly known to impact on children entering the system of foster care. Barbell and Freundlich (2001) are contributing authors to the circumstances leading to children being placed in foster care. They state that the system of foster care caters for

children who experienced abuse or neglect. These forms of abuse and neglect can present themselves in different forms and they play a key role into the functioning and well-being of families and children.

Similarly UNICEF South Africa (2012) reports that children are placed in foster care due to abuse, neglect and abandonment. Other than abuse, neglect and abandonment, Barbell and Freundlich (2001) provide other contributing factors leading to the placement of children in foster care.

Poverty is the first contributing factor where the authors argue that across the world it is a phenomenon which affects the functioning and well-being of families and therefore affecting children.

The second contributing factor which the authors outline is that of homelessness where the migration of families to urban areas with children has led them to live in the streets with their parents and therefore leaving them vulnerable and in need of protection.

The third contributing factor is adolescent parenthood whereby many teenagers find themselves as parents and end up unable to care and provide for their children.

The fourth contributing factor discussed by Barbell and Freundlich (2001) is that of parental substance abuse which leads to the neglect and abuse of children due to the abuse of alcohol or drugs.

The fifth contributing factor is HIV/AIDS whereby parents or guardians die due to AIDS related diseases leaving the children behind without care and protection. The provided contributing factors are also contributing to a greater extent to the numbers of children placed in foster care in that they are experienced by communities as different levels in the South Africa.

Since the system of foster care has been introduced around the world, the population of foster care children entering the system has doubled (Fisher, Burrastor & Pears, 2005). This is very applicable to the South African context because as Kruger (2006) points out, South Africa is recorded to have the highest prevalence of HIV and AIDs in sub-Saharan

Africa and as a result the number of orphaned children in South Africa has increased over the years. The Children's Act defines an orphan as a child who has no surviving parents caring for him or her. An orphan is also defined by UNAIDS, UNICEF and USAID (2002 cited in Beard, 2005, p. 106) as "a child under the age of 18 who has lost one or both parents to death".

UNICEF South Africa (2012) reports that there is an estimated 3.7 million orphans in the country and half of them have lost their parents to AIDS related diseases. From the 3.7 million orphans, around 520 000 are within the foster care programme. According to Cluver and Gardner (2006, p. 1) "orphaned children in South Africa have traditionally been cared for within the extended family, often by elderly grandparents and there are concerns that this support system is weakening as orphan numbers and HIV prevalence increase". Even though this is the case, the extended family has been the largest support system which has been caring for orphaned children in South Africa to date. Thus the majority of orphaned children in South Africa are placed in related/kinship foster care and it is usually the grandmother who takes on the responsibility of primary caregiver or foster parent.

Swann and Sylvester (2001) are of the view that parental incarceration is also a contributing factor to children entering the system of foster care in that their parents would be serving a sentence leaving them behind without caregivers. Therefore these children will be viewed to be in need of care and protection and will be placed in foster care.

Barbell and Freundlich (2001) add that the political and economic realities affecting the welfare of families and children also play a role in the extent and the occurrence of child abuse and neglect leading to the foster care placements of children. Bass, Shields and Behrman (2004, p. 6) in support of the contributing factors outlined, argue that "parents battling poverty, substance addiction, or mental illness woefully neglect their children's needs".

Section 150 (1) of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 as amended provides the following categories for a child to be placed in foster care "a child is in need of care and protection if, the child

(a) has been abandoned or orphaned and is without any visible means of support;
(b) displays behaviour which cannot be controlled by the parent or care-giver;
(c) lives or works on the streets or begs for a living;
(d) is addicted to a dependence-producing substance and is without any support to obtain treatment for such dependency;
(e) has been exploited or lives in circumstances that expose the child to exploitation;
(f) lives in or is exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm that child's physical, mental or social well-being;
(g) may be at risk if returned to the custody of the parent, guardian or care-giver of the child as there is reason to believe that he or she will live in or be exposed to circumstances which may seriously harm the physical, mental or social well-being of the child;
(h) is in a state of physical or mental neglect; or
(i) is being maltreated, abused, deliberately neglected or degraded by a parent, a care-giver, a person who has parental responsibilities and rights or a family member of the child or by a person under whose control the child is".

Section 150 (2) states that a child found in the following circumstances may be a child in need of care and protection and must be referred for investigation by a designated social worker:
(a) a child who is a victim of child labour; and
(b) a child in a child-headed household. Even though child-headed households are a type of foster care placement, social workers still need to ensure that the placement is in the best interests of the child and that care and protection are provided to the child concerned.

2.5. FOSTER CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA:

Foster (2004) is of the view that South Africa has one of the most well-developed statutory intervention strategies for orphaned children compared to other African countries.

Foster care gives the child in need of care a measure of legal protection in the sense that they are the ward of the State. The child's progress and movement is tracked through the continuum of care and by means of the provisions of the Children's Act. Each child placed in foster care by means of the Children's court order has a unique court number of their own. Furthermore, regular supervision and motivation of the child's progress is mandatory and explicit in the Children's Act.

The foster care system prioritizes ensuring their care and their protection and one of the ways of achieving this includes the Foster Care Grant (FCG). The FCG is provided to foster parents caring for foster care children after the placement of the child with a Court order from the Children's Court. The FCG assists foster care families in providing for the needs of the children under their care and relieving them from experiencing great poverty (Foster, 2004). In 2014 the FCG was R830 per month per foster child (South African Social Security Services, 2014).

The history of the placement of children in need of care and protection in foster care has shown that foster care placements were sought as a temporary solution for the children in need. This has also been observed in Maluccio (2003) who reports that foster care is seen as a time-limited form of care where preparations are made for the child to be placed permanently and the type of permanent placement can be that of the child's home environment. If this cannot be realised then the foster child will be eligible for adoption or be placed with a relative who will be given custody on a permanent basis. The notion of time frame in the placement of children in foster care was also observed on the definitions of the foster care system.

Barbell and Freundlich (2001) state that children who experience neglect or abuse are placed in foster care with unrelated foster parents, relatives or families who want to adopt them or in group homes. Foster (2004) however argues that the placement of foster care children with extended family as a type of foster care placement sometimes comes with exploitation especially for girls within the African communities when it comes to doing households chores and marriage. The author is of the view that there is exploitation in that foster care children are married off at an early age for monetary purposes.

The author further argues that the placements of foster care children in child-headed households can be problematic in their development. This is the case in that there is the lack of adult supervision for the orphaned children (Foster, 2004). Foster (2004) is of the opinion that there is a need to consider what is in the best interests of the child in that the problems provided above can contribute further to orphans being vulnerable. Furthermore, there will be a development of the foster care crisis. Whittaker and Maluccio (2002) state that a foster care crisis does not only refer to the institution of foster care but to the reality that too many children are staying in foster care for too long a time. Therefore there is a need for permanent placements of children within the foster care system. Even though the need for permanency is important to be considered, there also needs to be consideration of what is in the best interests of the child.

2.6. ROLE OF POLICY IN FOSTER CARE:

Foster care policies play a key role in the placement of children by "instituting key changes such as defining when it is reasonable to pursue family reunification, expediting timelines for making permanency decisions, recognizing kinship care as a permanency option, and providing incentives to the State for increasing the number of adoptions" (Allen & Bissell, 2004, p. 49).

The notion of making payments or giving incentives to people or homes caring for foster children has also been supported by international organizations. The International Convention on the Rights of the Child of (1995, Article 20.3, cited in Strijker, et al, 2008, p. 108) states that "when a child is placed out of home, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing". In South Africa the incentive is provided in the form of the Foster Care Grant.

Strijker, et al. (2008, p. 108-109) provide an overview of foster care practice in the Netherlands where "foster care as a short-term module is aimed at treating a child or parent for the purpose of returning the child to his or her birth family and long-term foster care can be provided until the age of 18, centering on the continuity and the child's right to a stable rearing situation".

The approach of foster care practiced in the Netherlands is similar to that practiced in South Africa in that a child in foster care is placed until a period when they turn eighteen years of age. Section 186 (2) and 159 (1) of the Children's Act of 2005 are also in support of this approach in that they state that the foster care placement should take into consideration what is in the best interests of the child and providing stability for the child on a continuous basis.

Beard (2005, p. 106) provides three programmes used in Malawi to care for orphans and these are "community-based orphan care (CBOC), institutional and residential care, and self-care". In addition, de Jager (2011) provides two informal approaches of caring for orphans which are Child-headed households and Community-based care. These programmes are similar in that they keep children within the community and they are cared for in their families and familiar environments.

Beard (2005) in support of the CBOC programme further states that is has strength of covering the needs of a large number of orphans and vulnerable children at a low cost and in a manner which is culturally appropriate while keeping children within a family environment. In addition, the programme encourages "strong community participation to identify the needs of the orphans and to develop long-term solutions to their problems" (Beard, 2005, p. 107).

The provision of social security is not the only form of interventions undertaken as a policy in South Africa to ensure the protection of the needs of vulnerable children and orphans. The adoption of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the country have been other strategies undertaken to ensure the protection and care of children so that they can develop well to become responsible adults. The adoption of the Children's Act is important in that it has an aim of giving effect to certain rights of children as contained in the Constitution and to set out principles relating to the care and protection of children. The MDG's are also important in that the first goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger and the sixth goal is to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Riddell, 2010, p. 42). These two goals are important in that poverty and HIV/AIDS are deemed to contribute to children being placed in foster care in South Africa as argued by authors such as Foster (2004).

2.7. ROLE OF THE FOSTER PARENTS:

Before adults can take on the role of foster parent they are assessed by accredited social workers to determine if they are fit-and-proper to take on these rights and responsibilities.

Foster parents play an important role when it comes to the development of children in foster care. Barbell and Freundlich (2001) state that foster parents were not appreciated for the work which they do with foster children. It was only in the 1980s where foster parents began to be viewed as more integral to the planning for the children whom they were fostering.

Dougherty (2001) states that foster parents play the roles of nurturing the children they foster, supporting the children's healthy development, providing guidance and discipline, advocating on behalf of the children with schools, mentoring birthparents, supporting the relationship between children and birthparents, and recruiting, training, and mentoring new foster parents.

Foster parents were also expected to "provide for the day-to-day needs of children, respond to their emotional and behavioural needs appropriately, arrange and transport children to medical appointments, mental health counselling sessions and court hearings, advocate on behalf of foster children with schools, and arrange visits with birth parents and case-workers" (Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004, p. 83). These roles played by the foster parents also depended on their reasons of them deciding upon being foster parents and looking after children who were not their own. These reasons are also important to be considered because they may affect the realization of permanency planning for the children the foster parents are looking after.

As far as unrelated foster care is concerned Chipungu and Bent-Goodley (2004, p. 83) point out that "most individuals become foster parents out of a sense of social obligation and a desire to enhance the life chances of a child and other reasons cited are the desire to fulfil a societal need, religious reasons, the need for supplemental income, foster care as a step towards adoption, increased family size, and substitution for a child lost through death". Other foster parents are motivated by having the best interests of the child at

heart and genuine love for children rather than the monetary allowance provided (Randle, 2013).

UNICEF South Africa (2012) has also taken a position that children should grow up in safe family environments and these environments can be provided by foster or adoptive parents. Therefore foster parents play a key role in the realization of permanency planning of children in foster care in that they provide safe family environments for the children.

2.8. PERMANENCY PLANNING:

Over the years, researchers made an observation that the decrease in the number of unrelated foster homes has led to permanency planning being prioritised in foster care placements. The emphasis on permanency has resulted in family foster care to be regarded as "a temporary service whose purpose was to reunite children with their families or to place them in alternative care on a permanent, or at least long-term, basis" (Whittaker & Maluccio, 2002, p. 118). Usher, Randolph and Gogan (1999) define permanency placements as adoption, guardianship and reunification of the child with the family of origin.

As stated above, adoption is one of the permanency placement options and the Children's Act provides the purposes of adoption. The purposes of adoption as a form of permanency placement are specified in terms of Section 229 of the said Act as:
(a) protect and nurture children by providing a safe, healthy environment with positive support;
(b) 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; and (c) respect the individual and family by demonstrating a respect for cultural, ethnic and community diversity.

Permanent placements are believed to be good for children (Barth, Lee, Wildfire & Guo, 2006) and for this reason Foster (2004, p. 82) emphasises that "enabling siblings to remain together in the care of family members they already know and are prepared to

accept as new, permanent caregivers is the best option and maintaining orphans in families should be our highest priority".

Family reunification has a purpose of ensuring family preservation and the children maintaining relationships with their families and communities. Whittaker and Malluccio (2004, p. 121) state that family preservation being important has led to a redefinition of family reunification to being regarded as "a dynamic process that seeks to meet the unique needs of children and their families in an individualized way and that underscores the value of maintaining and enhancing connectedness or re-connectedness between children in foster care and their families or members of their kinship system".

Barth (2006) argues that when family reunification for the purpose of family preservation is not done it leads the children to be uncertain about the permanency of their living arrangement or to have an experience of multiple placements whereby they tend to later portray more troubled behaviour. Permanency placement therefore has a goal of offering long-term stability and family membership throughout childhood for children in foster care (Schofield & Ward, 2011).

Strijker, et al, (2008, p. 121) are also of the view that "the desired outcome of long-term foster care is to achieve a permanent placement" and "social workers who are involved in the decision-making process when placing these children should be keenly aware of the increased risk of a breakdown in long-term foster care placements".

Schofield and Ward (2011) provide four different types of permanence in foster care and they reflect on the practice of foster care. The first type of permanence is objective permanence where the children's placement has an aim of lasting during childhood and also providing support in adulthood when needed. The second type is subjective permanence where the child's feelings of belonging with the foster family may be facilitated or treated by the involvement of the parents. The third type is enacted permanence which relates to all family members accepting that the child is now a foster family member. The fourth and last type is the uncontested permanence where the foster child does not feel a clash between the foster and birth family (Schofield & Ward, 2011). These types of permanence assist in the practice of foster care in terms of deciding which permanency options are in the best interests of the child.

The view of permanency as a desired outcome of foster care is also supported by the Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013, p. 5) where it is stated that "the preferred goal for children in care is permanency with caring parents". Allen and Bissell (2004, p. 56) argue that "because of the courts' key responsibilities in ensuring safety and permanency for children, policymakers have increasingly recognized the importance of increasing the capacity of child welfare courts to carry out already established legislative goals". This has made it easy for foster care practitioners' especially social workers to work with the Children's Courts and implement the Children's Act to ensure permanency in the placement of foster care children.

2.9. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

In order to gain a better understanding of the foster care system, the Systems approach has been used as a theoretical basis for the study. The reason for this is that it is a way of elaborating increasingly complex systems across a continuum that encompasses the person-in-environment (Anderson, Carter, & Lowe, 1999 cited in Friedman & Allen, 2010). The authors' further state that the Systems approach also enables us to understand the components and dynamics of client systems in order to interpret problems and develop balanced intervention strategies, with the goal of enhancing the "goodness of fit" between individuals and their environments.

According to Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005) the systems approach shifts the attention of understanding individuals from linear cause-and-effect relationship to the person-in-situation of his or her own life. Salas, Roe-Sepowitz and LeCroy (2012, p. 340) are also of the view that the systems approach is also based on the notion that "the best way to understand living phenomenon is to view them in the context, where they could be examined as part of a larger system". Friedman and Allen (2010) further state that the systems approach is the science of wholeness and focuses on the whole rather than focusing on the individual.

A system is defined as "an organized whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over some

period of time" (Friedman & Allen, 2010, p.7). It is important to note that the systems theory focuses on the interconnectedness of the individual with other systems and this is the reason why it is important to also take into consideration the person-in-environment. The systems theory looks at the person-in-environment and Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005) argue that this is important because the environment is part of the people and the people are part of the environment.

Friedman and Allen (2010, p. 14) mention that there are three important relational aspects of person-in-environment interactions and they are "the attributes of human relatedness, competence, self-direction, and self-esteem, which are all outcomes of the person-in-environment gestalt; the interdependence of such attributes, each deriving from and contributing to the development of the others; and the apparent absence of cultural bias in such attributes". These aspects are important because they will assist in the study to understand the perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parent concerning permanency placements for children in unrelated foster care.

Salas, et al, (2012) also mention that in using the systems theory to understand the individual, one need to understand that the systems theory emphasizes a holistic and interdependent view of the individual and their functioning. This will be important to be applied in the study in that a child placed in foster care is connected to other systems such as the family, extended family and the entire community. The systems theory will also be important for the study in understanding the challenges social workers are experiencing because it will consider the systems which they are interacting with when the child is placed in foster care.

According to Whiting and Lee (2003, p.28) "the environment in which foster children reside comprises many interacting systems, including the nuclear family, extended family, foster family, foster agency, and court, among others". The authors therefore recommend the use of the systems theory to understand the interactions of the persons within the multiple environments and in understanding foster care.

2.10. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:

From the discussion above, it can be noted that foster care is a system which involves different aspects but at the same time ensures the care and protection of vulnerable children. Various authors also provided their views concerning what foster care is and how best it can be practiced to ensure permanency planning for children in foster care. The literature reviewed also pointed out that permanent placements for children in foster care are to be prioritized in that they are viewed as good for the children and provide stability into the lives of the foster care children. It can also be noted from the above discussion that foster care placements need to consider at all times what is in the best interests of the child.

The chapter provided an overview of what foster care is and how it has been practiced over the years in the world, especially South Africa. The chapter also provided the roles which policy and foster parents play in ensuring the care and protection of children through the foster care system. In addition, the chapter also discussed the systems approach best suitable use to understand the perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parents regarding their challenges in the permanent placements of foster care children. The approach was regarded as suitable because it considered the person-in-environment situation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the methodology used in carrying out the actual study. It initially sets out the research questions, the primary and secondary objectives of the research study. Thereafter, the chapter describes the research design and the sampling procedures followed in the study. The details of the research instrumentation and the methods of data collection used in the study are then focused on. The chapter also provides a summary of the method used in analysing the data gathered, which is thematic content analysis, and also the validity and trustworthiness of the research. Lastly, the chapter provides an overview of the ethical considerations which were observed in carrying out the study.

3.2. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research study focused on two main research questions in order to gain an understanding of the challenges experienced by unrelated foster parents and social workers in realising the goals of permanency planning:

- What are social workers' perspectives regarding the challenges they face when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care?
- What are unrelated foster parents' perspectives regarding the challenges they face when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care?

3.3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

3.3.1. Primary aim

The primary aim of this study is to:

- Explore social workers' and unrelated foster parents' perceptions of the challenges experienced when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care.

3.3.2. Secondary objectives

- To investigate the nature of social work services being rendered in respect of the unrelated foster care cases and the reasons why this is so.
- To explore social workers' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not being reached.
- To investigate foster parents' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not being reached.
- To explore what unrelated foster parents think are their rights and responsibilities with regard to permanency planning.
- To establish what measures can be put in place to improve the permanency placements for children in unrelated foster care based on the perspectives of the social workers and unrelated foster parents.

3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN:

The study followed a qualitative approach as a form of research design in that the study aims at providing an understanding into the perceived challenges experienced in realising the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care. The approach was selected as a research design for the study in that it has a primary focus of providing an explorative and descriptive insight rather than an explanation of the reality of the participants and it is based on the participants' definition of their realities rather than something externally present (Marlow, 2005). Seabi (2013) is also of the view that the design presents facts in a narration and it assumes that there are multiple realities which are constructed by society.

The rationale for selecting this approach is that it brings to the study the researcher's construction of reality based on the interpretation of the research participants' contribution in the form of expressions of thoughts, feelings and stories. This approach was also selected because the study has an aim of the researcher gaining an understanding of the meanings the participants hold about the phenomenon of unrelated foster care and challenges related to it instead of the meanings which the researcher holds or that from the literature (Cresswell, 2007 cited in Delport & de Vos, 2011).

One of the strengths of the qualitative approach is that it provides depth in understanding the problem identified (Rubin & Babbie, 2005), and this is another rationale for selecting this approach for the study.

Qualitative research may be good for understanding in-depth information gathered from the participants, but it also has its limitations. Rubin and Babbie (2005) state that the limitations of qualitative research are best understood looking at the subjectivity and generalizability of the study in that the researcher may add their personal biases in the study. This also relates to the generalizability of the study in that it cannot be applied due to the personal nature of the data collected.

Even though this is the case, the approach is best suited for the study in that the researcher has the opportunity to have face-to-face interactions with the participants in the environments which they are found on a daily basis (Theron & Malindi, 2013).

3.5. SAMPLING PROCEDURES:

The sample for the study was selected from the population of social workers who are employed by the Department of Social Development and are rendering services to children in unrelated foster care. Sampling is a process of selecting participants to take part in the study and Marlow (2005) argues that it is important because one cannot include the whole population in the study. Morgan and Sklar (2013) also argue that what is important to note about a sample is that it is normally smaller than the total population and its purpose is to represent the population which it was drawn from.

The researcher used non-probability sampling to select participants for the study. Merriam (2009 cited in Morgan & Sklar, 2012) states that non-probability sampling is used in qualitative research in that the aim of the research is to create an in-depth description of the data than generalizing the findings.

The type of non-probability sampling used in the study is purposive sampling. The researcher deliberately selected participants based on that they would be able to provide the needed information (Royse, 2011). In purposive sampling, "the judgment of the individual researcher is obviously too prominent" (Strydom, 2011, p. 232).

The selection criteria for the social work participants was that they must be employed by the Department of Social Development and be responsible for rendering services to foster parents who have unrelated children in their foster care. The selection criterion for the other cohort of participants, namely the foster parents, was that they must be adults and legally fostering unrelated children. The foster parent participants were selected from the township areas of Johannesburg, which are serviced by the Department of Social Development. The researcher selected these participants taking into consideration their socio-economic background.

Even though the researcher had first obtained permission to conduct the study within the Department, permission was also obtained from different social work supervisors to recruit their staff members. The social workers were then approached to volunteer to participate in the study. After consent was obtained from the social workers, they were requested to invite the foster parents they were rendering supervision services to take part in the study. After foster parents expressed willingness to engage in the study their contact details were then given by the social workers concerned to the researcher to make the initial contact. For the purpose of obtaining an in-depth understanding of the study, five social work participants and five unrelated foster parents' participants were selected to take part in the study.

According to Marlow (2005) the number of participants in a qualitative study is often small in that the focus is on the depth of the information collected from the participants in order to understand the subjective experience of their realities. The researcher considered the view that the sample size is defined by the research question, the data

gathering and analysis process as well as the resources such as the time frame for the study (Merriam, 2009 cited in Morgan & Sklar, 2013). Monette, Sullivan and DeJong (2005) mention that the number of participants selected using the non-probability sampling contribute to the research having no claim of representativeness. The authors further state that this therefore affects the generalization of the findings beyond the sample selected to take part in the study.

3.6. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION AND TOOL:

The research tool which was used in the study for the collection of data is a semi-structured interview schedule. The schedule consisted of open-ended questions which were written down before interviewing the two cohorts of research participants.

There were two different sets of unstructured interview schedules; one for each group of participants as the information that needed to be obtained from them was different. (The schedules are both attached in Appendix A).

The semi-structured interview schedule was used is the research for the purpose that it assisted the researcher to gain "a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perspectives or accounts of a particular topic" (Greeff, 2002, p. 302). The preparation of the questions by the researcher assisted in the exploration of the topic for the study with the respondents and therefore adding more depth to the study (Monette, et al., 2005).

In the preparation of the semi-structured interview schedule, the researcher considered the three kinds of questions which build and make up the interview schedule. According to Rubin and Babbie (1995 cited in Greeff, 2011) they are the main questions, probe questions and the follow-up questions. All three types of questions are open-ended questions.

Open-ended questions prepared by the researcher allowed for the respondents to express their own perspective during the interview. Even though this is the case, the strategies used in the interviews are different and also have different wording and sequence into which the questions are asked (Rubin & Babbie, 2005). Monette, et al. (2005) argue that they are therefore suitable for the use in qualitative research because they do not place

restrictions in the answers given by the respondents and therefore allowing for exploration of the research topic.

The researcher going to the field and conducting research is considered to be an instrument for research according to Cresswell (2009 cited in Theron & Malindi, 2013). The schedule used in the study enabled the researcher to gather the needed data; however the schedule is also dependent on the interviewing skills of the researcher. Seabi (2013, p. 89) states that in using the semi-structured interview schedule, "the researcher needs to guard against being side-tracked by aspects which are not related to the study".

Rubin and Babbie (2005) therefore suggest that the researcher ensures that the participants are familiar with the schedule and the purpose of the interview before the interview. The researcher was able to also provide the participants who were literate with the schedule for them to familiarise themselves before the interviews and this assisted in the study in that the interviews were not side-tracked.

3.7. PRE-TESTING OF THE RESEARCH TOOL:

The pre-testing of the research tools in the study was conducted with one social worker rendering services to a child in unrelated foster care placement and one foster parent providing care and protection for a child not related to her and being supervised by social worker in the Department of Social Development. The responses of the two participants were not included in the actual study but they were used to reframe and restructure some of the interview questions. The researcher conducted the pre-test for the research tool to determine whether the research tool used in the study was effective in presenting the questions intended to be answered.

From the feedback provided by the participants, the researcher was able to note that some of the questions which needed to be clarified during the interview. An example of one question was that of the services rendered to the family by the social worker in ensuring permanent placements were realised. The researcher identified that the foster parent participant was anxious about sharing her challenges regarding the foster care placement. The researcher was able to take this information into consideration when

probing this aspect during the actual interviews conducted with actual research participants. Berg (1995, p.42) provides the importance of pre-testing the research instrument as "to identify poorly worded questions, questions with offensive or emotion-laden wording; questions revealing researcher's own biases; personal values or blind-spots; to assess how effective the tool will work in the real study and whether the type of information being sought will actually be obtained".

3.8. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION:

The method of data collection used in the study is face-to-face interviews with the social workers and foster parents participants. Interviewing is regarded as a method of data collection in that the process relies heavily on the skills of the interviewer to ask good questions and to keep the interview going in order to obtain the needed information (Monette, et al., 2005). Interviewing is also described as a predominant method of data collection in qualitative research and the researcher decided upon using face-to-face interviews for data collection in that the study followed a qualitative approach as a research design.

The researcher met with the social work participants at their offices after communicating with them and making appointments before the dates of the interviews. The social work participants were interviewed in the times suitable to them. Only one social work participant was interviewed in the English language and the other social work participants preferred to be interviewed in Sepedi, which is their home language. The advantage of using these two languages was that the researcher was fluent in both of them and was therefore able to ask the questions and interpret the results.

The foster parents' participants were met in their homes by the researcher after being introduced by their social worker and appointments were made concerning the times of the interviews. Only one interview with a foster parent was conducted in her car and this was due to the fact that there were people renovating her house and there were distractions within the house. The interview was therefore conducted in her car because it was quiet and there was no disturbance. The other foster parents' participants were interviewed in the sitting rooms of their houses and it was only the researcher and the

participant present during the interviews. All the foster parent participants were interviewed in Sepedi.

Even though face-to- face interviews enabled the researcher to collect the needed data for the study, as Rubin and Babbie (2005) state that it is time consuming. Greef (2011) is also of the view that during face-to-face interviews, the researcher may have problems in establishing rapport with the participants and also coping with the unanticipated problems and rewards of conducting the interviews in the field. Even though this is the case, interviewing was used because it affords the interviewer with the opportunity to clarify questions if the participant did not understand and to make observations and probe the participants' responses (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

In order to ensure that the researcher collected the needed information for the study, the interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher. The recordings were made with the written consent obtained from the participants (See Appendix D). According to Greeff (2011) recording an interview allows for a fuller record of the information than taking notes and also assists the researcher to pay more attention to the way the interview is proceeding. Monette, et al. (2005) also state that recording an interview requires the interviewer to be experienced and who can accurately identify what to record without adding his or her own interpretation of the information. The researcher decided to record the interviews to ensure that data no was left not captured as it could affect the interpretation of the collected data.

3.9. DATA ANALYSIS:

The study employed the thematic content analysis as a method of analysing the interviews conducted by the researcher. The researcher analysed the data away from the field where it was collected and this was done following transcribing the recorded interviews.

The process followed in analysing the data was that of doing a horizontal and vertical analysis of the data. The researcher first summarised the responses of each participant based on what the researcher deemed relevant to answering the research questions.

Thereafter, the researcher put together the responses of the participants according to the themes emerging from their responses. The analysis of the data collected was done with the aim of attempting to answer the research questions of the study.

According to Leddy and Ormrod (2010, p.144) content analysis is "a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases". Greef (2011) also states that in qualitative data analysis the researcher attempts to capture the richness of the themes emerging from the interviews with the participants rather than reducing their responses to quantitative categories.

Thematic content analysis also involves "discovering themes and sub-themes, winnowing themes to a manageable few, building hierarchies of themes and code books and linking themes to into theoretical models" (Ryan & Bernard, 2003 cited in Di Fabio & Maree, 2013, p. 139).

3.10. VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS:

The researcher conducted the pre-testing of the research tool to ensure the validity of the instrument in collecting the data needed for the study. Validity of a research instrument is defined as "the correspondence between the measurement made and the actual quality or nature of the observed phenomenon (Glofshani, 2003 cited in Di Fabio & Maree, 2013, p. 139).

Pre-testing of the research tool also assisted the researcher in ensuring the trustworthiness of the data collected. Trustworthiness is defined as the manner in which the data is collected, sorted and classified especially using interviews and in analysing textual materials (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013).

Correspondence checking with the supervisor was undertaken as a measure of ensuring the validity and trustworthiness of the research. The researcher used the supervisor to check the credibility of the themes, which the researcher came out with in the initial analysis of data. Monette, et al., (2005) state that what is important to note about validity in content analysis is to check whether the themes identified and the sub-themes coded

are meaningful indicators of what was intended to be measured. Therefore, the use of the supervisor can be seen as a measure to ensure that the themes measure what was intended to be measured.

The researcher also used self-awareness and reflection as a measure to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings of the study. According to Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen and Kyngäs (2014) a researcher needs to ensure that the findings of the study reflects the views of the participants and not the perspectives and biases of the researcher. This was done through using quotations of many participants in the study rather than a few.

Cresswel (2013) states that the sampling method used in a qualitative study is important in the trustworthiness of a study. The researcher used purposive sampling in the study in that the participants selected had knowledge of the research topic in that they were employed at the Department of Social Development and working in the field of foster care. Trustworthiness of the research study was therefore undertaken through ensuring that the participants selected represented the field through which the study was undertaken.

3.11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This research study like with all other research had limitations. Firstly, the study used purposive sampling and this limits the study when it comes to the generalization of the findings. Only a small sample of participants from the Department of Social Development in the Johannesburg Metro Region was used. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalised into the other regions of the Department of Social Development. Even though this is the case, the researcher recruited participants from various sections available within the Department of Social Development.

The second limitation of the study was the face to face interviews whereby the personal reactions of the researcher which could have influenced the responses being given by the participants. The researcher however used language to minimise this limitation in that the interviews were conducted in the language of preference of the participants.

Another limitation of the study was that of the research following a qualitative approach to understanding the perspective of social workers and unrelated foster parents challenges in realising the goals of permanency planning. The subjectivity of the study became a limitation in that the researcher might have added personal biases based on personal experiences especially as an employee of the Department of Social Development. The researcher tried to minimize this shortcoming by conducting interviews in environments where the participants could feel relaxed.

3.12. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Confidentiality:

The participants in the study were informed that the information gathered through the interviews would only be used for the purpose of the study. The participants were also informed that the information they share will be kept confidential and only the researcher will have access to the information.

Confidentiality is stated by (Monette, et al., 2005) to entail that information gathered from the participants is not made public in a manner which it can be linked back to the participants. The researcher also used codes in the process of writing the research report to ensure that the participants were not identified according to their responses.

Voluntary participation:

All participants were asked to volunteer to take part in the study after being approached by the researcher and they were not coerced or given any incentives to take part in the study. The researcher also observed this ethical consideration by informing the participants that there were no consequences, which they were going to face for refusing to take part in the study. Strydom (2011) is also of the view that voluntary participation for a study is important because if the researcher does not get permission from the participants, the results will be contaminated in that the participants will start acting differently when they get to know what is being studied about them.

Informed consent:

Informed consent was observed in the study through ensuring that the participants were provided with the participant information sheet (Appendix B) in order for them to read understand what the study entailed. After ensuring that the participants were satisfied with the information provided, they were asked to give their written consent to take part in the study. Illiterate participants, especially the foster parent participants were read out the participant information sheet by the researcher and gave their consent after understanding. The researcher also ensured that the information was explained to them in their own languages to ensure they understood.

The participants were also asked to give their written consent for the interview to be audio-taped as they were all literate and were able to sign the consent forms. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participating in the study anytime they felt they could not continue and there were no penalties for doing so. Strydom (2011) states that in informed consent the researcher needs to ensure that complete explanations of the research need to be clearly given without putting any pressure or unnecessary interference. The author further states that this should be done in clear and intelligible language and this is the reason the researcher also ensured that the information was explained in the home languages of the participants.

Counselling/debriefing:

Counselling was arranged by the researcher at the Department of Social Development and the information was provided on the participant information sheet provided to the participants. The researcher arranged for counselling for the participants concerning when they felt they needed it from the fact that the study evoked emotional difficulties which they needed to deal with. McBurney (2001 cited in Strydom, 2011, p. 122) defines debriefing as “sessions during which subjects get the opportunity after the study to work through their experience and aftermath and where they can have their questions answered and misconceptions removed”. Even though these services were arranged by the researcher, no participant took the offer to use the service.

Publication of the findings and feedback given to participants:

The participants in the study were informed that the information gathered through the interviews will only be used for the purpose of the study and will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. This information was provided in the participant information sheet and also explained to the participants before commencing with the interviews.

Approval of undertaking the research:

Permission to conduct the research was obtained by the researcher at the Department of Social Development and it has been attached (See Appendix F). Permission was also obtained at the Human Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand and it has also been attached (See Appendix E).

3.12. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:

The chapter discussed the methodology undertaken in carrying out the study. The chapter began with an outline of the research questions together with the primary aim and the objectives of the study. The research design used in the study, which is the qualitative approach, was discussed in the chapter. The sampling process of selecting participants as well as the criteria for including the participants in the study was discussed and the type of a sampling method used to recruit participants.

Using semi-structured interviews as a research tool used in the study was also discussed. The method, which the researcher used in gathering information namely that of conducting the interviews in the environments of the participants and also the languages which they were comfortable with, was also discussed in the chapter.

In order to ensure the credibility, trustworthiness and validity of the study and that of the research tool, the researcher discussed the undertaking of pre-testing the research tool and also correspondence checking with the supervisor. Lastly, the ethical considerations observed in undertaking the study were also discussed in the chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter presents the findings of the study in relation to the primary aim and objectives of the study. Firstly, it provides the demographic profiles of the participants forming part of the study, which were social workers rendering services to families caring for unrelated foster care children as well as foster parents caring for unrelated foster children.

The presentation of the findings is done in a manner which shows the themes and the sub-themes emerging based on thematic analysis. Relevant quotations from the participants highlighting the themes and sub-themes are presented and important literature is incorporated into the discussion that follows. Findings have been grouped in line with the objectives of the study.

4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS:

Providing key demographic particulars on research participants is an essential component of research studies because it provides the reader with a clear overview of the characteristics of the research sample from which findings were constructed (Sifers, Puddy, Warren & Roberts, 2002).

Table 4.1. on the following page presents the demographic particulars of two cohorts of participants namely the social workers and foster parents.

Table 4.1. Demographic profiles of the participants.

No. of participants	**Gender**	**Age range**	**Years of experience** Social workers: managing foster care cases of unrelated children Foster parents: fostering unrelated children
Social workers: 5	Male: 0 Female: 5	25-29: 2 30-34: 2 35-39: 1	3-4 years: 3 5-6 years: 1 7 years and above: 1
Foster parents: 5	Male: 0 Female: 5	45-49: 2 50 and above: 3	3-4 years: 1 7 years and above: 4

It can be noted from the profile of the participants in Table 4.1 that all the participants who took part in the study were females. Although the selection criteria for the research sample were not based on gender, the fact that all participants are female came as no surprise. As Dominelli (1999 cited in Fook, 2002) points out that social work is a profession for women; it has been founded and dominated by women.

The profession is also dominated by female clients when it comes to child care issues. The researcher also experienced the caring nature of participants throughout the time of conducting the interviews and could easily relate to them.

According to Ainsworth and Maluccio (1998), prospective foster parents screened are usually women. Connoly and Morris (2012) also point out that the characteristics of foster caregivers have been primarily women; caring for children has been always associated with women.

Three foster parent participants in the study were married, one was widowed and one was divorced.

The social worker participants had not been managing cases of unrelated foster care families for more than five years. The cases had been transferred to them from previous

social workers who had left the Department. This was the case because the foster parent participants had all been caring for the unrelated children for more than the years in practice of the social workers rendering services to them. Thus different social workers had rendered services to them over the years.

4.3. THEMES AND SUB-THEMES:

Themes and sub-themes are arranged under the objectives of the study. They are then summarised in table format to be more reader-friendly and thereafter discussed in more detail.

Rich data regarding the relevant objectives of the study were accrued by exploring relevant issues from the perspectives of the social worker rendering the social work services and the foster parents caring for unrelated foster children.

4.3.1. Objective1: Investigate the nature of social work services being rendered in respect of unrelated foster care cases and the reasons why this is so.

The first objective of my research was to explore the nature of social work services being rendered in respect of the unrelated cases and finding out the reasons of rendering these services.

The themes and sub-themes emerging are summarised in Table 4.2. below on the following page.

Table 4.2. Nature of social work services rendered by social workers.

Themes	Sub-themes
• Assess the home environment	• Check if the foster parent is doing things right • Check if child is happy in the home
• Maintain regular contact	• We need to monitor the child's progress • We maintain contact in different ways • We cannot always meet the expected frequency of contacts
• A multi-disciplinary approach	• We try adopting a multi-disciplinary approach
• Build positive relationships	• Support the foster parent • They need to know you are their social worker
• Permanency planning to ensure sustainability	• Long-term placement considered if foster parents proving capable • We do what is in the best interests of the child • Create stability in the life of the child • There is a bond between the child and the foster parent

- **<u>Theme 1: Home visits to assess the home environment</u>**

Both the social workers and the foster parents highlighted that social workers conduct home visits to assess the home circumstances in which the foster child resides. The assessment of foster parents' home environment is reported to be done before placement of the child in their care via a court order and also during the time of the placement.

Selwyn, Quinton, Harris, Wijedasa, Nawaz and Wood (2010) are of the view that the placement of a child is not possible without good planning and assessment. Paszstor and Petra (2012) state that an assessment in the form of screening the prospective foster parent is needed to determine whether the foster parent is able to meet the standards. According to the National Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2014) assessment also involves action planning which in turn enhances the child and family's development over a period of time.

The standards in the assessment process prior to the placement of the child in foster care involve screening the prospective foster parent to determine whether the foster parent will be able to meet the developmental needs of a child, has suitable parenting capacity and whether family and environmental factors would be conducive to the healthy physical, psychological and social development of a child within a loving home environment (Rogowski, 2013). The home environment where the foster child is residing is described as part of the systems within the life of the child; it therefore needs to be assessed in order to find out whether the system will be able to provide for the needs of the child concerned.

According to Connolly and Morris (2012) foster caregivers need special skills to be able to meet the developmental needs of the children in their care, therefore there is a need to explore their home environment and to provide an on-going support to sustain the placement. The researcher has observed through her work experiences in the Department of social development that social workers do conduct assessments prior to the placement of the child to assess the home environment. Both cohorts of participants have also highlighted in their responses that this is taking place in practice.

- Subtheme 1: Check if foster parent is doing things right

Most of the foster parent participants highlighted that after the child has been placed in their foster care, social workers conduct home visits to 'check' if the child is being raised well. One foster parent (Participant No. 6) pointed out:

The social worker comes to visit to check if we are still alright and if we are getting the foster care grant and using it accordingly for the needs of the child.

According to Hall and Proudlock (2011) orphans are stated to be poorer than non-orphans even though they are receiving the foster care grant. The reason for this is because the children are residing with relatives or non-relatives who are financially burdened with the additional children they have to look after. The provision of foster care grant in South Africa needed an amount of R5.5bn in 2011/2012 (Hall & Proudlock, 2011). Therefore social workers need to play a vital role in monitoring the use of the grant. Even though this is the case, social workers in the field feel that they are unable to monitor the use of the grant successfully because of the increasing numbers of applications needing their attention.

The 'checking' of the home environment is needed in foster placements in that the children need to be provided with "safe, stable and nurturing homes" in order for them to develop well (Harden, 2004, p. 36). Social workers therefore need to conduct a thorough assessment of the home environment before the legal placement could take place.

Although foster mothers perceived home visits as a form of inspection; a way of checking that they are meeting the needs of the child, home visits were seen by the social work participants as a means of offering support; monitoring the foster child's physical and emotional well-being within the home environment. Henderson and Thomson (2011, p. 8) are of the view that "children need a warm, loving and stable home environments to grow and develop in a healthy manner"; therefore on-going assessment of the home environment is seen as vital.

- Sub-theme 2: Check if child is happy in the home

Home visits were also a means through which the social workers could communicate personally with the unrelated foster care children in order to explore their feelings regarding the placement. Petrie (2003, p.173) states that "children are autonomous human beings and have rights to give and receive information and participate in decision-making in ways suitable to their age and understanding"; thus social workers need to communicate with children to understand their perspectives regarding the placement. One foster parent (Participant No 3) explained that:

My social worker does come at home and she will also ask to speak to the children individually to ask them how they are doing and whether they are still happy with the placement.

One social worker (Participant No 4) also emphasised that she personally interviews each foster child individually in this regard so that they can express their thoughts and feelings in privacy:

I render home visits services where I go to the home of the foster parent and check whether the child is still happy and also if the environment is still suitable for the development of the child.

In realising the goals of permanency planning, Randle (2013) states that researchers have acknowledged the importance of considering the views of the child. This process needs to be undertaken to ensure that the child does not remain permanently in a home which they are unhappy.

The researcher is of the view that this is taking place at practice level in that the foster parents participants have confirmed that the social worker through the process of service rendering communicate with the foster children.

In order to ensure that the best interests of the child will be met, social workers assess the home environment of the prospective foster parent. As a social worker in practice, the researcher can state that the process of conducting assessments prior to the placement of the child is taking place at grass roots level. The researcher can also state that even though the majority of the cases are related foster care cases within the Department of Social Development and the children are already residing with relatives, social workers do conduct assessments on the unrelated cases as there are no blood ties in the placement.

- **Theme 2: Maintain regular contact**

When rendering services to the clients, social work participants pointed out that they need to ensure that there is regular contact with the foster parents and the foster children

for the duration of the foster care placement. Maintaining contact with the foster parents has been deemed important in order to make sure that the child is well and safe at all times (Schofield and Ward, 2011). It also ensures that foster parents are provided with the support and guidance when fulfilling the role of foster parent.

- Sub-theme 1: We need to monitor the child's progress

Maintaining regular contact with the foster parents and the foster children is important to monitor the child's progress. Monitoring the child's progress is important in order to ensure that they are developing well in a placement where no biological ties exist. According to Connolly and Morris (2012) the role of the professional (social worker) in a foster care placement is to assess and monitor the child's progress. This is done through ensuring that the needs of the child especially the developmental, health and educational are identified and met.

Social work participants reflected a good understanding of the purpose of monitoring a child's well-being and development. For example, one social worker (Participant No 7) emphasised:

I also monitor the progress which the child is making within the placement since she is staying with people she is not related to.

- Sub-theme 2: We maintain contact in different ways

The foster parent participants in their responses indicated that the social workers usually communicate by making telephonic contact with them. When making telephone contact with the family, the social worker discusses matters with both the foster parents and the child(ren) concerned in order to monitor the progress being made.

Telephonic contact is seen by Schofield and Ward (2011) to play an important role in developing and maintaining a relationship with children in foster care. The emphasis on telephone contact was highlighted by the social work participants. One social work participant (Participant No 5) stated that:

I also have contact with them over the phone. The foster parent also contacts me and inform me about her well-being (the foster child) *and also if she is going somewhere with the child to visit.*

A foster parent participant (Participant No 3) also confirmed this form of contact and the purpose thereof:

The social worker will contact me telephonically at least once a week to check upon how we are doing with the child.

Most social work participants indicated that this method was cost-effective and facilitated making regular contact with their foster parent clients. The social work participants pointed out that they are able to communicate with the families about court dates as well as checking upon the well-being of the children. Miller and Bentovim (2003) are of the view that the involvement and continuity of services by the social worker are important aspects of communication especially when working with families. This method of keeping contact is only applicable to those clients who have access to telephones and excludes those without to make other forms of contact.

The social work participants also described another means of maintaining contact with the foster parent and the foster child for the duration of the foster care placement; office visits when the need arises. A statement from one social work (Participant No 4) implied that office visits were only arranged when urgent problems were coming to the fore:

I also meet with the child concerned and the foster parent in my office when there are pressing issues which need to be dealt with.

According to Brown (2012) a social worker working with foster children maintains contact through monthly home visits and the foster parent also maintains contact through contacting the social worker telephonically and electronically through sending emails. The author states that these methods of maintaining contact ensure that the foster children know that the social worker cares and is working hard for them. In the findings of this research, neither the social workers nor the foster parents reported to communicate with each other through sending emails.

Although various methods of maintaining contact are advocated to facilitate regular contact, putting this into practice in rural areas is not always practical. Social workers in rural areas of South Africa in maintaining regular contact are unsuccessful due to the difficulties they face when making appointments in communities where telephones are not easily available and in circumstances where access to transport is erratic and unpredictable (Meintjes, Budlender, Giese & Johnson, 2003).

- Sub-theme 3: We cannot always meet the expected frequency of contact

When it came to the frequency of making contact with the foster parent and foster child, the social work participants stated that they find it difficult in practice to meet the set requirements in this regard. They are usually only able to make contact with the clients approximately once every six months although the policy of their employers, namely the Department of Social Development, requires them that they make contact at least every three months. Even though this is the case, the National Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2014) mention that when it comes to the review of the Individual Development Plans of a child in alternative care, it needs to take place every six months.

The frequency of rendering the services as stated by the social work participants usually depended on the needs of the unrelated foster care families. As one social work participant (Participant No 2) explained:

It depends on the circumstances of the family. In normal cases we do it twice a year. But if the circumstances in the case are different, then we do it more often.

Schofield and Ward (2011) are of the view that social workers when trying to manage the appropriate level of contact in terms of the frequency; consider the emotional demands and the age of the child. Some social work participants also highlighted that some foster care cases present as difficult to manage and these cases require more intensive intervention.

The most common problem-situations identified by the social work participants were those of children presenting with behavioural problems. This can be stated to be the case in that the social workers at the Department of Social Development work with older children as compared to their counterparts at Non-Governmental Organizations that usually manage cases where the children are under the age of 12 years.

After the placement of the child, social workers supervise the placement through maintaining regular contact with the foster families. The inability to meet the requirements in regularly supervising the foster placements might be related to that they are working with older children as compared to the social worker at NGO's. It can be said that the social workers at the Department of Social Development feel that the older children are at a lesser risk within the foster care placements and therefore they maintain contact with the families after every six months.

- **Theme 3: A multi-disciplinary approach**

Social work as a profession works hand in hand with other professions in order to provide effective and efficient services to families. Most of the social work participants use a multi-disciplinary approach in the process of rendering services to the unrelated foster care families. Adams (2012) states that governments which have been successful in providing improved services to families espoused on implementing the principle of collaboration between professionals and this is referred to as a multi-disciplinary approach.

Davis and Smith (2012) state that this approach sometimes can lead to conflict in that some professionals dominate the multi-disciplinary meetings. The authors further state that this is the case in that in providing children and family services, "specific professionals were more likely to avoid activities they deemed lower than their level, privileged the role of statutory services, had little face to face contact with children/families, possessed poorly defined case loads, avoided mundane tasks and delegated their own roles to others" (Davis & Smith, 2012, p.77-78).

Horwath and Lees (2012) are however of the view that the approach is vital in foster placements in that it enables professionals to meet the needs of children and their

families whilst working together. The multi-disciplinary approach allows for the different professionals as systems in the life of the child concerned to work together and meet individual needs of the child. This is because the multi-disciplinary approach allows for the professionals to understand the child in the context of his or her own environment.

- Sub-theme 1: We try adopting a multi-disciplinary approach

The social work participants reported that they often meet with the teachers of the children to discuss the progress being made at school. They also refer the children for assessments by psychologists if a need arises as well as referring the family to a doctor for the child to undergo a check-up or to take treatment. Connolly and Morris (2012) point out that when social workers offer multi-disciplinary support, it ensures that families have access to services and support from a full range of agencies and this makes the response to be more readily and appropriate to the needs of the child. As one social worker (Participant No 9) stated:

I am helping the family with the communication between them and the medical doctors and also monitor the placement to check whether everything is still going well and the school progress to check on their performance at school.

For a child who is experiencing educational and social performance problems, a multi-disciplinary intervention focusing on the individual, family, community and policy is needed (Adams, 2012). In realising the goals of permanency planning, the assessment process needs to be undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team which includes the cooperation and adopting an integrated approach (National Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2014). The researcher has observed that in practice, social workers adopt a multi-disciplinary approach when there are educational problems experienced by the child and a thorough assessment is requested by the children's court.

The lack of adequate monitoring of the placement can also be noted through the manner in which they engage with other professionals in a multi-disciplinary setting where they mostly do so when there are difficulties experienced by the child concerned within the placement. The social workers at grass roots level associate their inability to meet the

requirements with their working conditions such as lack of transport and high caseloads. Their inability to meet the requirements in supervising the placements means that the needs of the foster families are not adequately met and therefore there is a need for improvement.

- **Theme 4: Build positive relationships**

In rendering supervision services to the unrelated foster care families, social workers identified maintaining a positive relationship with the family as a purpose of keeping in contact with the family. Sheafor and Horejsi (2010, p. 35) state that "a positive relationship is a pre-condition for effective work with individuals, families and groups of clients".

As much as it is important for the social workers to maintain a positive relationship with the foster parents, Kulp (2012) states that foster parents also need to maintain a positive relationship with the social worker as well.

The systems theory states that a change in one system often leads to changes in another (Doyle, 2012). Therefore, building a positive relationship with the foster family for social workers will enable them to have a positive relationship with the other systems within the environment of the foster family.

- Sub-theme 1: Support the foster parent

Providing support to the foster parent is stated by the social workers to be a purpose of them maintaining contact with the unrelated foster care family. In offering support, the social workers ensure that they check upon the well-being of the child as well as that of the foster parent through the process of rendering supervision services. Providing support to the foster parents is an essential component in foster placements in that it enables them with the ability to deal with difficult children and cope with stressful events which minimizes the chances for a need to find another placement for the child (Klein-Rothschild & Ekas, 2004) and improves the chances of permanency in the placement.

For example, one social worker (Participant No 4) stated that she supports the foster parent because she did not have previous experience fostering a child before the placement. She mentioned that:

I help her (the foster parent) *to know what is expected of her as a foster parent*.

According to Selwyn, et al., (2010) foster parents fear that the permanent placement of a child in their care could mean reduced support, therefore social workers need to provide continuous support to foster parent to assist them in decision making regarding the placement of the children.

Even though most social workers mentioned that they deemed it necessary to provide support to the foster parents, their inability to have regular contact with the families in practice made the foster parents to find alternative support from the people close to them.

- Sub-theme 2: They need to know you are their social worker

The social work participants highlighted that it was important for them to be known by the foster family to be their social worker. They stated that this was vital in them working with the families in that when a need arises; they would know who to contact for assistance. The researcher observed through the interviews with the foster parents that they knew who their social worker was and that the foster children also knew who their social worker was. Social worker (Participant No 5) highlighted the importance of being known by the foster family:

You maintain a relationship with the family so that they know you as their social worker as well as for the child to know you as their social worker.

As demonstrated through this statement from a social work participant, the family knowing you ensures that you assist in building a relationship between the foster parent and the child because there are no biological ties. Connolly and Morris (2012, p. 106) are of the view that during the placement, foster parents need support of having "a reliable and available social worker who listens to, value, and respect and visit them frequently".

The provision of support for foster parents is seen by social workers as necessary as it enables them to provide the best care to the children. The foster parent participants in the study had only good things to say about the social workers providing supervision services to them. This can mean that they have built a positive relationship with the social worker. The researcher is however of the view that they might have been reporting on what they thought their social workers needed to hear, that everything in the placement is going well. This finding on reporting that everything in the placement is going well is reported by Randle (2013) where ex-foster children reported that most foster parents painted a picture of happiness to the social worker whilst the opposite is the case in the placement.

- **Theme 5: Permanency planning to ensure sustainability**

In terms of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005, the placement of a child in alternative care such as unrelated foster care should outline plans for permanency. Shirk and Stangler (2004) also state that the removal of a child from birth parents should immediately set in motion plans for permanency such as that of reunification with family, adoption, placement with relatives, long-term foster care or independent living. The Children's Act No 38 of 2005 provides one of the reasons for ensuring permanency placement for children in foster care as that of creating sustainability in the lives of the children.

According to the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) sustainability refers to "that which is affordable, financially viable, efficient and effective". Sustainability in the White Paper was seen as a means for welfare programmes such as foster care requiring full government support as they targeted the poor and those persons needing protective services such as children.

Social work participants were well aware of the importance of 'sustainability' and thus highlighted that they do render services to the unrelated foster families with an aim of ensuring sustainability of the placement. They regarded this aim as an essential part of achieving permanency for the children in unrelated foster placements. The participants felt that they needed to do so in that they were considering the long term placement of the children in foster care.

- Sub-theme 1: Long-term placement considered if foster parents proving capable

Before considering permanently placing a child in foster care, social workers review whether the foster parent with whom the child is placed is able to cater to the needs of the child concerned on a long-term basis. Simpson (2012) is of the view that it is the job of the foster parent to provide continued support, develop trust, nurture self-esteem and re-build the ability of the child to love and connect especially in a long-term placement.

The social work participants felt prospective foster parents need to show this parental capacity because the child is not related to them and therefore one needed to ensure that they were capable of ensuring permanency for the child. One social worker (Participant No 7) verbalised:

As the worker, you can tell that these people (foster parents) *are looking after the child well and they are doing what is best for the child. Therefore maybe the child could be placed in foster care permanently*.

The above provided statement of a social work participant describes clearly what they consider before the child could be permanently placed. However, the researcher has noted that there are few cases of unrelated foster care managed by the Department of Social Development who are placed in permanent foster care.

- Sub-theme 2: We do what is in the best interests of the child

As social workers working with unrelated foster care families, most of the participants felt that they were doing what is in the best interests of the child when it came to making a decision on permanency of the placement. When young children are removed from their biological family environments, placement in another family environment is prioritised in light of the developmental stage of the child. A social worker (Participant No 4) demonstrated this by making this statement:

I believe that I will be doing what is in the best interests of the child considering that she is still young. I don't think she understands, but because I as her social worker know better then, that's why I choose for her the placement.

According to research conducted by Schofield and Ward (2011), social workers were viewed by parents and foster parents as the ones having the power to decide on the permanency placement of a child. Although social workers do not make the final decision regarding the long-term placement of the child, they use their professional assessment to make recommendations to the court concerning what will be in the best interests of the child considering the child's needs and development.

This is vital for social workers in that studies have reported that most children in unrelated foster placements have high-quality home environments than the other forms of placements (Harden, 2004). Children in unrelated foster care have been reported to be well-cared for at their home environments and have their needs regularly met because the unrelated foster parents only want what it is their best interest.

- Sub-theme 3: Create stability in the life of the child

Creating stability in the life of the foster child is one of the factors which social workers focus on when it comes to permanency in unrelated foster care placements. Adams (2012) states that even though foster care is regarded as a placement for a limited period, it still needs to offer family care and a feeling of permanence to the child. Harden (2004) is of the view that traditionally stability has been defined in terms of family structure. When it comes to foster placements, the author states that stability has been defined as "limited movement from home to home" (Harden, 2004, p. 33).

Stability is also regarded to be vital in foster care in that a lack of it "places children at risk in terms of their development, attachment to primary caregivers, identity and sense of belonging, behaviour problems and their ability to form relationships" (Connolly & Morris, 2012, p. 85). The participants felt that this should be taken into consideration in that the children are removed from different circumstances which may have led them in being moved from one place to the other. Therefore, there is a need for children to have foster parents who are consistent, constant and connected to them, mentally healthy cohesive, supportive, nurturing and provide good parenting practices (Harden, 2004).

A social worker (Participant No 2) highlighted that:

Finding stability for the child is important especially in the placement where you might find the child moving from one placement to another.

- Sub-theme 4: There is a bond between the child and the foster parent

Adams (2012, p. 22) described a secure attachment needed for foster children as "the consistency, stability, continuity and quality of permanent or substitute nurture and care that children and young people receive from their parents or carers". Most of the social work participants reported that they would consider permanency for the unrelated foster care children considering the bond between the child and the foster parent. This was also demonstrated in this statement made by a social worker (Participant No 4):

I will consider placing the child concerned in permanent foster care with the foster parent in that she is residing well with the foster parent and they have a good bond".

According to Selwyn, et al., (2010) research conducted on attachment shows that children do badly in life when attachment bonds are disrupted. Therefore social workers need to consider the benefits of the child's attachment in long-term care. Consideration of these benefits is vital in that the psychological and environmental factors of the foster homes can have an impact on the type of attachment the children have to their caregivers (Harden, 2004).

There is also a need for social workers to use the Circle of Courage in their assessments when it comes to the realization of the goals of permanency planning. This is because it is validated by resilience, which includes attachment of the child to their caregiver and environment. The Circle of Courage provides a universal model of developmental growth needs for holistic development. Developmental needs include mastery; belonging; independence and generosity. It takes cognizance of the fact that children in alternative care do not live in isolation, and that their interaction with their social-cultural, physical, spiritual and psycho-emotional environment provides valuable insights to their developmental status (National Department of Social Development & UNICEF, 2014).

The long-term needs of the child were considered by the social workers where they saw a need for sustainable and stable placements for the unrelated foster care children. Even though this is the case, there was no mention by the social workers of using the Individual Development Plans in ensuring that the placement meets the developmental needs of the child concerned. The researcher has also observed that this is not also taking place at grass roots level as a social worker working at the Department of Social Development. Therefore, it is concerning that the social work participants make mention of creating sustainable and stable placements whilst not considering the developmental needs of the children concerned.

- **Summary of findings**

The social work participants supervising foster care placements have a fairly good understanding of the nature of services they are required to render and the purpose thereof. The participants also highlighted in their responses how they try rendering these services on a regular basis as required by their employer. The foster parent participants confirmed the nature of services being rendered to them by the social workers. The participants also highlighted the importance of maintaining contact with one another to ensure that the needs of the unrelated children in foster care are met.

4.3.2. Objective 2: Explore social workers' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not reached.

The second objective of my research was to explore the views of social workers as to why the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care are not reached. Themes and sub-themes emerging are summarised in Table 4.3. below.

Table 4.3. Views of social workers in meeting the goals of permanency planning.

Themes	Sub-themes
• The Children's Court	• Court orders have to be extended every two years

• The biological family	• Reuniting the child with family • Biological family is still in the picture
• Permanency is not a priority	• Case load too heavy • Lack of adequate resources • Money matters • Foster parents do not cooperate

- **Theme 1: The Children's Court**

The legal placement of a child in foster care is done through the Children's Court where the presiding officer makes a decision based on the recommendations of the social worker on a child being in need of care and protection.

Section 186 of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 (as amended) is specifically relevant to promote permanency for foster children placed in unrelated foster care. It reads as follows: 1) a Children's Court may, despite the provisions of section 159 (1) (a) regarding the duration of a Court Order (normally two years), after a child has been in foster care with a person other than a family member for more than two years and after having considered the need for creating stability in the child's life, order that-
(a) no further social worker supervision is required for the placement;
(b) no further social worker reports are required in respect of that placement; and
(c) the foster care placement subsists until the child turns 18 years, unless otherwise directed.

The researcher has observed that there are only few cases of unrelated foster care children who are permanently placed in foster care in terms of section 186 of the Children's Act. The researcher, throughout the time of being employed at the Department of Social Development has not had an experience of reaching the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children through section 186 of the Children's Act. The social work participants in the study have also highlighted that they have not made such progress at grass roots level and this is attributed to the Children's Courts in their areas of work.

- Sub-theme 1: Court orders have to be extended every two years

Most of the participants highlighted that they experience challenges whereby some presiding officers were not issuing Orders whereby the child concerned is placed in foster care until the age of 18 years; instead orders were issued for a normal period of two years. Thereafter, the orders have to be extended every two years until the child concerned reaches the age of 18 years, if necessary even though they had made the necessary recommendations.

In their research study, Selwyn, et al., (2010) found that social workers felt that Court-related issues were the ones preventing the placement processes. The authors found that social workers were of the view that Courts prevented the processes of ensuring permanency placements whether through reunification, adoption and long-term foster care.

Schofield and Ward (2011) in their research on foster care found that social workers experienced challenges with the Courts regarding foster care placements of children. Despite the challenges experienced by the social workers, the authors state that they were aware of the instrumental role which the Courts played on behalf of the child regarding future placements. The challenges with presiding officers are explained by one social worker (Participant No 9) who indicated that:

We have a problem with that when you write a report with the recommendations of 186 to Court but the order when it comes from Court it will be in terms of section 159 as they are used to doing extensions for two years only.

The Children's Court has been highlighted to play a vital role in ensuring permanent placements for unrelated foster care children. The social worker participants can view the duration of the court orders as an opportunity to monitor the placement to ensure that the needs of the child concerned are adequately met. The researcher is of the view that social workers can also view the duration of the court orders as another opportunity to realise the goals of permanency through adoption during the time of the next review. This is however not the case in practice in that social workers view the extension of the court

order in terms of section 186 of the Children's Act as a way of putting one case aside and lessening the heavy caseload which need regular supervision.

- **Theme 2: The biological family**

The removal of children from their biological families is based on a comprehensive assessment of the circumstances to which they have been exposed to. If deemed to be at risk and in need of care and protection, placement in foster care can be considered to be in their best interests while services are rendered to their parents/primary caregivers with the hope that family reunification can take place. Carr (2006) is of the view that children are considered to be at risk and need to be removed when they are in repeated danger of being severely abused or neglected and when the parents/caregivers are unable to create and provide a safe home environment even with the assistance of other family members and professionals.

The National Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2014, p. 8) when it comes to permanency planning are of the view that "every child should be provided with the opportunity to grow up in her/his family, unless in circumstances where this is proved not to be in their best interest or not possible to have". The reunification of the child with their biological family/primary caregivers prior to their removal is dependent upon their availability and their willingness to provide for the needs of the child concerned. It is also dependent on the family improving their circumstances which led to the removal of the child. The child concerned having contact with the biological family whilst in foster care can be regarded to be beneficial in that the family is still part of systems within the environment of the child and they might play an active role in ensuring the child's development.

- Sub-theme 1: Reuniting the child with family

Most of the social work participants pointed out that family reunification were being rendered in respect of unrelated foster care placements. These services focused on helping the parents/primary caregivers improve their circumstances necessitating the removal of the child from their care. Children could not be reunited with their biological

family too soon because there had to be some sort of assurance that the child would not be exposed to risk.

Research conducted by Selwyn, et al., (2010) reflects that social workers usually changed plans for reunification due to two main reasons. Firstly because "new information became available or assessments revealed additional concerns about the children's safety" and secondly "parents failed to attend contact visits or planning and review meetings or showed no interest in their child" (Selwyn, et al, 2010, p. 65-67).

Findings in this study concur with those of Selwyn, et al, (2010) in that the social workers were not providing reunification services as they were proven not to be effective. The social work participants felt that the parents/caregivers were not accepting the professional assistance to improve on their home circumstances. In turn, the parents/caregivers felt disempowered to actualise the change.

The social workers pointed out that they assist in the process of reunification through facilitating contact between the children and their parents/caregivers. They further pointed out that this role presented as challenging to them in that some parents/caregivers were not cooperating. A social worker (Participant No 4) highlighted:

They (the family) *are always pulling back when it comes to having a relationship with the child concerned. I* (social worker) *want the child concerned to go and reside with her family. But because they are still not able to provide for her needs, she will remain in the care of the foster parent.*

- Sub-theme 2: Biological family is still in the picture

Most of the social worker participants have highlighted that the availability of the biological families of the unrelated foster care children made them not realize the goals of permanency. They stated that this was due to there being an opportunity for reunification services in the future. Whittaker and Mallucio (2002) describe the reunification of foster care children within the system with their parents as a top priority in permanency planning.

The social work participants recognised that if the child's family are available, family reunification still presents as a major goal. If placed permanently in unrelated foster care, the children might not be provided the opportunity to have contact with their biological families. This was highlighted by one social worker (Participant No 7):

Her family is available and I always knew they were available. I did not consider it (permanency) *because I knew there is a chance of her family wanting her to come back home*.

Social work participants expressed that they considered rendering reunification services for the unrelated children and therefore could not facilitate the process of ensuring permanency. The researcher has noted that there were a few cases within the Department of Social Development whereby family reunification services were provided for unrelated foster children. This has been associated with the circumstances of the biological parents/caregiver as well as insufficient services being provided to the biological family to assist them in changing their circumstances. The researcher believes that this is because most services within the Department are being provided by other organizations such as FAMSA for family counselling and Family Advocates for mediation.

- **Theme 3: Permanency is not a priority**

According to Carr (2006), permanent foster placements are a suitable choice for foster children in that they consider the formation of a strong attachment with the foster family, the ability of the foster family to accommodate the behavioural problems of the child and the routine established for the child to maintain contact with parents/caregivers.

Long-term foster care as a permanency option was also seen to be suitable for children in that foster parents were able to meet the cultural needs of the children and siblings had a chance of being placed together (Selwyn, et al., 2012).

Harden (2004) is of the view that social workers must ensure that foster children receive permanent homes and these family environments must be safe and stable. The social work participants highlighted different challenges which they experienced in the process

of realizing permanency for unrelated foster care children. These challenges were cited as reasons for not being able to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster placements.

The researcher has also experienced some of the challenges highlighted by the social worker participants as she has been employed at the Department of Social Development and has also been providing supervision services to unrelated foster care families.

- Sub-theme 1: Caseload too heavy

Most of the social work participants reported that they have high caseloads; the vast majority of cases involving related foster care placements. They stressed that in light of the high caseload and associated administrative tasks; it is difficult to focus on permanency planning. This was highlighted by a social worker (Participant No 5) through this statement:

We have a huge case load and this makes it not to be manageable and you are not able to provide the necessary supervision services to all the cases.

Swann and Sylvester (2006, p. 309) are of the view that "the growth in aggregate foster care caseloads has resulted in larger workloads for individual caseworkers, which is problematic because the mistreatment of foster children is often blamed on the ever-growing number of cases the average caseworker must manage". This is the case in practice in that due to the heavy caseload, social workers are unable to meet the requirements of providing supervision services to the foster care families.

Research findings by de Jager (2011) and Mokomane and Rochat (2010) indicate that high caseloads of social workers and lack of incentives as some of contributing factors to not ensuring permanency for children in foster care.

- Sub-theme 2: Lack of adequate resources

The social worker participants explained that they lack the adequate resources which would enable them to facilitate permanency in the unrelated foster care placement.

Inadequate resources included the shortage of cars to conduct the home visits to assess the home environments, office space to communicate with the unrelated foster care children in private and cell phones to communicate with the foster parents.

At the department of Social Development currently, the researcher has noted that most of the social workers do not have cell phones and they share telephones as well as vehicles to conduct home visits. The lack of resources was mentioned by a social worker (Participant No 2).

You find that the transport department is always telling you that there are no cars and at that moment you need to conduct home visits to the families.

According to Theron (2009 citing de Jager, 2011), South Africa lacks the resources to adequately implement the stipulations of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 which forms the basis for the practice of foster care. Such resources included human and material resources. The shortage of social workers as human resources in South Africa is stated to be one factor contributing to social workers being overburdened with big caseloads (Naido & Kasiram, 2006 in de Jager, 2011). Similarly, Meintjes, et al., (2003) found that social workers in South Africa had neither the time nor the resources to do the required home visits.

- Sub-theme 3: Money matters

According to the social work participants, the foster care grant being provided to the foster parents for caring for the unrelated children contributes to permanency not being given a priority. They stated that this is the case in that most of the permanency options available meant that the foster parents would no longer be getting the foster care grant. Even though this is the case research conducted by de Jager (2011) found that unrelated families become foster parents out of a desire to help children whilst aunts and uncles were primarily motivated by the foster care grant. At grass roots, most social workers are of the view that unrelated foster parents are motivated by love for children as compared to related family members who in most cases were motivated by the foster care grant.

The foster care grant was however seen by most of the participants as an income which assists the family to provide for the needs of the foster children. Therefore its unavailability would have meant that the unrelated foster parent would not be able to provide for the needs of the children. This was demonstrated by one social worker (Participant No 5):

Placing the children in foster care (unrelated) *for now is better because there is the foster care grant which the foster parent uses to take care of the child and use for the other needs of the child*.

The foster parent participants highlighted various reasons as being their primary motives for caring for unrelated foster children. The reasons provided included the love for children and the need to give back to the community. Some foster parent participants described being provided with the opportunity of being a parent through caring for unrelated foster children as a motive because they could not have children of their own. One foster parent (Participant No 6) verbalised her motive through this statement:

It all started when I and my husband realised we are not able to have children of our own. A friend informed us about the child concerned; we started meeting him where he was staying until we decided to take him into our care because he was not cared for well where he was staying.

Findings of a study conducted by Mokomane and Rochat (2010) are that foster parent caring for both related and unrelated foster children valued the love and care which they were able to provide rather than the monetary values which were associated with being a foster parent. The study further reports that the monetary issues came at a later stage after ensuring that the child receives all the love and care. Another study conducted by Randle (2013) found that ex-foster children reported to quickly notice when the motivation of their foster parents were financial in that they were not loved and cared for.

- Sub-theme 4: Foster parents do not cooperate

The social worker participants felt that the foster parents did not cooperate with them after they had gone to Court and legalized the placement. The foster parents were therefore not available to discuss permanency plans with the social worker regarding the unrelated children in their care. The foster parents would either be working or busy with other matters. They stated that foster parents only communicated with them when they were experiencing problems. The lack of cooperation from foster parents was demonstrated by a social worker (Participant No 9).

Our foster parents they relax and wait for the social worker to make contact or until they have problems.

The social workers therefore felt that placing the children permanently was not a priority in that the foster parents were not cooperating with the process and with them. The lack of co-operation and availability of foster parents has been determined as one factor which makes it difficult for social workers to support the foster care placements (de Jager, 2011). This is so because foster parents are stated not to co-operate and they disappear after receiving the court orders.

The researcher is of the view that the lack of cooperation from foster parents can be associated with the social worker not being able to meet the requirements in providing supervision services. This is the case in that if they were meeting the requirements, they would be able to pick up these challenges beforehand.

When it comes to the financial implications of caring for an unrelated foster child, the researcher has observed that there are no strategies for monitoring the use of the foster care grant by the foster parents. This once again can be related back to the heavy caseloads and lack of resources. Due to the fact that most families in the communities where the Department of Social Development provides services to are classified as being of low socio-economic status, there is a need for a better strategy to be implemented. Social workers have to ensure that the grant is being used for the needs of the child and foster parents cooperate with the social worker. This is however not happening currently at grass roots.

- **Summary of findings**

Social work participants felt that the realization of the goals of permanency planning was not being prioritized for unrelated foster care children due to the challenges they are experiencing in practice. Heavy work responsibilities, lack of adequate resources and cooperation from foster parents undermined the efforts focusing on facilitating permanency.

4.3.3. Objective 3: Investigate foster parents' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not reached

The third objective of my research was to investigate foster parents' views on why the goals of permanency planning are not reached. Only one main theme and two sub-themes emerged and are summarised in Table 4.4. below.

Table 4.4. Views of foster parents in meeting the goals of permanency planning.

Themes	Sub-themes
• I am their parent	• This is their home • There are no problems

- **Theme 1: I am their parent**

Most of the participants throughout the interviews kept on referring to the unrelated foster children as their own children. They were doing so even though the court order specifies that they are mainly carers for the children within their placements. They were of the opinion that they have rights regarding the child because of the placement being a legal one. The participants therefore felt that they were the only known parents to the unrelated foster children. This made the foster parents to feel that permanency has been reached as they considered themselves the parents of the unrelated foster children.

The foster parent participants also reported that the unrelated children in their care only knew them as their parents. This was because most of the children had been in the care of the unrelated foster parents from a young age and had no other known parents other than the foster parents. Therefore they never saw the need of ensuring permanency in the placement as they felt that permanency had already been reached.

Harden (2004) is of the view that foster parents who play the roles of ensuring that the goals of meeting the needs of the children are recognised by social workers provide more successful placements. Social workers therefore need to play a role of encouraging foster parent to take into consideration the developmental needs of the children even though the foster parents might feel that the goals of permanency planning have been reached.

- Sub-theme 1: This is their home

For the foster parent participants, the unrelated foster children knew that the home they were residing at was their own and therefore they were not going anywhere. This for them meant that permanency has been reached because the unrelated foster children knew they were at home and were no longer going to be moved or change placements.

A statement from a foster parent (Participant No 1) describes how she has made the unrelated foster children feel that they are at home. She pointed out that:

I have told them to look after the home once I am gone. This is their family house and they can stay as long as they want.

According to Randle (2013) children in foster care placements need to feel that they belonged in the family home. The ex-foster children in the study conducted by Randle (2013, p. 9) reported that they also needed to be "given all of the rights and responsibilities that would be given to the carers' own children".

- Sub-theme 2: There are no problems

All the foster parent participants reported that they were not experiencing any problems within the foster care placements. They further reported that the reason for not experiencing any problems with the placement was because the children felt that they were at home and regarded them as their own parents. This for the foster parents meant that the unrelated foster children themselves already felt that permanency has been reached as they communicated well with the foster parents regarding the challenges they might be experiencing.

The lack of challenges within the unrelated foster placement was verbalised by a foster parent (Participant No 10) who said:

We never had challenges as such. I am telling you I have never experienced any problems.

The New South Wales Department of Community Services (2007) is of the view that conducting a thorough assessment of the foster parents before the placement is vital in ensuring the success of the placement. Furthermore, it is stated that providing adequate support and sufficient supervision ensures the well-being of the foster children and the sustainability of the placement. This can lead to foster parents not experiencing any challenges within the placement as they would have received support and monitoring from the social workers.

The researcher is of the view that the views of foster parents that permanency has already been reached is misguided in that the formal process had not been done in the placements. The foster parents only considered that they had been residing with the unrelated foster children in their homes since they were young and knew them as their parents as being reasons for permanency. However, the formal process of ensuring permanency through the children's court still needs to be applied before the foster parents could conclude that permanency had already been reached.

- **Summary of findings**

The foster parent participants on their views regarding challenges in meeting the goals of permanency planning reported that permanency had already reached within their respective placements. The reason provided by the participants to come to such a conclusion was because they were the only known parents in the lives of the unrelated foster children and also the children felt that they were at home. The foster parent participants have also expressed that they were not experiencing any challenges within the placements.

4.3.4. Objective 4: Explore what unrelated foster parents think are their rights and responsibilities with regard to permanency planning.

The fourth objective of my research was to explore what unrelated foster parent thought were their rights and responsibilities regarding permanency planning for the unrelated foster children in their care. Themes and sub-themes emerging are summarised in Table 4.5. below.

Table 4.5. Rights and responsibilities of foster parents in permanency.

Themes	Sub-themes
• They are my children	• I have a Court Order • My family knows my children • We have a social worker
• Being a parent first	• We care • Providing rules • We talk to the child • Be involved • Facilitating contact with biological family
• We do what is best for the child	• Check on family background • Grooming the child

	• Ensuring child maintain his or her culture
• Permanent placements are needed	• The children are cared for

- **Theme 1: These are my children**

When asked about their rights as foster parents regarding permanency planning, most of the foster parent participants demonstrated that they knew more about their responsibilities towards the unrelated foster children than their rights regarding the placement. This was the case even though the rights and responsibilities of foster parents are printed on the back page of the Court Orders they receive after the legal placement. de Jager (2011) also brings attention to the fact that the rights and responsibilities of the foster parent are set out in the court order given to the foster parent after the legal placement of the child concerned in their foster care. Foster parents being aware of their rights and responsibilities makes them to think more about the placement and to consider the effects of caring for a child needing a placement within their home in their lives (Hastings, 2012).

Fletcher and Fletcher (2012) are of the view that many foster parents can be barriers to permanency due to their fears of loss. The authors, however, further state that many foster parents make unconditional commitment to foster care children without the formal permanency options available to them. This therefore makes it difficult for them to ensure permanency through the formalized structures as they feel permanency has already been reached. The researcher has noted that this view by foster parents regarding the unrelated foster children has become a barrier for social workers in practice to realise the goals of permanency planning.

- Sub-theme 1: I have a Court Order

According to Section 71 of the regulations of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 foster parents are given the right to make all day to day decisions pertaining to the care, upbringing and development of the child. The foster parents are given these and the other rights after the issuing of the court order after the legal placement. The foster parent

participants related that they have rights regarding the permanency planning of the unrelated foster children in that the children were legally placed with them.

Most of the participants felt more confident regarding permanency of the placement because they had court orders which meant that they were the legal guardians of the unrelated children in their care. Even though this was the case, the foster parent participants were well aware that they still needed the assistance of the social workers to realise the goals of permanency planning for the unrelated children in their care. The following statement (Participant No 3) demonstrates the confidence of foster parents with regard to their rights and ensuring permanency of the placement.

The placement will take place and Court Orders will be issued that the child will be placed in my care.

The foster parents also felt that no one could take the children from their care at any given point which made them to have more confidence regarding the placement of the children. Section 188 (1) (d) of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 as amended states that foster parents have rights and responsibilities towards the foster child when an order of court assigning parental responsibilities and rights in terms of section 23 of the said Act is made. Having a court order is seen by social workers at grass roots as also another barrier to realising the goals of permanency in that most foster parents start relaxing and do not cooperate with the social workers.

- Sub-theme 2: My family knows my children

It was highlighted by the foster parent participants that they had rights regarding the permanent placement of the unrelated foster children in their care when their families have accepted them as their own. Ex-foster children reported on the study conducted by Randle (2013) that they felt a placement was good for them when they felt welcomed by all family members in the foster family.

The foster parent participants in this study demonstrated their awareness of what was needed in a good placement and moving towards the realisation of the goals of

permanency through making the unrelated foster children to be part of the family. A foster parent (Participant No 6) demonstrated this by stating that:

My siblings and my parents treat him like our own child so he does not feel out of place.

The relationship between the unrelated foster children and the biological families of the foster parents made them to feel that the children had a sense of belonging and therefore will make it easy to ensure permanency planning. Recognizing the effects of the placement and the relationship of the foster child and that of the other members of the family such as the spouse, birth children, and extended family members and relevant others are important in foster care placements (Hastings, 2012).

- Sub-theme 3: We have a social worker

To demonstrate that that they had rights towards ensuring permanency for the unrelated foster children under their care with the assistance of the social workers, one foster parent (Participant No 1) mentioned that the children in her care belong to the social workers. The foster parent participant on the other hand demonstrated that there was a positive relationship between the social worker and the foster family.

Ke bana ba di social worker.

Most of the foster parent participants felt that they had rights towards the permanent placement of the unrelated foster children in their care in that the children had their own social worker working with the family. In order to provide and sustain a positive out-of-home environment, Jenson and Fraser (2011) stress that social workers should provide consistent support to the foster children as well as the foster parents.

In his research, Rogowski (2013) found that young people liked social workers who were friendly and approachable. The foster parent participants reported that they share a good relationship with the social workers who were working with them. They therefore felt that the social worker would work well with them in the process of permanency planning for the unrelated foster children in their care. One foster parent (Participant No 8) had this to say regarding the quality of relationship with the social worker:

When the children see a social worker, they are happy. I also tell them (the children) *that when they have a problem with me, they can tell the social worker*.

The researcher is of the view that the unrelated foster parents participants know about the roles which they need to play in the process of realizing the goals of permanency. Ensuring that the child feels like part of the family can be a positive step for the foster parents. However, the integration of the child with the other components in their life such as the community can be challenging. This is the case in that people have different beliefs when it comes to parenting and they might not be accommodated within the community where they are residing as parents because there are no biological ties between them and the children. Having a social worker coming in and out of the home also does not make the integration to be an easy process because the neighbours and members of the community will be observing the foster family at all times. The foster parents therefore need to practice their rights and responsibilities to ensure that that permanency is reached in the placement and the children become part of the community at large.

- **Theme 2: Being a parent first**

Some of the foster parent participants interviewed never had children of their own. They therefore felt that placement of the unrelated foster children in their care provided them with the opportunity to be parents. Even those foster parents who had their own biological children stated that they needed to share the love they still had within them with children who were in need.

According to Connolly and Smith (2012) there are different motivations for foster parents wanting to care for unrelated children and for some it is to have an opportunity to care for underprivileged children and for others it is to extend their families and their child caring roles.

The importance of being a parent to the children was highlighted by most of the participants. They stated that the first responsibility which they needed to exercise as a foster parent was that of being a parent to the child and providing them with all the love

they could give. Wilson and Sinclair (2003, p. 239) are of the view that foster parents are required to have basic qualities which are needed from any other parent and they are "warmth, firmness, consistency and willingness to encourage". Some participants even went further to point out that they loved the foster care children more than their own children.

- Sub-theme 1: We care

Ensuring that the unrelated foster care child eats, dresses well, goes to school and is residing at a homely environment were some of the responsibilities which the foster parents described and practice on a daily basis. Doyle (2012, p. 167) describes the benefits for children being in foster care as that of being provided with "an alternative model of family life where the children learn to feel safe and protected by adults". Harden (2004) argues that foster parents through providing safe, stable, and nurturing home environments for the foster children will foster resilience and also lessen the harmful effects of their previous experiences by exposing them to protective factors.

The foster parent participants mentioned that these responsibilities ensured that the unrelated foster children felt that they are cared for despite not being with their biological families. This was demonstrated by a foster parent (Participant No 6) who explained that:

I ensure that the child eats, he wears proper and good clothes like other children outside the house so that people from outside do not see that he is not my biological child.

Randle (2013) also reported that ex-foster children expressed that good foster parents were the ones who showed that they cared through doing their washing and providing them with healthy meals. The researcher has observed that most of the foster parents have been able to provide these needs to the unrelated foster children and the foster care grant has been enabling them to do so. Most social workers at grass roots have also been concerned about the lack of subsidies for children in permanent care such as adoption and whether the foster parents would be able to continue providing for the needs of the unrelated foster children.

- Sub-theme 2: Providing rules

After the legal placement of the child into unrelated foster care and ensuring that they love and protect the child, the foster parent participants stated that they provide rules of the household to the unrelated foster children. The foster parent participants explained that every child needs rules in order to behave accordingly and develop into a responsible adult. According to Harden (2004) being a consistent and a nurturing parents result in the children having the capacity to comply with rules. The author further states that this may lead to children behaving appropriately in the absence of an adult. A foster parent (Participant No 8) mentioned that:

I explain to the child the rules of the house and how I live with them as my children.

Ex-foster children reported that when placed in foster care, as children they needed to understand the rules of the household in order to have realistic expectations of the household they were being placed at (Randle, 2013). This reduced the likelihood of experiencing problems with the foster parents about what was expected in the household. Another foster parent (Participant No 1) regarding providing rules also mentioned that:

They are free; they come and go as they please but they know the rules of the house such as the time of coming home at night.

The foster parent participants felt that it was their responsibility to provide rules in that it was a way for them to ensuring the well-being of the unrelated foster children in their care. They also felt that this was necessary considering the permanency planning of the child in that if they were going to be residing with the child on a permanent basis, they needed to have rules within the household. Piszchala (2012) is of the view that as a foster parent one should be clear and concise about the rules of the house and ensure that the rules do not become personal but have a focus on the children.

Even though the foster parents have reported to provide rules to the unrelated foster children, the researcher has noticed that most of the children in unrelated foster care are problematic to the foster parents. This is the case in that they believe the foster parents cannot provide them with rules because they are not their biological parents. This results

in most of the children being placed in institutions by social workers where they are assisted with their behavioural problems. This also becomes a barrier to realising the goals of permanency planning in that the unrelated foster parents will not want to continue residing with children who are problematic.

- Sub-theme 3: We talk to the child

Communicating with the child to find out what their feelings regarding the placement was seen as an important responsibility for the foster parents regarding permanency planning. Moore (2012) highlights that communication with foster children should be given full attention because it makes the children feel special and encourages them to want to talk even more. Children who were previously in foster care facilities who were interviewed in Randle's (2013) study, emphasized the importance of feeling listened to by their caregivers and social workers and they wanted to be informed about plans about their future and be presented with opportunities to express their own opinions on the care plans.

The foster parent participants highlighted that the feelings of the child needed to be taken into consideration before making any permanency plans for the unrelated foster child. As one foster parent (Participant No 3) highlighted:

I always communicate with the child because some of the children do not find it easy to communicate especially in a new environment.

Research conducted by Holland (2011) found that children in foster placements felt that they lacked emotional support in their lives. The research therefore suggests that the children's experiences, wishes and feelings should be listened to. The participants felt that communication with the child was not only the responsibility of the social worker, but also them as the current caregivers of the child. The researcher has however noted that most foster parent tended to request that the social worker communicate with the child if they felt uncomfortable discussing certain matters with the social worker. They felt that their lack of training on communicating with children made them to be unable to communicate effectively with the unrelated foster children.

- Sub-theme 4: Be involved

Most of the foster parents highlighted the importance of being involved in the lives of the unrelated foster children in their care as one of the responsibilities regarding ensuring permanency of the placement. Foster parents also have the responsibility of creating a culture of learning in the home environment (Stensile, 2012). The participants recognised that they needed to take part in every aspect of the child's life and also be aware of what is happening in the life of the child, especially when it comes to their schooling and development.

Foster parents need to encourage educational experiences and attainment; relationship with peers, hobbies, talents and ensuring that the child has an opportunity to develop problem solving skills and social competence (Connolly & Morris, 2012). One foster parent (Participant No 3) made this statement to demonstrate her involvement in the lives of the children.

When you are involved with the school matters, you must check their books and also communicate with their class teachers. You are also involved in the health and well-being of the child such as taking the child to the clinic.

- Sub-theme 5: Facilitating contact with biological family

The foster parent participants reported that in the process of permanency planning for the unrelated foster children in their care, they assist the social workers through facilitating contact with the biological families. The participants stated that they ensure that the unrelated foster children maintain contact with their biological family and also grant the biological families access to the children. Klein-Rothschild and Ekas (2004, p. 332) argue that "keeping foster children connected to their biological parents, through visiting and other forms of contact is essential for reunification because it helps to re-establish and maintain family ties during the out-of-home placement".

A foster parent (Participant No 3) made this statement:

I call the families and ask them to come and visit the child at my place or for them to take the child for some few hours so that they can bond.

Most of the foster parents further reported that it was not an easy process to facilitate. However, considering the interests of the children in their care, they felt that it was necessary for the unrelated foster children to have contact with their biological family especially regarding permanency planning. The research in practice has also noted that to most of the foster parents the process was not easy to them because they regarded the unrelated foster children as their own. Therefore having them have contact with their biological families was a constant reminder that they were not their own. According to Carr (2006, p. 1040) foster parents should take responsibility of facilitating contact through "arranging contact between the child and the biological parents".

Even though the foster parent participants have reported to facilitate contact with the biological family of the unrelated foster child, it can be stated that they might not have a clear understanding of what family reunification entails. This is because they already feel that permanency has been reached within the placement and do not understand why the social worker would prioritize reunifying the child concerned with the biological family. This was demonstrated through a statement made by a foster parent (Participant No 8).

After you have bonded with the child thinking that he/she is no longer going anywhere, the social worker will come with a paper stating that the child needs to leave (be reunified) *and this hurts me more than anything*.

Every child needs rules and guidance in order for them to become active participants in the society at large. Therefore, foster parents providing the needed care and guidance to the unrelated foster children despite the circumstances which led to their placement proves to do wonders in the lives of the children. As reported in the study of Randle (2013) on the experiences of ex-foster children, there is a need for rules within the household and the foster children might not realise their importance whilst in care but will appreciate it when they are adults. The researcher is therefore of the view that the

foster parents have been doing a great job in caring for the unrelated foster children and this is essential in realising the goals of permanency planning.

- **Theme 3: We do what is best for the child**

The foster parent participants felt that it was their responsibility to do what it was in the best interests of the child. They stated that this was an important responsibility regarding the permanency planning of the children concerned in that they needed to be certain that the planning was going to be in the best interests of the child. They further highlighted that their main responsibility is ensuring the best interests of the children and the developmental needs of the child were going to be met in the permanency planning process.

Harden (2004) argues that research throughout time suggests that placement instability may lead to negative developmental outcomes for foster children. Therefore it is suggested that the children need placements which can meet their individual developmental needs (Harden, 2004). Meeting the developmental needs of the unrelated foster children in realising the goals of permanency planning is an important factor in permanency. However, social workers not utilising the IDP assessment method acts as a barriers for foster parents who on the other hand want to do what is in the best interests of the child.

- Sub-theme 1: Check on family background

Most of the foster parent participants reported that they take it upon themselves to check the background of the biological families of the unrelated foster children in their care. They felt that this was their responsibility in that if the child was to be reunified with the biological family, they needed to know what the family was about. The researcher is however of the view that this can be a hindering factor to realising the goals of permanency planning in that the foster parents have not been trained on how to go about finding information about the background of the children. Checking of the family background was highlighted by one foster parent (Participant No 8) who mentioned that:

I will do my own research about the biological family.

It was also highlighted by the participants that the information they find on the circumstances of the biological family was important in making a decision concerning the permanent placement of the unrelated foster children. This was so in that they would have peace of mind if the environment where the child was going to be returned to would meet their needs. Miller and Bentovim (2003) are of the view that family character and history can provide a crucial context in that one brings a past experience of families which at the end affect how one reacts and respond to current families. The participants also stated that their views about the biological family were recognised by the Courts and the social workers, therefore they felt that this responsibility was important for them to practice.

- Sub-theme 2: Grooming the child

The foster parent participants reported that one of their responsibilities was to ensure that the children develop into responsible adults. The participants stated that they groomed the children and taught them about the basics they needed to know about life. They felt that this was important regarding the permanency planning for the unrelated children in that wherever the children would go; they would know how to behave appropriately in society.

According to Jenson and Fraser (2011, p. 65) foster parents should ensure that they provide a child with "the developmental opportunities and emotional nurturance needed to grow into an adult who can live as independently as possible". Ensuring that unrelated foster children are groomed within the placements was emphasised by a foster parent (Participant No 8) who said:

My biggest responsibility is to look after the children. I groom them. This is because there are other children who are not taught how to behave in society, so I want that when they go back to the community, they will become a mother and a sister to other children.

The researcher is of the view that the unrelated foster parents within the Department of Social Development have been playing their part in preparing unrelated foster care children adjust well and fulfil their potential in life. This is the case in that the children have been in their care for years and there have not been placement disruptions since they started caring for them. Therefore they have been providing the unrelated foster children with the stability they need within the placements.

- Sub-theme 3: Ensuring child maintain his or her culture

One of the responsibilities the foster parent participants highlighted was that of nurturing the culture of the child and also ensuring that the child maintains his/her cultural aspects. Hastings (2012, p. 214) is of the view that foster parents should have "the ability to preserve continuity of the child's racial, ethnic and cultural identity in a positive manner". The participants stated that this was a responsibility which they needed to carry out even though in certain situations the culture of the unrelated foster children was clashing with theirs. One foster parent (Participant No 8) had this to say concerning culture:

I give the child the opportunity to practice his/her own traditions. This is because there are other things which I do not believe and traditions are not the same.

Another foster parent (Participant No 1) also made this statement:

My daughter has gone to an initiation school to become a traditional healer (mothwaso). *This is the only connection she has with her family; through her ancestors*.

Section 7 (1) (f) (ii) of the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) as amended states that the best interests of the child is monitored by the ability of the child to maintain a connection with his or her family, extended family, culture or tradition. Therefore the foster parent participants felt that they were doing what was in the best interests of the child by allowing them to practice their cultures. The ability by the unrelated foster parents to nurture and preserve the culture of the unrelated foster children in their care showed that they cared about the children. The researcher as a social worker in practice has also

noted that most foster parents have been nurturing the culture of the unrelated foster children in their care.

The loss of family ties for unrelated foster children can lead to them having developmental problems and unanswered questions about their background. This might in turn affect their development and therefore hinder the process of having them fully integrated into the family and community systems through permanency planning. The researcher therefore deems it important for the children to maintain their culture and for the foster parents to also have information concerning their background. This will give them a sense of identity which they might have lost at the time of being placed in unrelated foster care and enhance their sense of belonging in the unrelated foster family.

- **Theme 4: Permanent placements are needed**

Both cohort of participants agreed that ensuring permanency placements for unrelated foster children is vital in foster care. The participants felt that realising the goals of permanency planning would provide the unrelated children with the home environments which they needed to develop well and have their needs met. These environments will include the different systems which the unrelated foster children need to develop to their full potential such as the extended foster family and the community at large.

In ensuring permanency for foster children, Klein-Rothschild and Ekas (2004) state that there should be an assessment of the needs and strengths of the child and the family in that it is believed that permanency results in children spending less time in foster care. Permanency options such as adoption are said to be supported as compared to the other forms because it brings into the family permanency and protection (Mokomane & Rochet, 2010).

The foster parents felt that permanency would provide them with the feeling of the children being their own rather than thoughts of an uncertain future. For the social work participants, ensuring permanency would mean less intervention from their side with the family and providing the foster children with a stable home. Therefore social workers have a role of supporting the relationships which can develop in permanent placements between the foster parent and the children. This can be done through “encouraging the

development of secure attachments, a sense of identity and self-esteem" (Wilson & Sinclair, 2003, p. 238).

- Sub-theme 1: The children are cared for

The social work participants felt that the unrelated foster children within the placements they were rendering services to were cared for and well looked after. Studies have found that adults who were placed in kinship placements as children had poorer developmental outcomes compared to those placed in unrelated foster care (Harden, 2004).

These reports are however based on what is reported by the unrelated foster parents as compared to the voices of the foster children themselves. The unrelated foster parents may be reporting to the social workers that the children are well looked after even though this might not be the case at the natural home environment.

The social work participants were of the view that the foster parents were truly caring for the children because of the love they have rather than for monetary value in terms of getting the foster care grant. Ex-foster children have reported that there are foster parents who genuinely care for children and only want to provide the needed love and care to them (Randle, 2013). They felt that the children were in a better place with the unrelated foster parents than with their biological families. One social worker (Participant No 9) highlighted this through making this statement:

For me children who are in unrelated foster care are better looked after because the family is not looking for money but they are doing it out of their own hearts.

The permanent placement of unrelated children in foster care was viewed by both categories of participants as vital. Permanency is important because it provides the children with permanent systems which are needed for them to develop well. Permanency also provides foster children with the opportunity of having a future which is certain and has multiple environments which will provide them with all the care and love they need to thrive. The researcher is of the view that within the Department of Social Development, there have not been many cases where the goals of permanency planning have been realised for unrelated foster children. The researcher therefore feels

that this affects the development of the children as they will be uncertain about their future.

- **Summary of findings**

It was observed through the responses of the foster parent participants that they were more familiar with their responsibilities than their rights even though the rights were stated on the court order. This shows that the foster parents did not take the needed time to know more about the contents of the court orders or they were only interested on the legal placement of the children through going to court. It was also observed that the foster parents were however more informative about their responsibilities rather than rights towards the placement.

4.3.5. Objective 5: Establish what measures can be put in place to improve the permanency placements for children in unrelated foster care.

The fourth and last objective of my research was to establish what measures could be put in place to improve the permanency placements of unrelated foster children.

Themes and sub-themes emerging are summarised in Table 4.6. below.

Table 4.6. Measures to be put in place to improve permanency.

Themes	Sub-themes
• There is room for improvement	• We know from personal experience
• There are various measures	• More home visits • Increase foster care grant • Relationship with social worker • Education a priority • Reviewing the placement • More social workers

	• Improved resources • Improving the Court System • Manageable caseload • Foster parent training • Theory of attachment • Children's Act training

- **Theme 1: There is a room for improvement**

All participants identified a need for improvement if the goal of permanency is to be achieved. The researcher has however noted that there is a concern in practice for social workers of ensuring permanency as it may come with the loss of the foster care grant for the foster family.

- Sub-theme 1: We know from personal experience

All participants, based on their experiences, felt that there is a need for improvement in the process of ensuring permanency for unrelated foster children. According to de Jager (2011) the success of foster care placement is seen through becoming a permanent placement. However, there is a need for changes because there might be experiences of fear of losing the foster care grant or of cultural background of the foster child from the foster parents. A social worker (Participant No 9) pointed out that there is a need for improvement.

Yes, it does need to be improved because it has not reached the perfect stage where everything is running smoothly.

A foster parent (Participant No 8) also pointed out that there is a need for improvement.

I feel that it needs to be improved.

- **Theme 2: There are various measures**

Both cohorts of participants had their own views regarding how the process could be improved to ensure permanency in the placements of unrelated foster children. They felt that putting in place these measures would improve the process of realizing the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children.

Foster parents often feel constrained and feel that their views regarding what happens concerning the placement are not taken into consideration (Kaitcer, 2012). It was therefore seen as vital to provide them with the opportunity for them to present their views regarding improvements needed in ensuring the realising the goals of permanency placements. The measures as suggested by both participants involved are improvements for themselves and for the Department of Social Development.

- Sub-theme 1: More home visits

The foster parent participants felt that there would improvement in the process of ensuring permanency for the unrelated foster children in their care if the social workers would conduct more home visits. They felt that this was necessary in that the social workers would be able to check upon the home environment and communicate with the unrelated foster care children. The researcher has also observed that there are inadequate supervision services such as home visits being rendered to unrelated foster parents in practice and can therefore relate to the feelings of the foster parents. One foster parent (Participant No 10) verbalised this by stating that:

They (social workers) *must increase the number of times they come to the house to see the children*.

The foster parent participants felt that conducting more home visits by the social worker would also put them at ease when it comes to doing things correctly for the unrelated foster children. Ferguson (2011) is of the view that social workers in child protection should conduct more home visits in that the family home is where the children live and

they are able to assess the family relationships and parenting skills of foster parents in their natural surroundings.

- Sub-theme 2: Increase foster care grant

In improving the process of realising the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children, the foster parents felt that there was a need to increase the foster care grant. The foster parent participants felt that the money they were getting was little to meet the needs of the unrelated foster children in their care. The researcher has observed that most of the families especially those being provided services by the Department of Social Development are from poor backgrounds and they struggle to meet their basic needs. One foster parent (Participant No 3) had this to say:

In a case where a child is taking treatment, the money is little in that you need to buy some of the medication and transport to the check-ups.

For the unrelated foster children in their care, the foster parents felt that the money was little in that it did not enable them to meet most of the needs of the children. According to research from Swanepoel (1999) most foster parents felt that the foster care grant was not enough. The author further found that, the participants felt the social worker should assist the children in their care with food and clothes. The foster parent's feelings of the grant being little also confirms the fears of social workers that it is a barrier to realising the goals of permanency planning in that most of the options do not have financial incentives.

- Sub-theme 3: Relationship with social worker

To ensure the permanent placement of the unrelated foster children in their care, the foster parent participants felt that there was a need for social workers to improve their relationship with the unrelated foster children. Schofield and Ward (2011) are of the view that permanence for foster children feels helpful in that it offers them a sense of security within the placement. The participants felt that the children needed to know that

they had their own social worker who cared and was available to assist them within the placement. A foster parent (Participant No 8) mentioned that:

What I want is for the social worker to come and see the children because the children are used to them as their caregivers and they must play their roles.

- Sub-theme 4: Education a priority

Education of the unrelated foster children needed to be given priority in ensuring the goals of permanency planning, reported the foster parent participants. They felt that improving on the education of unrelated foster children and making it a priority would improve the chances of being placed permanently in foster care in that they would have a better future. According to Jenson and Fraser (2011) there is a need to improve on the education of foster care children through taking into account the appropriateness and proximity of the school in which the child is enrolled at during the time of the placement.

The priority needed in education was emphasised by a foster parent (Participant No 8) who suggested that:

There is a need for bursaries and better education which will enable them (unrelated foster children) *to have a better life*.

The foster parent participants needed to be assured by the social workers that the education of the unrelated foster children in their care would be given a priority as this would improve their part in ensuring permanency. Connolly and Morris (2012) state that social workers and foster parents need to support the foster children beyond school attendance and they need to take notice of the needs and wishes of the foster children. The researcher has noted that in practice, most foster children including unrelated have been assisted by social workers to get free education and also be placed at schools which can accommodate their needs.

- Sub-theme 5: Reviewing the placement

Reviewing the foster care placement takes place two years after the Court order regarding placement of the child in foster care. Meitjes, et al., (2003) state that the placements in foster care are made for a period of two years with the provision of on-going monitoring by social workers and them having a renewal process in order to continue the placement and the payment of the foster grant. The authors further state that even though the renewal process is not as difficult as the initial application process, better strategies are needed to be implemented considering the long-term effects of the provision of social security to the foster family. Therefore, there is a need for constant monitoring of the placement by social workers.

The social work participants felt that this was a long period to review the placement and therefore suggested that there was a need for a review on an annual basis. They stated that this would improve the permanent placement of unrelated foster children in that they would be in constant contact with the family before making a decision on permanency. One social worker (Participant No 4) demonstrated that through reviewing the placement more frequently, she could make better recommendations for permanency placement.

If I had to see them (foster family) *after a year; that would be better because that would give me a chance to monitor the placement*.

The researcher as a social worker in practice is however of the view that this might not be possible. This is because there are already inadequate supervision services being rendered to the foster families. Therefore, having to review the placement every year would mean more work for the social workers considering the strains of having a heavy caseload and lack of resources to provide the needed services.

- Sub-theme 6: More social workers

Social work participants felt that they were few professional social workers in the field of child care and there was a need for improvement in order to realise the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children. The researcher has also observed that

currently there are few social workers within the field of child care within the Department of Social Development as compared to the foster care applications both related and unrelated. This is a verbatim statement from a social worker (Participant No 5):

I also think that we need more social workers in the field because there is a few of us.

In her research Ngwenya (2011) found that social workers felt that there was a need for more social workers to be appointed in order to improve their working conditions within the Department of Social Development. According to Dawes (cited in Hall & Proudlock, 2011), there were only 13 773 social workers registered in South Africa.

In the research study conducted by Ngwabi (2013) findings, social work participants also indicated that the pressure in their work would be less if there were more social workers in the field. de Jager (2011) is of the view that having too few social workers in the field leads to caseloads being high and this therefore hinders the process of rendering all the necessary services to the clients. The participants felt that the Department of Social Development needed to employ more social workers to assist in the placement of unrelated foster children as this would improve the process of ensuring permanency in the placements.

- Sub-theme 7: Improved resources

The social work participants suggested that there be improvement on the resources which are available to them. They felt that this was necessary in that the resources enable them to render effective services to the unrelated foster families. It was found in the research conducted that the social workers employed by the Department of Social Development lacked resources such as human resources (social workers), office space, stationery, cars, computers and telephone and fax facilities in order to provide efficient services to the foster care families (Ngwenya, 2011). The lack of resources was verbalised by a social worker (Participant No 4) who pointed out that:

The issue of resources also needs to be dealt with in that it makes it difficult for us to render social work services properly.

For the social work participants, having improved resources would improve the process of realizing the goals of permanency for unrelated foster children in that they would provide adequate services to the family. de Jager (2011) also found that insufficient resources such as time and manpower posed as a challenge to the social workers when they needed to provide social work services to foster families. The researcher has noted that there is a challenge at the Department of Social Development regarding the needed resources to provide foster care services to the families.

The increase of resources will not only be beneficial to the social worker participants but also to the foster care families in that the process of realising the goals of permanency planning will improve. Throughout time there has been improvement at the Department of Social Development where social workers are provided with Telephones and Computers for them to provide adequate services to foster families. However, there is still a great need to improve on other resources mentioned by the participants in order for them to realise the goals of permanency planning.

- Sub-theme 8: Improving the Court System

Most of the social work participants felt that the Children's Court system needed to be improved as it was seen as sometimes affecting the outcomes of permanency for unrelated foster children. The participants stated this realising the part which the Children's Court play in ensuring permanency for unrelated foster children. The shortage of children's courts and Commissioners of Child Welfare have been stated to contribute to the backlog in foster care cases which also hinders the placements of children in need of care and protection in foster care (de Jager, 2011). The participants therefore felt that this needed to be improved in order to ensure the permanent placements for unrelated foster children. A social worker (Participant No 7) had this to say about the court:

The court system needs to be improved in that their court dates are far apart to the time which you submit the report.

- Sub-theme 9: Manageable caseload

Reduced caseloads was seen by the social work participants as a way which could improve the permanent placements of unrelated foster children. The participants felt that having a manageable caseload would enable them to provide better services to the unrelated foster families and making better recommendations for permanency in the placements.

Ngwenya (2011) is of the view that high caseloads of social workers hinder them to deliver effective and efficient services to clients. This is the case in that the clients wait for six to twelve months before they are contacted by a social worker to be screened for the placement.

The need to have a manageable caseload was highlighted through this statement from a social worker (Participant No 2):

If we can have a manageable caseload maybe things will be better.

The participants also stated that having a high caseload and administrative work has led them to having inadequate time for developmental programmes and projects. Therefore, having a manageable caseload would improve on the services they offered to the foster families. The researcher has however observed that in practice, having Social Auxiliary Workers does assist the social workers with the administrative work but it does not reduce the high caseload. Having a manageable caseload will improve the quality of services which social workers will provide to the foster care families.

The researcher has observed that social workers at the Department of Social Development have higher caseloads of foster care cases especially those of related foster care. This is because they are the main provider of foster care. The heavy caseload becomes a barrier of realising the goals of permanency planning. Therefore there is a need to improve on the caseload of social workers in order for them to realise the goals of permanency planning especially for unrelated foster children as they are residing with people with no blood ties.

- Sub-theme 10: Foster parent training

Most of the social work participants felt that there was a need to have training sessions with the unrelated foster parents concerning the placement of unrelated foster children in their care. The participants highlighted that most of their foster parents were not clearly informed on what foster care entailed. Therefore, they felt that there is a need to educate them in order to improve the chances of permanency placements for the unrelated children. This was highlighted by a social worker (Participant No 2) who said:

I also feel that our foster parents also need to be educated about what foster care is about and how to look after the children in their care.

The foster parent participants also felt that there was a need for them to be provided with training and support by the social worker pre and post the legal placement of the child in their care. Klein-Rothschild and Ekas (2004, p. 332) are also of the view that foster parent training and support as well as preparation are "essential components" and they "teach foster parents skills and coping mechanisms to deal with challenges of fostering".

In practice, there has not been any training provided to the foster parents whether of related or unrelated concerning caring for the foster care children. The researcher has noted that social workers are unable to provide these trainings to the foster parents even though they might not have any previous experience of caring for children. The social workers at other sectors such as NGO's have been known to provide training to their foster parents and this is not the case for social workers at the Department of Social Development. The researcher notes that this goes back to the heavy caseload which the social workers have highlighted.

- Sub-theme 11: Theory of attachment

It was suggested by the social work participants that they needed to use the theory of attachment in order to improve the permanent placements for unrelated foster children. In considering the permanent placement of children through adoption, Howe (2009)

states that the placement should be affected by the quality of attachment between the child and the proposed parents.

The theory of attachment is important in foster care in that firstly, it offers a way of understanding "the complex, multilayers nature of adoption and fostering" and secondly it deals "with what is at the heart of social work with children and families, that is, the importance of personal relationships" (Jones, 2012, p. 204). A social worker (Participant No 2) demonstrated the importance of doing so through this statement:

If we can also work on some theories such as the attachment theory when placing children, it can help because you might find that you are placing a child with someone whom the child does not have any attachment.

Even though social workers through their training are taught to use theory in their work with clients, this is not the case at practice level. The researcher has observed that most social workers in practice only write reports and make recommendations on what is expected from them by the courts and the Department of Social Development. They therefore do not use theories which are applicable in assisting them to realise the goals of permanency planning.

- Sub-theme 12: Children's Act training

The social work participants felt that they needed more training on the implementation of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 as it is the one they use in ensuring that the goals of permanency planning are reached. One social worker (Participant No 2) stated that:

Social workers need to undergo training especially of the Children's Act.

The participants felt that the training was going to enable them to implement the Children's Act and therefore ensure that children in unrelated foster care have permanent placements. In their research study Selwyn, et al., (2010) found that social workers felt that training, guidance and support was helpful and assisted them in their thinking and planning concerning the work which they were doing.

Social workers at the Department are provided with training of the Children's Act. However, the researcher is of the view that in practice there is a need for refresh courses provided to the social workers. This is because they might easily forget some aspects of the Act which they do not apply on a day to day basis.

- **Summary of findings**

The participants felt that the process of ensuring permanency for unrelated foster children needed to be improved. This was the case in that in practice there were not many unrelated foster children where the goals of permanency planning were realised whilst they were in foster care. The participants were also able to highlight the measures which they felt needed to be put in place in order to improve the process of realising the goals of permanency planning. These measures were highlighted considering the experiences of both cohorts of participants on the process of realising the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster care children.

4.4. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:

Realising the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children has its own challenges for social workers as it has been noted in the above discussion. This is because the developmental needs as well as the care and protection of the unrelated foster children need to be taken into consideration before anything else. The foster parents on the other hand feel that the goals of permanency have already been reached and therefore there is no longer a need for social work intervention.

It can also be stated from the above discussion that permanency in itself involves social workers working together with foster parents, biological family and other professionals in order to achieve the intended goals. The social workers also need to consider the motives of foster parents and their willingness to care for the unrelated foster children permanently. This is important in that previous research has showed that most foster parents are motivated by the money being provided as caregivers of children not related to them rather than the love of foster children. It has also been discussed that there is a

need for improvement in the process of realising the goals of permanency placements for unrelated foster children.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION:

The following chapter summarises the main findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Thereafter, the chapter discusses the conclusions reached and provides recommendations based on the main findings for practice, theory and future research.

5.2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS:

The main focus of the study was to explore social workers' and unrelated foster parents' perceptions of the challenges experienced when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care. The main findings of the research are presented in relation to the two research questions the study aimed at answering.

- **What are perspectives of social workers regarding challenges faced when trying to realize the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children?**

The main finding of the study is that social workers are aware of the types of social work services which should be rendered to the unrelated foster care families in order to realize the goals of permanency planning for the child concerned. The study also found that even though this is so, they are facing major hurdles in practice:

1. High caseloads: efforts to render effective services to unrelated foster care placements, this is hampered by the responsibility of managing high caseloads of related foster care placements.

2. Children's Courts: recommendations made by the social workers to extend the validity of court orders until children in unrelated foster care turn 18 years of age is not being approved by Court.

3. Lack of co-operation: unrelated foster mothers are not available to discuss permanency plans of the child concerned with the social worker during the process of rendering social work services to the unrelated foster family.

4. Lack of resources: there are insufficient human and material resources available at the Department of Social Development to ensure that social workers render the necessary services to ensure permanency for the child concerned.

5. Lack of incentives: the foster care grant not being provided to some permanency options hampers with the process of ensuring permanency planning as some foster care families are dependent on the money to provide for the financial needs of the child concerned.

- **What are the perspectives of unrelated foster parents regarding the challenges they face when trying to reach the goals of permanency planning for unrelated foster children?**

The foster parent participants reported to have a sense of ownership for the unrelated foster care children in their care due to having a Court order and the children being part of the family. They therefore felt that the goals of permanency planning had already been reached because they were already playing the roles of being parents to the unrelated foster children.

Through the interviews, the foster parents were able to describe their roles and responsibilities in ensuring the permanency of the children in their care. The foster parents' participants demonstrated to have more awareness of their responsibilities as compared to their rights.

It emerged from the findings that foster parents recognised the importance of the foster child to maintain contact with his/her biological family and they did not foresee the child

actually being reunified with his/her family. For the participants, facilitating contact with biological family and ensuring that the child maintains his/her own culture were seen as ways in which they ensured that their best interests were taken into consideration when it came to realising the goals of permanency planning.

All the foster parents' participants during the interviews related to the researcher that they were not experiencing any challenges with regard to permanency planning within the placement in that they had already felt that permanency planning had been met. Having a social worker working with the family also made them to feel at ease within the placement and to view the placement as permanent in that the social workers were rendering to them the needed services.

5.3. CONCLUSIONS:

The main conclusion that may be drawn from the findings of the study is that social workers are experiencing challenges in trying to realize the goals of permanency for children in unrelated foster care. For this reason, many children in unrelated foster care remain in this legal alternative for many years, sometimes until adulthood.

As the number of orphans, deliberately neglected and abandoned children continues to grow in South Africa, plans are needed to be put in place to ensure the realisation of the goals of permanency planning when these children enter into the system of foster care.

The study also draws a conclusion that there is a need for information sharing sessions and training regarding permanency planning for children in unrelated foster to be done by social workers. This is due to the lack of knowledge from unrelated foster parents regarding their rights and responsibilities in this regard.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The following recommendations are made regarding the rendering of social work services by the Department of Social Development in the Johannesburg Metro Region and for further research.

5.4.1. Recommendations regarding rendering of social work services by social workers in the employ of the Department of Social Development, Johannesburg Metro Region:

- The social workers in practice need to ensure that the children are provided with permanent placements which are stable and sustainable to ensure that they develop well into responsible adults in society. The social work supervisors need to ensure that this takes place through giving priority to unrelated foster care cases and assisting the social workers with challenges they encounter in the process of rendering services to the unrelated foster family.

- Foster parents need to be trained concerning their rights and responsibilities in realising the goals of permanency planning as the foster parents demonstrated to have little knowledge in this regard. The foster parents also need to be made aware of the contents of the Court order as most of them were not aware that the rights and responsibilities were printed on the back of the Court order.

- Frequent supervision sessions with the social worker in the form of one on one supervision or peer supervision to provide them with the skills to better manage their caseloads and also prevent burnout and/or staff turnover. Referring social workers to the employee wellness programme will also assist them on their well-being and them providing effective and efficient services to the unrelated foster care families.

- Increase the availability of basic resources needed by the social workers to realize the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care. The Department needs to increase the number of vehicles available for social workers to conduct home visits and also provide them with adequate office space for them to conduct the interviews with the unrelated foster families.

- Social workers in the field form strong partnerships with other professionals using the multi-disciplinary approach instead of relying only on consultations. This will ensure that the goals of permanency planning are realized in that the family will be provided with all the needed services from the different professionals involved.

- Providing an increase on the foster care grant for families who are permanently caring for unrelated children. Such an increase can be provided in the form of vouchers as some of the unrelated foster families are struggling to meet the needs of the unrelated foster children in their care as they feel that the foster care grant is not adequate. Permanency is therefore not being considered because of the financial burden that comes with taking full responsibility for the unrelated foster child. Therefore having an increase after permanency has been realised will ascertain that the needs of the unrelated foster child will still be met.

- Social workers within the Department attend regular training especially of the Children's Act No 38 of 2005 because it is their guiding policy in ensuring that the goals of permanency planning are realized. The training courses will act as a reminder to the social workers on what is required from them in the process of ensuring that the goals of permanency planning are realised. It is also recommended that the trainings also include the application of developmental theories applicable to ensuring permanency for children in unrelated foster care as this was found to be lacking in practice.

- Training social workers on the implementation of the Developmental Assessment Tool for children in alternative care as developed by the National Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2014) and social workers should be reminded during the training about the theoretical frameworks which could be used in practice to ensure permanency for unrelated foster children.

5.4.2. Recommendations for further research:

- This study was conducted using a qualitative approach and a small sample of social workers and unrelated foster parents from the Department of Social Development; it is therefore recommended that further research including a larger and representative sample be conducted. The sample can include the other regions of the Department of Social Development and male social workers and unrelated foster parents.

- Research be conducted to explore the views of unrelated foster children regarding their perceptions on why the goals of permanency planning are not reached. The unrelated foster children should include those already in the system and also ex-foster children who exited the system without the goals of permanency planning not being reached.

5.5. CONCLUDING COMMENT:

In conclusion, the researcher feels that it is fundamental that despite all the challenges and desires of social workers and unrelated foster parents, the best interests of the child be realised in that they are the future of our country. It is also important to ensure that their well-being and development are considered first before anything else in that they did not choose to be in those circumstances which they found themselves in. It is therefore important that they be provided with nurturing environments for them to thrive. This will enable them to be active members of society going into the future.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview schedules for investigating the challenges in realising the goals of permanency planning for children placed in unrelated foster care.

Schedule for social workers

Section 1: Demographic information

Gender

Male ☐

Female ☐

Age in years

18-22 ☐

23-27 ☐

28-32 ☐

33-37 ☐

38-42 ☐

43 – 49 ☐

50 and above ☐

Number of years in practice

0-12 months ☐

1-2 years ☐

3-4 years ☐

5-6 years ☐

7 years and above ☐

Section 2: Interview Questions

Questions on services rendered:

1. Tell me about the services which you render to unrelated foster care families?
2. Can you tell me about the frequency of rendering these services?
3. Can you tell me about the purpose of rendering these services?
4. Tell me about the family reunification services which you render?
5. What are the permanency placements services that you are rendering?
6. What challenges do you experience when rendering these permanency placements services?

Way forward:

1. Do you think that the process of foster rendering these services needs to be improved?
2. How do you think it can best be improved?

Schedule for foster parents

<u>Section 1:</u> Demographic information

<u>Gender</u>

Male ☐

Female ☐

<u>Age in years</u>

18-22 ☐

23-27 ☐

28-32 ☐

33-37 ☐

38-42 ☐

43 – 49 ☐

50 and above ☐

<u>Number of years as a foster parent</u>

0-12 months ☐

1-2 years ☐

3-4 years ☐

5-6 years ☐

7 years and above ☐

<u>Section 2</u>: Interview Questions:

<u>Questions on services being rendered:</u>

1. Can you tell me about your responsibilities as a foster parent?
2. Tell me about the services being rendered to you by the social workers?
3. How is the involvement of the family in the placement?
4. Can you tell me about the purpose of the involvement of the family in the placement?
5. Can you tell me about your knowledge regarding permanency placements?

6. What do you think is your role and responsibility in permanency placements?
7. What are the challenges that you are experiencing with the placement?

Way forward:

1. Do you think that the process of rendering these services needs to be improved?
2. How do you think it can best be improved?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

RESEARCH TITTLE

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

Good day,

My name is Tinyiko Mantsho and I am a student registered for the degree Masters of Social Work in Social Development at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parents regarding the challenges faced when trying to realise the goals of permanency planning for children in unrelated foster care at the Department of Social Development. It is hoped that this information may enhance the understanding of experiences of social workers and unrelated foster parents regarding permanency placements of unrelated foster care children and improve the services provided by social workers within the Department.

I therefore wish to invite you participate in my study as a person who is closely working with unrelated foster care children. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange an interview with you at a time and place that is suitable to you. The interview will last approximately one hour. You may withdraw from the study at any time and you may also not answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with answering.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one other than my supervisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes and the interview schedules will be kept for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be ensured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

As the interview will include sensitive issues, there is a possibility that you may experience some feelings of emotional distress. Should you therefore feel the need for supportive counselling following the interview, I have arranged for this service to be provided free of charge by Ms Tebogo Ngcobondwane. She may be contacted at 0113559312.

Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the study. I shall answer them to the best of my ability. I may be contacted on Tel: 0113559327 or 0734224261. You can also contact my supervisor Mrs Priscilla Gerrand and she can be contacted at 0117174473. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study; an abstract will be available on request.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

.....

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

If illiterate

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of witness: _____ **Thumbprint of participant**



Signature of witness: _____

Date: _____

Statement by the researcher

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

I confirm that the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this has been provided to the participant.

Name of researcher: **Tinyiko Mantsho**

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF THE INTERVIEW

I hereby consent to audio-recording of the interview. I understand that confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed two years after any publication arising from the study or six years after completion of the study if there are no publications.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

If illiterate

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Name of witness: _____ **Thumbprint of participant**



Signature of witness: _____

Date: _____

Statement by the researcher

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

I confirm that the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this has been provided to the participant.

Name of researcher: **Tinyiko Mantsho**

Signature of the researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Mantsho

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER H13/06/22**
PROJECT TITLE	Challenges in realizing the goals of permanency planningfor children placed in unrelated foster care: perspectives of social workers and unrelated foster parents
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms TC Mantsho
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human & Community Development/Social Work
DATE CONSIDERED	21/06/2013
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	11/08/2015

DATE 12/08/2013 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Ms P Gerrand

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10003, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature **Date** 13/08/2013

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX F



GAUTENG PROVINCE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Enquiries : Refilwe Makapela
011 355 7676 ; Cell No. 082 469 3131
Sub-directorate Research and Policy Co-Ordination
Dir.: Research and Demography
CD: Development and Research

Dear Ms. M. Constance

RE: YOUR APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT

Thank you for your application to conduct research within the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

Your application on the research on ***"Promoting the Goals of Permanency Planning for Children Placed in Unrelated Foster Care: Perspectives Of Social workers and Unrelated Foster Parents within the Department of Social Development"*** has been considered and approved for support by the Department as it was found beneficial to the Department's vision and mission.

The approval is subject to the Departmental terms and conditions as endorsed by you on the 2/05/2013

May I take this opportunity to wish you well for the research.

Looking forward to a value adding research and a fruitful co-operation.

With thanks.

Tshabalala.....

MS.W.R. TSHABALALA
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DATE.....6/6/2013.....