

Looking into the Philippine foster care experience

Trends and challenges

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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The Filipino family, the fundamental unit of Philippine society, is confronted with pressures of a rapidly changing society. Over the past decades, there have been significant changes in its composition, size, structure, support systems and organization arising from demographic, social and economic changes. Poverty and rapid social change have created stress situations that affect the family's ability to perform its function of caring and nurturing of children. Of particular concern is the displacement of families arising from rural-urban migration, high unemployment and underemployment and overseas employment. Such displacement has contributed to family instability and disorganization as manifested in reported increases in child abandonment, abuse and neglect, street children, prostitution and family violence involving children as victims.

The children are the most adversely affected by these changes. They constitute a growing population coming to the attention of the child welfare system – the abandoned, dependent, neglected and abused.

These recent social and economic changes are affecting how families function and the quality of life of their children, and have heightened the need for a variety of community-based, child-focused and family-oriented child welfare services in the country. One of the varied provisions pursued on behalf of children in difficult situations is foster care. A substitute child welfare service, foster care has come to form part of the child care system in the Philippines, providing alternative care

for displaced children who need out-of-home care in a family setting.

This paper is a descriptive information about foster care in the Philippines. It is divided into three parts. Part I outlines the social situation of children in the Philippines and the major areas of policy to address the needs of children. This provides the context/backdrop for the development of foster care as a child welfare service to address the needs of children who are abandoned, neglected and abused. Part II presents the Philippines' foster care system – its evolution, status of foster care as a community-based alternative care for children, and some of the issues and problems at the heart of foster care programming. The results of the 1998 baseline survey of foster care situation in the Philippines conducted by NORFIL Foundation provide valuable data on the extent of foster care implementation in the country. Part III looks at the trends and challenges associated with foster care in the coming decade.

I. THE SITUATION OF FILIPINO CHILDREN AND YOUTH: AN OVERVIEW

DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSIONS

In the Philippines, as in most developing countries, children comprise the largest segment of the national population. The 1997 ESCAP Population Data Sheet (Source UN, Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Population Division, World Population Prospects) indicated that the Philippines

Table 1 Distribution of the number of children at the government run reception and study center for children by region

Location/Region	No. of children	%
LUZON		
National Capital Region	313	31
Tuguegarao/ Cagayan	70	7
Angeles City	138	14
Albay, Bicol	79	8
CAR/ Benguet	13	1
VISAYAS		
Cebu	70	7
Tacloban	54	5
MINDANAO		
Zamboanga City	66	7
Cagayan de Oro	83	8
Davao	75	7
Cotabato	46	5
TOTAL	1007	100

has a population of 70.63 million. From the 2.3 per cent growth rate in 1990, it declined to 2.0 per cent in 1997. However, the number of young population or children below 15 years old has remained high. Approximately 38 million Filipino children 15 years old and below comprise 53.8 % of the total population. This percentage share of the children in the total population means that significant additional resources will be needed to provide adequate nourishment, health care and amenities for physical and mental development as well as substantial basic education facilities. In short, the proportion of young children is a rough estimate of the time, energy and resources that have to be devoted to their care if they are to be looked after.

PROBLEMS FACING THE YOUNG

Studies on the situation of Filipino children have been undertaken since 1987. These various studies have drawn pointed attention to principal problems facing the Filipino children: infant and child mortality; high morbidity rate and resulting debility; malnutrition and under-nutrition; and lack of access to basic educational services. Continuing

high rates of poverty, low income, low education of mothers in rural areas, large family size, poor environmental sanitation and lack of access to basic services, and declining budgetary commitment remain the underlying factors affecting health, nutritional and educational improvements among children. These problems go together and are indications of the many directions in which there is urgent need for an intensive and integrated effort. This health-nutrition-education triad remains a big challenge in addressing the survival, protection and development needs of Filipino children and youth.

CHILDREN IN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES (CEDC)

Children in especially difficult circumstance (CEDC) or children in need of special protection (CNSP) are a significant government concern. These include children in hazardous and exploitative labor, on the streets, trapped into substance abuse, who are victims of family violence, neglect and commercial sexual exploitation, in conflict with the law, displaced or otherwise affected by armed conflict, children in ethnic/cultural communities and those separated from or who have lost their parent/s. A child may be exposed to a multiple of these circumstances. For example, a child separated from parents, either because of abuse or abandonment, is likely to be found on the streets and, therefore, exposed to the hazards of substance abuse and prostitution.

While data remain inadequate, a 1997 situation study on CNSP has shown that the numbers of Filipino children and youth affected by different especially difficult circumstances have grown over the years. A national survey on working children by the National Statistics Office in collaboration with the International Labor Organization - International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC) estimated that out of 22.4 million Filipino children aged 5-17 years, 16 per cent or 3.7 million were working children. The National Project on Street Children, jointly implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the National

Council of Social Development Agencies (NCSA) network of NGOs and UNICEF, estimated the number of street children at more than 220,000 in 65 major cities as of 1993. End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) and other NGOs have placed the number of sexually exploited or prostituted children between 60,000 and 75,000 nationwide. Many had suffered from incest and child sexual abuse before their entry into prostitution (UNICEF, 1999). For the period 1992-1994 (DSWD, 1995), some 15,894 orphaned, neglected and abandoned children were provided with child care and placement services. The children came from families whose parents are unable to provide for their basic needs, either temporarily or on a permanent basis.

CHILDREN IN CHILD-CARING AGENCIES

The presence of an increasing number of child caring agencies/institutions run by both the government and non-government organizations (NGOs) is a strong indication of the rising rate of children needing care outside their homes. Records of DSWD indicated that as of September 1998, there were 1,007 children in different government run institutions for children ages 0-7 years old (Table 1).

The results of a survey conducted among the member agencies of the Association of Child Caring Agencies of the Philippines (ACCAP) for the period April to July 1998 show the same trend. ACCAP has 34 member agencies of which only 6 are implementing Foster Care Programs. Five hundred eighty seven (587) children were in the care of 22 child caring agencies/institutions as shown in Table 2.

While there is strong evidence that family care has more advantages than institutional care, the increasing number of child caring institutions being established is strong evidence that both the government and private agencies still prefer the latter.

At NORFIL, we have noted increased referrals of abandoned children who need foster care. We have been receiving calls from hospitals referring as many as 3-5 children at one time.

Cognizant of the increasing number of children in need of special protection and the serious consequences if their problems are neglected, the development of an array of family and community-based programs for children has become a matter of urgent necessity. Foster care is one such service that has become part of the child welfare system to address the needs of children in need of temporary family care while awaiting family reunification or adoption.

This overview on the situation of children serves as a backdrop for examining the development and current practice of foster care in the country.

II. THE PHILIPPINE SOCIETY'S RESPONSE: A COMMUNITY BASED FOSTER FAMILY CARE PROGRAM

A. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A glimpse of the evolution of child welfare programs and services in the Philippines provides the context for looking at the development of foster care program as part of the country's child welfare system.

Pre-war

Historically, institutional care was the primary model of out-of-home care for abandoned and destitute children in the Philippines. The first government orphanage was established in 1917 under then Public Welfare Board (PWB) by virtue of Act No. 2671 which was passed on January 10, 1917. This marked the beginning of the national government child welfare program. In 1925, the Public Welfare Commission (which replaced the PWB) purchased 56 hectares of land in Mandaluyong, where Welfareville, the government's child caring institution was established. The Welfareville system for over 40 years reflected the philosophy that it was the duty of the government to place children in 'better circumstances' when the parents could not provide adequate care for them.

After the war

Institutional care remained the major public child welfare program under the Social Welfare Administration (SWA)

through its Welfareville institutions. The SWA (now the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)) was established on January 3, 1951 through Executive Order No. 396 signed by then President Elpidio Quirino. In 1959-60, there were 3,000 wards cared for in Welfareville under its eight institutions: two nurseries for orphaned, abandoned and destitute children and for negative leprosy children of Hansenite parents, two units for children 7 years and above, one unit for mentally handicapped, one home for transients and two training schools (for boys and girls). In addition to Welfareville, other agencies involved in programs for children included 30 child-caring institutions (10 public and 20 private). Child welfare services outside Welfareville were provided by the Child Aid and Placement Section, Office of Child Welfare, notably probation and parole cases.

SWA-UNICEF-Assisted Social Services Project

The results of the SWA study of Welfareville institutions in 1959 indicated poor quality of casework and group work services for children. This prompted SWA to seek the assistance of UNICEF to improve social services for children. Thus, the SWA-UNICEF-Assisted Social Services Project was launched in 1961 with a two-fold component, training of family and child welfare workers and the establishment of experimental and demonstration projects in family and child welfare.

The entry of UNICEF in the 1960s ushered in several improvements in the field of child welfare. First, separate small villages were constructed in Welfareville to cater to specific

Table 2 Distribution of the number of children cared for by private agencies (NGO)

Child Caring Agencies	No. of Children	%
Batay Bata	2	0.3
Bethany Christian Home	32	5.35
Chosen Children Village	56	9.5
Concordia Children's Services	22	3.75
Cagayan Valley Children's Home	83	14.14
Friendship Home	31	5.28
Heart of Mary Villa	35	5.96
Home for Angels	8	1.36
Home of Joy	25	4.25
Hospicio de San Jose	20	3.41
House of Refuge	47	8.0
Jireh Home	27	4.59
KIBO	39	6.64
LETO	33	5.62
Palm Haven	12	2.04
Rainbow Orphanage	18	3.07
Shalom 'Bata' Center	18	3.07
Saint Rita Orphanage	35	5.96
Sun and Moon	11	1.87
CVCH Solano	19	3.23
The Little Children's Home	14	2.38
TOTAL	587	100

categories of children. These villages tried to approximate family life for the children. Second, casework and group work services were upgraded and were focused in preparing children for their reunification with their families or adoption.

Third, diversified family and child welfare services were initiated. Wage homes were established where older children got paid for some services aside from being provided with board and lodging. In 1962 the foster family care program was started to prevent institutionalization of babies and pre-school children. Families who were recruited and developed to provide substitute family care for unrelated children belonged to the upper income group. This was followed with the development of Needy Children Services (NCS) Program and Aid to

Families in Economic Distress (AFED) in 1963 and 1964, respectively. Both programs provided cash assistance to families to keep children in their own homes and to prevent placement of children 16 years and below who have lost the support or care of one parent due to sickness, death or imprisonment. Fourth, the early 1960s marked the first step in the planned dispersal of Welfareville institutions.

Integrated Social Welfare Project

Further improvements in child welfare services followed in the mid-60s onwards with the launching and implementation of the Integrated Social Welfare Project of then First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos, giving first priority to programs and services for children and youth. During this period, dispersal of institutional programs was realized following the establishment of the Reception and Study Center for Children, group homes program for the youth, and foster family homes for younger children.

Child and Youth Welfare Code

The year 1975 marked a milestone in the field of child welfare in the Philippines with the passage of the Child and Youth Welfare Code (Presidential Decree No. 603) under the administration of then President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Article 67 of the Code provides the legal base for the implementation of foster care.

Emergence of GO-NGO partnership

The 1970s also ushered in a stronger government/non-government partnership in the field of social welfare, notably in the area of child care and placement programs. In 1975, CRIBS (Creating Responsive Infants by Sharing), a licensed private child welfare agency, pioneered the first NGO-run foster care program in the country. Volunteer families who were recruited and developed to provide substitute family care for unrelated children belonged to the middle and upper income group.

In the 1980s other licensed NGOs in Metro Manila followed, namely Kaisahang Buhay Foundation in 1981, NORFIL Foundation in 1985;

Concordia Children's Services in 1991 and Parenting Foundation in 1989.

Philippine Plan of Action for Children (PPAC)

In 1990, the Government of the Philippines signed two important documents dealing with the Filipino child: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. With these documents, the Philippines committed itself to preparing a national plan of action for children for the year 2000 and beyond. These commitments were translated into the Philippine Plan of Action for Children that provided for the following core program areas in addressing the needs of children:

- Basic health, nutrition, social security and safe environment;
- Basic education, leisure, recreation and cultural activities;
- Fundamental civil rights of children;
- Protection of children in especially difficult circumstances;
- Family care and alternative parental arrangements.

The plan of action in two areas, ie, protection of children in especially difficult circumstances and family care and alternative parental arrangements, cover foster family care as an alternative arrangement for children in need of temporary family care.

At present, there are six NGOs involved in foster care program. In addition, 11 DSWD Regional Offices undertake foster care service in their respective area of operations. However, these agencies are constrained in serving more children in need of temporary out-of-home care due to the limited number of foster families.

B. STATUS OF FOSTER CARE IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

There is a dearth of materials on foster care in the Philippines. So far, only one masteral thesis of social work graduate student was done on the subject. This was followed with three studies conducted in the 1990s. First, was the 1991 preliminary study on the situation of adoption and foster care in Metro

Manila conducted in preparation for the first Metro Manila Congress on Adoption and Foster Care. The results revealed that the good coordination between the agency social worker and the foster parents and the thorough orientation given during foster care fora are facilitating factors in foster care. In 1992, Kaisahang Buhay Foundation made an evaluative study on its Subsidized Foster Care Project. In 1994 the Bureau of Child and Youth Welfare of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) made a study on the Situation of Foster Care in the Philippines. Two field offices of the DSWD and five non-government organizations were involved in the study. The findings indicate that children placed in foster homes are mostly abandoned and neglected, usually with delayed development and poor health. It recommended the allocation of funds for subsidies to low income foster families so as to sustain and strengthen the program.

For this paper, the data used in reviewing the current foster care practice in the country are culled from the 1998 baseline survey on the present situation of foster care in the Philippines conducted by NORFIL Foundation. A self-administered questionnaire was sent to each of the nineteen (19) agencies that are currently operating Foster Care Program. Out of this number, sixteen (16) or 84% responded. These agencies are located in the different regions of the country. Ten (10) or 62.5 per cent of the 16 participating agencies are field offices of the DSWD and six (6) or 37.5 per cent are non-governmental organizations.

Children in foster care

Number of children served

Collectively these 16 agencies have served a total of 2,533 foster children since the start of the program. Of this number, 2,004 children or 79 per cent were provided foster care services by the six NGO foster care agencies while 529 children or 21 per cent were served by the 10 DSWD Field Offices (Table 3).

Categories of children served

The guidelines issued by the DSWD specify that children from infancy to 17 years of age may benefit from foster

Table 3 Distribution of children served in foster homes by region/agency

Agency	Program start up	Children serviced since start of program	Children in care at time of study
GOVERNMENT			
DSWD FIELD OFFICE			
I	1994	36	16
II	-	10	5
III	1998	13	7
IV	1986	133	1
V	NO RESPONSE	0	0
VI	1991	149	29
VII	1992	37	14
VIII	1973	50*	0
IX	NO RESPONSE	0	
X	1994	81	15
XI	NO RESPONSE	0	0
XII	-	13	13
NCR/ CPC	1998	7	2
SUB-TOTAL		529	102
NON-GOV. ORGANISATIONS	1991	37	14
Concordia Children's Services	1995	59	12
CGM - Home of Joy	1974	20	6
CRIBS, Philippines	1981	1,042	33
Kaisahang Buhay Fdn.	1988	350	47
Parenting Foundation Inc.	1984	496	35
SUB-TOTAL		2,004	147
GRAND TOTAL		2,533	249

care if they are in any of the following circumstances.

- The child under the custody of DSWD or of any child caring agency but who is not yet legally free for adoption but needs individual attention or a family setting.
- The child who was left in hospital or with relatives who are not qualified or incapable to care for him/her.
- The child is neglected, maltreated or abused or in danger of further abuse or neglect by his parents or guardian.
- The child needs special care because of physical, mental or emotional difficulties, which the parents or guardians cannot handle and for whom adequate institutional facilities are not available.
- The child awaiting adoptive placement and would have to be prepared for family care, for language development and the appropriate life style of his new family.
- The child needs long-term care and close family ties that can be developed in a foster home but who cannot be placed for adoption or in residential care.

The result of the study supports the eligibility requirements set by DSWD. Majority of the agencies are serving neglected, abandoned, orphaned and abused children. Table 4 shows the categories of children served.

Profile of foster families

Eligibility criteria

The foster families serve as the programs major resource. Foster families are selected on the basis of their personal qualities that make it possible for them to perform the responsibilities required in caring for unrelated children.

Our Department of Social Welfare and Development has set the following eligibility requirements for prospective foster parents.

- Applicants should not be over 60 years of age and not under 25 years old and should have a genuine interest in parenting a non-related child.
- Applicants should be legally married. They should be able to provide a wholesome atmosphere for the foster child.
- Family members should be physically well and free from contagious and infectious disease.
- Applicants should have sufficient income to meet their needs. Their financial status must be secured and carefully assessed.
- In case wherein the applicant is a widow or single, it is preferred that a male adult be available in the home. Single applicants are discouraged from taking care of children of the opposite sex.

Table 4 Percentage distribution of children served by categories

Child Category	No. of agencies	%
Abandoned	14	87
Neglected	15	94
Abused	10	62
Orphaned	11	69
Street children	5	31
With Special Needs	8	50

Types of foster homes

In the Philippines, there are two types of foster homes – volunteer and subsidized foster homes. The volunteer homes are Filipino families who belong to the middle and upper income group as well as a few expatriates. They offer their homes for free and are provided by the agency with very minimal child caring supplies and medical needs of the foster child. They have both the time and resources to offer for the care of the child.

The subsidized foster homes are equally motivated and capable to provide substitute parental care but they lack the material resources to sufficiently meet the needs of an additional child. They are provided with some financial subsidy as well as child caring supplies needed during the stay of the children in their home.

The result of this study shows that the different agencies were able to recruit, develop and utilize the services of 482 licensed foster families. Of this number, 297 or 62 per cent were subsidized homes while 185 or 38 per cent were volunteer homes (Table 5). It is significant to note that the dropout rate among the volunteer families was high compared to that of the subsidized homes. This finding is significant as it indicates the need to look into the agency's strategies and interventions in working with volunteer families. With the encouragement of the DSWD, NORFIL Foundation implemented as a pilot project in 1997, the Kinship Care as a type of foster care. This involved the caring of children by their own relatives.

Family income

The financial capability of the foster family is an important consideration in the selection of foster homes. The foster parents should have the ability to meet the financial needs of their own families. The families who are not capable of providing the material needs of the foster children are provided with some financial subsidy and child caring supplies for the foster child.

The result of the study shows that majority of the foster homes have monthly income below US \$270 or P10,000.00 (1USD = P37.00). This finding is alarming considering the present value of the Philippine peso.

This poses a risk in meeting the physical needs of the foster children in favor of their own biological children. (Table 6).

Source of income

Some foster care agencies prefer foster mothers who are 'stay-home moms' because they can personally attend to the needs of the foster child/ren. The study revealed that majority of the foster parents are employed. Only six (6) agencies reported on their six unemployed fathers and seven agencies have unemployed foster mothers.

Civil status

The Philippine Child and Youth Welfare Code prescribes that foster homes shall be run by married couples. However the participants in the First Metro Manila Congress on Adoption and Foster Care in 1991 recommended the inclusion of single applicants whose qualifications are satisfactory and acceptable for children whose need for a two-parent family is not a crucial aspect of the care required.

The findings of our survey also show that majority of the foster parents are married. However, 9 agencies reported having single parents in their foster care programs.

Age

There is not much difference between the ages of the foster mothers and fathers. Majority of the foster parents (64%) are within the age range of 31-50 years old (Table 7).

Table 5. Distribution of foster families by type and status

Status	Volunteer No. %	Subsidized No. %	Total No %
Active with Child	60 32.43	121 40.74	181 37.56
Awaiting placement of children	5 2.70	18 6.06	23 4.77
On leave	6 3.24	39 13.13	45 9.33
Dropped	114 61.62	119 40.06	233 48.34
Total	185 38.00	297 62.00	482 100.00

Table 6 Income distribution among active foster families

Amount PESOS	No. of families	%
2,000 - below (\$54.05)	1	0.36
2,001 - 4,000 (\$54.05 - \$108.11)	19	7.01
4,000 - 5,000 (\$108.14 - 135.14)	91	33.58
6,001 - 8,000 (\$162.19 - 216.22)	29	10.70
8,001 - 10,000 (\$216.34 - 270.17)	29	10.70
10,001 - above (\$270.27 +)	102	37.64
Total responses	271	99.99

Table 7 Distribution of foster parents by age

Age of Foster Parents	Foster Fathers Majority Few	Total (38)	Foster Mothers Majority Few	Total (40)
20 - 30 years	- 4	4	- 5	5
31 - 40	5 6	11	8 3	11
41 - 50	11 3	14	11 3	14
51 - 60	2 4	6	2 4	6
Above 60	- 3	3	- 4	4

NORFIL's experience in foster care for children with special needs and kinship care

Foster family care for mentally challenged children

In the Philippines, foster care for children with special needs is a real challenge. The advanced countries of the West have for many years now been using foster care for placement of children with behavior problems. They refer to this as 'therapeutic foster care'. In the late 80s we at NORFIL tried to place some mentally retarded children who were selected from the oldest, biggest and only government institution for the disabled - Elsie Gaches Village. At that time, our foster care program was proceeding successfully with abandoned and neglected young children. Several visits to that institution have shown that these children needed better care. We wanted to expose them to a home atmosphere and we were sure that their development would improve. This 'experiment' lasted for 4 years with 5 children. It was a difficult and expensive project.

All the children responded positively to foster care. The 5-year-old boy with severe delay in development who was not toilet trained, no language, and was bottle-fed at the institution was able to eat normally, attend to his personal hygiene, developed some speech that enabled him to communicate and his behavior improved dramatically. However, both the foster families and NORFIL were not ready for long term care. The strain of long term care became a burden to foster families and the cost involved was beyond our budget. Furthermore, we could not find permanent homes for them. So with the approval of DSWD, we were forced to return them one by one to the institution. It was a very sad experience. Foster care for these types of children is truly a long-term engagement!

Foster family care for street children

The NORFIL experience with foster care for street children was a more successful and fulfilling experience. This started as a one-year pilot project funded by Child Hope-Asia. We started with 10 of the 5-8 year olds, 2 girls and 8 boys who all lived on the streets before they were taken into the Lingap

Center, a government facility for street children where they stayed for an average of one year. Their families could no longer be traced. After a year in foster care, one was able to join her biological family. Six months later, two were taken by a Christian Mission School where they will continue their schooling. After 3 years in the Foster Homes one was adopted through the government's Inter-Country Adoption Board. One is now being adopted by his foster family. We are still looking for a permanent placement for the five who are in foster care up to now.

The dramatic changes in their behavior and personality are truly great and extremely encouraging. Child Hope-Asia extended the one-year project for another year. Since then up to now NORFIL has included this project in its regular program with special funding assistance from the DSWD.

Kinship Care

In 1996 NORFIL was identified by the DSWD to pilot the Kinship Care Project. This involved foster care of children by their relatives/kin who are qualified to provide them with opportunities for growth and development. The relatives who qualified as kinship care givers were the maternal/paternal grandparents, uncles, and cousins up to 5th degree of consanguinity (second cousins). Spiritual kin like the Godparents could also qualify as kinship care givers. This use of the extended family system is culture-based where biological ties are maintained and reunification with family was much more possible.

C. FOSTER CARE PRACTICE IN THE PHILIPPINES: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

The survey results indicated that both foster parents and foster agencies have encountered issues and problems in the implementation of foster family care. It is noteworthy that appropriate actions have likewise been undertaken and/or recommended to address the issues.

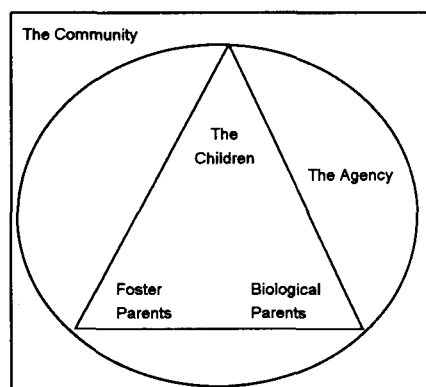
Problems encountered by the agencies and actions/recommendations

Running a foster care program is not easy, as the agency has to reckon with the needs of the different parties in the

foster care triangle in addition to administrative and operational demands.

The agency whether it is run by the government or by the NGO serves as the binding factor in foster care. The agency is outside the triangle but inside the circle as it tries to bind and balances the 'love triangle' between the child, the biological parents and the foster parents. It provides continuity in the process so that the outcome is a rewarding and satisfying experience (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Foster Home Care 'love triangle'



In our study, the problems encountered by the agencies were also looked into. Table 8 presents the problems that foster parents often encounter.

The baseline survey revealed that the problems encountered by foster care agencies in the implementation of its foster care service pertain to both administrative and case management issues as shown in Table 8.

Limited funds

Nine (9) agencies mentioned that the problem of limited funds is one of the reasons for not having a more effective foster care program. Some of them try to cope with this by tapping donations of child caring supplies from local manufacturers. Some have succeeded in getting the support of local government units for additional funding. Two agencies have put up a project that generates funds to augment their limited budget for foster care.

Recruitment of foster families

Majority of foster care agencies (12 agencies) experienced difficulty in recruiting foster families. One of the

respondents traced this difficulty to the limited attention devoted to recruitment. They recommended the use of media to increase the social awareness of the public on foster care. Another agency believes that having a full time staff exclusively for recruitment will result in the increase in the number of foster homes.

Convincing families to become foster parents is not an easy task. Different factors such as pre-conceived ideas about what kind of children there are, what fostering really is, the cost involved and the cultural attitudes about taking an unrelated child into one's home, all impact on the capacity of any agency to recruit foster families. The children who need foster care have so many varied needs and therefore require different types of foster families.

Kadushin (1965) in his book *Child Welfare Services* asserts that:

The fact is that there are and probably always have been relatively few people who are willing to accept the burden and responsibility of rearing someone else's child.

Meltsner (1988) cited the basic socio-economic conditions of the community and society as one of the factors influencing recruitment. High unemployment rate, inflation and generally tough economic times lead people to tighten their belts and be less likely to reach out to help others. Due to economic needs, more women are working outside their homes. Even the best of foster care rates will not substitute for earned income. The changing structure of the family is another barrier to recruitment. The increase in the number of single parent headed households and living-in couples pose unique dilemmas to recruitment.

Consequently, recruitment involves a program for conveying to the public the need for foster homes for children and the intrinsic rewards derived from fostering a child. The agency's social marketing strategy must be intense so that potential foster families will be convinced on the foster family's significant role in the life of a child and the long term effects that fostering can give to society.

Table 8 Problems encountered by foster care agencies

Problem	No of agencies	%
Limited Funds	9	56
Recruitment of foster families	12	75
Recruitment of foster families for children with special needs	9	56
Difficulty in sustaining the interest of the foster families	4	66
Dropping out of foster families	11	69
Foster families adopting their children	6	38
Overstaying of children	11	69
Lengthy process of declaration of abandonment	10	62
TOTAL		50

Recruiting families is similar to an advertising job (Terry, 1998), one that must be done continuously. Numerous resources can be used: mass media, posters, small group campaigns and mobilizing experienced foster parents. Such advertising can be used not only to recruit potential foster families but also to affect the attitudes of the general public about fostering.

The agency's immediate response to the initial inquiries of potential foster parents is a vital factor in the recruitment of foster families. The manner in which the inquiry is received and responded to, will greatly influence whether the individual will pursue his interest to become a foster parent or not. We, at NORFIL have received comments from some of our volunteer families that they initially tried calling other agencies, but were disappointed with the response so they decided to explore other agencies.

Conducting foster care fora is the most commonly used approach (24.59%) by the respondent agencies. Here, experienced foster parents are mobilized as resource speakers. Individual recruitment of families was done by some 14 agencies. Some 12 agencies utilize print media while only four resort to radio announcement. Meetings with interest groups are also conducted by nine agencies (refer to Table 9 for details).

Retention of foster families

Eleven (11) agencies see the dropping out of foster families due to varied reasons as one of the major problems in foster care. They recommend a continuing and stronger support to these families.

More often, some of the agencies lose foster parents because they are remiss in some of their responsibilities. They have not given the families enough preparation nor information on the

Table 9 Approaches used in the recruitment of foster families

Approach	No of agencies	%
Use of media		
Radio	12	19.67
Television	4	6.56
Printed materials (newspaper ads, leaflets/posters)	7	11.47
Meeting with Interest Groups	9	14.75
Conduct foster care forum	15	24.59
Individual recruitment	14	22.95
TOTAL	61	99.99

background of the child for them to be able to understand and be able to meet the child's needs better. Also, they were slow in responding when the parents experienced difficulties with the child's behavior or when they had an emergency in the family. Sometimes foster parents are treated as baby sitters rather than important members of the child welfare team. Perhaps a close look on how agencies treat their foster parents can result in higher retention rates in the program.

Competent foster parents are not born, they are developed. Philippine law requires that foster parents must be married and should have taken care of their own children. This experience, however, is not sufficient to become competent and successful foster parents and to stay in the program for long. Foster parents must be prepared for the issues and problems that foster children bring into their families.

Boyland Remy (1978) found that while the length of experience of foster parents was influential, there were significant differences between trained and untrained foster parents with regard to the length of the children's placements and the rates of foster parents' retention in the program. Those who have undergone training were more likely to keep children in their care for longer periods of time and were also likely to renew their licenses. The study further revealed that foster parent assertiveness and activism had a positive effect on license retention but training made an additional contribution.

Holding regular meetings with foster families is the most commonly used

Table 10 Support services/incentives to foster families

Service	No. of agencies
Credit Assistance	3
Health/ Medical Assistance	5
Financial Assistance	9
Scholarship	1
Burial Assistance	3
Respite Care	1

approach by our respondent agencies (14). Many (9) also conduct Foster Parent Training Workshops. Topics for training include Leadership, Value Formation, Christian Parenting, Behavior Modification, Coping with Separation, Child Development, Bonding and Attachment, Caring for Unrelated Children and Handling Children Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse. Only 5 agencies are into organizing support groups for their foster families.

Adequate supervision from the agency social workers contributes in sustaining the interest of foster families. It helps facilitate the child's adjustment into the foster family and it assists the latter in coping with their parenting responsibilities. Regular supervision ascertains that the child is receiving care in accordance with acceptable standards. This process also promotes the competence of foster parents by alleviating the anxieties brought about by the behavior of the child. This is done by increasing the foster parents understanding of the child's behavior and by giving appropriate information and guidance in meeting the needs of the child.

Social workers are required to visit the foster homes at least once a month during the first three months. The initial period of placement is apt to be a high-risk period. The foster parents may feel a sense of frustration and anxiety where there is no sign of positive change in the child. During the supervisory visits, the social worker discusses with the foster parents the child's adjustment and the family's reaction to the child. He/she takes on the role of an adviser, teacher and counselor. The social worker can also be a source of psychological support by trying to decrease anxiety, reduce guilt and provide reassurance. The social worker also brings her professional knowledge of foster care as well as the equally important support of the agency resources.

Home visitation as a supervisory strategy is used by all the agencies involved in the study. The frequency of visits, however, varies. The other approaches used are counseling through telephone, group meetings and office interviews. NORFIL has developed peer supervisors among our experienced

foster parents. They assist the social worker in monitoring and supervising the foster families.

The availability and provision of incentives and other support services to the foster families help ease their responsibilities to their biological children and encourage retention of subsidized foster families to the program. Majority (9) of the agencies provide financial assistance to foster parents. Other assistance includes medical/health assistance, scholarship for their biological children, burial assistance and respite care (see Table 10).

Length of children's placement

The distinguishing characteristic of foster care is that it is designed to be a temporary arrangement. Studies show that the longer a child has been in care the greater is the likelihood that the child will continue in care. The problem of over/prolonged stay of children in care and the lengthy process of the court proceedings in involuntarily committing a child for adoption was expressed by many agencies (see Table 8). They recommend the transfer of overstaying children to other facilities for long term care like the S.O.S. Children's Village.

Stein and Gambрил (1977) demonstrated that early achievement of permanency was related to early case planning, reduced caseload size, written contracting, intensified casework services with the parents and an emphasis on frequent parental visiting.

Problems presented by foster parents and actions taken/recommendations

Coping with separation

For the placement to be successful, the ability of the agency and the social worker to help the foster parents with the resolution of the difficulties related to foster care is very important. Coping with the separation from the foster child is the most common problem faced by the foster parents. This finding affirms de Guzman's report (1994) that the single most difficult aspect of foster care in the Philippines is overcoming the pain or trauma of separation. Many families have proven themselves to be resilient, bouncing back as it were after each separation by taking in another child, but quite a few have become

reluctant to continue because of the emotional bruising that they get after each separation. The intervention used by the agencies are counseling (6) and conduct of training on coping with separation anxiety (2). Some agencies try to lessen the separation anxiety by immediately placing a new child with the family. The experts, however, have expressed disagreements on this practice, as it does not give enough time for the parents to grieve for the child who left their home.

Pre-placement issues

Some foster parents complain of the very limited information on the child who is placed with them. They feel that having sufficient information can help them understand and cope better with the child's behavior.

Pre-placement preparation facilitates the adjustment of the child to the foster home. The foster parents are the principal 'ingredients' of a successful placement. Preparing them for their responsibilities is crucial. With proper preparation and adequate information, a foster family can help ensure the success of the placement. By providing them with sufficient, thorough and accurate information about the child and his/her circumstances, the agency social worker can help them make an informed decision to proceed with the placement. The foster parents can also anticipate the child's initial behavior when he is introduced to the home and they would be able to better understand and meet the child's needs during placement.

The agencies in our study have undertaken different activities to prepare the foster parents for the actual placement of a child. The provision of information to the parents on the background and characteristics of the child is done by all the agencies. The other activities include orienting the foster families on their responsibilities (15); conduct of pre-placement visit by the foster parents to the child (13); and holding of training activities on child care. The result of the study shows that these activities are not sufficient.

Managing children's behavior

The difficulty in disciplining foster children is also experienced by many foster parents. This is partly due to the crucial differences between foster and

biological parenthood. The foster parents take in the parental role in their day-to-day contact with the child but they do not have the full right of the true parents. They substitute for the biological parents but do not replace them. Foster care agencies try to support the foster parents by providing counseling, training on behavior modification and conducting family conferences.

Some foster parents complain about non-receipt of reports or photos on the adoption of their foster children. These documents reassure them that the child is in good hands and is well taken care of.

Parental visits

Some foster parents experience difficulties in dealing with visits of the child's biological parents. Tower (1989) described the role of the foster parents as not easy. Foster parents may have difficulty seeing the biological parents as part of the foster care team because of their perception that the biological parent has in some ways harmed the child. On the other hand, the natural parents may also have some difficulties in dealing with the foster parents because they see them as competitors who are uncooperative, inconsistent and unpredictable. The feelings of failure and their need for control may result in the biological parents criticizing the foster parents.

The tension between the biological and foster parents is detrimental to the foster children who usually respond to parental visits by regression, acting-out and by exhibiting general periods of unhappiness. With proper and adequate support from their social worker, the foster parents can be extremely therapeutic in their approach to the biological parents.

Many studies have shown that parental visitation is correlated with reunification (Fanshel & Shinn, 1978, Fein et al, 1983). Continuing contact with the child is an essential medium for preserving the integrity of the biological family. There is an increased possibility that the family can be successfully reunited if the family identity can be preserved during the placement period (Minuchin, 1995).

Social workers of the different agencies in the study have tried to ease these difficulties by carefully planning and conducting the visits in their office and by supervising the interaction between the two sets of parents.

Limited financial subsidy

The limited financial support from the agency also hampers some subsidized foster parents in meeting the physical needs of the child. The agencies usually attribute such situation to the meager budget for the program. To make up for this, social workers try to solicit donations for child caring supplies and help foster parents to access medical services from government hospitals or from volunteer medical practitioners. Some DSWD offices coordinate with local government units for additional funds.

As highlighted in the foregoing discussion, the practice issues in foster care pertain to both administrative and case management issues.

Administrative issues include foster care funding or subsidy, recruitment and retention of foster homes. Case management issues revolve around several interrelated problems, ie, pre-placement issues (eg, limited information on children), length of placement, separation issues, supervision, parental visits, discipline of children, lengthy processing of declaration of abandonment and adoption.

III. TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

A. TRENDS

1. Increasing number of children in need of out-of-home care

Statistics show that there is an upward trend in the number of children who need placement outside their homes. A similar direction is seen in the number of agencies in the Philippines who are encouraged into foster care project. But this is still very low compared to the number of children awaiting foster care placement.

2. Bias for institutional care facilities

While there is strong evidence that family care has more advantages than

institutional care, the increasing number of child caring institutions being established is indicative that both the government and private agencies still prefer the latter.

Our government and private organizations as well as some funding agencies continue to allocate a huge part of their budget for the construction of institutions or centers for children in the country. These institutions are physical structures that are more visible than community-based programs and they continue to attract funding from benevolent groups.

3. Working with the volunteer or elite foster families

The results of our study revealed that 38% of the total number of foster homes that were recruited and developed were volunteer homes. These homes require less funding from the agencies. However, the dropout rate among volunteer families is very high (61%) as compared to the subsidized homes (24%). For developing countries like the Philippines who have similar types of foster homes or who are thinking of developing these types of homes, this finding is significant as it indicates the need to look into the agency's strategies and interventions in working with volunteer families. The training and exposure of social workers are mostly directed towards working with the poor. Perhaps there is a need for our social workers to improve their skills in working with more affluent families. Social workers must have skills on how to harness the inherent interest of the families to help children.

I am sure that there are some such families, who are very much willing to take in unrelated children into their homes. However, some of the mothers are not full-time 'stay-home moms' and therefore they have to delegate some foster care tasks to their house-helpers and nannies or 'yayas' as Filipino call them. These 'yayas' do not always possess the experience and skills to cope with the particular needs of children in care. There is a great need to train these helpers as caregivers of children.

4. Prolonged stay of children in foster care

One of the reasons is that the biological parents are not ready to resume their responsibilities. The provision of adjunct service to biological families that are aimed at strengthening their marital relations and parenting capabilities would hasten the reunification with their children. At present, most of us have focused our services on the needs of the children, supervision of foster homes and networking. I strongly suggest that we should not limit our services to the children in care but should also offer programs to their biological families.

Some of these families involved are single mothers who need guidance and support so they can assume parental care of their children. In my agency, a good amount of the social worker's efforts are spent in bridging relationship with single mother's family and in helping her to find suitable job. There is a need for continuing work with these mothers, which many agencies including mine are not able to give.

5. Recruitment and retention of foster families

Recruitment and retention of foster families is an ongoing concern among foster care agencies, both GO and NGO. This requires the use of more creative ways in promoting the foster care program to the public. Social workers in foster care should also be able to make use of their skills in community organizing. I know that our limited time and budget hinder us from engaging in more aggressive recruitment campaigns. Perhaps we can get sponsors for television and newspaper ads. Press conference and press releases could also help in this advocacy. Foster care associations can also be a great resource for recruitment. My own agency has developed and mobilized community-based advocates recruiters, peer supervisors and counselors from among our experienced and trained foster parents. They are found very effective in attracting potential foster parents not only within but also outside their communities. These parents have truly become our partners in the implementation of our foster care program.

B. CHALLENGES

There are major challenges facing foster care practice in the Philippines. These include the following:

1. A need to shift from a center-based to a community-based approach to temporary out-of-home care for abandoned, neglected and abused children

Experiences of both government and NGOs on foster care for abandoned, abused, neglected, and street children have demonstrated that innovative, community-based approaches and actions relevant to the unique needs and circumstances of children in need of temporary out-of-home care are viable and can provide alternatives to institutionalization of children or placing them into residential care facilities and orphanages. This will entail forging new partnerships with DSWD, NGOs, communities and LGUs that will focus more on community-based interventions rather than center-based facilities for children. NORFIL's innovative community-based foster care for street children and mentally challenged children may be further reviewed and supported for further pilot testing and large scale implementation.

The vice-president of the Philippines and concurrent Secretary of our DSWD, in her speech during the National Conference on Foster Care, Adoption and other Alternative Parental Care last year, shared with us her vision for children whose parents are unable to provide care. She spoke of harnessing the caring capability of each village as she referred to Hillary Clinton's 'The Global Village'. This is more desirable instead of uprooting a child from his community to be cared for in an institution in the city! She gave us the scenario where children are cared for in families under the caring guidance of his/her own village. Here, we will need our skills on how to mobilize the community to address basic child-related issues. The village in the case becomes the 'family to these children'. The community then as a whole and not just a particular family will start to 'own' the situation of each child/children in their communities.

I would like to quote from Professor Elie Weisel, Nobel Peace Prize Winner,

from the book, 'The Community of the Future' (Peter Drucker Foundation, 1998):

This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century – solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair. It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others.

2. There is a need to strengthen and expand advocacy and social mobilization efforts.

An integral part of advocacy is generating a sense of responsibility on the part of families, communities, local government units and various sectors of civil society to care for and protect children. While there have been advocacy and recruitment campaigns for foster care, in general they are sporadic and fragmented in nature. A more comprehensive, proactive and sustained recruitment effort should be undertaken to ensure priority attention, support and commitment of government, non-government organizations and LGUs for community-based family and child welfare initiatives such as foster care. Such advocacy efforts should be mainstreamed into the bigger advocacy program for child rights and protection.

The caring capacities of families in every community should be encouraged and enhanced. NORFIL has been helping families in depressed communities for many years now. Our experience reveals that as the family improves its living situations, the members find it easier to help and respond to the needs of their neighbors and of their community.

3. There is a challenge to build, expand and strengthen partnerships and alliances with government line agencies, the LGUs, NGOs and the various sectors of civil society to mobilize more resources for sustainability of foster care.

Efforts in networking and partnership building will have to be strengthened. Through alliances, the sharing of experiences, expertise and resources will be facilitated. This requires a process of harnessing and mobilizing

resources within and outside the community where all sectors including the families are active participants.

Legislative advocacy will focus on the passage of the proposed 'Foster Care Bill - An Act to Strengthen and Propagate Foster Care and Kinship Parenting for Abandoned, Neglected and Other Children with Special Needs and For Other Purposes' which has been pending in our Congress for two administrations (Ramos and Estrada). Other child protection bills should likewise be given priority attention.

4. Documentation of best practices in foster care

Various initiatives have been tried in recruitment and training of foster families as well as innovative community-based foster care models, notably foster care for street children and kinship care as pilot tested by NGOs. However, the experiences that will constitute best practices have not been properly evaluated and documented in a way that will be useful for future programming and planning purposes.

5. Expand foster care as a placement resource for children and youth with special needs ('therapeutic foster care' and long-term foster care)

The innovative community-based fostering experience of street children and mentally challenged children should be further reviewed, supported and replicated and/or expanded to serve other children with special needs, eg, children who are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.

6. Continuing need to hone and upgrade knowledge and skills of foster carers and staff

Putting the whole child at the center of the foster care program and empowering families and communities and LGUs to be responsive to the needs of children in need of temporary out-of-home care will require changes in perception and attitude of program managers, supervisors and service providers, ie, social workers and foster parents. Ongoing capability-building and supervision of direct service social workers focused on advocacy work, case management and training of foster

families are important factors in the effective delivery of quality foster care. Cross posting of staff among agencies within and beyond the Asia-Pacific Region would further improve competencies of foster care workers.

7. There is a need to build and strengthen family stability.

The presence of family ties, the quality of family relationships and support services are key factors in the protection and care of children and in the prevention of abuse, neglect and abandonment. There is a need to ensure availability and accessibility of varied community-based and family-based supportive services to strengthen and/or support the family in its child rearing functions.

8. Developing a manageable database and monitoring and evaluation system on foster care

Currently, there is no standard system being used by DSWD and NGOs to collect data and monitor situation and management of children in foster care. Thus, support for the development and implementation of case management-based data system is needed.

The availability of timely, reliable and relevant information and statistical data on foster children and foster families remains wanting. Efforts should be exerted to develop a common database system so that information generation on foster care is updated and accessible for assessing and analyzing situation of foster care; determining the impact of the program; and developing responsive services.

9. Undertake research studies on foster care to support planning and program development

There is a wealth of case reports on foster care prepared by DSWD and NGOs, but there have been no comprehensive integration and analysis of foster care situations and their management. Priority agenda should include a comprehensive study on foster care situation and needs in the country and on the impact of foster care intervention on the lives of children and families served.

Again, there is a need for collaboration, sharing of successful interventions and strategies, studies and research between

and among countries at the regional and international levels.

10 . Setting up a foster care fund for the Asia Pacific Region

We always mention limited funds as reason for not being able to serve more children in foster homes. Earlier I mentioned how some of us have achieved relative success in mobilizing community resources at the local level. With the present economic situation in our country this may not be sufficient. We need to avert its effects especially on our youth. As more youth drop out from schools and teenage girls are drawn into unplanned relationships, more children will be most likely left abandoned, neglected and abused.

I am proposing for the setting up of a foster care fund for the Asia Pacific region that can be managed by IFCO. This fund can be used for information dissemination, training and capability building as well as consultancy in the implementation of foster care at the community level. Perhaps the funds can come from contributions of member countries as well as from funding agencies and benevolent groups.

Indeed, foster care truly represents a giving of self by everyone involved but especially on the part of the foster families who, I would like to emphasize, are our partners in this program. To honor them further, let me end my paper with a quote from Kahlil Gibran's 'The Prophet':

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

□

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