
A Stakeholders' Analysis of the Systems that Support Foster Care

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Abstract

This paper focuses on understanding how the key stakeholders of the foster care system work together, as well as the systems that facilitate collaboration. We conducted 20 interviews with foster parents, 2 with non-profit agencies, and 1 case worker interview. Our findings suggest that each stakeholder faces their own unique challenges and sociotechnical systems put in place to assist stakeholders are not sufficient for addressing these concerns. This poster identifies the major stakeholders, their goals and needs, as well as the systems used. Our work helps identify gaps in order to design more effective systems that can better support the foster care system.

Author Keywords

Foster Care System; Stakeholders analysis; Foster Parents; Foster Teens; Caseworkers; Adolescent Online Safety

ACM Classification Keywords

K.4 COMPUTERS AND SOCIETY

Introduction

This study is part of a larger work-in-progress project on online safety for foster teens [1,2]. In conducting this larger study, we uncovered interesting complexities related to the number of different stakeholders and systems that support foster care. The goals of this

Side Bar 1

Descriptive Statistics

Foster Parents:

- Most foster parents identified as White/Caucasian (15/20); only three as African American/Black, and two remained unidentified.
- Most were under the age of 50 (70%); four were between 50 and 69, and one over the age of 70.
- Mostly all foster parents were female (19/20) except for 1 male.
- Places of residence included Florida, Maine, Georgia, Kansas, New York, and North Carolina.

The non-profit representatives:

- Females
- Florida and Texas

Case worker:

- Female
- Florida

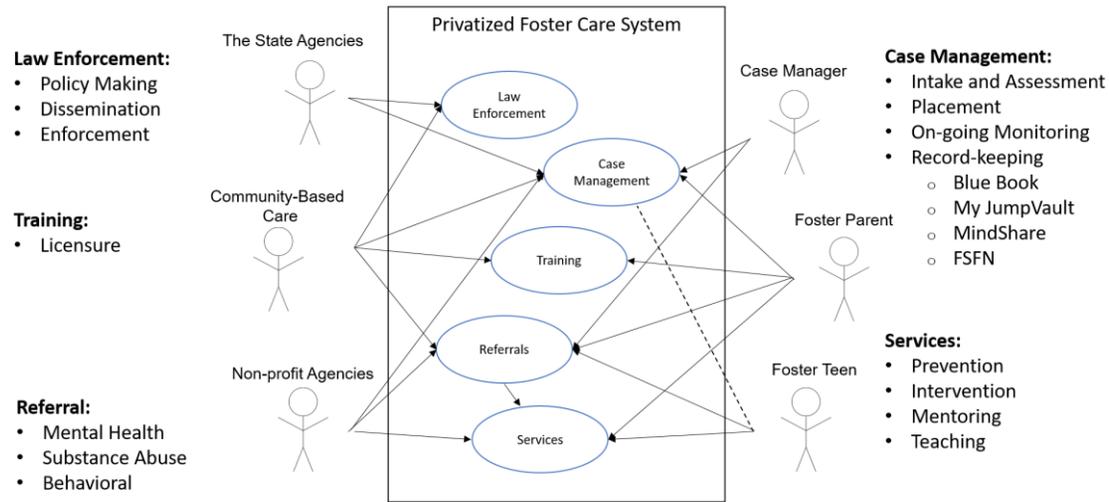


Figure 1. Use Case Diagram of U.S. Foster Care System.

research are three-fold: **RQ1**) to identify the key stakeholders and **RQ2**) understand their unique goals as they pertain to caring for foster youth, and **RQ3**) examine the systems that currently support these goals.

Background

Our recent literature review [2] on foster teens and online safety revealed a lack of empirical research on technology-based interventions that support foster youth and other foster care stakeholders. Additionally, existing programs do not adequately support the needs of foster care stakeholders, due to lack of funding and supervision [3]. In accordance with prior research within the GROUP community [5], our research will inform the design and implementation of technologies

that can support foster care stakeholders and promote organizational change.

Methods

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 foster parents, 3 foster care non-profit representatives, and 1 case worker. Parent interviews were conducted by phone, for about an hour, and were followed by a demographics questionnaire. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes. Descriptive statistics are provided in **Sidebar 1**.

RQ1: Who are the primary stakeholders?

We initially identified 3 primary stakeholders—foster parents, caseworkers, and foster teens. However, throughout our interviews and research, we realized

Side Bar 2**What are the goals and needs of the stakeholders?**

Lack of support: “My frustration is when the agency or the caseworker is telling you to treat them the way you would treat your child. Punish them the way you would punish your child. But yet I can't do that because they're not my child.” FP4

Lack of resources: “...I think that the foster system has its hands so full... they're like, 'we hear you, and we agree that's really odd and frightening, but we have some other cases right now that are a whole lot worse than yours,' and I'm like wow! So, I think that the foster care—even if the foster care system did have a way to monitor, I don't know that they have the capacity to stay on top of all of that” FP6

Overloaded: “I handle about 30+ cases on average and yes! It's way too much.” CW1, Florida

there may be additional, critical stakeholders (e.g., the state agency, community-based care agency, and non-profit agencies). To illustrate each of their roles, we developed a use case diagram (**Figure 1**) in which we present the key stakeholders (actors), as well as their main goals (ovals and lines). The state agency governs the laws, opens the case, and either passes it on to a community-based care agency (if privatized) or provides the welfare services themselves (if not privatized). Community-based care organizations are responsible for enforcing laws, licensing foster parents, and working with non-profit organizations to provide welfare services. Non-profit organizations, per insights from our representatives, assign licensed social workers to the foster teens' birth family and provide necessary support to the birth family and teen. The primary task of a licensed social worker (case manager) is to act as a “coach” for the birth family and foster teen, as well as refer them to any services that may support their needs. Foster parents are responsible for taking care of the teen, advocating for the teen's needs, and making sure the case plan (developed by the social worker) is followed. Finally, foster teens are required to follow the case plans developed by the case manager. We concluded that the system works similar to a hierarchy in which the state agency has the most power, and the foster parents and teens have the least. In the following section, we delve further into the goals and needs of each stakeholder.

RQ2: What are the goals and needs of the stakeholders?

Through our interviews, we found that the overall goal of the foster system is reunification of the teen with their birth family (though in extreme cases it may be finding a permanent home). To reach this goal, each

stakeholder focuses on their own individual goals. For instance, a caseworker's goal is for both the birth parent and foster teen to meet the goals of their case plan. The foster parent's goal is to figure out the needs of the teen to help find a permanent home. To reach these goals, stakeholders must be able to complete their tasks and perform their individual roles effectively. Unfortunately, each stakeholder has numerous unattended needs. For example, foster parents feel as though there is a “*lack of support*” from caseworkers or foster care agencies when teens are misbehaving or “*things go awry*.” (See **Side Bar 2**, FP4). However, parents also understood that the agency may have a lack of knowledge or available resources (See Side Bar 2, FP6). This perspective coincided with some of the challenges outlined by the case worker and non-profit representatives. For instance, the case worker stated that she is often overwhelmed by the numerous cases she is assigned (See **Side Bar 2**, CW 1 quote). One of the non-profit representatives also said that sometimes she feels as though the organization is trying too much, with too little resources, to help. She also mentioned that group homes can be overwhelmed at times too, reaching about 40 teens, 13 to 18 years old (when the average is typically 15 teens per group home). Though systems are put in place to help alleviate some of these challenges, there is still room for improvement.

RQ3: What systems support stakeholders' goals and needs?

During the foster parent interviews, several participants mentioned various systems of support. Since we only focused on questioning the general challenges surrounding foster care, we originally did not include questions concerning these systems in our interviews. To investigate further this emergent theme, we

Side Bar 3

What systems support stakeholders' goals and needs?

Blue Book: "Each child that comes into the home has blue book and along with the blue book normally, from early childhood or whatever, they have a book and that this is their life story or journey." FP2, Florida

My JumpVault: "they no longer use what is called a Blue Book. It is now electronic where you get a jump drive and it has all of the children's information on it, or it is sent via email to you, for you to peruse through the child's information." FP1, Florida

conducted a general search. The system most mentioned was the Blue Book (also known as Life book, Plan Book; See Side Bar 3, FP2). This "blue 3-inch binder" is kept throughout the course of the teens' care. It contains the child's history and placement information. It also allows the child to answer questions regarding their personal preferences and unique interests. Some states have transferred it onto online platforms like MyJumpVault (see **Side Bar 3**, FP1). Designed by foster care alumni, MyJumpVault [6] serves as a safe place to upload and manage confidential information. It also provides resources to better prepare foster care youth for the transition to adulthood. Unfortunately, when interviewing the non-profit representatives and case worker, both stated that teens either have limited access or do not get access to this system until the age of 18 (which by this age most teens have aged out of the foster care system).

Discussion and Future Research

Teens in foster care have limited access to the systems that are ultimately used to manage their lives. To increase teen engagement in the systems designed to support their needs, we recommend taking a value sensitive design (VSD) [4] approach to ensure the needs and values of *all* stakeholders are considered when developing a system of support. Prior research on VSD have implemented 3 main stages to VSD: 1) *conceptual*—identifying stakeholders and needs, 2) *empirical*—studying the context of the technical support system, and 3) *technical*—how stakeholder values are incorporated (or neglected) within the design of the system. This paper covers the first stage, conceptual and identifies the major stakeholders of the foster care system, their needs, and the technical systems of support. A limitation of our work is that most of our

participants are from Florida, and the foster care systems varies from state-to-state. To overcome some of our work's limitations and acquire a more holistic perspective, we plan to interview more case workers and non-profit organization representatives that live outside the state of Florida, as well as previous foster youth, who recently aged-out of the foster care system (at or above the age of legal IRB consent), to better understand their needs from the perspectives of VSD and sociotechnical design.

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