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| *Stable Foster Placements* |
| The weird dance: Experience of natural siblings’ relationships and support |
|  |
| Susan Youngson |
| Research thesis submitted in part requirement for the Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology  The University of Sheffield  School of Education |

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# Forethoughts

# Abstract

Foster placement breakdown has an adverse effect on a looked after child’s (CLA) educational outcomes and social and emotional wellbeing. One third of foster families have Natural Siblings (NS) and it has been reported that these placements are significantly more likely to break down than placements with no NS. Problems between foster child and foster parents’ own children have been given as the reason for termination in 56 % of placements that failed in nine months or less. The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of older NS in relation to their relationships with CLA and explore what support they receive in making and maintaining those relationships. The research focussed on foster families where there had been at least one, successful, long-term placement of over two years.

Six participants between the ages of 18 - 25 were recruited from one Local Authority (LA); three male and three female. They were purposefully selected to a set criterion to enable them to discuss their experiences in relation to the topic of study and choice of methodology. They each took part in a semi-structured interview that was recorded, transcribed and analysed using a Thematic Analysis methodological approach. The data was reduced to emerging themes from which six main themes resulted. These themes were; the family as a system, how fostering impacts on NS personally, making relationships with CLA, increased knowledge and training, layers of support and the difficulty of transitions.

The research findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and psychological theory with the intention of sharing the participant’s knowledge and understanding of their experiences to highlight elements of positive relationships and support between CLA and NS and areas that may need development. Suggestions that have arisen from these findings may be shared to potentially enhance further positive relationships between CLA and NS so that placement breakdowns are reduced.

Contents

[Forethoughts 2](#_Toc460244787)

[Abstract 3](#_Toc460244788)

[List of Tables 8](#_Toc460244789)

[Glossary 9](#_Toc460244790)

[Chapter 1 - Introduction 10](#_Toc460244791)

[1.1 Introduction 10](#_Toc460244792)

[1.2 Personal background and interest in the topic area 11](#_Toc460244793)

[Chapter 2 - Literature review 14](#_Toc460244794)

[2.1 Introduction 14](#_Toc460244795)

[2.2 Statistics and Legislation 14](#_Toc460244796)

[2.3 Why do children become ‘looked after’? 16](#_Toc460244797)

[2.4 Educational outcomes 16](#_Toc460244798)

[2.5 Placements 17](#_Toc460244799)

[2.6 Families 19](#_Toc460244800)

[*Families* 19](#_Toc460244801)

[*Foster families* 19](#_Toc460244802)

[2.7 Attachments, Loss and Belonging 20](#_Toc460244803)

[*Attachment* 20](#_Toc460244804)

[*Attachment and loss -* 21](#_Toc460244805)

[*Belonging* 21](#_Toc460244806)

[2.8 Relationships within families 22](#_Toc460244807)

[*Natural sibling relationships* 22](#_Toc460244808)

[*Relationships with disabled siblings* 22](#_Toc460244809)

[*Natural sibling and foster sibling relationships* 23](#_Toc460244810)

[*Psychodynamic and attachment theory* 23](#_Toc460244811)

[*Developmental psychology* 24](#_Toc460244812)

[2.9 Family systems theory 25](#_Toc460244813)

[*Foster carers* 26](#_Toc460244814)

[*Parenting* 26](#_Toc460244815)

[2.10 Support for foster carers 28](#_Toc460244816)

[2.11 Placement breakdown 28](#_Toc460244817)

[2.12 Natural sibling and relationships with CLA – where is the research gap? 29](#_Toc460244818)

[Chapter 3 - Methodology 31](#_Toc460244819)

[3.1 Introduction 31](#_Toc460244820)

[3.2 Research Design 31](#_Toc460244821)

[*Ontology*, 32](#_Toc460244822)

[*Epistemology* 33](#_Toc460244823)

[3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – Theoretical Underpinnings 34](#_Toc460244824)

[*Phenomenology* 34](#_Toc460244825)

[*Hermeneutics* 36](#_Toc460244826)

[*Ideography* 37](#_Toc460244827)

[3.4 Rationale for choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis 38](#_Toc460244828)

[*IPA Limitations* 39](#_Toc460244829)

[*Considerations of alternative approaches* 39](#_Toc460244830)

[3.5 Procedures 40](#_Toc460244831)

[*Ethical Approval* 40](#_Toc460244832)

[*Design Phase* 42](#_Toc460244833)

[*Design Phase 1 – Consultation with Professionals/Service Users* 42](#_Toc460244834)

[*Design Phase 2 – Pilot Study* 43](#_Toc460244835)

[*Design Phase 3 – Main Study* 44](#_Toc460244836)

[*Sample* 44](#_Toc460244837)

[*Method of Data Collection* 47](#_Toc460244838)

[*Interview Schedule* 47](#_Toc460244839)

[*Interviews* 48](#_Toc460244840)

[*Analysis* 49](#_Toc460244841)

[3.6 Quality in Research 51](#_Toc460244842)

[Chapter 4 - Findings 54](#_Toc460244843)

[4.1 Introduction 54](#_Toc460244844)

[4.2 Theme One – The Family as a System 57](#_Toc460244845)

[*Family environment* 57](#_Toc460244846)

[*Family systems/parenting style* 58](#_Toc460244847)

[*Foster Mothers (further information relating specifically to loss and mothers see pg. 63)* 59](#_Toc460244848)

[*Family involvement* 59](#_Toc460244849)

[4.3 Theme Two – How Fostering impacted on NS Personally 60](#_Toc460244850)

[*Type of fostering* 61](#_Toc460244851)

[*Losses* 62](#_Toc460244852)

[*Self-protection* 64](#_Toc460244853)

[*Personal growth* 64](#_Toc460244854)

[*Influence on Future Thinking* 65](#_Toc460244855)

[*Security* 65](#_Toc460244856)

[4.4 Theme Three – Making Relationships with CLA 66](#_Toc460244857)

[*‘Sibling Like’* 67](#_Toc460244858)

[*Age* 68](#_Toc460244859)

[*Spending time together* 70](#_Toc460244860)

[*Natural relationships* 71](#_Toc460244861)

[*Relational difficulties* 71](#_Toc460244862)

[4.5 Theme Four – Increased Knowledge and Training 72](#_Toc460244863)

[*Knowledge and understanding* 73](#_Toc460244864)

[*Training* 75](#_Toc460244865)

[4.6 Theme Five – Layers of Support 76](#_Toc460244866)

[*Who supports?* 76](#_Toc460244867)

[*Lack of Social Care involvement* 77](#_Toc460244868)

[*Emotional support* 78](#_Toc460244869)

[4.7 Theme Six – The Difficulty of Transitions 79](#_Toc460244870)

[*Initial placement* 79](#_Toc460244871)

[*Placement endings/breakdowns* 80](#_Toc460244872)

[Chapter 5 - Discussion 82](#_Toc460244873)

[5.1 Introduction 82](#_Toc460244874)

[5.2 Underlying positive relationships between NS and CLA 82](#_Toc460244875)

[5.3 Family Systems Theory 83](#_Toc460244876)

[5.4 The Family as a Whole 83](#_Toc460244877)

[*Security* 84](#_Toc460244878)

[*Parenting* 85](#_Toc460244879)

[*Young people ‘parenting’* 85](#_Toc460244880)

[*Foster Mothers* 86](#_Toc460244881)

[5.5 Personal Impact & relationships 87](#_Toc460244882)

[*Length of stay* 87](#_Toc460244883)

[*Age, Sibling like & Natural relationships* 88](#_Toc460244884)

[*Spending time together* 90](#_Toc460244885)

[*Loss and Self-protection* 90](#_Toc460244886)

[*Relational difficulties* 92](#_Toc460244887)

[5.6 Personal and External Influences 94](#_Toc460244888)

[*Increasing Knowledge & Training (also see support)* 94](#_Toc460244889)

[*Support* 95](#_Toc460244890)

[*Support from Social workers* 96](#_Toc460244891)

[*Emotional support* 97](#_Toc460244892)

[*Transitions* 97](#_Toc460244893)

[*Personal growth & Influence on future thinking* 98](#_Toc460244894)

[Chapter 6 - Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations 100](#_Toc460244895)

[6.1 Introduction 100](#_Toc460244896)

[6.2 Conclusion 100](#_Toc460244897)

[6.3 Limitations 102](#_Toc460244898)

[6.4 Recommendations for future research 103](#_Toc460244899)

[6.5 Recommendations for future practice 104](#_Toc460244900)

[6.6 Recommendations for Educational Psychology Practice. 105](#_Toc460244901)

[6.7 Reflexive account of my experience whilst completing this research 107](#_Toc460244902)

[References 109](#_Toc460244903)

[Appendices 122](#_Toc460244904)

[Appendix 1 – Local Authority Statistics 122](#_Toc460244905)

[Appendix 2 – Ethical Approval Letter. 123](#_Toc460244906)

[Appendix 3 – Participation Information Sheet 124](#_Toc460244908)

[Appendix 4 – Consent form 127](#_Toc460244909)

[Appendix 5 – Synopsis for the Fostering Newsletter 128](#_Toc460244910)

[Appendix 6 – Natural Siblings Information 129](#_Toc460244911)

[Appendix 7 – Researcher Interview Schedule 131](#_Toc460244912)

[Appendix 8 – Interview Schedule – Participants 133](#_Toc460244913)

[Appendix 9 – Initial reflections on the Interviews 134](#_Toc460244914)

[Appendix 10 – An example of a transcript with initial ideas & coding 139](#_Toc460244915)

[*Step 1 & 2 of the analysis* 139](#_Toc460244916)

[Appendix 11 – Coding the entire data set 151](#_Toc460244917)

[*Phase 2 & 3 of the Analysis* 151](#_Toc460244918)

[Appendix 12 – Collating codes into potential themes and Defining and naming themes 167](#_Toc460244919)

[*Step 3 - 5 of the analysis* 167](#_Toc460244920)

[Appendix 13 – Thematic Map of the analysis 172](#_Toc460244921)

[Appendix 14 – Data relevant to each Code within the Themes 173](#_Toc460244922)

# List of Tables

[Table 1 – Information regarding the Natural Siblings 44](#_Toc458931683)

[Table 2 – Phases 1 to 6 of Thematic Analysis as suggested by Braun & Clark, (2006). 48](#_Toc458931684)

[Table 3 – Showing Themes and sub-themes. 54](#_Toc458931685)

# Glossary

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| CLA | Children who are Looked After |
| CYP | Children and Young People |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DFES | Department for Education and Skills |
| FC | Foster Child/Foster Children/Fostered Children |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| HOC | House of Commons |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LAC | Looked after children |
| NS | Natural Siblings \* note abbreviation is used for the plural use of the word. |
| NSPCC | National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SGO | Special Guardianship Order |
| VSH | Virtual School Head |

# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Children are usually looked after and raised by the parents and families, born into a situation which might be described as ‘natural’. Parents usually want nothing more for their children than to know that they are safe, happy, in good health and in receipt of a good education that can help them to be successful and grow up into mature adults. Sadly this is not always the case and when some parents struggle to look after, protect and nurture their children there is sometimes a need for them to be ‘looked after’ by other family members or families other than their own.

When children are ‘looked after’ they are also often referred to as ‘foster children’. Such families are often known as ‘foster families’. The literature also refers to the terms ‘foster carer’ or ‘foster parent’; often used interchangeably (Mietus & Fimmon, 1987). Male and female carers are sometimes differentiated using the terms ‘foster fathers’ and ‘foster mothers’ (Smith & Smith 1990; Inch, 1999). Foster parents take on the day to day responsibilities of looking after these children, often alongside their own children, with the LA maintaining overall responsibility.

The term ‘looked after’ (LAC) was introduced by the Children’s Act (1989) and refers to children and young people (CYP) who live away from their parents or family and are supervised by a social worker from the local council’s children’s services department. LAC has been extensively used for many years and appears in most of the literature that relates to children who are looked after. The term Children in Care is also a recognised term for this group of children. Children who are Looked After’ (CLA) appears to be a relatively new term which is becoming more commonly used within many government publications. The LA where this research was undertaken has recently made a decision to refer to children who are ‘looked after’ as ‘Children who are Looked After’ (CLA) rather than ‘Looked after Children’ (LAC). Therefore, throughout this document. I intend to the use the term CLA when referring to children who are looked after; although there may still be reference made to LAC when quoting others.

One third of foster families have natural siblings (NS – see glossary) (Kalland & Sinkkonen, 2001) and it has been reported that these placements are significantly more likely to break down than placements with no NS. Problems between a foster child and foster parents’ own children have been given as the reason for termination in 56 per cent of placements that failed within nine months or less (Cautley, 1980). It is widely reported that the educational attainment of CLA are poor (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001) and on the whole they do not attain as well as children who are not in care (Mclung and Gayle, 2010). When placements break down and CLA incur placement moves, this has a detrimental effect on their educational attainment. The more placements they have, the less they achieve academically (Biehal et al, 1995; Jackson & Thomas, 2000). Ensuring the stability of placements for CLA is a high priority for Social Services as reflected in a number of social care policy and practice documents in the UK (Arnold, 2007). Positive relationships within a foster home are key to ensuring that stability between CLA and NS.

The aim of this research was to explore the thoughts and feelings of older NS with regards to their relationship with CLA and what support they receive to make and maintain those relationships. NS who took part in the research lived within a foster family where at least one placement was deemed to have been successful. A successful foster placement is one where a CLA has lived within the home for more than two years. As already shared in the forethoughts above, and to ensure my positionality within the research is transparent, I begin my research by explaining my personal background and interest in the topic area.

## 1.2 Personal background and interest in the topic area

As a natural sibling within a foster family, I shared my life with many, many babies, children and adolescents. At the time, while I understood them to be less fortunate than myself I had not appreciated just how vulnerable they were. I look back on my childhood as a happy one where life was always busy and there was always someone to play with. I remember how different many of the children looked on entering our house compared to when they left; they were often very different people. However, this was not without difficulties for my siblings and me. The most difficult time was as a teenager when emergency foster placements meant children would often come in the middle of the night. I recall social workers visiting the house but never recall being asked my opinion or feeling that my wishes were ever taken into account. I feel that it is really important for all members of a household to be heard. I had a dislike of social services and social workers as my recollection of them was them coming in and out of the house uninvited. As an adult, I now appreciate that my mum had an open door policy, which extended to social workers too.

On entering my career as a teacher, with my parents still fostering, a number of the children in their care joined the school for short periods of time. It was only then that their vulnerability, particularly in education, became much more apparent to me. Rarely did they stay for any length of time and often their time in school was very unsettled. As an Advisory Teacher, many of the children whom I supported ended up with placement moves which often included moves to different schools. I believe that everybody needs to feel that they are safe, belong and are valued, and this should begin in the home. As an Advisory Teacher I worked closely with many social workers where I learned to appreciate what a difficult role they have. Having attended many meetings with senior social workers I began to understand and break down some of the barriers that had been built throughout my childhood. Having subsequently worked with many different social workers and seen such positive results from genuine joint working I feel I have already moved a long way from the feelings that I had as a child.

Having spent some time as a Trainee Educational Psychologist with the Rights and Participation Team in the LA where this research was conducted, my opinion of the fostering system has steadily improved. This included joining meetings with groups of CLA where their opinions were sought in relation to various issues regarding fostering. I was helped to understand that practices in relation to NS also included seeking their views. I also had the opportunity of looking through the child centred literature that is available for CLA and NS for information regarding being looked after and living with CLA. On a personal level, I went into this research feeling much more optimistic that things had changed and that both the views of NS and CLA were listened to and acted upon much more. Having completed my research I subsequently feel that very little appears to have changed. One of the aims of this research was to create a space for the often unheard voices of NS, an opportunity for them to share their own personal experiences of building relationships with CLA and the support they receive to do so.

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have challenged my own personal thinking and thoughts that have arisen regarding fostering and being raised as a NS within a foster family. I have included some of my reflections in reflective boxes throughout. I have had the support of my research tutor, colleagues, family and friends which has helped me to question some of my beliefs and the impact that they may have had on this research and my day to day practices as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

The following are Chapters that are covered in this thesis:

* Chapter 2 - A review of the literature including key issues and up to date statistics and psychological theories pertinent to the topic area resulting in presenting my research questions.
* Chapter 3 - A methodology section, which introduces the methodology chosen, the rationale behind it and my phenomenological position.
* Chapter 4 – The findings and my initial interpretations.
* Chapter 5 – A discussion of the findings with reference to the literature and psychological theories.
* Chapter 6 – Conclusion and limitations of the study, including recommendations for practice and future research.

# Chapter 2 - Literature review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present a selective, but not exhaustive review of the literature that is relevant to this research. The relevant literature includes material in relation to CLA within families that they were not born into; foster families and NS who live alongside them day by day. The relevant legislation and most up to date statistics regarding the prevalence of such placements will be presented and considerations of why children become looked after will be discussed (for local statistics see Appendix I). There will be an exploration regarding educational outcomes for CLA and how multiple placements have an adverse effect on their educational and social and emotional wellbeing. The literature in relation to foster families and the relevance of Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory will be explored. Similarities in relation to families who have disabled siblings or non-nuclear siblings (families living with step and half and where one ‘parent’ is not related) will also be considered. The research relating to possible precursors for placement breakdowns will also be considered, including relationships with NS and other family. The review will conclude by describing how this present research may extend the exploration within this field, therefore potentially improving relationships with CLA and NS, which may prevent placement breakdowns, thus improving the life chances of many children in care.

## 2.2 Statistics and Legislation

The number of CLA has been steadily increasing over the last seven years. There were 69540 looked after children in England as at 31st March 2015 (DfE, 2015). It has increased by 1% compared to 31st March 2014 and 6% compared to 31st March 2011(DfE, 2015). This rise is not just a reflection of the rise in child population: in 2015, 60 children per 10,000 of the population were looked after, an increase from 2011 when 50 children per 10,000 of the population were looked after (DfE, 2015).

The figures state that 61% of children become looked after due to abuse or neglect with other reasons being family dysfunction (16%), acute family stress (9%), absent parenting (5%), parental illness or disability (3%), child disability (3%), socially unacceptable behaviours (2%) and low income (<1%) (HOC, 2015).

Children between 10 and 15 years of age account for over a third of the children in care, with there being more boys (55%) compared to girls (45%) (HOC, 2015). Last year there were a greater number of older children who were looked after (DfE, 2015), with the increase mainly being in the over 16 age range. In 2015, 16% of children starting to be looked after were 16 and over, compared to 12% in 2011 (DfE, 2015). The minority group are children under the age of one (5%). The ages and gender-related distributions have been said to have remained relatively consistent over the last five years (HOC, 2015).

In March 2015, 60% of children were looked after under a care order (DfE 2015). A care order grants parental responsibility for the child to the LA specified in the order, to be shared with parents. 14% of children were looked after on a placement order or some other order such as a freed for adoption order (DfE, 2015). Both of these orders give parental responsibility to a LA to place a child with prospective adopters (GB 2014). Children who are placed in care under a voluntary agreement accounts for 29% of children in care; this is where children are placed with their parents’ consent (DfE, 2015).

There were 31,100 children who ceased to be looked after (no longer classed as CLA) during the year ending 31st March 2015, which has steadily increased since 2011 (DfE, 2015). This was mainly due to an increase in adoptions or the granting of special guardianship orders (SGO), residence order or child arrangements orders. In contrast the percentage of 10 – 15 year olds leaving the care system has decreased from 20% to 16% over the same period of time (DfE, 2015). The percentage of over 18 years olds who have left the care system has remained fairly stable since 2011 ( DfE, 2015). In 2015, 7390 18 year olds were no longer classed as CLA, which represents 24% of all children ceasing to be looked after.

As stated above, there has been an increase in children ceasing to be in care due to SGO, which accounts for 3520; an increase of 5% in 2015 (DfE, 2015). Of children leaving care with a SGO, 1630 (5%) were made to former families - which is a decrease from 2014 (DfE, 2015). However the percentage of children ceasing to be in care to carers other than former foster families continues to increase; it was 1890 (6%) in 2015 (DfE, 2015). Other reasons for children no longer being in the care system were residency orders or child arrangement orders which accounted for 1020 children, (3%) in 2015. Adoption accounted for 17% of children ceasing to be looked after in 2015 (DfE, 2015).

## 2.3 Why do children become ‘looked after’?

When children are deemed to be at risk of harm from their care givers, most often their parents, they are removed from their care parents and placed in the care of the LA or sometimes other family members.

In England, section 22 (1) of the Children Act 1989 defines the term - “looked after child” - as a child who is accommodated by (section 20) or in the care of (section 31) a LA. This includes children provided with accommodation under the criminal justice requirements (section 21) and also children who are treated as looked after under s104 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (Knowledge and Analytical Services, Welsh Government, 2014). This study is regarding CLA under section 20 and 31.

Children are placed in care with the intention of keeping them safe and in the hope that they will have better chances in life than they would have had, had they stayed within their own family system. The English government guidance emphasises the need to ‘ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond’ (DfE, 2012a). Although foster care is intended to be a safe haven and a secure alternative to difficulties in the home, a study completed by Lawrence et al (2006) suggested that children who were placed in care showed elevated levels of behaviour and internalised problems compared to children who had been left in the home with maltreating caregivers. According to Curtis et al (1999), the legislation at that time suggested that removing children from their families and placing them in out of home care had been associated with negative developmental consequences that placed children at risk of behavioural, psychological, developmental, and academic problems. These poor outcomes have been attributed to various factors such as: adverse early life experiences before coming into care, poor corporate parenting, poor care environments, a lack of educational priorities for these children, inappropriate expectations, placement instability and disrupted school patterns (Norwich et al, 2010). Although, as one child dies in the hands of another person each week (NSPCC 2014), it could be argued that some of the negative consequences that arise from foster care are more favourable than the possible alternative; as long as children are only taken into care where absolutely necessary and that we continually strive to reduce those negative consequences.

## 2.4 Educational outcomes

It is widely published that CLA have poor educational experiences and outcomes (Jackson and Sachdev 2001). This has also been found to be the case in many counties (Dill et al, 2012). Generally the attainment levels of CLA decreases and the gap widens, in comparison to children who are not looked after, the further they progress through school.

In England, data produced by the Department for Education (DfE, 2014b), showed that at Key Stage 1 (aged 7), 71% of CLA achieved the expected level in reading; in writing the figure was 67% and in maths, 72%. This compares with 90%, 86% and 92% of all children in those subjects respectively. By Key Stage 2 the gap widened: 48% of children in care achieve the expected levels in English and maths, compared to 79% of all children (DfE, 2014b).

By the end of secondary school this gap is even wider. The latest statistics show that among Year 11 students in 2014, 31% of CLA obtained five GCSEs at grade A\* to C, compared with a national figure of 75% (DfE, 2015); which is a decrease from the previous year, with 37% and 80% respectively being the recorded achievements (GB, 2014). Only 14% of CLA achieved five GCSEs A\* to C including Mathematics and English, compared with 55% nationally by children who are not looked after (DfE 2015).

Government agencies have been highly critical of these poor educational outcomes (GB, 1998). The Department for Health (1998) went so far as to suggest that children in the care of local authorities have been abused and neglected by the care system that was supposed to look after them. Yet local authorities have a statutory duty under the Children Act (1989) to promote the educational achievement of children. It is thought that educational achievement is an indicator of success in life and better long term outcomes in general (Gorard et al, 2012). It is equally increasingly important to obtain qualifications and skills in a competitive economy, as well as achieve personal fulfilment (Finnie, 2012). However it is also thought that low academic attainment is only the tip of the iceberg for children in public care, who have many other life-limiting outcomes (Maginn & Cameron, 2013). According to Maginn & Cameron, 2013, 80% of *The Big Issue* sellers had been in care; more than a third of young people leaving care were unemployed; half of all prostitutes had been looked after; and up to 50% of the prison population under 25 had been through the care system. As Maginn & Cameron, 2013 suggest, clearly too many care leavers end up homeless, jobless, friendless and incarcerated.

## 2.5 Placements

Most children are placed with foster carers and the number has continued to rise in 2015 (DfE, 2015). In 2015, 75% of children who were looked after were placed in foster care (DfE, 2015) this figure includes an increase of 8% since 2011 (DfE, 2015). Children are also placed in children’s homes and hostels, although there has been a decline in the use of such placements and it is less likely for the future (DfE 2013). A small number of children are placed in care with their parents and also placed for adoption (DfE 2015).

Research has also indicated that other care factors such as age at placement, gender, reasons for being in care and risk factors prior to being placed are also contributing factors that determine educational outcomes (Mclung & Gayle, 2010, Berridge, 2007). McLung and Gayle (2010) also found that children who were placed in care prior to the age of 12 fared better academically. It was thought that because they were able to live more settled lives for a longer period of time, this enhanced their academic achievement. Jackson (2007) strongly rejected Berridge’s (2007) suggestions regarding pre placement risk factors as it was felt that reduced academic achievement were due to shortcomings in the care system. An argument has also been put forward by Forrester et al (2009) who undertook a systematic review of the impact of outcomes for children in care; he suggested that conclusions were limited due to the quality of studies that were available.

In 2015, 67% of children managed foster care in just one placement, 23% had two placements and 10% three or more within the year (DfE, 2015). Each additional placement change after the age of 11 is equal to one third of a grade less at GCSE (O’Higgins et al, 2015). O’Higgins et al (2015) research found that the third most relevant factor was change in school placement at age 10 and 11. Young people who moved at that age were found to score over five grades less than CLA who did not move. Therefore stable placements in foster homes which incur fewer school placement moves is likely to ensure better educational achievement and therefore desirable.

Changes in placement usually involve moving to a new neighbourhood, children’s social experiences are also affected; which has an impact on their emotional well-being. A study by Newton et al (2000) suggests that changes in placement might increase emotional and behavioural problems in children who did not initially exhibit serious emotional and behavioural problems when they entered care. An examination of a group of children judged not to be at risk when they entered foster placement who experienced multiple placements were at greater risk for mental health problems just one year later (Newton et al., 2000).

## 2.6 Families

*Families* ***-*** The importance of the family cannot be overstated. A child’s physical, emotional and psychological development occurs within the family environment; it is where the vast majority of us learn the fundamental skills for life (The Centre for Social Justice, 2010). Family life over the last fifty years has seen an increase in diversity and fluidity (McKie and Callan, 2012; Silva and Smart, 1999), in that there are many variations as to what has typically been known about the traditional or nuclear family; two parents and their own siblings. In an ideal world family is where children enjoy loving attached relationships with the adults responsible for them (Maginn & Cameron, 2013). These attachments are what enable them to live a fulfilling life, which enables them to explore and discover their immediate and more distant world.

*Foster families* ***-*** Children who end up living in foster families most often have come from fragmented families; these are families whereby a child is living with only one of their natural parents. These children’s lives are disrupted and they may experience repeated disruption by moving back and forth from their birth families to foster families and subsequent foster families. They are cared for by a variety of different ‘mother figures’ which can sometimes result in them not knowing who is, or should be ‘family’ (Biehal, 2014). CLA know that they have a birth family but making sense of where they belong may be difficult. Biehal (2014) suggests that research into family change has often concentrated on children in stepfamilies, who like CLA, often have different sets of family and step-family relationships who are sometimes in different households (Silva and Smart, 1999). Children in these households have to make relationships with other children who are related and not related. The difference between stepfamilies and foster families are that CLA are separated from both parents and are having to make these ‘family-like’ relationships with others, where none of them are related. There has been very little research into how CLA negotiate these ‘multiple family identities’ (Biehal, 2014).

Making these ‘family-like’ relationships and forming new attachments with different members of a foster family may prove difficult for a foster child due to adversities that they have experienced before coming into care, and/or whilst in care. Many areas have been investigated to try to gain a better understanding of both the difficulties of fostering and when foster care works best including looking at attachment (Bowlby, 1973, 1981) family systems, attachment and loss (Thompson & McArther, 2009), belonging (Biehal, 2014) and looking at the foster carers parenting style (Wilson, 2006). The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) reported that much of the evidence identified for recent guidance for CLA is the importance of secure attachments and establishing a sense of permanence (SCIE & NICE, 2010).

## 2.7 Attachments, Loss and Belonging

*Attachment* ***-*** Children who enter foster care and remain there for any length of time have often experienced abuse, severe family conflict or both early in life (Wilson 2006). There is therefore a high possibility that they enter care with differing attachment qualities that may make forming relationships difficult for them. It has been argued that forming attachments is instinctive and as much part of our biological evolution as the need for food (Maginn, 2011). Attachment theory suggests that the early bond between care giver and infant is crucial for healthy development (Bowlby, 1973). Infants hold an ‘attachment behavioural system’ the function of which is to elicit comfort from and maintain proximity to the care giver, leading to a strong sense of security (Bowlby, 1973). Bowlby (1981) identified the infant stage (particularly the second half of the first year), when relationship with the caregiver is being developed, as the most important stage of attachment. Children feel secure when they know that they can return to their caregiver when they are in need of protection (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). A child uses this secure base to explore their surroundings while keeping within the proximity of the carer. Through repeated interactions the infant learns to adjust their behaviour accordingly. These experiences with their caregivers are internalised to form the child’s own internal working model, leading to the self being seen as worthy of love and support and able to determine whether or not others can be regarded as trustworthy in later life (Bowlby, 1973). Differences in the quality of infant attachment organisation are related to variations in caregiving experience during that time (Ainsworth et al, 1978; Bowlby, 1960/1982). Bowlby (1981) also argued that it is the mother with whom the child forms the basis for the development of subsequent relationships in life and that this may in turn affect the child’s ability to parent his/her own children (Bowlby, 1953). Various research studies suggest that children who experience rejecting or insensitive care frequently come to expect parental unavailability and are likely to develop behavioural patterns that have long-term negative consequences for socio-emotional development (Egeland & Carlson, 2004; Sroufe, 1996). Four attachment categories were suggested by Main & Solomon (1986); secure, insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent (resistant) and insecure-disorganised. In contrast to attachments being purely in relation to the mother, Bowlby also noted that attachment relationships do not exist in social isolation but develop within the broader context of group and family dynamics (Slater, 2007). This could be looked upon as extending attachment theory from one person to multi-person psychology (Diamond & Marrone, 2003). It has equally been stressed by Fromm and Maccoby (1970) that when understanding individuals within families this includes understanding the family within the social and cultural environment as well as economic realities. There has also been research that suggests that attachment styles are correlated with child temperament more than motherly sensitivity and that attachment classifications vary according to different cultures and childrearing practices (Kagan, 1998; Quinn and Mageo, 2013).

Research has consistently demonstrated that foster children who have developed such externalising behaviour problems, such as oppositional behaviour, fighting, and stealing, experience a greater number of placements than other children (Cooper et al, 1987; Fanshel et al, 1990; James et al, 2004; Newton et al., 2000; Palmer, 1996; Pardeck, 1983; Proch & Taber, 1985; Stone & Stone, 1983; Widom, 1991). These difficulties in attachment patterns leave many foster children with difficulties in handling relationships in the foster family, school and in the wider community. Sadly only 2% of children actually come into care for socially unacceptable behaviour (DfES, 2015), which may suggest that it may be their journey into care and the hurt and emotional trauma around that journey that results in ‘pain based’ behaviour (Maginn, 2014).

*Attachment and loss -* There is recognition that foster families face loss and grief on a continual basis, with the movement of vulnerable children and young people in and out of their lives (Edelstein et al, 2001; Buehler et al, 2006; Twigg & Swan, 2007). Attachment can be looked at from three different angles; the way in which CLA are capable of forming new relationships (discussed above); the attachment of CLA to the foster family as a whole and how their past experiences and connection to their birth family may make that difficult (discussed above) and the difficulty in members of a foster family allowing themselves to feel attached to CLA as the placement may not work and the child may leave the family (see below).

*Belonging* ***-*** Research suggests that a fostered child’s degree of integration and belonging in the foster home should be regularly assessed, as poor integration in a foster home appears to be a key part of the risk process leading to disruption (Leathers, 2006). Biehal’s (2012) study suggests that a foster child’s development of ‘a sense of belonging’ to their foster family depends a great deal on how they position themselves to their birth families. When CLA found the ‘loss’ of their parents difficult or when they were consumed with rejecting or unreliable parents they found where they belonged much more difficult to make sense of. Other key factors in relation to belonging for CLA was when they were fully integrated in the day to day activities of the family (Biehal, 2012), and treated just like ‘biological children’ (Oke et al, 2011). The research undertaken by Biehal, (20-12) was completed with foster carers and CLA with very little reference to other family members such as NS. When NS were mentioned this was with reference to placement break down. CLA thought that they did not belong because they thought they were disliked by the foster mum’s daughters. Oke et al, (2011) consider the tension between the ‘necessity of belonging’ and the ‘need to differentiate’ as two key components in the process of identity formation and explored how this process is affected by the condition of non-biological filiation which pertains in foster and adoptive settings.

### 2.8 Relationships within families

*Natural sibling relationships* - Relationships between siblings often spread over a lifetime and there has been a strong association found between the quality of sibling relationships and child developmental outcomes (Cicirelli, 1995; Dunn, 1989; Sulloway, 1996) which highlights the importance of these relationships. Early studies have suggested that a sibling’s position in the family gives rise to social psychological processes with lifelong implications for individual development and adjustment (Irish 1964). In a study completed by Furman and Buhmester (1985) children reported both positive and negative aspects of sibling relationships. The authors reported that sibling relationships could be described as ‘multifaceted’ (p.456) and identified different dimensions how sibling relationships can vary. It is thought that there is potential for sibling relationships to impact on personality, identity and future relationships (Edwards et al 2006). Understanding sibling dynamics requires simultaneous attention to multiple dimensions of the relationship (Mchale et al, 2012).

*Relationships with disabled siblings* - Research into the relationships of siblings who have a disability or chronic illness has relevance to the present study as many of the experiences that these children face also appear to be observed within families that foster children. Not surprisingly, research suggests that siblings of disabled or chronically ill children have positive and negative elements (Tozer, 1996; Franklin & Sloper, 2006; Ross & Cuskelly, 2006 and Burke, 2010).

One of the positive elements is that siblings who have a brother or sister with a disability or chronic illness consistently show more warmth and positive effect (Stoneman, 2001). Similarly a review of studies from NS in a foster family believed that they were, as a consequence of the fostering experience, more sensitive, responsible and caring people (Twigg & Swan, 2007).

Burke, (2010) discussed the concept of ‘disability by association’ to clarify the impact of siblings living with a disabled sibling. The findings included the family not being able to ‘do things together’ as caring for the disabled sibling meant that organising events were often difficult, which meant that the siblings missed out too. Similarly, siblings and carers in a foster family felt that having a foster child could involve ‘complicated changes in everyday life’ (p 73. Hojer 2007) however in a subsequent study and in contrast some NS also recognised the benefits of more family outings and holidays (Hojer 2007).

*Natural sibling and foster sibling relationships* ***–*** To gain a theoretical insight into the relational experience that may be present within CLA and NS relationships, Thompson & McPerson, (2011) considered three different psychological theories. They explored 12 different research studies from five different countries of the experiences of birth children living with foster siblings, as described by the birth children. Although all of the studies had a qualitative element, there was a variety of methods used to gain the information and there was a wide age range of participants from age three years old to 30 years old. There is a possibility that the experiences of NS in differing age ranges may be very different and therefore may make making assumptions from such a wide variety of ages slightly difficult. What was interesting about this study is that they called upon psychodynamic and attachment theory, developmental theory and Family Systems theory in which to discuss their findings, which will be described below.

*Psychodynamic and attachment theory* - considers how a child might feel displaced when a new sibling is born, this leads to internal conflict that can be difficult to deal with but which is ultimately important (Thompson & McPerson, 2011). The child perceives that their mother’s attention has been displaced to the new sibling and may cause an unconscious desire to destroy the new sibling (Thompson & McPerson, 2011). Colonna and Newman, (1983) suggested that this may add to the struggles already being experienced through the oedipal conflict, which may be worked through later in the sibling relationship. Dunn and Kendrick (1982) suggested that the birth of a sibling results in sharp changes in the parent-child relationship, and that these changes may be linked to the quality of relationship that develops between siblings. This suggests that the initial changes in the parent-child relationship are important to consider when studying sibling relationships (Thompson & McPerson, 2011). Thompson & McPerson (2011) suggested that it could be argued that this may be what occurs in natural children when a new foster sibling arrives in the family, however that may very well depend on the age of the foster child and natural sibling at the time they arrive at the family home.

Thompson & Mcperson, (2011) continue to explain that the importance of the parent-child relationship is also evident within attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby (1969) suggests that children with insecure attachment to their parents may re-enact this relational dynamic with other people, which may include their siblings (Thompson & Mcperson, 2011). Boer *et al,* (1992), suggested that there is a correlation between good parental care and positive sibling relationship. Thompson & Mcperson (2011) suggested that CLA, who may have experienced disruptions in parental attachment could re-enact these relational patterns with carers and foster siblings. While this may be the case, there is equally the possibility that NS who may also have disrupted attachment patterns with their attachment figure and may equally be re-enacting those with the foster siblings.

*Developmental psychology* -Thompson & Mcperson, (2011) highlight that the literature on sibling relationships also identifies the impact that those relationships can have on a child’s psychological development. They quote Dunn (1983) as suggesting that sibling interactions are ideal opportunities for social – cognitive development. Conflict between siblings helps them to develop skills in perception, emotional understanding, negotiation, persuasion and problem solving (Brown et al 1996; Dunn 2007; Howe et al 2002). These skills learnt through siblings relationships are linked to later social competence, emotional understanding and peer relationships (Stormshak et al & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group 1996; Updeggraf et al, 2002; Youngblade & Dunn 1995). In adolescence, sibling relationships are also said to contribute to positive prosocial behaviour (Brody et al, 2002; Whiteman et al, 2007) empathy (Tucker et al, 1999) and academic engagement (Bouchey et al, 2010). The research clearly suggests that positives to sibling relationships include academic and social well-being. I feel that if these benefits transfer to relationships with foster children, this highlights the importance of supporting and maintaining positive relationships with fostered and NS to enable these benefits to enhance the support offered by the foster carers. When considering that foster families may have multiple natural siblings and CLA of differing ages the interplay between them will be very complex and difficult to determine if it is positive or negative for both the NS and the CLA. This was highlighted by Sinclair (2005), when he suggested that much depends on the age and characteristics of the children involved. He concluded, ‘In short, there is no simple answer to the question about the effects of other children on placement. It all depends.’ (Sinclaire, 2005, pg 79).

The main themes found within the Thompson & McPherson (2011) study related to positive experiences, loss, conflict, transitions and coping. Twigg & Swan (2014) reviewed 14 studies including nine published and five unpublished; a number of which were the same studies as in the Thompson & McPherson (2011) article. Again all of the studies used a variety of qualitative methods and a wide age range of participants, ranging from age seven to 32. In this study the themes relating to the NS experiences also included positive and negative elements; the benefits of fostering, the impact or living with foster children, responses to loss of role and parental attention and the impact of child welfare and foster care agency. It could be argued that the experiences of younger NS may be very different to older NS, due to very different needs and in this research their experiences have been analysed together.

2.9 Family systems theory –

Family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) is based on an assumption that all parts of the family are connected and a true understanding cannot be reached if considering the parts in isolation (Karakurt & Silver 2014). As systems theory is interested in the interactions of the entire family, the entire family should be under analysis (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Behaviours of members within a system affect the environment and the environment is affected by all the members in the system. Research exploring links between family characteristics and sibling relationships shows that more positive parent-child relationships and siblings perceptions of parental fairness between siblings was linked to more positive sibling relationships (Mchale et al, 2007; Dunn & McGuire, 1992). Mchale et al’s, (2007) study also highlighted that positive older siblings relational experiences with parents was also a powerful indicator of the tone of sibling relationships.

Elements of family life, such as spousal conflict, co-parenting and parenting behaviours are also thought to influence sibling relationships (Oconner et al, 1998). Differential treatment of siblings by mothers and fathers can lead to negative relationship between siblings (Kan et al, 2008; Solmeyer et al, 2011; Vollings & Ellins, 1998). Siblings contact and companionship with each other when their parents are not present provides opportunity to shape each other’s socio-emotional development and adjustment (McHale et al, 2012).

Foster carers speak of the challenges of including a new child into the family system and the effect on the family structure and dynamics, and in particular the effects on other children (Thompson and McArther, 2009). The addition of new family members means that the children already in the family have to re-evaluate their roles within the group (Wilkes, 1974). It is thought that this can lead to feelings of loss with regards to their place in the family and that once the family enters fostering ‘the hierarchical order has to be established, and individual members may find themselves pushed into less prominent roles’ (Wilkes, 1974, p 374). This may cause resentment between family members thus upsetting the systems within it. Within foster families who look after CLA on a short term basis, natural siblings and any other foster children have to re-evaluate their roles on a regular basis, which may cause difficulties within the family environment.

*Foster carers*–A considerable amount of the research relating to fostering has been undertaken by exploring the experiences of foster carers. Research suggests that parenting fostered adolescents from troubled backgrounds is a challenging task (Farmer et al, 2004). Foster carers are in a difficult position, they bring un-related children into their homes; they care for them ‘as their own’ while any legal rights remains with the LA where they originate (DfE, 2015). Morrow (1998) in her study of children’s perception of family suggests that children perceive mothers as especially important providers of love and support. Research studies have revealed that the majority of care provided for CLA from foster carer’s is by women (McHugh et al., 2004; Grimm and Darwall, 2005; Siminski et al., 2005). While all foster carers go through a rigorous assessment process and are expected to be good enough parents, it may not be possible to assess their own attachment experiences and how that may affect their ability to make attachments with the foster children in their care. Walker (2008) highlights the relevance of foster carers’ own attachment experiences to their ability to form nurturing relationships with the children who come into their care. Farmer et al (2005) concluded that various types of strains on foster carer’s affects their capacity to parent well and can have an adverse impact on placement outcomes and stability.

*Parenting* – As discussed above parenting style is thought to have an effect on sibling relationships and therefore may equally affect CLA and NS relationships. It is widely recognised that research suggests that there are some foster carers who are consistently less likely to have placements that break down and that certain parenting skills in foster carers have an effect on the outcomes (Wilson, 2006). These skills include foster parents who are warm, child centred, persistent and have the ability to ‘set limits’ (Wilson, 2006). It has been suggested that even when child care is being done well, carers are unlikely to be aware of the specific elements and processes that underpin their good practice (Anglin, 2004). However the Anglin (2004) study was undertaken in a residential setting rather than a foster home setting. Foster carers may have more experience and be more aware of their own parenting skills and deficits. The concept of other factors such as the child’s own characteristics, whether the child was matched to the family and the carer’s characteristics and the ‘chemistry’ between child and carer also helps the placement to be more successful (Wilson, 2006). Chemistry in the context of relationships could be described as the ‘emotions’ that people get when they share a special connection. This special connection for NS and parents is often present prior to birth and continues from birth when the baby and mother begin to form attachments as both their ‘bonding hormones’ begin to interact with each other’s (Palmer, 2015) and the mother begins to attune to her baby’s needs. Clearly this type of ‘chemistry’ may not be instinctive when parents decide to look after children that aren’t their own, and indeed may equally not be present with all parents and NS’s. Even though attempts may be made to try and match children to foster carers so that the likelihood of them ‘clicking’ is greater, this may not always ensure ‘chemistry’; as one foster carer pointed out in the Wilson (2006) study, ‘in all honesty there are some you bond with and some you don’t’ (pg. 508). There is a possibility that these children who foster carers struggle to bond with may be the children that need even more emotional warmth and support to enable them to build up their abilities to be able to bond with people and form good personal relationships. The Emotional Warmth approach of professional child care as suggested by Cameron and Maginn (2009) considers that the starting point for young people in care should be the relationship between each individual young person and their carer. The approach highlights four important components, including; 1) The Pillars of Parenting, 2) Adaptive emotional development, 3) Signature strengths and 4) Living psychology through consultation. Although all components are clearly relevant to looked after children, briefly described below for the purpose of this present section and this research study is section one, The Pillars of Parenting. A further detailed description of The Pillars and all four components can be found in Cameron and Maginn (2009, 2011).

*The Pillars of Parenting -* Cameron & Maginn, (2011)suggest that the terminology relating to children in care, such as ‘looked after’ and ‘being cared for’ implies a passive receiving which is devoid of commitment, engagement and attunement that comes with ‘parenting’. Cameron & Maginn, (2011) argued that the skills and knowledge for ‘professional parenting’ should not be left to trial and error but that they should be unpacked, analysed, understood and implemented. There are eight pillars and each has a psychological underpinning and activities that can be ‘implemented’ by carers. The most appropriate one or two pillars that are thought to meet the child or young person’s priority parenting needs are selected and activities are then ‘implemented’ by carers when the opportunity arises. The pillars include; primary care and protection, making close relationships, positive self-perception, emotional competence, self-management skills, resilience, a sense of belonging and personal and social responsibility. The approach was initially created to support children and young people in residential care, where by a number of ‘carer’s may recognise the opportunity to ‘implement’ the activities therefore the support is shared by a number of people. The approach also means having regular access to advice and support from ‘experienced applied psychologists’. Cameron & Maginn, (2011) suggest that this approach is also being used in foster care, with foster parents; however it would be interesting to explore how many foster carers have been exposed to such an approach and how much support they are receiving. I equally feel, when looking at the pillars in detail, even though the model suggests that one or two pillars should be worked on at any one time, the majority of the pillars seem to be relevant to most CLA most of the time. While I understand the desire to not let ‘professional parenting’ be left to ‘trial and error’, I would also argue that even with the well thought out pillars that are backed up by psychological knowledge, parenting *is* often ‘trial and error’. I also feel that parenting, to an extent, is a natural activity and that there is the possibility that some foster carers may not have the personal skills that are needed alongside the ‘informed professional expertise’. A final critique is that there is very little reference made to other family members and their involvement and relationships with CLA. A high proportion of foster homes have NS, and some of them will be adults (over 18); inevitably to make the placement successful, their contribution to the giving of ‘emotional warmth’ may need to be considered in more detail.

## 2.10 Support for foster carers

It is important for CLA to have stable supportive relationships with their foster caregivers. To enable them to do this foster carers need support. Foster care literature indicates that the level of stress in foster carers is affected by the amount and type of support they receive (Wilson et al, 2000; Sinclair et al, 2004). Foster parents have access to training and support to understand some of the behaviours that foster children may display that are related to the suffering, trauma and loss they have experienced in their lives (Golding, 2004). However the support that they receive is limited. Individualised support or training to deal with the psychological needs of their maltreated foster children is rare (Timmer et al, 2006). Often services that are available are designed to address the child’s problems, not the foster parents’ ability to manage them (Timmer et al, 2006). Yet (as mentioned above in sibling relationships) there is evidence that marital and family processes, such as spousal conflict, co-parenting and parenting behaviours are good predictors of sibling relationship quality. This may suggest that support for the foster carers, as well as the child, would be beneficial. Studies have shown that when foster children and foster parents receive support together, there is a beneficial effect for both (Timmer et al 2005). While foster carers at least have access to support, there appears to be no mention in the literature of support for NS. It is also worthwhile exploring the notion that if more support went into helping foster carers to understand how to support their own natural children through their feelings associated with fostering, this in turn may help natural children in their relationships with their parents and foster children.

## 2.11 Placement breakdown

As discussed above placement stability is extensively considered as central to developing long term educational, social and emotional achievement for children in foster care (Oke et al, 2011). The UK Government’s criteria for a stable placement are that a child has been continuously looked after by an LA for four years and has remained in the same placement for two years (DfES, 2006). Foster care breakdown, in the form of an unplanned ending of placement for a child, occurs in 19 to 40 percent (depending on placement type) of cases (Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Rushton & Dance, 2004). There are many reasons why placements breakdown and many of them are child related difficulties including being older as opposed to younger at placement, disruption of previous placements, low educational achievement, mental health disturbance and delinquency (Barber et al, 2001; Berridge & Cleaver, 1987; Doelling & Johnson,1990; Minnis & Devine, 2001; Wulczyn et al, 2003).

From the body of research undertaken it appears that there is a greater risk of placements breaking down when NS live at home (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). Kalland and Sinkkonen (2001) found that one third of the foster carers had birth children and reported that there is a greater risk of placement breakdown than those without. Cautley (1980) indicated that ‘problems between foster child and foster parents’ own children were given as the reason for termination in 56 per cent of placements that failed in nine months or less’ (p 302). Later research suggested that one of the most common reasons given by foster carers for ceasing fostering is the effect it may be having on their own children (Triseliotis et al., 2000; Sinclair et al., 2004; Twigg and Swan, 2007).

## 2.12 Natural sibling and relationships with CLA – where is the research gap?

Much of the research into foster families has been from the perspective of the foster parents or the social workers (Holloway, 1997; Timmer et al 2006; Leathers, 2006; Oke, 2011). Children and young people are often seen as a part of the family and not as individuals in their own right, which makes them less visible (Brannen et al 2000). There has been some research from CLA perspective (Selwyn et al., 2010). While there has been research concerning experiences of NS (Kalpan, 1988; Hojer, 2007; Thompson & McPherson 2011; Twigg & Swan, 2014) this has been research that has compiled a number of other research studies together and has included research from other countries too. These research studies have taken the views of all age groups together rather than differentiating the experiences of children and adults (over 18s). There appears to be no research into relationships and what support NS receive or what they feel they may need. Although research has indicated positive aspects of fostering for NS, many foster parents reasons for ceasing fostering is over their concerns of the effects on their own children. Foster carers where placements are deemed to be successful are said to have particular parenting skills and maybe those skills enhance their own children’s ability to form good relationships. NS report that they often do not know who to talk to or avoid talking about their difficult feelings associated with foster care. Research also suggests that foster parents do not always recognise their own children’s difficulties, thinking that it is just a part of everyday life (Hojer 2007). Pent up feelings, not feeling understood and not understanding may be impacting on their relationships with foster siblings. These difficulties experienced in foster sibling relationships clearly have the potential to be one of the reasons for the placement breakdown.

Other studies have suggested that there is a need for more preventative work and also that families taking older children should be offered more support after placement as they are more at risk of disruption (Holloway 1997), yet there appears to be no definition of what that support may be.

Given that research shows that foster placement can provide a higher degree of stability for looked after children in comparison to other types of placement, and that positive relationships of siblings within a family may offer positive outcomes it is important to nurture those relationships to avoid placement break down. It is also important to try to understand just what would help both sets of children, fostered and natural, that would support positive relationships to ensure a stable future for CLA within a foster family.

The aim of this research was therefore to explore the experiences of NS regarding their relationships with CLA, who still lived within the family home and who were over 18 and what might help them make and maintain those relationships. The overarching research questions were:

* What are NS’ experiences of making and maintaining relationships with CLA in their parents care?
* To what extent and how are these relationships facilitated?

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# Chapter 3 - Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to explore my rationale for the methodology and method adopted for this research project. I will initially explain my research design. I will then explain my underlying ontological position, epistemology and choice of methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I will explore the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, how they relate to the present study and discuss some of the methodological limitations. I will also briefly discuss alternative methodological choices that were available for this study and my rationale for choosing IPA. The procedures that were followed will be carefully explained including ethical considerations and how quality was maintained throughout this qualitative research enquiry.

## 3.2 Research Design

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of relationships and support that NS have in relation to CLA within their family home. In particular I wanted to explore their understanding, feelings and thoughts in relation to how they formed and maintained relationships with foster children in their parents care. I was interested in how they made sense of those experiences and what or who they felt helped and supported them with those relationships and if they had any other thoughts and feelings as to how best they could have been supported. In order to gain an in-depth detailed personal account of my participants’ experiences, they needed the opportunity to be able to speak freely and reflectively, which I felt would best be gained through individual interviews. This meant that this research would be qualitative in nature. There was not a pre-determined hypothesis which meant that the research was inductive rather than deductive. The data collected inductively developed a theory or pattern of meaning throughout the course of the research rather than it being determined by existing theory and literature. Figure 1, shows a diagrammatic representation of the methodological elements that were adopted and expanded upon in this study.

There are different visions of how social reality should be studied and there is an increasing trend across social sciences in recognising the merit and value of qualitative research. Grix (2002) noted the importance of a researchers understanding of their own ontological position, after which their epistemological and methodological positions would logically follow.

Diagram 1- Diagrammatic representation of the methodological elements. Adapted from Grix (2002).

Ontology – Constructionist

Epistemology – Contextual Interpretivism

 Theoretical Perspective – Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Ideography

 Methodology - *Intended* - Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis *On reflection after data collection* - Thematic Analysis

 Method – Face to Face -semi-structured interviews

 Sources – Interview transcripts

*Ontology*, is the image of social reality on which a theory is based (Grix, 2002). Blaikie (2008) described the concept more fully as the claims and assumptions that are made about social reality. In brief, ontology is our beliefs regarding social reality. Ontological considerations range from positivism/objectivism, social entities having a reality external to social actors, to constructionism/subjectivism, where ones reality is built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman, 2008).

Positivists accept an objective, apprehendable reality; post-positivists acknowledge an objective reality that is only imperfectly apprehendable (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Positivists believed that the goal of science is to uncover the truth; post-positivists believe that the goal of science is to continue to work towards the goal of getting it right about reality, even though it can never really be reached (Ponterotto, 2005). It is suggested that a key distinction between the positivist and post-positivist views is that the former stresses “theory verification” and the latter “theory falsification” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 107).

Constructionists maintain that through deep reflection a hidden meaning can be brought to the surface (Schwandt, 2000; Sciarra, 1999). Ponteretto, (2005) argues that interaction between researcher and participant helps to stimulate the reflection and uncover deeper meaning denoting that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, p.12). Equally as there are many constructed realities and each person has their own reality, constructionists believe that time and context-free generalisations are neither desirable nor possible (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This research is positioned within the constructionist ontology and to further clarify my position I will explain epistemology in more detail.

*Epistemology* with its roots in philosophy constitutes one’s “assumption about how to know the social and apprehend its meaning” (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 1). Two contrasting epistemologies are that of Dualism and Interpretivism. Dualism is an epistemological position based on the assumption that “the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, that there is a method for studying the social world that is value free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided” (Mertens, 2005, p.8). Objectivity is thought to be key and that time and context free generalisations are sought-after and possible and real causes of social scientific outcomes can be determined reliably and validly (Nagal, 1986).

Some researchers suggest that their own biases can be eliminated; they can remain emotionally detached and uninvolved with their objects of study, which then enables them to test or empirically justify their stated hypothesis (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Interpretivism on the other hand is an epistemological position that ‘ is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action’ (Bryman, 2008, p 16). The social science domain is concerned with how social scientists/researchers can gain access to peoples ‘common-sense thinking’ to interpret their actions and their view of the social world (Bryman, 2008). Of equal importance to the interpretivist epistemology is the context in which the experiences take place. Jaeger & Rosnow (1988) suggest that contextualism emphasises that human activity does not develop in a social vacuum but is rigorously situated in a sociohistorical and cultural milieu of meanings and relationships. Heidegger’s perspective of the ‘person–in-context’ and the phenomenological concept of intersubjectivity are central (Smith et al, 2009). Intersubjectivity refers to the shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement with the world. In other words, we cannot choose to detach ourselves from our inner world because relatedness to the world is a fundamental part of being human. As this research is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of NS’ experiences of living within a foster family, it will be necessary for the researcher to use a degree of subjectivity to interpret their views in the context that they are given. The researcher’s own positonality in relation to the topic of fostering and NS will invariably influence that subjectivity and thus means the research will need to be understood in those particular contextual terms. Equally the intersubjectivity between the researcher’s experiences and relatedness to the participants experience will need to be considered too. The epistemological underpinnings of this research are therefore contextual interpretivist and the theory in relation to those underpinnings will now be described in more detail.

## 3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis – Theoretical Underpinnings

The following perspectives are the theoretical foundations for my chosen methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I felt that these would enable participants’ experiences to be heard, analysed and considered individually initially, then build up to joint comparisons, similarities and differences. The three key areas are phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. Each perspective will now be explained in more detail and then summarised with reference to their practices in IPA.

*Phenomenology* is a philosophical approach to the study of experience (Smith et al, 2009). It is concerned with thinking about what the experience of being human is like, especially in terms of the living world (Smith et al, 2009). The founding theorist was Husserl (1859 – 1938), whose work was then developed by Heidegger (1889 – 1976) amongst others including Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Landridge, 2007). There are various phenomenological approaches and although they do not engage equally with the same concepts, key to all of them is the focus on experiences (Landridge, 2007).

Husserl was interested in the means by which someone would come to accurately know their own experiences of a given phenomenon so that they could do so with depth and rigour and be able to identify the essential qualities of that experience (Smith et al, 2009). This was sometimes described as “transcendental phenomenology” Moran (2000). Husserl argued that we should ‘go back to the things themselves’, that is, the experiential content of consciousness and focus on each and every particular thing in its own right (Smith et al, 2009). He advocated adopting a phenomenological attitude rather than a natural attitude, which involves a reflexive move by turning our gaze from objects in the world to our perceptions of those objects (Smith et al, 2009). Husserl suggested that a proper understanding of the world is distorted and obscured by a natural attitude which is based on numerous assumptions (Larkin, 2011). To focus on each and everything in its own right the researcher engages in a certain sense of wonder and openness to the world while, at the same time, reflexively restraining pre-understandings (Finlay, 2008).

Husserl suggested that to achieve a phenomenological attitude we need to use phenomenological reduction; a series of ‘reductions’. Each reduction offers a different lens or prism, a different way of thinking and reasoning that leads back to the phenomena (Larkin, 2011). This is also known as epochè or bracketing (Larkin, 2011). However, throughout Husserl’s writing this phenomenon is not specifically defined (Gearing, 2004). Bracketing has been described as a radical self-meditative process where the researcher “brackets” the natural world and world of interpretation in order to see the phenomenon in its essence (Finlay, 2008). It is about being open-minded (Glendinning, 2007) as a way to expose and engage one’s own pre-suppositions (Finley, 2002).

Heidegger (1962, 1972) refuted the concept of reduction as he questioned the possibility of any knowledge outside of an interpretative stance. Heidegger’s move was to a more hermeneutic, (see hermeneutics section) and existential emphasis (Smith et al, 2009). Heidegger was more concerned with existence itself, and with the practical activities and relationships which we are caught up in, through which the world appears to us, and is made meaningful (Smith et al, 2009). Heidegger emphasised that a person is always a ‘person-in-context’ and the concept of intersubjectivity is central (Smith et al, 2009). Intersubjectivity is described as the overlapping and relational nature of our engagement with the world and Heidegger believed that we cannot choose to move outward from some inner world because relatedness-to-the-world is a fundamental part of our existence (Smith et al, 2009).

Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty emphasized the situated and interpretative quality of our knowledge about the world; although Merleau-Ponty moved in the direction of the embodied nature of our relationship to the world and how that relates to our individual perspective of it (Smith et al, 2009). Merlau-Ponty suggests that humans see themselves as different from everything in the world so they are looking at the world rather than being subsumed within it (Smith et al, 2009). This means that perceptions of others always begin from a position of difference as ultimately we can never share another’s experience.

Sartre (1948) stressed the developmental aspect of human beings. He expressed this as ‘existence comes before essence’ (Sartre, 1948:26) that we are always becoming ourselves, and that the self is not a pre-existing unity to be discovered, but rather an ongoing project to be unfurled. Kierkergaard (1974) suggested that ‘An existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming’. Sartre used the term ‘nothingness’, to indicate that things that are absent are as important as those in the present. He suggested that who is present during an experience will make a difference as to what perspective is taken. If an experience is experienced alone then one may be able to take in all the experience, if it is experienced with someone else present then that someone else may be the focus of the experience rather than the surroundings that experience is in. Thus, for Sartre, the world is not an individual’s alone as perceptions of the world are largely shaped by the presence of others.

In relation to IPA Husserl’s work established the importance of focusing on experience and its perception (Smith et al, 2009). Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre added that a person has to be seen as embedded and immersed in a world of social objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns. They moved towards a more interpretive position where people have individual perspectives that are related to their relationship with the world. Hence IPA focuses on our attempts to understand other people by interpreting their attempts to make meanings of what happens to them (Smith et al, 2009).

*Hermeneutics* is the theory of interpretation (drawn from theology). When described in a researcher context it is concerned with analysing text, social action and phenomena from the perspective of its author (Bryman 2008). It includes attention to social and historical context in which the text/action was produced (Bryman 2008). Schleiermacher offers a holistic view of the interpretation process. He suggests that there is uniqueness about the techniques and intentions of a given writer that includes the writer’s own linguistic community and language. He also adds that those meanings are also open to interpretation by the reader who also needs to consider the original context in which the text or action was produced. The writer of the text therefore needs to be understood as well as the text. Heidegger defines phenomenology as hermeneutic by micro-analysis and synthesis (Smith et al, 2009). Moran (2000) points out that how things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied.

The hermeneutic circle is said to be the most resonant idea in hermeneutic theory (Smith et al, 2009). It is regarding the part and the whole. To understand any given part you look to the whole, yet to understand the whole you look to the parts that of which it is made. This process has been said to describe the process of analytical interpretation which suggests a dynamic, non-linear thinking (Smith et al, 2009). The meanings of words are only clear when you look at the sentence but the meaning of the sentence depends on the words cumulatively. This has been said to be useful when thinking about methods used in research.

As IPA is an interpretative phenomenological approach, hermeneutics is a significant element. It is the researcher who interprets and makes sense of how the participants discuss the phenomena. It can be said that IPA researchers engage in double a hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what has happened to them (Smith et al, 2009). Therefore within this study (or any qualitative study) it is important to understand the researcher and their experiences in relation to the topic as they are jointly constructing and interpreting the research data.

*Ideography* is a major influence on IPA and is concerned with the particular which is in contrast to most psychology, which is nomothentic and makes claims at a group or population level. IPA is concerned with understanding how particular experiential phenomena are understood by the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith et al, 2009). Due to IPA’s commitment to the particular, researchers need to go for detail and depth. This means that analysis needs to be thorough and systematic which, consequently leads to using a small, purposively-selected, carefully-situated sample (Smith et al, 2009). Ideography can also refer to the commitment to the single case in its own right and then to a process that moves from single cases to the more general (which involves multiple cases) (Smith et al, 2009). Ideography is not said to deny generalisation but prescribes a different way of establishing those generalisations (Harrė, 1979). Although there are a number of approaches that have been developed for moving from a single case to multiple cases two in particular are briefly discussed, analytic induction and a quasi-judicial approach.

Analytic induction is a method that attempts to derive theoretical explanations from a set of cases (Hammersley, 1989; Robson 1993). An initial tentative hypothesis is tested against each case in turn. The hypothesis is revised to fit the case. The procedure has been described as iterative as it allows the researcher to reflect and modify their thinking as each new piece of evidence arises. Alternatively Bromley (1985) discusses a quasi-judicial approach. This is said to be like a gradual development of case law, as single cases are written up and then compared to each other (Smith et al, 2009). Bromley (1985), suggests that this produces ‘Highly circumscribed accounts of persons in situations, giving rise to low level generalisations within relatively narrow areas of scientific and professional interest’ (1985:8), (Smith et al, 2009).

## 3.4 Rationale for choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Some might say that understanding experience is the very essence of psychology, and IPA (Smith, 1996) offers psychologists the opportunity to learn from the insights of the experts – research participants themselves (Reid et al, 2005). Although initially within the realms of health research, there has been an increase in the use of IPA as a methodology in other applied psychologies such as clinical, occupational, counselling and educational (Smith et al, 2009). The appeal may be due to IPA’s focus on subjective lived experience which means that the voices of participants are clearly heard by using verbatim excerpts. The phenomenological position within IPA meant that I would be trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their experiences (double hermeneutics). Their own words and stories heavily feature in the interpretations and conclusions that were made through the interpretative element of IPA, which has been recognised as one of its key features (Reid et al, 2005).

As a novice researcher, the use of the rigorous and systematic analytical steps suggested by Smith et al, (2009) appealed to me, whilst also having an understanding that these ‘steps’ allowed for flexibility in my approach as long as the ‘principles’ of IP were adhered to (Smtih et al, 2009). The hermeneutic circle allowed me to move into the participant’s world. I moved from initially listening carefully to some very personal insights of the participants own interpretation of their experiences of being a natural sibling, to that of my own experiences. I was then able to compare and contrast those experiences to what I had read in the literature. It had been recognised at the outset that due to my background of being a natural sibling that my interpretation may be very different from other researchers who have not been in the same position. My own experiences may have firstly influenced the way I constructed the interview schedule. When interviewing the participants, however much I tried to interview with epochè any subsequent questions that I asked may well have been unconsciously driven from my own experiences. My understandings of their experiences were such that I had personally been exposed to many similar situations therefore my deep seated personal understanding will most definitely have had an impact on the way I interpreted the data.

The ideographic element ensured that the data could be analysed on an individual basis moving up to a more holistic view of the participant’s views. This ensured that individual experiences and perspectives as well as similarities and differences across participants could be explored and extrapolated. This element felt a very respectful way to assist participants to share their own personal story as well as enable the research to show some careful generalisations across experiences.

### *IPA Limitations*

Language – IPA is dependent on participants being able to use language to describe their experiences to produce the data that is analysed, often gained by semi-structured interviews or diaries. Willig (2008) suggests that it could be argued that language constructs rather than describes reality and that transcripts from interviews or diaries tell us more about how a person talks about an experience, rather than the experience itself. Smith et al, (2009) further discusses that Heidegger pointed out that our interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by language.

Suitability of accounts – IPA requires rich data and is therefore reliant upon the participants being able to provide such data for analysis. Willig (2008), shares a number of scenarios whereby she describes how difficult it would be for participants to be able to describe their thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours, e.g. participants’ experience of coronary artery bypass surgery (Moustakas 1944: 177). Willlig (2008) also referred to a study whereby patients were asked for their experience of care in an Accident and Emergency Department; however patients with head injuries or who had taken drugs were excluded from the study (Lemon & Taylor 1997).

Descriptive – As IPA is interested in the experience of the participants and how the world presents itself to them within a specific context, it does not make claims about the world itself (Willig 2008). It has been argued that while it can generate rich descriptions of participants’ experiences it does not explore why those experiences takes place and why there are differences between peoples accounts (Willig 2008).

### *Considerations of alternative approaches*

There are a wealth of methodologies and methods available to the social researcher (Crotty, 1998). The method chosen by a researcher is largely dependent on their ontology and epistemology. This research was interested in exploring the experiences of NS in relation to foster children who were in their parents care. As phenomenology places the study of experiences centre stage rather than other methodologies such as discursive analysis, which focusses on language (Landridge, 2007), this was to be an underlying theoretical position necessary for this research. IPA however is not the only phenomenological method.

Descriptive phenomenology, the most traditional approach (Giorgi, 1985; Giorgi & Giorgi 2003), is concerned with describing the phenomena by sticking closely to the Husserlian philosophy (Landridge 2007). Descriptive phenomenology is not concerned with explaining phenomena but more with *describing* phenomena. For the present research descriptive phenomenology did not allow for my own interpretation of the phenomena which was in part the reason for choosing IPA.

Grounded Theory was also a possibility for this study and is often the main competing method to choosing IPA (Smith et al, 2009) however the method is often said to require a large sample of participants. On a practical level the number of participants for this study was limited, which meant logistically this methodology may have proved difficult. Equally IPA is thought to offer a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experiences (Smith et al, 2009) which appealed to me more.

## 3.5 Procedures

## *Ethical Approval*

This research was undertaken in accordance with the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014). Ethical approval was sought and approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and approval was granted on the 10th April 2015, reference number 003443 (See Appendix 2). Through the whole of the research process from planning, implantation, analysis and eventually to text, care was taken to ensure that a respectful and trustworthy approach was maintained, especially in relation to consent, confidentiality and reduction of potential harm.

All participants were fully and truthfully informed by the use of a Participation Information Sheet (see Appendix 3) which was handed to them and fully discussed prior to the interview commencing. They were given time to digest the information and ask any questions prior to signing the written consent form (See Appendix 4), part of which was confirming that they had read and understood the Participation Information Sheet. The participants were reminded prior to and during the interviews that their consent could be withdrawn at any time during and after, up until December 2015, at which point the data would be transcribed and analysed. I also discussed with the participants that I would not be specifically checking out with them their understanding of my analysed data prior to write up. This decision had been based on my reasoning that I feel the views of the experiences of participants in research are open to change as they are based on how they feel on that day, at that time, in that moment and that ‘checking it out’ with them could be an ever evolving task. Participants were told that I would write a shortened version of my research findings that would also be shared with other main stakeholders such as the Educational Psychology Team, Child Care Team and possibly other departments.

The participants were also informed of my own position of being a NS within a foster family at the outset, although no experiences or perspectives were shared. Participants were offered the opportunity to discuss any details they wished after the completion of the interview. I felt this to be an ethical issue for me and had thought long and hard, individually, with colleagues and my mentor as I would have felt disingenuous, had I not divulged this.

The consent forms and any personal information collected that could identify participants have remained strictly confidential and accessible only to me. The participants had the opportunity to decide how they would like to be referred to throughout the research and as none of them had a preference they are referred to as NS, M or F (denoting natural sibling, male or female) and a participant number 1 – 6. Agreement was gained from the pilot participant that the interview would be video recorded, with the lens directed only at myself, so only their voice could be heard. This was to enable improvements to be made to my own interview technique (see pilot study). I was the only person to view the video recording, which was deleted after it had been viewed by only me. Agreement was gained from the participants of the main study for the interview to be audio taped to assist with the analysis. All recordings were immediately transferred to the work encrypted memory stick and laptop that is password protected and was deleted as soon as the transcript and analysis was completed. Whilst transcribing the interviews, personal information was changed so as to anonymise any reference to individuals within the house hold in order to ensure confidentiality.

It was possible that participants may have felt psychological discomfort or distress arising during or after the interviews depending on their mental health and emotional disposition at the time of the study. The interviews required participants to reflect on their experiences in relation to building positive relationships with foster children, which may have uncovered uncomfortable memories or personal revelations. This experience may have caused distress for participants as they recalled possible difficulties that they may have encountered or as they recalled some of the events that they were aware of that resulted in children coming into or leaving care. It may also have uncovered some unresolved issues for them. There was also potential that experiences recalled may have impacted on relationships with other family members. The participants were advised to discuss any issues directly with family members and they also had the option of discussing it further with myself, my research supervisor or the family’s social worker after the completion of the interviews. To minimise distress the participants were also advised approximately how long the interviews would take. They were also given a written template of the types of questions that were to be covered during the interview.

There was also the possibility that participants may have enjoyed the experience as they may not have had the opportunity of sharing their experiences and being listened to on a one to one basis by someone other than within the family structure. All of them commented how they had been comfortable with the interview and some commented that they had enjoyed the experience.

### *Design Phase*

In order to increase the profile, share my thoughts and ensure the relevance of my study a consultation phase (phase 1) was included in the early planning stages of my research. The consultation was with both the service users and the professionals who work with foster families. The main reason for the consultation was to utilise the knowledge of both the professionals and the service users, raise the profile of the study within the authority and gain access to information for potential participants. Phase 2 was the pilot study and phase 3 the main study.

### *Design Phase 1 – Consultation with Professionals/Service Users*

***Professionals*** - My initial contact was with the Virtual Head for Schools as I felt it important that she was aware of any research in the area of CLA within the authority. This discussion proved useful on many counts and helped me to consider my own position within the research. It also helped in positioning the research within the context of the authority. She was able to support with liaison with key members of the Fostering Team. I further discussed my research with The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and then subsequently with the Fostering Team Manager; who provided me with invaluable help and support. This discussion led to a change in the language used within the study from birth children to NS as NS was the terminology generally used within the authority. Due to my own personal experiences I felt I already had a “certain level of cultural competence…..” (p.195), as suggested by Smith et al (2009) in the topic area which helped with my understanding of my participants’ ‟ terms of reference” (p. 195) however I felt a better understanding from the point of view of social workers, who work with families would also be beneficial. I attended a Fostering Team team meeting with a view to explaining my research, gaining their agreement for them to raise it with families as they visited and to gain some initial thoughts relating to my subsequent participant interviews and interview schedule.

***Service Users*** -There has been an increase in the inclusion and recognition of the benefits of including service users during most stages of research (Staley et al, 2013) and service users have been involved at many levels (Trivedi & Wykes, 2002). I had initially intended to use a focus group of NS to gain their general feelings and experiences in relation to fostering, relationships and support, so as to enable me to adapt or amend my interview schedule accordingly (explained in more detail later) and ensure that the questions were open and not leading and would help participants give detailed accounts of their experiences. However, although three NS had agreed to take part in the focus group only one participant managed to attend. I used this opportunity to complete a pilot interview (see pilot study) which also included a discussion in relation to the interview schedule questions and my personal performance during the interview. As both the participant and I felt that the interview questions had supported us to have an in-depth discussion and I had already consulted with colleagues and NS that I knew personally when compiling the interview schedule, I decided that with minor changes I was confident the schedule was suitable for conducting a comfortable interaction (Smith et al, 2009).

### *Design Phase 2 –* *Pilot Study*

As I intended to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants for my main area of study, design phase 2 was to conduct an interview with one NS. The reason for this was three fold. This would enable me to pilot my interview schedule, practice my interview techniques and visually analyse my own performance to check my use of body language and facial expressions. Secondly, I would then be able to discuss with the participant my interview style and adjust my style and/or any questions that may have appeared too sensitive or probing. Finally, I intended to analyse some of the transcript using IPA in order to familiarise myself with the process and have a better idea of how long the transcripts would take.

Prior to the interview I had prepared a participant sheet that contained the interview questions to enable the participant to see in advance what questions may be covered (this helped to reduce anxiety or distress), although the participant was also advised that there was not a necessity to discuss all of the questions and that they were not intended to be discussed in any particular order. Although I had already written some prompts on my copy of the interview schedule to aid the discussion, throughout the interview I found it difficult to refer to my notes and show active listening. I equally found it difficult to interview using bracketing or epoche (see reflective box below).

Feedback from the participant in relation to my interview schedule and interviewing technique was very positive. She referred to being made to feel very comfortable, which enabled her to give an account of her experiences in depth. She also explained that she was not usually very talkative but that my manner had helped her to instantly relax and that she had found the experience ‘surprisingly pleasant’ and that she had enjoyed it.

On evaluating the video recording, I was pleasantly surprised that I had managed to keep my facial expressions to a minimum therefore not exposing my own feelings in relation to the conversational topic, although I noticed a number of aspects that could be improved regarding my technique. I regularly had my hand covering my mouth when I was asking the participant questions and listening to her answers. I also often asked multiple questions within one sentence or did not finish a sentence before moving on to the next. These were important reflections and learning points that could be adapted with further interviews. Finally when attempting the transcribing and analysis, I became aware of how time consuming it was and needed to ensure that sufficient time was factored into my timescale.

On discussing my pilot study with my university supervisor, further adaptations were made to the interview schedule relating to an extra question or prompt that could have naturally followed on from what my participant had raised (see reflection box below)

### *Design Phase 3 – Main Study*

### *Sample*

IPA studies usually have a small number of participants that are a homogeneous sample and the aim is to reveal something of the experience of each of those participants, as well as report convergences and divergences in some detail (Smith et al, 2009). The homogeneity is expected to vary from study to study and to some extent Smith et al (2009) suggest that the ‘homogeneity’ of the participants may depend on who agrees to take part in the research and further steps may need to be taken to ensure the most homogenous sample is selected. The participants are therefore selected purposively rather than through a probability measure in order to ensure that they can offer a particular insight into the topic being researched (Smith et al, 2009). As I had made the decision that my research would involve the experiences of NS who lived in a foster family, whereby there had been at least one successful foster placement (see below for definition), this was my first criteria for recruitment of participants.

Recruitment of participants went through a number of stages. Initially, after my discussion with the Fostering Team and the Manager, I advertised the research in the LA’s monthly fostering magazine, which is delivered to all foster carers (See Appendix 5). I also attended a number of training sessions that were undertaken by the Fostering Team for foster carers. The aim was to raise the profile of my research and to gain the support of the foster carers in initiating discussions with their NS. Following this I gained access to the list of foster carers in the authority and initially highlighted all foster carers who had NS over the age of 18 who still lived in the household. I considered interviewing younger NS within a family but was very mindful that I did not want to disrupt any stable placements of any children who may be looked after at the time of the research (see reflection box below). I therefore decided to attempt to recruit participants within the 18 -25 age range with the hope that they may be able to recall their lived experiences in as great a depth as possible.

My criteria were:

* NS of parents who had fostered children.
* NS who had lived at home when the parents fostered children.
* NS in homes where a foster placement had lasted more than two years (deemed successful, see above).
* NS who were between the ages of 18 – 25

There were 31 families who had NS still living within the household, some of which had multiple NS still living at home. I realised at this point that using the list excluded families who had NS who were between 18 – 25 who had moved out of the parental home, but felt that I had sufficient potential participants. There were two families where the children deemed to be NS were adopted and I felt for the purpose of this research they did not fit the criteria. I initially attempted to contact all of the foster carers who had siblings within the criteria. I either spoke to or left an answer phone message regarding the research with reference to the article that had been placed in the fostering magazine. After re contacting them agian at an agreed time, I then spoke to the potential participants over the phone, gained their agreements and arranged interviews.

As the intention of IPA research is quality rather than quantity in an attempt to uncover complex human phenomena the sample study is usually small in number (Smith et al, 2009). Hefron and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) suggested that fewer participants examined at a greater depth are always preferable to a broader, shallow and simply descriptive analysis. They suggest that for a professional doctorate there should be between four and ten participants. Smith et al, (1999) suggest a sample size of a maximum of 10 helps the research maintain an ideographic focus. Six participants were recruited, none of whom were related; - three females and three males between the ages of 18 and 24 whose parents had had at least one successful foster care placement. All but one participant were from two parent families and all had other NS. Below is a table showing information regarding the NS, for a more in-depth profile of each participant see Appendix 6.

Table 1 – Information regarding the Natural Siblings

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | NSM1 | NSF2 | NSF3 | NSM4 | NSF5 | NSM6 |
|  | Male | Female | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Age of participant | 20 | 19 | 24 | 20 | 19 | 24 |
| Other NS & ages | Brother – 18 | Sister 30  Brother – 26 | Brother 27  Brother (Adopted) 21 who has Downs Syndrome | Sister – 22 | Brother 27  Sister 25  Sister 23 | Sister 33  2 Brothers Adopted both older but one died 5 years ago  Half-brother who died 10 years ago |
| Other NS living in the household | Yes  NSMI is at University | Yes  Brother | Yes  Brother 21 | No | No | No |
| Foster Carers in the household | Mum  Dad | Mum  Dad | Mum  Dad lives in Hong Kong | Mum  Dad | Mum  Dad | Mum  Dad |
| Age when parents started fostering | 10 | 5 | 4 | 13 | 15 | Fostered before he was born |
| Approx no of foster child placements in total | 8 | At least 180 | Unsure | 1 | 7 | 10 since he has been born |
| Age range of Foster children | various | Used to be young  Now has teenagers | Babies  But in situ to date a child age 6 | From age 7 -14 | Used to be babies  but now upwards of 8, oldest has been 12. | Babies recently  Differing ages in the past |
| Type of Foster care offered | Long Term | Long Term, Short Term & assisted living | Long Term  Children with disabilities  Respite | Long Term  Moving onto respite | Short Term but some have stayed longer | Long Term  Short Term |

### *Method of Data Collection*

The chosen method for much qualitative data collection is semi-structured interviews (Reid et al, 2005). Smith et al, (2009) suggest that IPA is best suited to a method of data collection that invites participants to share a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences. Participants should have the opportunity to tell their stories openly, freely and reflectively. Smith et al, (2009) suggested that in-depth interviews or diaries may be the best means of accessing such accounts. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection. Un-structured was an option but I felt that using an interview schedule (see below) would help with the process and aid my confidence. Such interviews are often described as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (Smith, et al, 2009). The aim of the interview is to facilitate an interaction so that the participant is able to tell their story in their own words and in some depth. My intention was to ensure that the participant did the majority of the talking and I the listening. The interview is an event that facilitates the discussion of relevant topics, which will allow the research questions to be answered subsequently, via analysis and interpretation (Smith et al, 2009).

### *Interview Schedule*

An interview schedule (see Appendix 7) helps to structure the interview and prepare for its likely content. It is to help facilitate the interview so that participants can feel comfortable, which in turn will support them in describing their experiences in depth. The schedule helps to set a loose agenda (topics that may be covered). This also enables the anticipation of potentially sensitive issues that may be raised during the interview. It equally enables a process to ensure that the questions are framed openly. Choosing to use an interview schedule and a semi-structured interview technique rather than a less structured form has the inclusion of probes and prompts that enable more attentive listening which should ensure there is less temptation for the interview to move over to a more informal discussion. When compiling the interview schedule I took note of Smith et al’s (2009, pg. 61) suggested sequence for compiling an interview schedule and as discussed in the consultation and pilot phase the schedule was refined and updated after reference to colleagues and other NS. A participant schedule was also produced (see appendix 8) which listed the questions that may be covered in the interview. Participants were given this prior to the interview as suggested by Smith et al (2009), so that participants could be aware of questions that may arise in advance.

### *Interviews*

The interviews were initially intended to take place in a council building however the participants were also given the option of the interview being held in their own homes which ensured more privacy and comfort for discussion of what were sensitive issues. Travelling time for the participants was also reduced as I felt this may have affected my participant take up. All barring one interview was completed in the participant’s homes; one participant was interviewed in a local council office. Participants were all advised that their involvement should take approximately one hour and that the interviews would be audio recorded, which would be kept safe (see ethics above) and destroyed after transcription and analysis. The interviews ranged from 34 minutes to 61 minutes. An attempt had been made to learn the questions on the schedule in advance so as to try and ensure that the interview went as smoothly as possible. During the interviews I was mindful that this was the part of the hermeneutic circle where I was entering the participant’s world. I endeavoured to engage deeply with their concerns and extrapolate their experiential expertise using probes related to what they were saying rather than sticking to the interview schedule rigidly or using probes from my own pre-existing thoughts (see reflective box below). To aid with subsequent transcription, analysis and interpretation I noted down some initial thoughts and reflections regarding each participant (see Appendix 9).

*Reflective Box – I really enjoyed the interviews with the participants and felt that I grew as a researcher with each interview that I completed. During the first interview I caught myself divulging something from my own experience in relation to what the participant had said but felt that I learned from that experience and did not make the mistake throughout the rest of the interview or any subsequent interviews. I also found the interviews very emotional at times as one of the participants got quite upset as she revealed experiences in relation to her mum. I felt I had made the correct decision to divulge my own position in the research as this helped the NS appreciate my genuine interest and commitment to the subject. I was humbled by lots of what the participants said and it helped me to personally reflect on my own experiences in relation to being a NS and how each participant’s experiences were very personal to their own circumstances.*

*At this point, however, I was beginning to question the homogeneity of the participants. Their experiences in relation to the age of children that their parents fostered, the amount of varied experiences in relation to how many children their parents had fostered and their experiences in relation to long and short term fostering were quite different. Also, when looking at the transcripts there was the possibility that my own experiences of being a natural sibling had impacted on the depth of the questioning of my participants experiences. (see Analysis below and my reflexive account of my experience in completing the research pg.107).*

### *Analysis*

My intention had been to analyse the data using IPA; however after my reflections in relation to the homogeneity of the sample and beginning steps one and two of IPA analysis as suggested by Smith et al. (2009), I felt that the interviews may not have generated data with the depth needed to conduct an IPA anlaysis. During the interviews I worked hard to interview with epochè, bracket off my own experience of being a NS, to enable myself to be fully immersed in the participants’ experiences. However in an attempt not to bring my own experiences to the interview I stuck more rigidly to the interview schedule. This may have resulted in not always following the direction that the participants may have taken and therefore gain an in-depth account. I feel that there may have been a further dilemma that affected the way in which the interviews progressed. I have some very negative feelings in relation to how fostering has played a part in my life. I began this study looking for what supported NS and CLA to have positive relationships. This may have affected how I questioned the participants. When a NS was referring to negatives aspects of living with CLA, I asked questions such as, ‘Were there any positives?’ which may have prevented me from probing deeper and therefore too may have affected the ‘depth’ of the interview. I equally felt almost ‘protective’ of my participants in possibly subconsciously wanting them to have had a more positive experience of fostering than I had. This equally may have prevented me from delving deeper into any negative aspects with them and it became almost an ethical difficulty for me. This may have been in the hope that experiences for NS living with CLA can be more positive. It was decided that to enable the differences between participants to be embraced a thematic analysis of the data would be more appropriate as thematic analysis has been described as having the benefit of being more flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also enabled me to look for themes on a latent or interpretative level (Boyatizis, 1998), which fulfilled my desire to go beyond the semantic content of the data too. I was also able to remain with the ideographic element in that I could interpret each data set, case by case initially prior to collating the analysis and across the entire data set, therefore remaining within my theoretical underpinnings.

Throughout Phase 1, initial noting and coding interesting features in the data, I included notations in relation to my own personal thoughts in relation to my own experience of being a NS from the comments from the participants of their experiences; these can be seen as green text on the example transcript in Appendix 10, which includes a full transcript and initial noting of one of the participants. I felt this may assist in having a deeper understanding of my interpretation of the data.

Table 2 – Phases 1 to 6 of Thematic Analysis as suggested by Braun & Clark, (2006).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thematic Analysis | |
| Phase | **Description of the process** |
| Phase 1 - Familiarising yourself with the data – see Appendix 10 | Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas – as with IPA |
| Phase 2 – Generating initial codes see Appendix 10 & Data relevant to each code see Appendix 14 | Coding interesting features of data in a systematic fashion, initially across one data set and then across the entire data set.  This step examined semantic content and language on a very exploratory level. This involved maintaining an open mind and noting anything of interest. It also helped me to grow more familiar with the transcript. The aim was to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. These comments were broken down into four areas;   * Descriptive comments – describing the content of what the participant said (normal type) * Linguistic comments – exploring more specific use of language (italics) * Conceptual comments – focussing on engaging on a more interrogative and conceptual level (bold text) * Personal thoughts (green)   I then collated data relevant to each code. |
| Phase 3 – Searching for themes - see Appendix 11, 12 & 14 | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. |
| Phase 4 – Reviewing themes - See Appendix 11, 12 | Checking how the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of analysis. |
| Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes – See Appendix 12 | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme. |
| Phase 6 – Producing the report | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis. |

*Reflective box – I found the analysis initially very difficult and thought it helped immensely listening to the participants talking whilst reflecting and analysing what they had said. I found once I had completed the first participant the analysis became easier. I also felt it necessary to go back to the first interview once I had finished ensuring the analysis was as robust at the beginning as it had been at the end. I found that once I had started to write up my findings I regularly went back to the transcript to check and ensure meaning and the context of what had been said. I added my own layer of interpretation to highlight areas that had directly made me reflect on aspects that had resonated with my own experiences and therefore may have impacted on how I interpreted the text.*

## 3.6 Quality in Research

Quality in research is often defined by its validity, reliability and generalisability. Yardley (2000) suggests that research of a qualitative nature is less interested in the generalisablity of the findings to the general public and more interested in the particular situations, experiences and context of the individuals participating in the study. Hefferon (2011), suggests that within the qualitative paradigm in general, there is more of a focus on the possible transferability of findings from group to group rather than generalisation. Smith et al. (2009) also argue for ‘theoretical generalisability’, where the reader may be able to ‘assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge’ (p.4). Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasised what is important for quality research is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognise them as decisions.

It has been argued that the same measures for quantitative research are inapplicable or inappropriate for qualitative research (Bryman, 2008.) Various guidelines or articles have been produced that suggest measures for good quality qualitative research (Elliot, 1999; Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2000, 2008). Yin (1989) suggests that if the data for the research is filed in such a way that somebody else could follow the chain of evidence from the initial documentation through to the final report that would be a way of checking validity. Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) refer to an independent audit as being a powerful way of showing validity. To show that chain of evidence throughout the research Yardley (2000) suggests four broad principles. Below is a description of those principles and how I adhered to them throughout the research;

1. Sensitivity to context – Throughout this research from planning through to the write up sensitivity to the context has been shown. The participants have been treated with honesty and respect. I have been mindful of the intricate power-play where I as the ‘research expert’ have met the participants as the ‘experiential expert’. Throughout the interviews I endeavoured to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the process and ensured that they understood that the data that was produced would be treated with the utmost respect and their words would be heard throughout the write up with the intention that I felt they were said. At the outset I felt it was important that the participant knew of my own positionality within the research and thought long and hard about whether to disclose this personal information and the impact it could have had on their responses. I have also been sensitive to my own personal experiences and was mindful during the interviews to bracket this as much as possible while also acknowledging that during the interpretation stage this will have impacted on how I interpreted the data. As indicated above, after the interviews and during analysis, I accepted that my closeness to the topic may have hindered the depth needed to analyse using IPA and therefore adapted my methodology to ensure that the differences between the participants could be embraced.

2. Commitment and rigour – Participants were carefully selected and considerations were made to ensure that they were as homogeneous a sample as possible from the potential participants who wished to participate in the study. On initiating the analysis, re-reading the transcripts and beginning the interpretation, I was mindful to stay within the ethos of the methodology and therefore made a decision to analyse the data using thematic analysis rather than IPA. I was committed to ensuring that the participants felt comfortable, which included travelling to a destination of their choosing for the interview and data collection to take place. The analysis of each participant’s words was completed with care and interpreted in such a way as to include their extracts within the write up to illustrate the resulting themes. Prior to the interviews I had reflected on my interview techniques using suggestions from Smith et al (2009). I feel I showed commitment by videotaping myself during the pilot and taking advice from supervisors and fellow colleagues at university with regards to IPA and Thematic analysis.

3. Transparency and coherence – I have endeavoured to ensure that the stages of the research process have been clearly described throughout this write up. I feel my decision to be transparent in relation to my own position of being a natural sibling within a foster family is coherent with myself as a person and a researcher and felt that transparency was necessary for the reader to understand, as inevitably it clearly impacted on the way the participants were interviewed and will have impacted on my interpretation. I feel that I attempted to remain within the underlying theoretical assumptions of IPA in supporting the experiences of my participants’ voices to be heard. I equally accepted that the data that was produced may be represented more fully using thematic analysis, which still enabled me to complete a study that was within my ontology and epistemology.

4. Impact and importance – The research aims to uncover an interpretation of the phenomena for the NS who were interviewed. It will share their unheard voices and may help towards raising the importance of supporting all family members with in a foster family. Tracy, (2010) suggests that the findings of good quality research should be sufficiently authentic and secure enough to enable their implications to be acted upon; to construct social policy or legislation based on them.

# Chapter 4 - Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the findings of how the NS who took part in this study described their experiences of relationships and how they felt those relationships were facilitated with foster children who were raised within their family home. What follows will be a narrative account of my detailed analytical interpretation of the transcripts (an extract of one of the participants can be seen in appendix 10) of the six participants’ experiences with reference made to existing research. Transcript extracts, to illustrate my reflective engagement with the participants accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2006 ),will be included within the narrative. The data produced six main themes which contain sub-themes within them. Each theme will be considered individually; equally each theme needs to be recognised in relation to the others. The six themes were: (1) the family as a system, (2) how fostering impacts on NS personally, (3) making relationships with CLA, (4) increased knowledge and training, (5) layers of support and (6) the difficulty of transitions. My interpretation is that successful relationships formed by NS and CLA are influenced by the family and the systems within that family, which has a personal impact on the NS. The knowledge and understanding that a NS has regarding CLA within their family and the support that they receive both within and outside of the family also impacts on their experiences and their relationships with CLA. Transitions both at the beginning of a CLA’s stay and at the end also appear to impact on present relationships and possibly future relationships that NS may have with CLA.

I had initially intended to investigate if there was a difference between the experiences of Males and Females concerning their relationships and support with CLA but unfortunately this was not possible within this study timeframe. I have however, left the notation of Male and Female (M and F) when identifying participants so that the data could easily be analysed further within that realm.

Table 3 below lists the themes and sub-themes. The themes were data driven and were formed using the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For a sub-theme, the topic was relevant to the research question and was prevalent in at least three out of the six participant’s interviews; a cluster of connected sub-themes were then classified an overarching themes when the topic had occurred in all participant interviews suggesting internal homogeneity (Patton, 1990). I have also presented the themes diagrammatically (See Diagram 2 below) which shows how each theme is inter-related.

**Diagram 2 – Main themes and their relationship to each other**

**The family as a whole**

**External External**

**Influence Influence**

**Personal & External Influence**

Table 3 – Showing Themes and sub-themes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Themes | Sub-theme |
| 1. The Family as a system | Family environment  Family Systems  Parenting style  Foster Mothers  Family involvement |
| 2. How Fostering impacts on NS Personally | Type of fostering  Losses  Self-protection  Personal growth  Influence of Future Thinking  Security |
| 3. Making Relationships with CLA | Sibling like  Age  Natural relationships  Spending time together  Relational difficulties |
| 4. Increased Knowledge and Training | Knowledge and understanding  Training |
| 5. Layers of Support | Who supports  Lack of Social Worker involvement  Emotional support |
| 6. The difficulty of Transitions | Initial placements  Placement endings/Breakdown |

Each theme will now be discussed in more detail while also referring throughout to the diagrammatic inter-related theory above. Participants’ data extracts will be shared and *written in italics* to highlight my analytical interpretation and to illustrate that this research is a joint product of researcher and researched (Braun & Clarke, 2009). Any names used in the transcripts have been changed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. An attempt has been made to ensure that each participant’s voice is, wherever possible, equally heard throughout the narrative; - this encapsulates the phenomenological element of the methodology. While unable to share an example for each participant for each sub theme in this narrative, Appendix 13 shares further extracted examples from all participants for each sub-theme.

## 4.2 Theme One – The Family as a System

Participants discussed various aspects of what family life was like for them when living with CLA. There were five sub-themes related to this theme which were; family environment, family systems, parenting style, foster mothers and family involvement. I felt that this theme highlights the importance of the family as a whole in relation to how family members, systems, parenting styles and in particular foster mothers, within a family interact with each and impact on the NS relationships with CLA. Family systems Theory (Minuchin, 1974) highlights that as all aspects of the family are connected that a true reflection of the family cannot be gained by considering the parts individually, therefore in analysing and interpreting the sub-themes within this theme (and others) the connections between sub-themes will also be recognised. Participants discussed various experiences that included members of the family who no longer lived within the family home, who are still very much a part of the fostering experience. Each one of the themes will now be discussed in more detail.

### *Family environment*

Four out of the six participants spoke about how fostering had a positive effect on the family environment. Research suggests that when CLA feel that they are included in day to day, family activities, then they feel as if they belong (Biehal,, 2014). NS made reference to enjoying being part of a busy house hold: *Well I’ve been brought up with it and I like having a busy household. I didn’t like it when we didn’t have people’* (NSF2, lines252, 354) and how a calm environment helps: *Mmm, I think it’s just a very, very stable, calm environment here.’* (NSF5, line 1271). A further participant described how life had been brought back to the family: ‘*It was nice, we started celebrating Christmas again and doing more family things together. When we got him me and my sister were teenagers, so yeah it was just doing things with a younger child again.*’ (NSM4, lines 869 – 870).

One of the participants, while not necessarily depicting a negative environment, commented on the fact that her family did not really show an open display of physical affection: *‘In some ways yes, in some ways it might just be also that our family is quite…. It’s not that we are distant from each other but we are not very touchy feely…….’* (NSF3, line 626, 627). She also went on to discuss how she may find it more difficult to relate to an older CLA but managed well with the babies that her mother had generally fostered. Possibly the family environment of being less ‘touchy feely’ may be due to cultural differences as this family originated from China. Fromm and Maccoby (1970, suggested that when trying to understand individuals within families, the social and cultural environment needs to be considered. I equally felt that as this family predominantly looked after babies, it may be that the family style, environment and family members were naturally more comfortable supporting babies, who are generally easier to be tactile with and possibly less affected by their previous plight.

### *Family systems/parenting style*

All of the NS talked about various family systems or ways in which their parents handled or dealt with situations that arose. There was a general sense of a fair and open style of parenting whereby the NS and the CLA were treated equally: *‘Just the same way as you would resolve any argument, I guess. Probably since there was an argument we would both get told off…because…. It’s erm… I would probably get told off because I would be told to be more responsible and they would get told off for starting the argument’* (NSM1, lines 169 – 171) and *‘Well no. I certainly didn’t get any favours or anything, no…’* (NSM1, line 1710). One participant described how family meetings were used to resolve difficulties or just to get together to discuss household chores: *‘My mum, and then we would probably have a little family meeting’……. ‘Mainly stuff like house stuff and chores, if we have got any, but if it was something like that it would be just me my mum and the foster child to just sort things out if we needed to.’* (NSF2, line 382 – 387). These findings are consistent with Mchale et al, (2007) and Dunn & McGuire, (1992), with regards to sibling’s perceptions of parental fairness between siblings being linked to more positive sibling relationships.

There was also a sense of the NS receiving reassurances from their parents in relation to the potential impact fostering may have on them: ‘*No….. I think they……mmm. I remember them stating very, very clearly, like I know they very reassured me very much. They said, I know that we are going to have foster children, but by no means will that take away anything from you….’* (NSF5, lines 1128 – 1129). Further reassurances were in relation to the responsibility of looking after CLA being their parents’ responsibility and not the NS: *‘and I think that that is also something that she has brought into the fostering where she is saying it’s not my responsibility but occasionally she will want me to babysit’* (NSF3, lines 740, 741). From a psychodynamic perspective this may help NS feel more secure in their position in the family however differential treatment by parents towards ‘siblings’ may foster the development of negative relationship between siblings (Kan et al, 2008; Solmeyer et al, 2011; Vollings & Ellins, 1998).

A number of participants made reference to older NS being included in discussions and decisions regarding their role with the family system: ‘*Yeah, so long as I know what’s been done and as I have got older, I have got joined in those discussions and asked what’s been done, she’s been able to tell me and I’ve said… ok’.* (NSM4, lines 1100, 1101). Due to the amount of discussion regarding ‘knowledge’ from a variety of differing perspectives, this topic became a theme within its own right and it will therefore be discussed in greater detail on page 72 under the theme heading ‘Increased Knowledge and Training’.

### *Foster Mothers (further information relating specifically to loss and mothers see pg. 63)*

Within the family system mothers seemed to feature heavily in the discussions when participants were describing whose idea it was to foster children and when they made reference to support for the CLA. During four out of the six participant interviews the only parent mentioned was the mother. Two of those four gave clear indication that fostering was mainly their mum’s idea or interest: ‘*Technically when we were in Hong Kong it was my dad as well, but it was never his thing, it was my mums’…….. yeah it is pretty much my mum that….. It’s her personality I think……’* (NSF3, lines 521 – 523) and *‘Well mum did it before she met my dad, but then she met my dad and still did it.’* (NSM6, line 1587). NSF3 also described how her Mum enjoyed her collection of prams; ‘*my mum loves babies and she has quite an impressive collection of prams, like coach built, like silver cross prams, like we have.. I think there are two or three of them in the garage, there’s two of them in the conservatory, she might have some more hiding somewhere that I’m not sure about, she has got a lot of prams and there are old ones that she has restored or… she takes great pride in pushing babies around in those.’* (line, 646 – 650). Fostering may have been fulfilling a particular need for this foster mum (see below).

The other two participants made reference to their mums being at the centre of supporting the CLA: ‘*I think my mum is quite a big part of it… like she always gets us all…. Like sometimes if they are really shy my mum will try and get them to talk a little bit and then they always come out of their shell, more and more and then….’* (NSF2, lines 364 – 366), in this case to help them during social situations. Others comments were in relation to resolving issues and liaising with the Social Care Team: *‘Well my mum resolves it as the foster carer. She obviously goes off and tells social services what’s happened’* (NSM4, line 1097 – 1098).

It appears that in more than half of the participants foster families the foster mother seem to be the central figure. There is also the possibility that fostering, per se, fulfils a need in females more than it does in males and can be understood within the theory of Maternal Role Attainment (MRA), Reuben (1967). Bowlby, (1981) described the importance of the role of the mother as being the ‘attachment figure’ that may equally explain why NS naturally refer to their mothers when describing ‘mothering’ and support for CLA.

### *Family involvement*

When discussing relationships with CLA, half of the participants talked about the inclusion of family members who no longer lived within the family home being included in a variety of different family activities: *‘We* ***all*** *go on family holidays and family meals, and they all come with us… we go out for meals’.* (NSF2, line 399) and ‘*whenever we go to visit the family we will always take the foster children with us. It really nice actually, our wider family, we don’t have a big family but at Christmas time they will buy a little present for the foster child and everything. They are very, very included, yeah they are really nice.’* (NSF5, lines 1470 – 1472). This gives an essence of the CLA being treated as part of the family which must help them to feel that they belong as suggested by Oke et al, (2011).

In contrast to participants describing events that may help CLA feel as if they belonged, one of the participants described a time whereby the family were going to visit a relative in China and the CLA had been given the option of going or not, he had chosen not to go and spent two weeks in respite care: ‘*My parents asked him because my sister lives in China, they asked him if he wanted to come with us and he said no, so he went in respite at the start of the year for two weeks while they were off’.* (NSM4, lines 943 – 945). Even though the CLA had the choice it feels very different than if the CLA had been a natural sibling. At the age he was, I wonder, had he been a natural sibling, would he have been given the option not to travel? There is the possibility that the CLA, even though it was his own decision, resented the fact that he hadn’t gone on holiday, thus possibly having pent up feelings in relation to his belonging in the family and that may have impacted on his relationships with the family as a whole (he did subsequently leave the foster family, having lived there for a significant period of time).

## 4.3 Theme Two – How Fostering impacted on NS Personally

All of the NS described experiences of fostering that appeared to have positive and/or negative connotations for them personally which may affect their relationships with CLA.; however on the whole NSM1 and NSF3 appeared to have more of a negative view than the other four participants. The family as a system, the environment, parenting styles and in particular foster mothers have a personal impact on both the NS and the CLA. The sub-themes within this theme are consistent with the previous research of Twigg & Swan (2014). Influences that NS have no control over, such as who and how CLA are placed in their parents care and for how long also appears to have a personal impact on the NS. The experience of living with CLA seems to naturally include dealing with different types of losses. There were also examples of personal growth and discussions around how fostering has had an impact on various decisions that NS are making about their own future.

### *Type of fostering*

When discussing the type of fostering, this generally included the length that a CLA stayed in the household, the age of the CLA, disabled youngsters and young people who were over the age of 18 and in need of assisted living.

Different NS found different aspects of fostering more challenging, e.g. the age of the child proved more difficult for NSF3, who was used to her mum fostering babies, she explained: *‘my mum used to mainly have kids who had disabilities, like learning disabilities and stuff like that…… Yes they have been mostly babies…… and the 10 year old we have now………. And if it’s long term.,,,. She will be around for at least another… let’s see if she is 10 now it will be like another 8 years at least… and that’s a very different situation’.* (NSF3 – line 500 – 504, 541 – 543). She went on to explain how she struggled to know how to communicate with a ten year old as she was not used to having younger siblings. Yet in contrast NSF6, was disappointed that she was going away to university and wouldn’t be there to support ‘older CLA’, who were placed in her parents care: *‘I wish I could stay longer to get to know these two girls better……., I mean my parents can support them a lot and they are very supportive of them but there is a limit to how much……….. I think that they would... in some situations they might find me more approachable’* (NSF5 – line 1422 – 1426). These findings clearly echo Sinclair (2005), when he suggested that much depends on the age and the characteristics of the children involved.

All of the participants described events relating to when a foster child is initially placed with their family and the uncertainly regarding how long they would stay; either short term or long term. There was a general theme that CLA often began their stay with the families on a short term basis, but very often stayed much longer than expected: ‘*No.. they are long term ish….but it depends because it always starts out with….Can you look after this person for a week while we sort out their family….and then It’s…oh we can’t sort it out and then maybe they stay for a month…and then it can kind of be a year…and then people don’t go’.* (NSM1, line 26 – 28). This appeared to be an issue for some participants and not for others. The issue appeared to be related to a lack of trust in the placement system of CLA which resulted in them staying longer than intended, rather than with the child; even though there appeared to be a general understanding that that was the nature of fostering, a number of the NS found this element difficult and described a ‘holding back’ in making relationships. (see Self-protection pg. 64). Foster carers in the Thompson & McArthy (2011) research, echoed these findings when one participant described the enormous emotional challenges when a planned short-stay of a child turned into a one or two year placement.

In contrast, when NS had an understanding at the outset that the intention was much longer term: ‘*I think it was pretty much, sort of like fostering, but all the time……..Yeah, had them from young all the way up, yeah.*’ (NSM6, line 1595, 1597), they appeared to be happier with the situation. This particular foster mum had been fostering for a long time, throughout the whole of this participants life and prior to him being born; he had never known a life without fostering (She had fostered for 45 years in total, with her present husband, NSM6’s father and throughout her previous marriage). He appeared to be extremely tolerant of fostering and the majority of placements in this family had resulted in the CLA continuing to live within the household post fostering age. Possibly knowing that CLA are going to stay longer helps NS to know that it is worth investing in the relationships.

The type of fostering that families undertook appeared to change depending on the families circumstances. From a developmental prospective, this may help to make placements more successful as the NS and CLA may be at different stages in their lives and not in need of the same parental attention. One family had decided to delay fostering until their natural sibling was older and then decided to take babies: *‘Yeah they did. My mum and dad had wanted to foster for a very long time’, (*NSF5, line 1278) while another family had decided to move on to respite fostering after a particularly difficult placement break down: *‘I think my mum has expressed an interest in doing, erm.. what do you call it? Respite?’* (NSM4, line 851). Taking into consideration the feelings of the NS within the family may help towards successful placements.

### *Losses*

Throughout the interviews the topic of loss was raised within a high proportion of the participant’s experiences. The feeling of loss was a common occurrence when discussing placement breakdown; some described this as the loss of ‘a sibling’. All but one of the NS had experiences of being exposed to multiple children joining the family and then subsequently leaving. The occurrences of such events were much greater than would usually be seen within families who do not foster. It has been recognised by Pugh (1996) that carers’ children are likely to be affected by attachment and loss and may suffer emotional harm as a result of the grief.

A significant time when dealing with loss seemed to be after the first CLA had left the placement: *‘I think many birth children could be very affected by having a long term relationship and they just go. The hardest thing is that you can’t see them again or at least for several, several years because it’s the whole attachment of the child to the foster, you can’t disrupt that’*. (NSF5, line 1539 – 1541), she also explained: ‘*So I think it’s, well it was, very, very hard to say good bye to them, particularly the first one who was with us for two years’.* (line 1243). These feelings were also experienced by other participants in relation to the first CLA. They described a type of holding back emotionally with subsequent CLA as they were unsure of investing in a relationship that they may eventually have to let go of (see Self-protection pg. 64, Layers of Support pg. 76 and The difficulty of transitions pg. 79). One of the participants described this loss in terms of not liking the ‘space’ that was left when a CLA left*: ‘I didn’t like it when we didn’t have people’.* (NSF2, line 353, 354).

NSF3 and NSM4 described how difficult it was when a placement had broken down and the CLA had left quite suddenly and how the impact on their mums had a personal impact on them: *‘erm because the result of that was that the little girl was taken from us, I think my mum was actually thinking about adopting her.. or taking her on long time… we had had her since she was born…….’,* ( NSF3, line 633, 634) *‘I know my mother has been in therapy ever since’* (NSF3, line 608) and *‘It’s definitely affected my mum. She is devastated. She brought him up for seven years’.* (NSM4, line 1185). This will be illustrated further in the Self-protection sub-theme below. When people are faced with loss, they need time to recover, multiple losses makes this recovery more difficult, as described above (Pugh, 1996).

Two participants described ‘hiding away’: *‘I’ve possibly taken to hiding in my room sometimes…’* (NSF3, line 550), this was generally a result of CLA constantly wanting adult attention or NS removing themselves from difficult or conflicting situations. The loss of personal space or being able to move around your own home freely may eventually end up in resentment and difficulties in relating to the CLA. This could happen when CLA were displaying more difficult behaviour as NSM one explained the reasons for two CLA leaving the foster home: *‘one left because he threatened to attack my brother, one left because he got abusive all the time and kept running off’* (lines, 251 – 252). Heidbuurt (1995) equally identified that there was the potential for some NS to seclude themselves as a way of coping with difficult CLA.

Other studies have described NS struggling with a loss of parental attention for themselves as their parents have to spend time dealing with CLA (Hoyer, 2007, Thompson & Mcperson, 2011). Interestingly only one participant talked about his experience of fostering involving him dealing with loss of attention for himself (and his brother) from their parents*: ‘No, I try and stay out of the way a bit’.* (NSM1, line 19) and ‘*sometimes I kind of wish it hadn’t happened because it’s a lot of attention that gets taken away.’* (lines 214 – 216). Inevitably feelings of parental attention being directed away from the NS could result in resentment towards the CLA. It may appear to have less of an impact in this study as the NS (at time of interview) were somewhat older than the CLA therefore, as explained above, they may not be seeking as much attention from their parents.

### *Self-protection*

Half of the participants described holding back from investing in the relationship with CLA in some form or another. One described it as not getting involved: *‘‘….you don’t know how long someone is going to be there. Its…you don’t want to get involved…..* (NSM1, line 20, 22) and ‘*I don’t like making friends with people if it’s only going to be for a week because I don’t see that there is any point in doing that’.* (line 127, 128). This participant was in his second year at university, he also used the example of not investing in the relationship as it was him going away rather than the CLA.

Not getting too attached was also an example of self-protection: *‘It’s always a weird dance anyway trying to figure out how attached to get to someone and how not to because with foster kids they are always going to move on somewhere pretty much’* (NSF3, line 634 – 636).

The third talked about protecting herself by not getting too close so as not to have to deal with the pain when the CLA left: ‘*I think I never got as close to the other ones, to the consecutive children……* (NSF5, line 1554) *…..‘I didn’t want to feel the pain of… because you knew that they were going to go. I think, yes because I knew that the fist little girl was going to go but until you experience the hurt, it never really hits you.* (line 1556, 1557). Participants used these examples of holding back, protecting themselves from further upset or disappointment to describe how difficult it was to invest in relationships with CLA when they knew they might not stay. Many of the NS have suggested that often CLA come for a short period of time and then stay longer, as NS are ‘protecting themselves’ by not getting close to CLA for fear of being hurt, this may inevitably affect the forming of new relationships.

The experience of multiple losses was different for two of the participants. One of the participants rarely faced loss as the majority of CLA that his parents fostered had stayed in the placement until they were older and left at ages that may be more ‘natural’ within families who do not foster. Equally a further participant had only experienced one CLA’s departure and the family had not had any more CLA since. His mum was looking into respite care, possibly a conscious decision as to reduce the devastation the family have felt since the CLA left (see comment above in the Losses section pg. 63, how devastated his mum was).

### *Personal growth*

Personal growth refers to when participants discussed elements of increased personal attributes that they felt were directly related to the fostering experience. Three of the six participants specifically described an increase in their personal skills due to their experience of fostering. While the further three participants may not have directly verbalised increased skills, some of what was said during the discussion may well have been interpreted that they too had increased their personal skill set. Amongst many things there has been a general increase in the understanding of children whose parents have been unable to look after them. All of the NS have had the opportunity of experiencing and accommodating ‘siblings’ younger than themselves and sometimes played the nurturing role: *‘I play with them… feed them when needed to, change them if needed…..’*(NSF 3, line 700). Participants have equally built up empathy and understanding of people who could be described as more vulnerable than themselves, this equally could be described in terms of a loss of innocence (see Losses pg. 62): *‘I think it has definitely helped, I mean it has definitely opened my eyes. I think before I was so ignorant and naïve as to what went on in the world really…..so yeah definitely helped. Now I have a whole new appreciation of society, I guess’.* (NSF3, line 1326, 1328), which for one participant included a better understanding of a disabled youngster who has Downs Syndrome. One participant talked of an increase in confidence: *‘Normally I am quite shy [laughs] when I first meet people.. but I think the more I’ve met new people come in and out.. I think it has helped me be a bit more confident….’* (NSF2, line 437, 438). The increased skills may have a positive impact throughout their lives.

### *Influence on Future Thinking*

Half of the participants made a direct reference to how they felt fostering had impacted on decisions that they had made in relation to their careers and thoughts on having a families of their own. Two of those three discussed that their chosen career had similarities: *‘Yeah, that’s (*transcript was unclear*) my personal career, it’s similar…well not too dis similar to this’,* (NSM4, line 1056). The second participant, who worked in a nursery, also expressed that she would like to take up fostering herself and her desires to have a big family: ‘*I want at least a couple of children myself and I also want to foster as well. I wouldn’t mind a big family.’* (NSF2, line 482, 483). The third participant suggested that the experience of growing up around a lot of children had partially affected her desire to have children: *‘I do know that for the foreseeable future I have no plans to have my own family….’* (NSF3, line 657). One may need to bear in mind the ages of the participants in the group when considering how fostering may have affected their life choices. The group was aged between 19 and 24 and therefore their careers and desires on having a family are very much open to change over the next few years.

### *Security*

Participants described a sense of security when they were discussing family systems and parenting styles (see pg. 58). There was a general reference to open and honest relationships with parents where issues were dealt with openly and fairly. Half of the participants made reference to parents ensuring that NS’ own needs were being met and that action would be taken to ensure that they were met. I interpreted this as a feeling of security that their parents were taking their needs into consideration and clarifying some of the NS worries. Sutton and Stack, (2012) suggested that opportunities to speak about their worries with parents to gain clarity and reassurance aided the NS experiences to be more positive. Some families had made conscious decisions regarding the age of CLA that they looked after so as not to ‘affect’ the NS: ‘*I think that they just didn’t want it to affect me at all. I think they had heard that and know that teenagers can be a little bit volatile and could be leaving the house or causing upset in the house and maybe a little disruptive to my school work and they just didn’t want anything to affect that’* (NSF5, line 1317, 1319) (A further example from the same participant can be seen within Family systems/parenting style pg. 58).

One of the participants gave an example of feelings that his needs would be put before the CLA if their behaviour was such that it warranted it: ‘*Yeah, I think a few times early on my mum said obviously me and my sister, as our birth children, you do come first……’ ‘That’s if the foster child was an absolute terror or hurting us, then our needs before them.’* (NSM4 line, 1079, 1080, 1082).

I felt that NSF3 found solace in the fact that if she wasn’t comfortable with her mum accepting a particular child then her mum would refuse: *‘Yes it does make a difference, because if I wasn’t comfortable with it, she would say no.’* (NSF3, line 6709). However this particular natural sibling was not as confident that the Social Care Team would give the same considerations, when discussing her experiences of how the Social Care Team places children her response was ‘*Who knows, its social services… who knows’.* (NSF3, line 824). Again, as described above, open and honest communication with parents helps NS have a more positive experience (Sutton & Stack, 2012) and NS felt more comfortable when their views were heard too.

## 4.4 Theme Three – Making Relationships with CLA

This theme is underpinned by the first two themes and affected by the following three themes. This theme incorporates how secure NS feel in relation to their own place within the family and how those family systems and parenting styles allow NS to have ‘natural’ and ‘sibling like’ relationships with the CLA who they live alongside on a daily basis. Clearly understanding the family as a system and systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), as discussed in theme one is a key element to understanding the experiences of the participants within this theme. A key aspect of making relationships is the ages of the CLA and how spending time with them is pertinent to the relationship success; as could be said for any relationship. In relation to age and temperament, having an understanding of developmental psychology is pertinent to this theme as suggested by Munn & Dunn, (1988). It also became apparent that NS recognised that the relational experiences CLA have had prior to coming into care often has an impact on the way in which they behave and that behaviour has an impact on their ability to make and maintain relationships. Attachment theory and the possible difficulties within the CLA’s ‘attachment internal working model’ may help with understanding these relational difficulties (Bowlby, 1973, 1981). Equally contact with their birth families while in care may also impact on their relationships within the foster home.

### *‘Sibling Like’*

All barring one natural sibling referred to their relationship with at least one of the CLA that their parents had looked after as ‘being like a sibling’. Two of those five NS were discussing particular CLA that had been looked after by their families for seven and ten years respectively: ‘*You know you have like a special relationship don’t you between your siblings, like you can say a word and you parents don’t know what you’re on about.. and you laughing like… that was his way’* (NSM4, line 1101,1102). He was referring to his foster brother and; *‘Erm…with the first one that came, we are pretty good friends… like he stayed with us for over 10 years [right] so he was pretty much like a brother….’* NSM1, line 97, 98). Interesting NSM1, did not refer to any other CLA that his parents had looked after as ‘like a brother’, this particular CLA joined the family when NSM1 was young and was a similar age (see age below). In other respects NSM1 described more difficult experiences regarding other CLA: *‘sometimes I kind of wish it hadn’t happened’* (line 215); and ‘*I try and stay out of the way a bit.’* (line 19,already quoted above within the losses theme). When he talked about his parents, there was no reference to him being able to talk through things with them and he was also the only NS to discuss attention being taken away from him (and his brother). Possibly, if there was a lack of open communication within his relationship with his parents, then this may have impacted on his relationships with CLA as he had no way of communicating his feelings with an adult as suggested by Sutton and Stack (2012) and Twigg and Swan, (2014).

Two NS were referring to a number of different CLA that had been in their parents care. The first natural sibling in answer to the question, So do you see it any different to your other sister? replied *‘No.. it just feels normal and natural.’* (NSF2, line 468) I interpreted that as, like a sister. The second: ‘*Well I just regard them as my brothers and sisters really. Not the little kids, because they weren’t here very long, but all my older brothers and sisters and stuff……………. Yeah, yeah, it was just like having a brother really, about the same age, yeah’* (NSM6, line 1615, 1616). Both of these families were foster families whereby CLA generally stayed for longer periods of time and after the age that a child is deemed to be CLA. Although on the whole this appears positive, however there is the possibility that both NS were trying to present a positive public image of fostering and keep any issues to themselves as was considered by Swan, 2000 and Norrington (2002), as cited in the Twigg & Swan (2014) study.

The last natural sibling not only likened herself as a sister but also considered herself to be like a second mum: ‘*at one point I felt like a second mum or just second older sister or something like that and definitely for the following children, it did, yeah.’* (NSF5, line 1343, 1344). This particular family were mainly looking after babies. From a developmental perspective this could be describing a CLA who matured early and was taking on more of a mothering role and responsibilities earlier than she would have had, had her parents not fostered (Twigg & Swan, 2014). This may also be true within families where there are no foster children and may possibly be a natural reaction to younger children in a family. Sanders (2004) as cited in Thompson & McPerson (2011), suggests that where there is an ‘older sister’, she is likely to be more nurturing and contribute to the caregiving of ‘younger siblings’.

NSF3 was the only NS who did not discuss the CLA in ‘sibling like’ terms and was the only natural sibling whose Mum had predominantly looked after babies. She described how her mum, who had only looked after babies on a short term basis (apart from adopting her younger brother), was now looking after a young child (10 yrs. old), who was potentially going to be staying long term (also see Type of fostering, above, pg. 61). She described her worries at being able to relate to a younger child (see Age, below) as she had never had to. From a psychodynamic perspective, NSF3 may have been struggling to readjust to her place within the family as she talked about not knowing how to be an ‘older sister’.

Length of stay of the CLA in the same placement appeared to be the common thread for NS to think of them like siblings. On most occasions NS who described the CLA as siblings were discussing CLA that had been in their parents care for a longer period of time. NSM6 stated that he did not count the babies whom his mother and father had fostered as a brother or sister as they weren’t there for very long.

### *Age*

All of the participants made reference to the age of the CLA with regard to the relationships being positive or negative. Existing research is thought to be inconsistent regarding age (Twigg & Swan, 2014) and equally in this research, there were inconsistencies between experiences and how participants felt age helped or hindered relationships with CLA. Most of the experiences (excluding when a child left) that were discussed regarding babies & toddlers were positive apart from one comment regarding babies being harder work: ‘*I remember there were days when you are looking after a baby and it’s such hard work. I remember times when we had a baby and there was absolute…. Never much adult conversation at the table and it was just baby, baby, it’s just like ahh, I miss just talking about adult conversation or something like… yeah but even that it’s just a tiny thing in contrast to anything else*.’ (NSF5 line 1306 – 1309). This has been echoed in previous research in relation to loss. Poland & Groze (1993) as cited in Thompson and McPerson (2011), suggested a loss in family closeness with NS not being able to really sit down and talk to their parents like they used to.

Interestingly all of the female participants fondly discussed playing: *‘With the younger children I used to play with them all the time and help mum, because I used to love kids…. Well I still do. I love playing with kids and stuff.’* (NSF2, line 330). Also mentioned was singing and cooing to the CLA: *‘….it’s mostly been babies… so you know, you sing to them… you coo with them and then…..’* (NSF3, line 624, 625), and playing games: ‘*I just think with the toddlers we would be playing and doing lots of games and stuff.’* (NSF5, 1381, 1382). As cited in Twigg and Swan (2012) a feminist analysis of fostering theorises that foster mothering is an example of the exploitation that women experience when they assume roles that conform to the dominant definition of women as sole nurturers and caretakers (Meyers, 1985; Miller, 1991; Baines, Evans & Neysmith, 1998; Swan, 2005). Female NS may well be taking on the role due to observing their mothers, however it may equally be a natural reaction to a younger, more helpless, child or simply a happy pastime.

None of the three male participants discussed enjoying such activities with the babies, however, to my knowledge; two out of the three had not experienced fostering babies or toddlers. Twigg and Swan (2014) suggests that although research into gender differences in relation to fostering is too small to allow generalisations, early maturation and nurturing younger foster siblings may be particularly problematic for young women.

All of the participants who described having CLA a similar age to them (including slightly older or younger) over a long period of time (three NS) described mainly positive experiences and all three described the CLA as being like a sibling (see like a sibling above). One of those participants also described an older long term CLA as them not getting along, as he was more annoying, but still described him as ‘a sibling’: ‘*He was just like an annoying older brother really* ‘ (NSM5, line 1641). In line with other findings this highlights the inconsistency in relation to age Twigg & Swan (2014).

A number of participants described friendships with CLA who were either much older or much younger than them as ‘different’ as there was much ‘less common ground’: *‘Some have been older…ones now are younger [right ok, do you think that is different to build up relationships with them?] yeah one of them is nearly half my age… so that is different [ok, how is it different?] well.. he has like different interests to what I have.. so there is not much common ground there.’* (NSM1, line 114 – 116). They described the breakdown in those relationships being more related to their behaviour rather than their age (see Relational difficulties pg. 71).

As mentioned above NSF3, described feeling nervous at not knowing how to interact with a younger child: ‘*With this particular one.. I get a bit nervous because I don’t necessarily know how to interact with the older children… (ten yr old.)* (NSF3, line 540, 541). She has never had a younger sibling before and is comfortable when her mum has babies, but has struggled more when she has had older children. She had also described a difficulty with another older sibling wanting her attention and resorted to hiding in her room.

According to this research, it appears then that it is more common for NS to have a positive relationship with a CLA who is a similar age to the NS and who live in families’ longer term. This is in contrast to the findings of Ellis (1972), Kelly (2000), Hojer and Nordenfors (2003) as cited in Twigg & Swan (2014), who suggested that children close in age would experience conflict.

### *Spending time together*

Possibly as with any friendship, NS talked about their experiences of spending time with CLA and how they felt that helps when building relationships. All three of the NS that talked about spending time together talked about spending time together as a family as a whole, either at Christmas, on holiday or going out for birthdays or general outings: *‘Yeah.. not so much now… like my brother and sister have moved out now… but we still all go away on holiday together as a family once a year and birthdays we always go out for a meal, every birthday and sometimes barbeques other stuff’* and *‘Day trips… like going to the beach…. Cinema.. bowling..’* (NSF2, lines 341 – 343 & 345). A CLA being included within the family as a whole, as any natural sibling would be, may help them with the feeling of belonging, which may in turn help them to feel comfortable in building individual relationships. This could be compatible with my model as to how the themes inter-link (see diagram two above) for the NS. From an attachment perspective, if CLA have ‘family support’ (foster family), which has a positive personal impact, this then may help them to have a secure base to branch out to ‘test out’ new friendships.

NS also described events when they spent time with the CLA without other family members, as they would with any other friends who did not live within the house hold: ‘*Yes… she used to come out with me and my friends and things on a weekend*.’ (NSF2, line 330). Also being at the same school and having the same school friends (see true/natural, below), as mentioned above in relation to age, this is in contrast with previous research. It could be argued that spending time together is one of the biggest factors in any friendship, and is linked to the next sub-theme. Spending time together may allow natural relationships to develop over time.

When the NS did not discuss spending time with the CLA, it was generally due to them not getting on with the CLA due to the CLA own difficulties (see Relational difficulties, pg. 71) or not having anything in common with the CLA (see Age, pg. 68) or that they were protecting themselves (see Self-protection, pg. 64).

### *Natural relationships*

Some of the relationships that NS made with CLA appeared to be ‘true’ and ‘natural’ friendships. Two people who enjoyed each other’s company and spent time together doing mutual activities separate to the whole family activities. Five of the six NS mentioned being good friends with at least one CLA. Words such as ‘*we are pretty good friends…’* (NSM1, line 97), *‘quite good friends’* (NSF2, line 315) and *‘No, because we had pretty much just the same friends at school anyway even though he was in the year below’* (NSM6, 1695, 1596) were used to describe the relationships/friendships that had developed with CLA.

NSM1 talked about a CLA as a friend also suggested that that was a rare occurrence: ‘*I mean…they can be friends… but that’s quite rare.’* (NSM1, line 81). Describing CLA as ‘friends’ or ‘brother or sister like’ was more common in the households that had had foster children for longer periods of time, which is perhaps unsurprising considering that friendships are often built up over time.

The only NS who did not talk about any CLA as friends was NSF3, and this was possibly due to her mum mainly caring for babies. None of the NS discussed the babies that their parents looked after at friends.

### *Relational difficulties*

All but one of the NS talked about experiences where CLA had displayed difficult behaviours. Of those five, three of them made a direct connection to it affecting their relationship with them. The behaviours were described across all age ranges, including babies. The difficulties described by the participants in relation to the CLA’s behaviour can be understood within the attachment framework (Bowlby, 1973, 1981). Many children who come into care have difficulties forming attachments as they continue to use inappropriate and unhealthy means; which is often the way they have learnt to cope (Bombèr, 2007). These often result in the behaviours that the participants in this study described.

Three of the NS discussed low level issues around the CLA being annoying: ‘*either they were like….really verbally abusive or just really annoying.’* (NSM1, line 51,51), and ‘*yeah he did a lot of things that would annoy me, like talking with his mouth open and stomping about and talking like at eight o’clock in the morning when I was fast asleep.. yeah.’* (NSM4, line 889, 890) and ‘*I don’t know, we disagreed a lot. Ted wasn’t too fond of him either. He was just a bit annoying really’.* (NSM6, line. 1643).

Emotional difficulties and violent behaviour were also topics of discussion for a further two NS: *‘Erm…if they don’t have as much serious problems… that helps…[why do you think that helps] because they don’t… like they are not as emotionally scarred or psychologically scarred….’* (NSM1, line 134 – 135). He went on to express that he felt that over the age of 11 young people who came into care were already too damaged: ‘*If people come in when they’re maybe already over the age 11, then it’s kind of too late.’* (line 232). He described how CLA had left the placement due to difficulties relating to their behaviour. Furthermore NSF3 described how one particular child who she felt had attachment issues would follow her around calling out her name: ‘*..who was around 2 or 3 and she had emotional attachment issues and every minute that I was in sight it was Nancy..Nancy…….. I’ve possibly taken to hiding in my room sometimes..’* (line 545 -550). This natural sibling also described how she felt that sometimes when CLA have contact with their birth parents’ and birth siblings’ they often come back displaying difficult behaviours that also makes it difficult for the NS.

NSF5 also explained that she felt she even noticed a difference in some of the babies’ behaviours: *‘You would see sort of a behavioural trait in them which you just thought who has taught them that or why are they like that.’* (NSF5, line 1353, 1354).

Only NSF2 did not make reference to any difficulties that CLA displayed, considering her parents had fostered over 180 children it is quite surprising that she never talked about any difficulties relating to her making relationships with CLA. As already mentioned above there is the possibility that she was trying to overstate the positive (Swan, 2000), possibly to protect their parents’ choice to foster.

## 4.5 Theme Four – Increased Knowledge and Training

Knowledge was discussed within the interviews in a variety of different ways. It related to the knowledge that NS had of their understanding of why a young person had come into care, what they had been told by their parents and the Social Care Team and how the CLA’s difficulties may impact on support that foster carers may try to give. In a number of the studies reviewed by Thompson & McPerson (2011), NS reported that they were not given enough information and preparation for the realities of fostering (Martin, 1993; Poland and Groze, 1993;

Pugh, 1996;Younes and Harp, 2007).There was also a theme in relation to what knowledge the Social Care Team had of the needs of the NS within the family where they were placing a CLA. Do social workers know enough about the NS within a family to be able to ‘match’ a child to a family, as suggested by Wilson (2006). Training, what was available and if NS could access this training was also featured within this sub-theme.

### *Knowledge and understanding*

A general theme for all of the NS was that they rarely knew the details of the CLA that came to live in their homes: *‘No we don’t get to know unless the child tells us.’* (NSF2, line 389) and *‘Erm…No…but we haven’t had any new in a while. [ok] since I’ve been to university….but I still don’t think that they would tell me…’* (NSM1 line 92, 93, referring to his parents). It was generally accepted that as younger children it was possibly not in the best interests of the NS or the CLA that NS knew why a child had come in to care. It did seem however that as a natural sibling got older they felt that it may be beneficial for them to know more detail: ‘*I think as an adult I can obviously comprehend stronger subjects and I have an understanding of what goes on in the world more.’* (NSM4, line 959, 960). Suggesting that once NS are adults they should know the background details, not necessarily to play the parental role but to enable more awareness and understanding so that they can adapt their relationships accordingly. In the Twigg & Swan (2014) study, they reported that older participants had expressed embarrassment at saying and doing things that they would not have done had they known more about the child placed within their family.

It may be inevitable that older siblings do partly take on a parenting role as happens naturally in some families when there are large age gaps between siblings. (also discussed in Layers of support, pg. 76). Having knowledge of why the children had come in to care may help NS build up their own empathy, as one natural sibling pointed out: ‘*I think it’s important that I knew some of it because I am living with them and it helps me understand their behaviour a lot as well. In a way it helps me to empathise with them as well, I think.’* (NSF5, line 1361, 1362). A further examples of NS being joined in discussions regarding CLA can be seen on pg. 58 (Family systems/parenting style). Also in the Twigg & Swan, (2014) study older participants felt frustrated that they were not being involved in planning meetings for CLA, as often CLA would confide in them and they would know things that no one else did.

From a differing perspective in relation to knowledge about a CLA background and history, NSF3 was the only participant to make the point how not knowing everything is difficult: *‘with my younger brother, we adopted him… so I have grown up knowing pretty much everything that he knows but she’s (foster child) had a whole other life before she came to us that she is aware of…’* (line 554, 556). When CLA are potentially going to be staying long term with a family the family and the NS have to come to terms with not knowing everything about the child. Information about the child’s life may surface over a number of years which will then need to be digested by all, including the child themselves, which may have implications for any future relationships within the family unit. Furthermore, Thompson & McPerson (2011) discussed the difficulties for NS living with a child who has had a completely different experience of being parented and how that might affect their attachment patterns and impact on their relationships with NS. Thompson & McPerson (2011) felt that NS may benefit from training to increase their understanding of attachment principles.

Throughout the interviews there were also various references to experiences in relation to the knowledge of how long a CLA would be staying with the family (see data extracts in Type of fostering, pg. 61 and Self-protection, see pg. 64). This seems to be a major influence on NS holding back with relationships with CLA for fear of ‘getting too close’ and then the CLA moving on: ‘*Yeah, because erm…you don’t know how long someone is going to be there. Its…you don’t want to get involved…so…..’* (NSM1, line 21, 22.). As quoted in Type of fostering (see pg. 61), it was difficult for the natural sibling to know how long a child was going to stay with the family so they were not sure about investing with time in forming a relationship with the CLA. From an understanding of loss, Twigg & Swan (2014) quoted a participant from Nuske (2006) explaining how it felt when NS did not know how long a CLA would be staying;

You have to put your whole heart and soul into these kids and try to make them feel comfortable and make them feel at home and everything like that, and at the same time you have to keep a fair distance away to save yourself (pg236).

This ambiguity of how long the CLA will stay, as often placements break down and CLA move at varying ages, is clearly a difficulty for NS. In a ‘non-fostering’ house hold it is more ‘usual’ that children live at home until adulthood and then leave for College/University or move out to their own property; which could be thought of as a more ‘usual’ or ‘natural’ departure.

There appeared to be two NS who had a limited knowledge, understanding and empathy in relation the difficulties that some CLA faced. NSM1 showed a lack of understanding when he said; *‘…….but I think they don’t let themselves get helped. I think that’s why it’s difficult…they don’t want to be helped…most of the time’* (line, 71), I felt that this showed a lack of understanding of how CLA struggles prior to coming into care may be impacting on their ability to accept support. NSF3 also displayed a lack of understanding in relation to contact that CLA received and the importance of CLA staying in contact with their birth families; ‘….*I think they can be very short sighted and basically some of the decisions that I am aware have been made don’t appear to have been made in the best interests of the child at all. Erm like at the moment C\*\*\*\* is having a lot of contact. She’s had so many contacts this Summer because she’s got two siblings to have contact with as well as two parents where she has to have contact separately…..’* (NSF3 line, 749 – 752).

NSF3 also talked about knowledge in relation to what the Social Care Team know about what is going on in the lives of NS and other family members: *because apparently social services don’t always think about what the actual people that are doing the fostering have going on in their own lives… erm my mum had to remind them that she does have a family and we live there as well and that any decision that she makes will also have to be also based on what we feel.* (NSF3, lines 673 – 676). NSF6 was referring to a lack of knowledge and interest with all of the family members in the household and that it shouldn’t be soley in relation to the foster parents and CLA. The implication of this could be building up a resentment of new foster placements regardless of what the CLA are like before they even join the family. Within the review of a number of the studies in the Twigg & Swan, (2014) research suggested that foster care social workers need to recognise the needs of the foster carer’s children (Part, 1993; Twigg, 1993, Verity, 1994, Pugh, 1996, Swan, 2000 and Watson & Jones, 2002). It was also felt that older NS should be included in case planning processes, if they so wished to be (Twigg & Swan, 2014).

### *Training*

Half of the participants made reference to training and all three advised that they had not attended any training and didn’t know what was available: *‘No I haven’t but Yeah… my mum goes on lots of training and she still does go on training courses and things now.’* (NSF2, line 424, 425). One participant made reference to training that he thought he may have attended when his parents started fostering: ‘*No, no support or training… which sounds like a good idea… but no, I might have because there were some sessions that all blurred into one.’* (NSM4, line 1040, 1041). Participants had no knowledge of what training was available to them, if any. There appeared to be a general agreement that it was their parents who went on training and that it was not available to NS to attend. In relation to NS being recognised as part of the Fostering Team, and in relation to older NS often taking on a care giving role Watson (2002) equally recognised that NS should be given specific literature or training appropriate to different age groups. Clearly any training or literature could be interpreted as a ‘layer of support’ as the next theme describes.

## 4.6 Theme Five – Layers of Support

Support was discussed throughout the interviews in a variety of ways. Who supports CLA? Was there any recognition by NS as to their role in supporting CLA? What was meant by support and what did that look like? The role of the Social Care Team and specifically the Social Worker and how they may support the family and the NS. There were specific experiences recalled that related to the possibility for the need of more emotional support for NS and their parents. Lack of support for NS was highlighted within the majority of the literature in relation to NS (Watson & Jones, 2002; Thompson & McPerson, 2011; Sutton & Stack, 2012; Twigg & Swan, 2014). In the same literature it was also recognised that often NS are not recognised as part of the ‘fostering team’, apart from in the Sutton & Stack, (2012) research, where participants felt very much included.

### *Who supports?*

Throughout all of the interviews NS entered in to a discussion regarding support, prompted by a specific question on the interview schedule. Many of them recognised that some of the things they did *could be classed as* support but most of them only recognised that when they were prompted further. i.e. *‘Maybe, I suppose, I haven’t really thought about it like that to be honest…’* (NSM6, line 1739).

Some of the words that they used were interesting and worthy of discussion. When asked if they thought they were of any support to CLA, one natural sibling replied: ‘*Unofficially I suppose so, yeah, suppose we are part of their life.’* (NSM4, line 1115). It’s interesting that he saw it as ‘unofficial’, as if his parents or possibly the Social Workers were the only ‘official support’. Perhaps if NS understood and were explicitly helped to appreciate that they can or do play a role in supporting CLA within the home (which may nor may not happen in some households), it may be more beneficial, especially with older NS. Conversely it may be recognised that lots of the ‘support’ is just what happens naturally within families and between ‘siblings’ as they are growing up and that by making it more explicit reduces the ‘normalising’ that CLA often seek.

All three female NS, once prompted, did appreciate their part in supporting CLA and also embraced it, describing it in terms of them being a role model: *‘I don’t know, erm I think sometimes we can be seen as some sort of a role model*.’ (NSF2, line 386) and ‘*Yeah I think so, I wish I could stay longer to get to know these two girls better but I can imagine that being younger, I mean my parents can support them a lot and they are very supportive of them but there is a limit to how much…’* (NSF5, line 1422 – 1424). Recognising that she was closer in age to the CLA and thus may been able to support them in ways that her parents could not, she went on to say: ‘*well there is such a big age gap between them and those two girls, do they really want to confide in a 50 year old man. As nice and friendly as he is, I mean, I think that they would... in some situations they might find me more approachable.’* (line 1424 – 1426). From a developmental perspective, some research suggested that NS were often expected to be good role models and that this could be one of the causes of early maturation as the NS felt that they needed to be sufficiently more mature to be able to fulfil that role (Twigg & Swanm 2014).

A CLA potentially having ‘layers’ of different support within a family may be ideal, providing the NS are willing to fulfil that role, they may equally benefit from support and training in knowing how. This may equally be interpreted as NS taking on more of a parenting role which is also mentioned in the Increased Knowledge & Training section above (see pg. 72). The last female natural sibling recognised that simply playing with and attending to the CLA was support: ‘*Well the babies, I play with them… feed them when needed to, change them if needed… but it was mostly just sort of… well babies are just there they are kind of easy in some ways..* (NSF3, line 700, 701).

NSM1 recognised that friendship may be support: *‘No…just like friends…. I think it helps….’ ‘*(NSM1, line 200) but explained that he felt the most important aspect of support was from his parents: *but it’s not the support that they need. I think that mostly they need a parental figure, more than anything else…so I think that’s what they look for.’* (202 – 203). Again this could be thought of in terms of what happens naturally in families, as ‘siblings’ naturally support each other.

### *Lack of Social Care involvement*

Support was also discussed in relation to how the NS felt supported in understanding their role within the fostering experience and if they felt they had had any particular support themselves. Surprisingly all six NS expressed that the experience of involvement with the Social Care Team and specifically Social Workers was virtually non-existent and that their opinions were not sought after: *‘Erm…basically none, they come like every year, I think, or every other year and maybe fill out a form asking me how I feel about it, but that’s all really. They don’t really ask my opinion so much.’* (NSM1, line 153 – 154). There was a general theme that visits from Social Workers were to see foster carers or CLA: *‘Yeah, well I rarely see them…they come for meetings and see the foster children.. but they usually just say ‘Hi’ and ‘bye’…mainly.’* (NSF2, line 404, 405) and that the NS had been spoken to on very few occasions: ‘*Erm, not that I can remember. I might have been talked to once or twice, but I can’t really think....’*(NSM6, line 1745). This particular natural sibling’s parents had been fostering since he had been born, yet he could only recall taking to a social worker ‘once or twice’. NSF3 had very negative feelings toward Social Workers and their apparent inability to listen: ‘*I don’t know if you have picked up on my feelings towards social workers?... They just need to listen, to actually listen to people when they are saying things to them….’* (NSF3, lines 747, 748). This particular family had had at least one major difficult emotional breakdown of a foster placement that is included within the next sub-theme Emotional Support. While some NS in previous research have identified social workers who took an interest in them and recognised their contribution (Pugh, 1996, Swan, 2000), generally the lack of support for NS and their opinions not being sought by social workers is featured heavily in the existing research (Twigg & Swann, 2014). In the Nurske (2006) research, 18 out of 23 participants said that they had never been in contact with a social worker, with other studies (Swann, 2000) predominantly describing experiences with professionals as negative.

### *Emotional support*

Three of the NS described events regarding emotional difficulties that they faced in relation to their experience of fostering. I felt that a further one of the NS throughout my discussion with him displayed a deeper emotional response to his experiences even though he never described particular events. He talked about staying out of the way: ‘*No, I try and stay out of the way a bit*’, (NSM1, line 19), the children’s behaviour being difficult: ‘*really verbally abusive or just really annoying’* (line 51, 52) and described the effect it had on everyone: *‘I feel that it can be quite difficult on everybody’* (line 65), he generally came across as frustrated and described the CLA as not accepting offers of help: *I think they don’t let themselves get helped. I think that’s why it’s difficult…they don’t want to be helped…most of the time* (line 70, 71). I interpreted this as him struggling with the difficulties that CLA often bring to a household and his potential lack of understanding in relation to the CLA ‘not wanting to be helped’, rather than perhaps they are actually trying to work out their own emotional trauma. Some of the research suggests that NS display empathy beyond their years when talking about foster children and that they can relate some of the difficult behaviours to their past experiences rather than a reaction to the present circumstances; a reflective approach that is more commonly associated with foster carers than their children (Sutton & Stack, 2012).

Two of the four described a specific experience of a breakdown in a placement where the CLA had had to leave the placement and these events had equally impacted on their mother’s too: *‘my mum has had some issues a few years ago, not that I think were her fault at all and she has been exonerated of anything but it was very traumatic for her………. I know my mother has been in therapy ever since.’* (NSF3, line 602 – 608,). Clearly this mum has managed to get some emotional support for herself that NSF3 explained was funded. NSM4 expressed: ‘*She’s my mum, if she’s unhappy, then I’m not happy. I have supported her as best as I can, yeah.’* (line 1189), he was talking in relation to a CLA who left the family after being there seven years. This natural sibling was dealing with his own trauma of the events too as well as worrying about his mum, he had had no specific or extra support. The research indicates the difficulties that NS face in relation to witnessing difficulties for their parents especially their mothers (Twigg & Swan, 2014). It is equally felt that the foster care system simply overlooks these issues, or minimises the impact on the NS (Ward, 1966; Verity, 1994; Swan, 2000; Watson & Jones, 2002), therefore there appears to be no suggestion in the research of any specific emotional support provided for NS.

NS also felt they may benefit from emotional support when CLA leave the placement naturally to either move on to a longer term placement, be adopted or return home. Many examples have been shared in the section How fostering impacted on NS Personal personally (starting on pg. 61) and specifically when discussing losses (pg. 63) and self-protection (pg. 64). NSF5 describes her own feelings: ‘*So I remember feeling very upset by that and I’m wondering if there could be maybe some sort of support service for that for when a child leaves a family.’* (line 1541, 1542). As discussed during the knowledge and understanding section on page 73, as some NS seem to experience increased amounts of emotional upset due to placement moves, there may be a need for more emotional support. This may be naturally provided through the support and ethos of the family; however multiple losses may lead to unusual emotional trauma which in time may need a different type of emotional support.

## 4.7 Theme Six – The Difficulty of Transitions

Throughout the interviews the majority of NS described difficult experiences regarding initial placement of CLA and subsequent endings of placements either planned or unplanned when placements had broken down. These difficulties have been expressed by many participants in previous research (Watson & Jones, 2002; Sutton & Stack, 2012; Twig & Swan, 2014). Many of the experiences with regards to placement involved the idea that if social workers had a better knowledge and understanding of the NS within the household it may enable a better match to be made for new children who are placed within a foster home. Research has equally suggested that where there is a ‘chemistry’ between carer and CLA, placements are often more successful (Wilson, 2006). This idea of ‘chemistry’ appears to be only discussed within current research with regards to the foster carers rather than considering ‘chemistry’ or lack of it with NS that live in the family too.

### *Initial placement*

The initial placement of children is really quite an uncertain time, as one natural sibling recalled: *‘Oh like you have got a six year old child that has just been removed and we don’t know the details of anything. We don’t know if they are going to be very, very upset when they come to us. They are going to be coming round to us in like an hours’ time and we haven’t got the bedroom sorted or the house sorted and we don’t know what to expect and we don’t know how long they are going to stay with us. It’s all the absolute uncertainty of it all.’* NSF5, line 1523 – 1527). Although with babies, where there are sometimes arrangements that they will be removed before they are born, more of the uncertainty is removed and can be pre-planned: ‘*Well they would just say a new baby will be coming soon. Well mostly they would be told before the baby was born*.’ (NSM6, line 1670, 1671).

NS discussed possibilities that may help make those experiences less anxiety provoking for both the NS and the CLA: *‘The way they come to the house? [yep].. I think it helps when they have little visits before… but that can’t always happen.. like.’ Emergencies…but to be fair…I don’t know…’.* (NSF2, line 471, 472), although clearly the nature of fostering may not mean that is possible. There were also discussions regarding matching CLA to households: ‘*Sometimes people have had to come in and their like…woow…because sometimes they are not use to having busy houses…’* (NSF1, line 474, 475) and how it may be beneficial if Social Workers knew the NS in the household better: ‘*Perhaps interview the birth children beforehand and find out what sort of people they are and then try and match children that need help with those. Because then I feel like if they get on better, they are more likely to get the help they need and are less likely to want to leave*.’ (NSM1, line 247 – 249). The practical experience of NS not knowing at the outset how long a CLA will be staying in the house seems to be a common concern: *‘We have had her much longer than we thought we would. She was only going to be there.. I think she came on an emergency placement for like a weekend, and this was two or three months ago I think……….. and they are possibly talking about long term.’* (NSF3, 531 – 534), a further example is given in the Increased knowledge and training section (see pg. 73).

### *Placement endings/breakdowns*

Foster placements inevitably end and CLA move on. There appears to be a difference of opinion in NS reactions to a placement ending, which appears to be relief on one side of the coin and despair and sadness on the other and NS can also feel both for the same child.

It appears that when a foster placement breaks down, then NS sometimes feel relieved: *‘I generally don’t mind…because usually they have because they have been too much of a problem… like they have had too many problems that my parents can’t deal with… so they have had to leave because of that....so it more just… it’s kind of relief then [relief?]* (NSM1, line 49 – 50). This appears still to be the case even if the young person has been in a household for a long period of time: *As harsh as it sounds, after everything that has happened it’s been a bit of a breather to have him leave…after the way he has acted towards mostly my parents and especially my mum*. (NSM4, line 922, 923), this young person had been in the families care for seven years. However NSM4 also described being sad at his departure, after him initially saying he was relieved he also talked about being sad; *‘Sad really and my anger towards the person who is partly responsible.’* (line, 1172), he clearly had some unresolved emotional issues, which may be understandable as the incident had only very recently happened prior to our interview. Both of these NS were reacting to CLA whose placements had broken down due to difficulties with the NS behaviour.

Conversely, NS also feel a deep sense of loss when a placement has ended: *‘It sounds so dramatic really but it felt as though she had died in a way because you can’t see her at all. One minute she is in your life and then she just goes.* (NSF5, line 1542 – 1544). Examples are also given in the How fostering impacted on NS Personally,(see losses section on pg. 62). This is clearly quite a different experience to the one described above and it was a stronger reaction to how some of the NS felt. However out of the six NS, three of them had described very strong reactions to CLA leaving the household, two of which had been sudden departures and this present example was in relation to a planned move; equally traumatic and difficult and a more frequent upset for NS to deal with compared to NS in families where parents do not look after other people’s children. This difficulty with loss in respect of placement endings is a common occurrence within the literature, (Waton & Jones, 2002; Sutton & Stack, 2012; Twigg & Swan, 2014) with some NS describing it as the most difficult part of the process. I suggest that the impact of these losses, and in particular, in the earlier years of a family fostering, impacts on subsequent relationships that NS form with CLA (as explained in the theme, how fostering impacts on NS personally (see pg. 60).

These findings will be discussed in the next chapter in relation to the literature discussed in the literature review and further relevant literature.

# Chapter 5 - Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the implications of the findings with reference to the literature already discussed. Having completed semi-structured interviews to gain an insight into the experiences of NS who live with CLA, a thematic analysis was conducted and data extracts used to highlight the six themes that the analysis produced. The majority of research relating to his topic has focussed on foster carers or social workers experiences (Holloway, 1997; Timmer et al 2006; Leathers, 2006; Oke, 2011). Research that enlists young people’s views, CLA (Selwyn et al., 2010; Goodyer, 2013) or NS themselves has been much less prevalent. While there has been some research into NS’ experiences (Kalpan, 1988; Hojer, 2007; Thompson & McPerson, 2011; Sutton & Stack, 2013; Twigg & Swan, 2014) there has been much less compared to that of foster parents and social workers views. There appears to be very little understanding of NS’ relationships with CLA and what support they may receive in making and maintaining those relationships either at the family level or from outside sources. Relationships and support was therefore the focus of the present study. It was felt that if relationships between NS and CLA could be understood more from within families where there had been at least one successful placement (see criteria, pg. 46), that knowledge may be compared with previous research and shared to support stronger and more resilient foster placements, which are less likely to breakdown; thus resulting in less negative outcomes for some of the most vulnerable members of society, CLA. There is insufficient space during this chapter to discuss all of the findings, I therefore intend to discuss what I feel is most relevant to looking at the relationships between NS and CLA. Due to the inter-related nature of the findings this involves pulling together relevant parts from different themes.

## 5.2 Underlying positive relationships between NS and CLA

In the following discussion I will make the argument that underlying positive relationships between NS and CLA is the family as a whole system. The findings in this study indicate that the family as a whole and the systems and communication within the family has a personal impact on the NS which affects their relationship with CLA. Influence outside of the family system, the support, guidance, knowledge and decisions around placements both in and out of the foster family also impact on that relationship between NS and CLA. Diagram two, refers to my interpretation of how the family as a system, the environment and parenting style, knowledge and external influences inter-link and underpin those very intricate details within the relationships between NS and CLA, which may equally be explained with reference to models such Bronfenbrenner’s Macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) and/or a Systemic Theory (Pellegrini 2009). Such models consider the interfamilial processes between parent-child interaction and the external systems that affect the family and the manner in which they exert their influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

## 5.3 Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory is based on an assumption that all parts of the family are connected and a true understanding cannot be reached if considering the parts in isolation (Karakurt & Silver 2014). As systems theory is interested on the interactions of the entire family, the entire family should be under analysis (von Bertalanffy, 1968). My findings within theme one, ‘The Family as a system’ describes experiences by the participants of systems within foster families that underpin how the families function. Those systems and the ‘ethos’ in foster families of relationships between adults and adults and children, and how they interact with each other, all have an impact personally on the NS (and CLA) and some of those experiences are captured within theme two and three regarding the relationships that NS and CLA make. There are also external influences. Again all families who do not foster have external influences such as peer relations, schools and community influences, although foster families have additional influences. These include the knowledge that is available to the NS, what type of support they receive and what systems are in place to decide to move a CLA in and out of care. As with Systems Theory, much like hermeneutics (see page 34) the whole cannot be studied without the parts and the parts without the whole. The next section will explore how the family and family systems may have a personal impact on the NS and their relationships with CLA.

## 5.4 The Family as a Whole

Some participants in this present study described stable, calm environments whereby families’ do things together with the foster children and the extended family, whilst others described families who were much less ‘touchy feely’ and less open with communication. Research has suggested that CLA feel more like part of the family when they are included in routine family activities and special occasions such as birthdays, holidays and family outings (Biehal, 2014). In the present research experiences of living in a ‘busy family’ were discussed as being a positive element of fostering which may or may not help the CLA to settle into family life, possibly depending on where they see their position within the family. There was lots of discussion of parenting being fair, open and honest, with there being ‘no special favours’ for NS, with CLA being treated equally. This has also been recognised in the literature with CLA speaking of being treated the same as bio-logical children and how these day to day practices help them feel as if they belong in the family (Biehal, 2014). It appears that this equality and feeling of belonging may have a positive impact on relationships between NS and CLA, with both of them being helped to understand acceptable boundaries taught by their ‘parents’, again noted in the literature review (Mchale et al, 2007; Dunn & McGuire, 1992) and could be likened to being just like ‘normal’ family life.

### *Security*

Half of the NS talked about feeling relatively secure in the knowledge that their parents would ensure that their needs would be met and that fostering would not have a negative impact on them. Some NS went so far as to explain that their parents had had open discussions regarding their needs (NS) coming first and CLA either would be ‘sent back’ or the foster mother would not accept them in the first place. This secure feeling could be described in terms of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982). This sense of security may have enabled the NS to feel safe enough to explore relationships with CLA knowing that their own base was sufficiently secure enough for them to take the risks and develop coping strategies (Sutton & Stack, 2013), alongside age and spending sufficient time to get to know the CLA; which may also be crucial factors in building positive relationships with CLA. However, what might the impact of this possible ethos within the family, have on the relationships of NS with CLA? Does that mean that the CLA’s needs come second or does it just mean that these foster parents have found a way to balance out the feelings of both NS and CLA? Research has suggested that when NS feel that their own needs are not recognised as being as important as those of the CLA then it can result in feelings of jealousy and resentment. There is the possibility that these foster parents had managed the balance of supporting both the CLA and NS, therefore feelings of resentment and jealousy had been managed well as they were growing up or as these participants were all over 18, time may also have aided them in forgetting such feelings. There is also the possibility that some participants were not saying how it had made them feel and staying ‘quiet’ (see the next paragraph). One of the participants did describe a lack of attention for himself; ‘*I wished it hadn’t kind of happened as it has taken the attention away me’*, throughout this particular interview, the tone of his voice and the way in which he expressed himself made me feel as if he did have feelings of resentment, and there is the possibility that his needs may not have been met as successfully as other NS appeared to have been.

There may also be other explanations for the NS feeling secure. Possibly these reassurances were more a sign of more open communication between the NS and their parents whereby they felt that they could talk through their feelings and difficulties. As mentioned in the literature review, other findings suggest that often NS do not know who to talk to or avoid talking about their difficult feelings that are associated with foster care (Hojer, 2007) and that foster parents do not always recognise their own children’s difficulties, thinking that it is just a part of everyday life (Hojer 2007). Other studies have found that when NS have the opportunity to speak about their worries gaining reassurance and clarity they have the potential to integrate these traumatic experiences in a positive way, therefore providing a blueprint for future resilience (Sutton & Stack 2013). Acknowledgment and understanding from parents that NS have these feelings and that they are real and valid may also partly help the NS work through these difficult feelings with the help of their parents. Thompson & McPhearson, (2011) describe this well in Psychodynamic and attachment theory terms.

### *Parenting*

Unsurprisingly, maybe, research suggests that the foster carers parenting ability is crucial to the success of a placement. According to Wilson (2006), foster carers who show particular qualities of parenting and child orientation experience fewer placement disruptions and contribute to more successful outcomes. Research also indicates that an adult’s ability to process his or her attachment related experiences has a direct relationship with the security of attachment with a child (Mein, M & Solomon 1986). Walker (2008) also highlighted the relevance of foster carers’ own attachment experiences to the ability to form nurturing relationships with children. Some NS in the present study made reference to the way in which their parents parented; they spoke of NS and CLA being treated equally and parents having open and honest discussions with NS and CLA. One participant discussed having a family meeting to discuss issues where necessary. Previous research has also found that when sibling perceive parental fairness, that has a positive impact on sibling relationships (Mchale et al, 2007; Dunn & McGuire, 1992), the findings in the present study appear to suggest that this is equally the case between NS and CLA. The parenting styles described by the NS in previous research may have helped the NS feel more secure, however as the present research did not interview CLA, it is not possible to comment on how these parenting styles had an impact on CLA in this study. Cameron & Maginn (2011) argued that the skills of ‘professional parenting’ should not be left to trial and error. The Pillars of Parenting was initially created for residential settings and is also thought to be used within foster care. It may be possible that such an approach would enhance the positive parenting styles already described by the NS in this research and therefore their relationships with CLA.

### *Young people ‘parenting’*

All of the NS who were interviewed were over 18 and lived at home. I am interested in their role of ‘mothering’ and how they also play a part in that ‘caring/nurturing’ role, maybe sometimes ‘sibling like’ (see Age, Sibling like, Natural relationships, below pg. 88) and maybe sometimes more like a ‘parenting role’. NS knowledge in relation to their ‘parenting type role’ may be lacking and something to consider (see Increased Knowledge & Training below pg. 94). There is research to suggest that older NS, as young as between nine and twelve years of age identify with their mothers as carers (Kalpan, 1988). The analysis of the present research did not differentiate between males and females so it is difficult to hypothesise one way or another in relation to gender, however, some interesting results in relation to older female NS were apparent. All three of the female participants talked in a nurturing/caring way regarding the babies who were in their parents’ care and the male participants did not. One of the female natural siblings likened herself to being a ‘second mum’. These findings (although with a small number of participants) raises thoughts regarding the on-going debate regarding maternal instincts (Thomas, 2014) and the importance of potential role of female NS with regards to the CLA in their parents care, especially when the NS remain living at home. Equally from a developmental perspective, this may be an indication of NS maturing earlier than they naturally would, as they take on a mothering role (Twigg & Swan, 2014). This could still be the case in a non-fostering household when a new sibling is born, therefore not unique to fostering. However, the number of babies that many foster homes have is generally greater than a non-fostering household.

Male participants did not appear to identify with their mothers as carers in the same way as the female participants did. It also needs to be recognised that not all of the male participants’ families had looked after babies within their household. Such experiences may also have relevance to participant’s influence on future thinking (see Personal growth and Influence on future thinking, below pg. 98).

### *Foster Mothers*

Also worth noting is the disproportionate comments relating to foster mothers and foster fathers. During four of the six interviews participants only made reference to their mothers. They discussed that it was their mothers who wanted to foster, when talking about caring it was their mothers they talked about and how placement breakdown affected their mothers (see Losses & Self-protection pg. 90 ). Is it possible that fostering fulfils a need in the foster mother, who may be playing out a role with CLA, giving her, (foster mother) the opportunity to maintain a sense of being and comfort through a continued maternal role? Reuben’s (1967) Maternal Role Attainment (MRA) posits that motherhood does not coincide with the arrival of a child but evolves as a woman achieves a sense of being and comfort in her role. The MRA theory has said to have been further refined and expanded to include a women’s maternal self-perception as a dynamic, fundamental inseparable part of women who chooses motherhood (Reuben, 1984; McBride and Shore, 2001; Nelson, 2003; Mercer, 2004). Stack and Sutton (2004) noted that participants in their study, without exception spoke how fostering affected their mothers (as did Watson & Jones 2002) and displayed a need to protect their mother from CLAs misbehaviour or aggression. In the present study half of the NS spoke in relation to the aggression and misbehaviour of CLA and how it made them feel knowing that their mothers had to deal with such behaviour (See Losses & Self-protection pg. 90).

5.5 Personal Impact & relationships

As well as the family and systems with in it contributing to the personal impact on NS and therefore relationships with CLA, there appears to be other related influences that are partly outside of the family and NS’ control. A major significance appears to be the different types of foster placement including the length of stay and whether that was known at the outset of the placement. NS described a type of holding back, interpreted as self-protection, from forming friendships with CLA as they did not know if it was worth investing in a relationship because the CLA might not stay. For some this seemed to stem from earlier experiences of CLA leaving (and significantly the first one) and how that had impacted on their ability and desire to make and maintain further relationships (also see The difficulty of Transitions pg. 97) and for others, age may have also been a factor (See Age, Sibling like, Natural relationships, below pg. 88).

### *Length of stay*

The amount of time that CLA stayed within these families was varied; it appeared that when NS knew that a child was coming to the house for an extended period of time they were more likely to make relationships, although all CLA spoke of babies differently (See Age, Sibling like, & Natural relationships below pg. 88). All of the NS had experienced CLA living at the house for extended periods of time (more than two years) and four of the NS seemed to associate more positive experiences when the CLA stayed for longer. One of the natural siblings who did not associate the length of time with making relationships was generally positive about long or short stays and the other (apart from a recent ten year. old CLA and her brother being adopted when she was younger) had mainly experienced short term fostering of babies. The length of stay appeared to be associated with NS thinking of the CLA as ‘like their siblings’.

There has been research undertaken with foster carers regarding long term foster placement which suggests that foster carers understanding of their role may differ depending on the type of foster care they provide (Smyth & McHugh, 2006; Riggs et al, 2007, 2009b). There appears to be a clearly perceived distinction between the responsibilities of short term and long term foster care (Blythe et al, 2013). In interviewing foster mothers who reflected on being asked to keep short term foster children on a more long term basis the carers explained how they transited emotionally and psychologically from foster carer to more of a mothering role (Blythe et al, 2013). When undergoing short term foster care, foster mothers described feeling as if their role was one of preparing the CLA for reunification with their parents or for a move onto long term foster placements (Blythe et al, 2013) rather than a mothering one. Possibly this ethos is being reflected through the NS’ behaviour too. One foster carer’s description of her feelings for a short term foster child was …’ when he was short-term it was like I had a little box around my feelings’ (Blythe et al, 2013. pg. 1063). It appears that both foster parents and NS protect themselves by keeping an emotional distance from these children, possibly for fear of getting too attached (see Losses & Self-protection pg. 90) and the quote in the findings from NSF3; ‘a weird dance…….’ (Chapter 4, Findings, Self-Protection page 64). When considering this ‘emotional distance’ to the CLA in terms of attachment theory it may serve to make building new relationships difficult. These children will most likely have come into care with insecure attachments and they are then possibly faced with carers and siblings who are physically available but not fully emotionally available. As there seems to be less research in the area of short term fostering and the effects on the CLA and NS, there may be a need for more research in this specific area.

It appears that it is more difficult for foster carers and NS to form ‘bonds’, ‘attachments’ and ‘relationships’ with children and young people who stay in foster homes for shorter periods of time. Many foster homes look after children who come into care short term, long term and short term who stay longer, therefore foster homes are regularly dealing with loss and ambiguity. Beuhler et al (2006) recognised that being able to ‘manage ambiguity and loss’ is an important area of competence for a foster carer. While foster carers choose to look after children, however, often NS do not; this may make the ambiguity more difficult for them. NS may need more support in how to manage those feelings to enable them to be able to relate to the CLA who are placed with their families shorter term.

### ***Age****, Sibling like & Natural relationships*

Age of CLA was discussed by all participants in relation to relationships with them. When babies were discussed NS talked about them fondly, irrespective of their length of stay. All of the comments regarding babies were positive apart from one comment. This may be related to the age of them where they pose less of a threat, even though they may take up more of the foster mothers time. One participant talked about babies being harder work and that when there were only babies in the household all of the discussion around the dinner table was baby related. Other research has discussed the disruption of family meals, but more in relation to the foster child’s behaviour rather than age (Hoyer, 2007). For this particular participant, this may impact on her own future plans when considering children of her own (see Personal Growth and Influence on future thinking pg. 98). Also discussed in the parenting section (see Parenting pg. 85) there was an interesting finding in relation to Female NS and babies. There appeared to be no research relating to NS and their experiences of fostering specifically babies and/or toddlers. Due to the limited but positive findings from this study, it may be an area for further research.

One natural sibling whose parent has predominantly fostered babies is finding herself in a position whereby her Mum has agreed a placement of a ten year old girl and there may be a possibility that she will be staying long term. She advised of her nervousness at being unsure as to how to interact with her as she had never been ‘an older sibling’, she also discussed how difficult it was knowing that the CLA has a ‘whole other life’ that she (the natural sibling) did not know about. She equally explained the difficulties in terms of seeing the CLA deal with disappointment and upset prior to and after visits with her siblings. This natural sibling has experience of living with other non-related siblings as she has an adopted brother; however she describes that as very different as he was adopted from a baby so she knows all about his past life. It struck me that this natural sibling may benefit from having support with her knowledge around helping CLA feel as if she belonged within the family. Biehal (2014) interviewed foster carers and their CLA in relation to what day to day practices may support in developing a sense of belonging. Using what has been learnt from research to inform support for NS and foster families may well make the difference of an improved long term placement.

My participants described various differing experiences in relation to age and relationships, which I feel may, in part be associated with longer term care and the age gap of the NS to the CLA. Five of the six participants described their relationships with CLA as ‘being like a sibling’. Two of those five were referring to specific CLA who had been in their parents care for seven and ten years respectively (one of these CLA was younger and one was older). Two other participants were referring to a number of CLA who their parents had looked after (both had experienced CLA older and younger than themselves). Of the latter two NS, both their families had had a number of long term, CLA who had stayed with the family post the age for CLA. The fifth natural sibling, not only described herself as ‘a sister’, but also as like a ‘second mum’ (all of the children she was referring to had been younger than herself) (also see Parenting pg. 85). Three of these five NS had CLA that were a similar age to themselves (including older and younger).

The literature equally makes reference to age, in respect of the age at which NS are when their parents begin fostering (Kaplan, 1988; Ellis, 1972; & Pugh, 1996). However more relevant to this research is the research in relation to age gap between NS and CLA. Pugh (1996) and Berridge & Cleaver (1987) suggested that it was not just the age of the NS, but the age gap between NS and CLA. They suggested that a gap of a few years was more beneficial with the NS preferably being the oldest. Where the relationships had been described as ‘sibling like’ during my participants experiences there were examples of all differing age gaps between NS & CLA but the CLA were children who had stayed for longer lengths of time (see Length of stay pg. 87). Interestingly, when there was a much larger age gap with female participants and babies/toddlers, it was then when NS appeared to take on more of a nurturing/mothering role (see above). During the present research when discussing relationships with CLA and NS where there was a large age gap (between four to nine years) NS saw the barrier to those relationships in terms of different interests. However, when considering relationship breakdowns, they discussed those in terms of the child’s behavioural difficulties rather than age

### *Spending time together*

Maybe like any relationship time needs to be spent together for it to build into true and natural friendships. When NS talked of true friendships with CLA (Five of the six did), it coincided with spending time with them and their length of stay. All discussed CLA where they had spent time with them outside of the whole family with various activities.

When NS described reasons for not spending time with CLA it was due to the different CLA’s behavioural difficulties (see Relational Difficulties, pg. 92), not having anything in common with them, which was often age related or they were holding back so as to not get too attached (see Loss and Self-protection, below).

*Loss and Self-protection*

The majority of studies that have been undertaken with NS have talked of losses (Watson, 2002; Hoyer, 2007; Thompson & McPearson, 2011; Sutton & Stack, 2013). Five of the six NS described experiences associated with loss. NS whose parents foster, deal with loss and grief on a more regular basis than other ‘normal family households’ (ones with no CLA). Generally family life does not involve ‘siblings’ leaving the house suddenly at a young age unless there is a death or significant difficulties within a family or a marital breakdown; even then, it is not usually a frequent occurrence. The type of experience that appeared to be discussed the most in relation to loss was the emotional affect that placement breakdown had on NS themselves and other family members, in particular mothers. For some, the most significant time appeared to be after the very first experience they had had of a placement ending. One natural sibling described how difficult it was; she spoke of it as being like ‘a death’. She went on to describe that being able to reflect on the experience made her realise that she subsequently held back emotionally from getting too close to the next CLA for fear of getting as emotionally attached again. What she described could be explained in terms of attachment theory in relation to separation. Bowlby (1973) described an initial phase of protest and attempts to recover the missing attachment figure, followed by despair and depression, and then eventually one of emotional detachment from the attachment figure. This natural sibling was describing her feelings as a young adult as her parents did not start fostering until she was 15 and this CLA had been with the family for two years. According to Parkes (1994), a similar sequence of phases has been described among bereaved adults. Kubler- Ross (1969) also made reference to this in her work ‘stages of dying’. Pugh (1996) argues that NS may well be affected by attachment and loss and possibly suffer from emotional harm. One of the NS described how she protected herself following the suffering of the first CLA leaving by not getting so emotionally attached to CLA for fear of continued hurt and grief when she said; ‘I think I never got as close to the other ones, to the consecutive children…..’ (Chapter 4, Findings, Self-Protection pg. 64). This has also been described above with regards to length of stay, whereby when the family knows that the CLA may be staying longer they eventually allow themselves to become attached to the CLA.

Two NS described the sudden loss of a foster sibling through placement breakdown and the emotional impact that it had on themselves and their mothers. It seems natural to me that when NS’ parents are emotionally affected by incidents relating to CLA there will most definitely be an emotional impact on the NS. Both of these participants spoke about how they felt their parents had been let down by social workers (see Support social workers pg. 96). The plan for both of these CLA before the placement had broken down was to stay long term at the foster home. I feel that both of these siblings were grieving for ‘siblings’ that they had ‘lost’, similar to how they would grieve for a death (as described above). One of these natural siblings broke down in tears when she described the effect it had had on her mum, who she advised was still in therapy. Taking on a caring role for their own mothers’ feelings may equally be described as a ‘loss on innocence’ in feeling the need to act as the ‘carer’ rather than ‘the cared for’. Loss of innocence in the literature is often in relation to NS being exposed to information regarding difficulties that CLA experience and circumstances that have surrounded their reasons for coming into care (Hoyer, 2007). Although the participants in this study mainly described experiences of not knowing why the CLA had come into care (see Increased Knowledge & Training pg. 94). NS were still aware of some of the reasons and had been exposed to the stories in relation to the CLA’s previous life, and the difficulties of the CLA’s parents. Pugh (1996) suggested that children lose their innocence when they are exposed to human hardship prior to them being sufficiently cognitively developed to cope with such information, one could argue comparable to the majority of the CLA (also see above in Young people parenting pg. 85). Sutton & Stack (2013) described the NS in their study as ‘mature beyond their years’. I feel that this exposure may equally serve to help the NS build up more empathy towards the CLA which may support more positive relationships. Sutton & Stack (2013) referred to this as ‘empathetic learning’ by NS due to the degree of empathy they showed in relation to difficult behaviour that CLA often display. NS tended to show this empathy towards their own mothers prior to considering their own feelings.

Two NS described how they had resorted to ‘hiding’ or ‘staying’ in their rooms which amounted to them having a loss of freedom to move around in their own homes. Reed (1993) noted that NS reported finding difficulties with reduced space and privacy that resulted from their parents choosing to look after children. However he also suggested that most managed to adapt to it. Both of these participants were discussing CLA where there was a large age gap (nine and fourteen years). Interestingly this was also recognised by Heidbuurt (1995). She suggested that these types of difficulties (young people secluding themselves) are often seen where the children are a similar age and when there is a larger (four years or more) age gap between NS and CLA.

Many studies have recognised that foster families including the NS may need the time to grieve when CLA leave the home (Pugh, 1996; Poland & Groze, 1993; Twig, 1993; Swan, 2000; Norrington 2002 & Watson & Jones, 2002). However it has also been recognised that often families do not get that chance due to the high demand for foster homes (Twigg & Swan, 2007). Sutton & Stack (2013) noticed in their study that participants who had appeared to have positively integrated the experience of loss had had a period of rest in between foster children. During that period NS and families had had chance to remember and consolidate their own personal and family identity. Of the two NS described above (in my study), one of the participants’ family were in the process of taking a period of rest. They were also considering changing the foster care that they offered to respite care, which may equally serve to create necessary grieving space. The other participant however described how her mum had continued to take on further CLA; however I am unsure of the amount of time in-between.

### *Relational Difficulties*

All barring one of the NS described experiences of witnessing CLA displaying difficult behaviours. The only natural sibling who did not discuss this was the participant whose parents had fostered the most CYP (approximately 180). Throughout her interview she was extremely positive about the whole fostering experience and it may be that she truly had not witnessed any difficult behaviour. There is also the possibility that she was overstating the positives, as already discussed above (Twigg, 1994). NS’ experiences of CLA displaying difficult behaviours stemmed across all age ranges, including babies.

Half of the NS talked about low level behaviours and the difficulty in forming relationships due to the CLA behaviour being; ‘just being annoying’,’ verbally abusive’ or ‘eating with their mouths open’ . This has also been recognised in the research. Martin (1993) reported birth children saying that they found it difficult to cope with conduct such as ‘sexualised behaviour’, ‘bad language’ and ‘acting out’ (Swan, 2002). Two NS also described experiences of emotional difficulties, describing the NS as emotionally or psychologically scared. One of these natural siblings continued to explain that he felt that if a child came into care over the age of 11, they were already too damaged. The second natural sibling, when talking about emotional issues, was referring to a younger child who she felt had attachment issues; she explained that the CLA would follow her around calling her name over and over again. This natural sibling continued to explain the difficult behaviour that was witnessed following visits with the CLA birth family. She described how witnessing such behaviour made relationships difficult. One natural sibling was shocked at noticing displays of aggression from some of the babies that their family looked after.

NS were describing a range of behaviours that may naturally make it difficult to make and maintain positive relationships with some CLA. I feel that systems within and outside the family may be crucial in supporting this relationship building process. Building up a resiliency in the NS while also ensuring they have support and a voice may be the key to ensuring better relationships, alongside support and help for the CLA themselves. Wilson (2006), in her research suggested that skilled committed foster carers who demonstrate a quality of responsive parenting could bring about changes in CLA’s difficult behaviours, social skills and relationship problems. Her research suggests that it may be possible to learn from foster carers’ who appear to have more successful placements, and use that knowledge to enhance the skills of others. She suggested that foster care should be viewed as ‘an environment for change’ and the model of successful foster care developed throughout her study could be shared and used to enhanced carer’s skills to help foster carers address CLA’s difficulties. Wilson’s model was developed further within the framework of the dynamics of attachment and interest sharing (Heard & Lake, 1997), which provides a more complete theoretical integration of systems of caring for others, of exploration and integration sharing with peers and of a self-care within intimate relationships which is thought to be helpful in analysing the interpersonal in complex child-care cases (Wilson, 2006). She further suggested that if foster carers could enhance their own children’s emotional and behavioural responses, then CLA’s very limited coping resources and fragile attachments can be sustained and strengthened within the home rather than a more therapeutic intervention external to the foster placement; this would clearly require adequate training, supervision and support but may prevent placement breakdown and equip the CLA with life-long skills. This example relates back to The Family as a whole and specifically Parenting (see above pg. 83 & 85).

## 5.6 Personal and External Influences

As well as the family and systems within it having a personal impact on NS’ relationships this study also highlighted other influences that were somewhat external to the foster family. What knowledge is available to NS and how they increase that knowledge were both topics that were explored throughout the interviews. What equally appeared to be an external influence was the support that they received and what considerations were made at the outset of a child joining the family and then them subsequently leaving.

### *Increasing Knowledge & Training (also see support)*

Knowledge and training was discussed by all participants in a variety of forms throughout the interviews. Included in these discussions was what knowledge was held by the NS regarding the CLA coming into care and how they may benefit from training. A further discussion regarding knowledge was the length of time that CLA would stay with a family and how that may impact on the NS decision to invest in a relationship or not (See Length of stay, pg. 87). Also included was how much knowledge social workers have of the NS that live within the household where CLA are placed.

All of the NS explained that when they were younger they did not know the full extent of why a CLA came into care and as adults over the age of 18 they were still not party to this information. One natural sibling discussed finding it difficult not knowing the full history of a potential long term CLA and how that may impact on their relationship. There was a general feeling that as adults they should know the details regarding the CLA placement as it may help them to understand, empathise and be able to support more with some of the behaviours that are often displayed by CLA. Knowledge is only briefly mentioned in existing literature and it is somewhat contradictory. Hoyer (2007) discussed it in relation to a negative impact on NS; NS having knowledge when they are too young to cognitively process it (see Loss & Self-protection, pg. 90). However Sutton and Stack (2013) discussed knowledge in relation to it having a positive impact on NS; giving NS ‘empathetic learning’ experiences which helps younger NS show more empathy and understanding towards CLA. It may be helpful for NS who are adults (over 18) and who still live in the foster home to have a better understanding of the CLA’s past history as their history may have implications on how best to support CLA or may equally help NS to understand some of the CLA’s more difficult behaviours. The majority of this support will naturally come from their own parents, and as discussed above, will be part of the whole family system; however I feel there is equally a need for further support and training specifically for NS. Throughout the interviews it was apparent by some of the remarks that were made in relation to CLA that there was a lack of understanding with regards to how children come into care, what affect any trauma they may have experienced has on their ability to accept and integrate into a family and reasons behind some of the difficult decisions that social workers may have made regarding CLA. Some of these misunderstanding may be due to a lack of communication with their parents or social workers, but they are more likely to be due to a lack of awareness which may be addressed through training.

Watson & Jones (2002) highlighted that foster carers are provided with training by their agency or LA yet foster carer’s children are not thought to have the same need. Yet many NS live in the house with the CLA 24 hours a day. Half of the NS felt that having access to training may be of benefit for them. Even if there is already a possibility that NS can access training, none of these NS that were interviewed were aware of that.

There was a reference from one participant regarding how much the social workers knew about NS and what was happening in general around the family home and how there appeared to be a lack of regard for the whole foster family. Research indicates a lack of contact between social workers and NS with descriptions of negative experiences (Nurske, 2006; Swan, 2000) however this will be discussed in the next section support (see below).

### *Support*

There were various strands in relation to support. What is support? - the extent to which NS recognised their part in supporting CLA, what support NS received themselves and support specifically in relation to emotional support. All of the NS entered into a discussion regarding support however, most of them needed prompting to recognise themselves as being any part of the support network for CLA.

Goodyer, (2014) conducted a study obtaining the views of CLA in relation to initial moves into care and placement moves. In this study a number of CLA had explained that their move to foster care had happened very suddenly, without much warning and described feelings of being alone and isolated and of missing their own family and friends. Also in the Goodyer,(2014) study, one CLA explained that what she wanted when she went to a new foster home was simply for someone to be friendly, while others explained that they often felt scared and needed to be on guard, to avoid difficulties and remain alert. During my research one natural sibling discussed that he was possibly ‘unofficial support’ as if the ‘official support’ was from his parents or possibly social workers. I feel this suggested that the NS in my study may not have appreciated how important simply being ‘friendly with’ or ‘just being there’ or just allowing the CLA to spend time with them or to simply ‘hang out’ was for some of these children. May be it is that ‘unofficial’ support that makes things feel more ‘normal’ for CLA. One natural sibling in my study did recognise that friendship helped but quickly followed that up with the fact that he felt that his parents were the main people who CLA needed for support.

The female NS, once prompted, did appear to recognise themselves as support. They recognised roles such as being a role model and being a ‘confidante’ to slightly older CLA who may not want to confide in her parents as she was much younger and closer to her age. Where older NS are willing to fulfil such roles it may be helpful to ensure that they have sufficient training to ensure that they know how to support a CLA and what to do if there are any disclosures (see Increased Knowledge and Training, pg. 94).

### *Support from Social workers*

Perhaps shockingly all six NS reported that personal support from social workers was non-existent and that their opinion was not sought. Most mentioned that they had seen a social worker, but it was mainly for the completion of the Disclosure and Barring Service. One of the natural siblings whose mum had been fostering the whole of his life advised that he had only seen a social worker twice. One particular natural sibling, whose mum had had a particularly difficult placement breakdown, was very negative with regards to social workers in general as she felt that they did not listen, not only to her views but to the views of her mum too. While there is research that suggests that some NS feel that social workers took an interest in them and recognised their contribution (Pugh, 1996; Swan, 2000), many other studies describe examples of NS sharing negative feelings with regard to social workers and social services (Nurke, 2006; Twigg & Swan, 2007, Rock et al, 2015). Most of the research where foster carers, NS or CLA have been interviewed indicates some type of lack of support. The Children Guidance Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011) states that:

5.68 The fostering service should also provide support to sons and daughter of foster carers and other people living in the carer’s household who play an important part of supporting children in the household (pg. 51.).

There has also been reference from Verity (1994), that sometimes professionals lose track that The Children’s Act 1989 is with regards to safeguarding all children and not just CLA. Ward (1996) agreed with Verity stating that children whose parents foster appear to have no support networks. It is not surprising to me really that NS do not feel they get the support as many foster carers themselves complain about lack of support. Berridge and Clever (1987) emphasised the value of supporting foster carers as without the support there is a risk that the placement could breakdown. Macaskill (1991) also suggested that social worker support is the difference between success and failure.

### *Emotional support*

Four of the NS discussed or described specific events that had an emotional impact on them other than the day to day difficulties. Of these four, two of them were in relation to specific events when there had been a particularly difficult breakdown and one regarding the initial placement and subsequent placement endings. Three out of the four talked about how they felt they may have benefitted from extra support although there was no agreement as to who they might have turned to for that support. Three of them discussed the effects that the difficulties had had on their parents and in particular their mums (see Foster Mothers, pg. 86). Most of them accepted that support would be from their parents (more likely mum) but with the recognition that their parents were equally emotionally distressed, it could be argued that they may not be in the best place to give that support. It has already been discussed that allowing a period of time after a CLA leaves may help the family re-adjust however we already know that this does not often happen. I feel that there may be times when foster carers, siblings and any other people who are in the household may need support from people who are more qualified in giving support in relation to loss. At present social workers are generally expected to give support, however due to heavy workload demands they often struggle, as is being stated by foster carers. However research seems to be indicating that without that support foster carers would consider ending placements (Rock, 2015). Further research may be of benefit to find out what support may be needed and who is best placed to give that support.

### *The difficulty of Transitions*

There were varying discussions in relation to the beginnings and ending of placements. NS described the beginning as being a particularly worrying time with there being uncertainty around what the child is going to be like and how long they are going to stay. Goodyer (2014), as described above explained that CLA too, naturally find initial placements very difficult. They often come into care with very little or no notice and are possibly still in shock when they arrive at the placement. Babies were described as slightly more predictable and sometimes that families knew they were having a baby come to stay before it was born. NS generally appreciated that children often come into care quickly and there is often very little time to make some of the important decisions regarding where they should be placed. However ensuring that they are in the best place for a particular individual is very important, especially considering what we know regarding placement moves and the potential detrimental effect on the CLA outcomes.

There clearly is a difference between short term and long term fostering and often when children come into care it is not known if the placement is for the long or short term. NS in my study found this element of placement very difficult. As described in the loss and self-protection and length of stay sections above NS find it difficult to know when and how much to ‘get attached’ to the CLA for fear of getting hurt when they have to leave. NS in my study talked of social workers interviewing them so that they could match CLA to families so as to try and ensure a successful placement. Section 3.1 of The Children Guidance Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services states that children should be matched where appropriate to foster carers, ‘chemistry’ between the child and carer (as mentioned in the literature review) is equally important too (Wilson, 2006). However if social workers are not in contact with all of the members of the household how can they match a child appropriately.

Placement endings are clearly a difficult time and appear to be so whether they are planned or unplanned. This has already been considered during various parts of the discussion and appears to be a mixed reaction. Some NS appeared to be relieved when CLA leave the house due to their difficult behaviour and the strain and stress that they cause the NS’ parents while other NS feel lost and devastated. As already discussed in the emotional support and loss and self-esteem section placement endings can sometimes be so difficult that it leaves NS and other family member grief stricken and in need of extra support. Younes & Harp (2007), reported how difficult placement endings can be for NS, which includes feelings of anxiety, loss and guilt.

*Personal growth & Influence on future thinking*

There are both positive and negatives for NS from their fostering experience, which I feel possibly may last a lifetime. I suspect all of the NS will have had some type of personal growth from their experience which may equally have impacted and influenced their thinking about the future. Clearly each participant’s (and other NS) experience will be different. I feel there are many factors that will have contributed to the way in which their experience of fostering has affected their lives. These include (although not exclusively), the different behaviours of the children and young people who were in their homes, age of the CLA, age difference to the NS and their position in the family, length of stay, possibly the amount of time their parents have been fostering and the amount of children that their parents have had. Equally, and I feel most importantly, the way in which their parents parented may be one of the crucial elements that have affected their experiences, which may equally be true in relation to their relationships with CLA.

Throughout the interviews three of the six NS felt that the fostering experience had impacted on their choice of career and/or their thoughts on having families of their own. Two of those were in professions that worked with children. One of the natural siblings talked about the impact of her not wanting her own children; while another said she would like to foster children herself. One of the natural siblings had commented on the babies that were CLA being harder work and also recognised that when there was a baby in the house the majority of the talk consisted of ‘baby talk’. There is the possibility that this may impact on her decision to have children herself. Within the research there were many examples of how NS felt they had personally grown including having an enhanced capacity for empathy and compassion (Hoyer, 2007). Sutton & Stack (2013) shared how NS felt they were active members of the fostering team, which resulted in them feeling a sense of pride when positive outcomes occur, which may serve to increase their self- esteem and self-worth. If it truly is recognised that they are active members rather than passive recipients then ensuring that they receive the knowledge and training to fulfil ‘their role’ within the team may be paramount. Spears & Cross, (2003) reported that NS suggested that they had improved communication and listening skills and had grown in confidence, equally one of my participants spoke of her increase in confidence.

Various studies have reported that young adults who have been part of the fostering experience have continued in later life to be foster carers themselves and they have reported that it was the fostering experience that has led them to their chosen careers (Twigg & Swan, 2007). If through this experience NS are going into fostering and other caring professions then it would be helpful for society to ensure that they are correctly nurtured for their own sake and for the sake of CLA as equally some of the more negative effects, may have lasting effects too.

# Chapter 6 - Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

## 6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be to consider the points raised throughout the research and their relevance and meaning for both NS and CLA. The limitations of the study will be highlighted as well as recommendations for practice and further research in this highly emotive subject.

## 6.2 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the experiences of NS who live with CLA. In particular I was interested in their experience of how they build and maintain positive relationships with CLA and what support they receive to do that. The study was important as placement breakdown for CLA within families where there are NS has been highlighted as more prevalent (Thompson & McPherson, 2011). When placements breakdown, which results in multiple moves for CLA, there is a negative impact on not only their wellbeing but their educational attainment too (DfE, 2015). It was decided at the outset to look for participants where there had been at least one successful foster placement, where a CLA had lived with the family for more than two years. My intention was to help increase our awareness, knowledge and understanding by listening to the experience of others to be able to learn from that experience by considering what recommendations may be taken from it.

The research highlighted that there are both positives and negatives of living within foster families, as there may be in any family. Equally foster families who have successful placements may also have unsuccessful placements. The main findings highlighted that relationships between NS and CLA are often dependent upon many aspects that are not within their own control. Relationships between NS and CLA are dependent on the systems that are within the family as a whole, and the systems that are outside of the NS and CLA’s control therefore the relationships between NS and CLA cannot be studied independently of those systems. Foster carers are usually regarded as competent parents (Hoyer, 2007) however it may be a very different skill to try to maintain the balance between caring for NS and CLA alike.

There has been research in relation to specific training that has been provided to foster carers (Minns & Devine, 2001; Timmer et al, 2005; Wilson, 2006; Price et al, 2008, Cameron & Maginn (2011) which has been shown to be effective. None of these interventions/support packages involved work including NS. Improving the knowledge and understanding of all adults within a foster home can only be a positive move for relationships with CLA. At minimum I feel the NS should complete health and safety courses to ensure their own personal safety and that of the CLA’s

The support and nurture that is given through family personnel and the systems within it serve as both positive and negative indicators for the relationships between NS and CLA. The Foster Mother seems to play a central role within the family and any impact on her serves to further exacerbate any positive or negative impact that there may be on the NS.

Outside of the family systems much of the impact on relationships were still outside of the NS or the CLA’s control including the length of stay, age of the CLA and the difference in age between the NS and the CLA. Discussions around babies were generally very positive.

Dealing with various types of loss appeared to be a major difficulty for NS and the family as a whole, with placement beginnings and endings being pertinent times. There appeared to be an element of self-protection where NS may not get too close to CLA as they do not know how long they may be staying and to invest in a relationship may mean further loss. This may indicate that research that differentiates between short term and longer term care may reveal differences in how relationships between NS and CLA are formed and maintained. However often children who are placed in short term care placements remain there longer term, thus making the distinction between what is thought of as short term and long term care, quite difficult. Possibly, NS struggle with new attachments the longer their parents foster, as the more losses they deal with the more difficult it may become; equally they may also become inured to this. A lack of time allowed between each placement and loss may exacerbate the difficulty.

NS’ experience of support was mainly from their parents with a 100% agreement that specific support for themselves from social workers was non-existent and that they did not have access to any training. Many of the NS talked about not knowing the true extent of why a child was in care and that as they mature into adults having more knowledge of the circumstances surrounding a child’s placement may serve to increase their ability to support them. Equally it may be beneficial for the NS if they had access to training in relation to fostering and the impact of attachment difficulties as it may increase their knowledge and understanding to enable them to give more knowledgeable support. Some NS shared negative thoughts in relation to social services as a whole and specifically to the ability of some social workers to listen. There were equally comments with regards to social workers not knowing NS, which would therefore make matching of CLA to families extremely difficult. There may be a need to work around increasing positive relationships between NS and social workers as a united support would be more beneficial to CLA than a fragmented one.

While fostering may give CLA a chance of a more stable life, it may equally serve to destabilise NS lives (Hoyer, 2007). As many NS go on to be parents and foster carers themselves it is important that their welfare is considered too. It is of equal importance to remember that The Children Act 1989, is there for the safety of all children and not just children that are fostered.

## 6.3 Limitations

There were limitations in relation to the chosen methodology, thematic, many of which have already been addressed within the methodology section (see pg. 39).

Due to the data producing inter-linking themes; a further challenge in relation to the analysis was deciding in which sub-theme some of the themes were best placed, as it would have been relevant to place them under a number of themes.

When interviewing participants, an attempt was made to bracket off my own experiences however, as described throughout the methodology, I feel that this is not truly possible and I have been open about my positionality. A limitation of this study therefore is how my own experiences may have impacted on the whole of the study from the planning stage; to the construction of the interview schedule; follow-up questions throughout the interviews and in the way in which the data was interpreted and discussed. I actually feel that this could serve as a limitation in one sense and strength in another. There may be strength in my overall knowledge of the NS experience, as research by someone who has equally had an in-depth experience may enable me to interpret what the participants were saying from a position of knowing, all be it *my* position of knowing.

My intention was to choose participants that were homogeneous however although all of the participants did fit my criteria there were many differences. These differences included how many children their parents had fostered, the age of the CLA and if they were short or long term carers. Smith et al (2009) discussed that the homogeneity of a group varies from study to study and some decisions are partly practical ones. I did have a choice of a number of participants and chose participants that I felt may be able to give the most meaningful interviews in relation to the topic in hand. This was one of the reasons as to why the decision was made to analyse the findings using thematic rather than IPA.

While the sample and selection process was in line with the methodological standards and appropriate for the aim of the study (Smith et al 2009), the sample does not reflect the experiences of the perspectives of the NS population as a whole. It also needs to be recognised that the participants talked about their experiences about how they felt on a particular day, in the context that the interviews were held. Their thoughts on their experiences may be open to change. Given these limitations these findings are not generalisable. However their similarities to existing literature confirm their transferability (Grbich, 2009).

A number of the participants were extremely positive about the fostering experience and one in particular gave very little negative feedback. While I feel that I created an atmosphere to enable the participants to feel relaxed to talk and be honest there is still the possibility, as already mentioned, that to some extent they were overstating the positives for fear of being critical of their parents or not wanting to show to much of a negative outlook (Twigg, 1994).

## 6.4 Recommendations for future research

This research indicates that the fostering experience and relationships made by the NS and CLA are dependent on the family as a whole. There has been research with CLA and foster parents (Biehal, 2014). However research that involves interviews with all family member including NS, CLA and foster carers as a case study within a foster family may be helpful in sharing the experiences of all family members. This may also need to be extended to family members who have left the home too.

I had initially intended to investigate if there was a difference in the way female and male NS interpret their experiences of relationships and support with CLA, however unfortunately due to the time limitation and word restrictions I was unable to do so. While some reference has been made to some differences in relation to males and females, specifically around babies, I feel that further studies in relation to gender may be beneficial.

As the fostering experience clearly has a profound effect both positively and negatively on NS, I feel it would be interesting to interview NS who are older for many different reasons. I feel that there is a possibility that fostering has an impact on the way in which NS parent their own children and how NS feel in relation to their parents (the foster carers) in their role as mother, father and grandma, granddad, especially if they are still fostering children themselves.

Many of the difficulties appear to be in relation to loss and the length of time that CLA are within a foster family. I feel that more research is needed in relation to short term foster placements and how relationships are formed and supported.

Further research in relation to what training is available and what may be appropriate in supporting older NS with their role with CLA as they continue to live within the foster home as an adult. This may include revisiting some of the research already undertaken that supports the foster carers in their role of guiding their NS in how best to support the CLA who they live with. There has been research regarding the foster parents receiving specific training in relation to therapeutic interventions with CLA (Timmer et al, 2005) and specific training on emotions and behaviour (Minnis & Devine, 2001) and in relation to parenting (Wilson, 2006; Cameron & Maginn, 2011) however these interventions do not seem to involve any training for adult NS. Training, implementation and research into the effects of such interventions may equally be a positive way forward.

Research specifically into what type of support may be helpful and appropriate for the losses that the whole family seem to regularly deal with. Part of this research may usefully look at who should provide that support and if social workers are qualified to do so and if they have time, with already heavy case loads. Of equal importance may be research using case study models into the specifics of some of the very challenging circumstances in which foster carers and their siblings find themselves.

## 6.5 Recommendations for future practice

I feel that one of the most important aspects to take away from this research is the need to look upon the foster family as a whole and ensure that any practices in relation to CLA are considered within the context of the whole family including NS.

Most of these participants appeared to talk about their experience of communication with their parents being open and honest and I feel that NS need to be able to communicate with their parents and let them know how they are feeling, negatively and positively. They also need to know that their own needs will be met and foster carers need to have the skills and training to be able to meet the needs of their own children as well as the needs of the NS, and that often it will cause conflict.

Foster families need to continue to include CLA in the day to day activities, trips, outings and birthday celebrations as some of these NS described. CLA need to feel as if they belong in a family that wants them to be there even if it is only for the short term.

As NS move into adulthood and remain within the family home, their contribution needs to be recognised and their feelings taken account of. CLA may benefit from adult NS having more information regarding the difficulties that CLA may have encountered prior to coming into care so that they NS can adapt what they do and say to the CLA. It may also serve to allow NS to understanding and accept more of the difficult behaviours that CLA sometimes display.

To ensure less disruption and placement moves, social workers need to get to know all of the foster family and ensure that they know the NS and any other adult members who live within the foster family and take their wishes into consideration too.

Support for NS may need to be revisited. What support is available to NS including training to help older NS understand the fostering experience in a more holistic way? Are there lessons that can be learnt from Independent Fostering Agencies (Sutton & Stack, 2013)? Is there specific support into dealing with loss and should the support come from professionals who are specifically trained in loss?

NS may benefit from training at the beginning of the fostering experience that is ongoing and age appropriate. Should this come from the social worker or are there other professions who are more qualified to teach it, Educational Psychologists for example? Is the training differentiated for foster carers to understand the needs of CLA who are placed in short term foster care? – Is the training the same for short term and long term foster carers?

The whole aspect of nurture for all members of the foster family may need to be revisited, especially in terms of foster parents understanding and appreciating how to fulfil the needs of the CLA as well as catering for the needs of their own children.

## 6.6 Recommendations for Educational Psychology Practice.

When EPs are undertaking consultations and supporting schools in relation to CLA, it may be beneficial for them to consider who lives within the foster family and what relationships CLA have with any NS who may be living at home. Being aware who the CLA lives with and asking extra questions regarding NS who live in the household when undertaking initial consultations with schools may help with a greater understanding of the holistic situation.

When talking to Designated Teachers (DT) in schools, EPs could help them to appreciate how relationships within the foster home, and in particular between NS and CLA, might have an effect on their behaviour, concentration and desire to learn in school.

Again, through the usual consultation process, EPs may assist in helping the DTs in schools to be aware which families foster and that the NS within that family may need to be considered vulnerable too and may be in need of an empathetic ear.

It may be helpful to consider if EPs (maybe the senior EP for CLA) are in a more knowledgeable position to complete training for foster carers and NS in relation to attachment, behaviour, loss and coping. It equally may be beneficial to undertake joint training sessions with EPs, social workers and foster family members (including older NS), so as to promote a ‘working together’ ethos.

Revisit the content of any training that is delivered to DT in schools to include increased awareness of NS potential vulnerability in their own right and to raise awareness of the importance of relationships with NS and CLA within foster families.

## 6.7 Reflexive account of my experience whilst completing this research

I decided on the topic for this research about 20 years ago, when I first decided that I wanted to become an Educational Psychologist. From the age of four I grew up surrounded by CLA. While growing up, but more so as an adult I have battled with understanding how the experience has impacted on me as a person, a parent, in the work that I have chosen to do and most importantly in relation to all of the CLA that lived within our household. I was interested in the experiences of NS regarding their relationships with CLA, how they made and maintained them. While reading the literature I have learned that the way I felt in relation to my upbringing with CLA was similar to many other NS but more importantly how unique it was too. This has helped me to consider the uniqueness of every other persons experiences and to try and remember that when working with different cases, it is important to try to listen to every person’s account without pre judging, trying where possible to listen with epochè. It was most important to me to listen to, and hear, the experiences of NS (my participants) while putting aside my own experiences, interviewing them with epochè. I felt my originally chosen method of IPA was congruent with my epistemology and ontology. I recognised at the outset that I felt that it was impossible to interview with epochè however until I completed the interviews and reflected on the transcripts, I hadn’t realised that in trying to prevent me from bringing my own experiences to the interviews, I struggled to delve deep enough for the transcripts to be analysed using IPA. It made me reflect on the possibility of using IPA when the subject of the research is so close to the researcher personally. I realised that I had partly been trying to bring out the positives in fostering for the NS whom I interviewed and therefore rather than stick with the train of thought that the participants were discussing, I asked questions that might bring about a more positive response. Conducting the interviews confirmed to me just how easily I find helping people to be at ease in a conversation as all of my participants commented upon that. Equally I also realised that when I identify with people I then almost become protective of them. Whilst this may be good in one sense, (as I feel it is maybe what drives me to ensure I try to get the best outcomes for the young people that I work for), it can sometimes be a negative too. When I work with staff with whom I identify and listen to ‘their side’ of ‘the problem’ in relation to different cases, I maybe then pre-judge other participants regarding ‘the problem’ and I maybe go into interviews with pre-conceived ideas, rather than fully listening to all sides of the issues from other participants and a position of not knowing. As I am aware of this, I feel that it is something that I can work upon.

Completing this research has also made me more aware of how difficult it is not to let your own pre-conceived ideas affect how you interpret an experience and how difficult it is not to bring your own experiences into the equation. I feel that possibly when discussing concerns with schools, parents and children I am thinking about my own experiences rather than considering the psychological paradigms to steer my hypothesis. While I feel that using previous experiences and knowledge learnt from similar situations is clearly helpful in some respects, as use of existing knowledge can be beneficial, it may also be helpful to hold the information in hand and truly reflect on the present circumstance in order to consider the best way forward.

The research has also helped me to reflect on my relationship with my own mum and my feelings towards how her and my father’s decisions to foster has had an impact on me and my siblings (although like many comments from the participants it was my mums decision to foster rather than my fathers, and to this day at the age of 78, after losing my father three years ago she continues to do so). I have always realised that without people like my parents, lots and lots of children wouldn’t have had the stability that they had, even if it was for a short period of time (we looked after children for long and short term periods) but I still battle with the feelings that surface on a regular basis. I feel that going forwards it is important to use research to help to increase the understanding of what will help *all* members of a foster family and for that to be achieved *all* the members need to be listened to and heard. Equally I feel working with Social Care Teams and foster carers may help to raise awareness and understanding of what might make foster placements more stable and thus have less CLA move placements which can reduce their academic achievement and life chances.

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# **Appendices**

## Appendix 1 – Local Authority Statistics

The following statistics were taken from the LA in which this research was undertaken. The majority of the figures were attained and up to date as of April 2016.

The total number of CLA in this authority has reduced over the last year from 290 in April 2015 to 262 in April 2016. This figure includes 2 children who were in respite care. 64 of those children and young people (CYP) were place in out of county placements (meaning they were looked after in placements other than within this LA). When broken down by age the figures were as follows; age 0 – 4 yrs. – 11%, 5 – 9 yrs. – 23%, 10 – 15 yr.s 37% and 16 – 17 yrs. 27%.

The majority of those children were placed foster care (68%), of which 20% were placed with private fostering agencies. There were approximately 120 foster carers.

310 other LA’s CLA also live within this authority, although this figure may not be accurate due to the reliance on other LAs notifying this LA when children are placed and when they leave placement.

The majority of CYP in care were white British (90%), with other nationalities being recorded as white other (12 CYP), other (7 CYP), white traveller (4 CYP), other ethnic (3 CYP), mixed parentage (2 CYP), Asian (1 child) white/African (1 child).

At the time of completing my thesis, I was unable to access information regarding placement moves, breakdowns or difficulties. This is not to say that this information is not recorded but that it was not available to me.

## Appendix 2 – Ethical Approval Letter.

## 



## Appendix 3 – Participation Information Sheet

**Information Sheet**

**Research Project Title:** Stable Foster Placements – Experience of birth children’s relationships and support.

**Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

**What is the project’s purpose?**

The aim of the research is to elicit the views of birth children who have lived within a family where there have been children placed in the care of their parents/families by the local authority (fostered or children in care). When placements breakdown and children in care have multiple placements, their academic achievement is greatly reduced. Placement breakdown is regularly associated with relationship breakdown with family members and often birth children within the foster family. The object of the research is to explore the experiences of birth children within the foster family to find out what strategies and resources they use to maintain relationships with CLA children. I feel that exploring the experiences of birth children when foster placements have been stable may expose strategies and practices that can be shared with other families and services to give a better understanding of what helps placements to remain stable. The project will run from April/May 2015 to July 2016.

**Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen as there has been at least one child that has had a stable foster placement. You have been asked to take part as sharing your experiences could be important in helping us to gain a better understanding of what you think are helpful strategies and practises that helped you to maintain a relationship with the foster children that lived in your home.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet and asked to sign a consent form. Even though you are giving written consent you will be able to withdraw from the research at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

**What will happen to me if I take part**?

The entire research project will last approximately 14 months. However if you were to take part your participation will be for a maximum of two hours. Participants will be asked to take part in a small focus group with approximately five-seven other participants (all of whom will be/or have been birth children within a foster family). Subsequently up to six participants will be asked to take part in an individual semi-structured interview with only the participant and myself present. The same participants may complete the focus group and the individual interview.

**What do I have to do**?

You will be invited to take part in a focus group session, to share your experiences of being a birth child within a foster family with other group members. The group will consist of six-eight birth children over the age of 18 who have lived in a foster family where there has been at least one stable placement of a foster child. I will facilitate a group discussion using a pre-designed interview schedule. The focus group will be recorded using a Dictaphone, so that the data can be analysed. I will also be videoing myself during the focus group so that I can improve on my interview techniques.

You may also be invited to take part in an individual in-depth interview at a time that will be mutually agreed. These interviews will take place at the nearest council offices to where the participant lives. This interview will be so that you can share your experiences of being a birth child within a foster family.

All recordings will be used for analysis and stored in a secure place until the research is complete when they will then be destroyed.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

The main reasonable foreseeable disadvantages or risks in taking part in this research could be recalling any negative experiences or feelings that you have had in relation to living with foster children. If any participants experience any emotional difficulties from taking part in the study they can take a break from the focus group/interview or withdraw at any time of the research. They will also have the option of talking about any of their feelings with myself of my research supervisor after the focus group/interview has been completed and the recording equipment turned off. These discussions will not be included as part of the research.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

It is possible that by taking part in the study you may find the process supportive and cathartic, as you may not have had the opportunity to express you views or feel that they have been taken into account in the past. There is also hopefully an intended benefit to the CLA population. A more in-depth understanding of what strategies and resources birth children use to maintain relationships with CLA children may help towards supporting more CLA placement to remain stable.

The research may also benefit CLA and birth children if the findings help to develop policies and practices throughout the local authority in relation to support and understanding for birth children within a foster family.

**What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

It is unlikely that the research study will be stopped earlier than expected, but if this is the case you will be informed and reasons will be provided.

**What if something goes wrong?**

If for any reason you were to have a complaint during any of the research I will be happy to listen in the first instance. You also have the opportunity of contacting my supervising tutor via email: [m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:m.j.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). If you do not feel that your complaint has been resolved or handled to your satisfaction you can contact the University’s Registrar and Secretary via email: [registrar@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@sheffield.ac.uk).

**Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected from you while completing the project will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. In signing the consent form you will be giving permission for myself and my research supervisors to have restricted access to your data once is has been anonymised. During the research tasks, you will be referred to by your first initial and may adopt a pseudonym if desired.

**Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recording

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the project will be written up and form part of my thesis, which may also be published in a journal. You will not be identifiable in any reports of publications. You will have access to the research summary, once the thesis is completed and approved. You will be informed of where you can obtain a copy of the completed thesis. If the data is published in a journal you will be advised and have the option of receiving a copy of the report.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research project is part of the requirements for completion of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology and does not have any sponsorship or funding.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield’s Education Department ethics review procedure.

**Contact for further information**

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. If you have any further questions or concerns then please do not hesitate to contact me Susan Youngson

Susan Youngson

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Local Authority

Information removed

Work Telephone number \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*\* – a message will be passed on to me if I am not available.

[sjyoungson1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:sjyoungson1@sheffield.ac.uk)

The supervising tutor for this project is Dr \*\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* and his contact details are as follows:

Dr \*\*\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Information Removed

## Appendix 4 – Consent form

**Participant Consent Form**

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| **Title of Project:** Stable Foster Placements – Experience of birth children’s relationships and support.  **Name of Researcher:** Susan Youngson  Participant Identification Number for this project: **Please initial box**   1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the above   project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.   1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. (To withdraw please contact Susan Youngson at susan.youngson@eastriding .gov.uk).      1. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.  I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.      1. I agree to being recorded using audio tape and that the researcher can record herself   using video tape   1. I agree to take part in the above research project.   \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Name of Participant Date Signature  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Lead Researcher Date Signature  *To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*  Copies:  *Once this has been signed by both parties the participant will receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and information sheet. A copy for the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project’s main record, which will be kept in a secure location.* |

## Appendix 5 – Synopsis for the Fostering Newsletter

**Research involving Foster Carer’s birth children.**

My name is Susan Youngson. I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist, working in \*\*\*\*\*\*\* Local Authority. As part of my doctoral training I am conducting research into the experience of how birth children maintain relationships with foster children that are cared for by their parents within the family home. I would like participants above the age of 18 to take part in my research in a focus group and individual interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies that they use to make and maintain relationships with foster children and also what support they feel they have had to do so. For more detailed information see the attached information sheet and flyer.

## Appendix 6 – Natural Siblings Information

**Natural Sibling 1 -** NSM 1 was a white British male who lived in a family that consisted of two NS, mother and father. He was the eldest of two brothers. He was 20 and his younger brother was 18. NSM 1 was in his second year of University so lived away during university term time. The family were registered as long term foster carers and had been fostering for approximately ten years. They had looked after approximately eight children. The initial CLA was older than NSM1 but subsequent children have all been younger than him within the household. Some of the children had stayed for a longer period of time (two years plus) and the family have also had children that have stayed for shorter periods of time as well as children placed in respite foster care. The family, at the time of interviewing had two young children in their care.

**Natural Sibling 2 -** NSF 2 was a white British female who lived in a family that consisted of three NS, mother and father. She was the youngest of the three siblings. She was 19, her older brother is 26 and older sister was 30. She still lives within the family home; her elder brother and sister now reside in their own properties. The family were registered as long term or short term foster carers but had more recently moved in looking after young people on an assisted living capacity, which means that the CLA are generally over the age of 18. The family have fostered more than 180 children. The children and young people in their care have been older and younger than NSF2. The family had fostered prior to NSF2 being born but took a break of five years and restarted fostering when NS 2 was five. Many of the children have stayed for longer periods of time (two years plus) and the family have also had children that have stayed for shorter periods of time. At the time of interviewing the family had two young people on an assisted living capacity.

**Natural Sibling 3 -** NSF 3 was Chinese. Her father was from China and originally lived in Hong Kong. She lived in a family that consisted of one natural sibling, one adopted sibling and her mother. Her father lives in China and she hasn’t lived with him since she was seven. She was 24, her older brother is 27 and her younger adopted brother is 21, he is Downs Syndrome. The family used the look after children in Hong Kong prior to moving to England and had predominantly looked after children with disabilities. The family were registered as short term foster and respite carers although a number of children have stayed longer. Since NSF3 was 17 her Mum has looked after babies, until recently as they are now looking after an older children, it is possible that at least one of those children may become a long term foster child. The family have looked after many children but NSF3 was unsure of how many although knows it is in the double digits. At the time of the interviewing the family had one older child.

**Natural Sibling 4 –** NSM 4 was a white a white British Male who lived in a family that consisted of two NS, a mother and father. He was the younger of the two siblings. He was 20, his older sister was 22; she did not live in the family home, she lived abroad. The family were registered as long term foster carers but have more recently been looking to continue fostering on a respite basis. The family had fostered just one child who had recently left under difficult circumstances. The child that was in the families care was younger than NSM4. At the time of interviewing the family had no CLA within their care.

**Natural Sibling 5 -** NSF 5 was a white British female who lived in a family that consisted of four NS, mother and father. She was the youngest of the four siblings. She was 19, her older brother was 27 and older sisters were 29 and 23. She still lived within the family home although was due to move to start university the month of the interview; her elder brother and sisters reside in their own properties. The family were registered as short term foster carers but due to the circumstances of the CLA, many had stayed longer term. The family had fostered approximately seven children. The children and young people in their care have all been younger than NSF5. The family initially fostered babies but more recently have fostered older children with the eldest child that they had fostered being 12. At the time of interviewing the family had two young people aged eight and 12.

**Natural Sibling 6 -** NSM 6 was a white British male who lived in a family that consisted of one natural sibling, one half sibling, two adopted siblings, and four CLA, mother and father. He was the youngest of the eight siblings. He was 24 and his elder natural sister was 33. His half brother would have been approximately 40 but he died approximately 10 years ago. He was unsure of the ages of the two adopted elder brothers, as they had been adopted before he was born; one of them had died approximately five years ago. He was also unsure of the ages of the one of the male CLA as he was older and had been looked after prior and after he was born, the other male CLA was the same age as NSM 6, they had grown up together. The other two CLA were older females, both of whom had been looked after before he was born. NSM 6 still lived within the family home. The family had been registered as long term and short term foster carers. He thought the family had had approximately 10 CLA since he had been born. The children the family fostered tended to stay long term and then leave the family home as adults. Latterly the family had moved on to fostering babies, but had made a conscious decision to take a break approximately two years ago. There were no CLA in the home at the time of the interview.

## Appendix 7 – Researcher Interview Schedule

Interview schedule – Researcher.

**Prior to the interview**

* Explain to participants that the interview is about their experiences, so hopefully they will be doing the majority of the speaking.
* Explain my position and my attempt at bracketing and epoche, but that participants will be able to have a discussion with me after the interview if they so wished.

Research Questions

* What are NS experiences of making and maintain relationships with CLA in their parents care?
* To what extent and how are these relationships facilitated?
* **I would like to start by asking you about your family, birth siblings? foster siblings?**

*Prompt* *; any other birth children? Where you lie within the birth children? How old were you when your mum/dad started fostering? How long have mum/dad been fostering? How many foster children have your mum/dad had?*

* **Could you describe your overall experience/feelings about fostering?**

*Prompt Positives? Negatives?*

* **When/How do you find out that your parents are getting a new foster child?**
* **Do you know in advance about what has happened in the child’s life before they join your family?**
* **How would you describe your relationships with the children that are fostered?**

*Prompt – Anything that affects that?*

* **What helps to make your relationships positive with the fostered children?**
* **If you have a problem/difficulty with a foster child, how do you resolve it?**

*Prompt – Who do you turn to for help?*

* **How do you feel you support the young people that are in your mum and Dads care?**

*Prompt If so How? Have you ever thought of yourself as support? Have you ever thought about it in that way?*

* **Is there anything that you think may help BC build relationships with foster children?**

*Prompt…. Parents?.... Social worker?......systems?*

* **We are nearly at the end of the interview, is there anything else that you feel you may like to add?**

## Appendix 8 – Interview Schedule – Participants

Interview schedule – Participant

* I would like to start by asking you about your family, birth siblings? foster siblings?
* Could you describe your overall experience/feelings about fostering?
* When/How do you find out that your parents are getting a new foster child?
* Do you know in advance about what has happened in the child’s life before they join your family?
* How would you describe your relationships with the children that are fostered?
* What helps to make your relationships positive with the fostered children?
* If you have a problem/difficulty with a foster child, how do you resolve it?

* How do you feel you support the young people that are in your mum and Dads care?
* Is there anything that you think may help you build relationships with foster children?
* We are nearly at the end of the interview, is there anything else that you feel you may like to add?

## Appendix 9 – Initial reflections on the Interviews

**NSM 1**

He was the first participant that I interviewed after I had made the phone calls. I had previously met his Dad at some fostering training so I felt that the family as a whole may be interested in the research. Initially I couldn’t decide if he was talking with an American accent but realised later this was just the way he spoke. He initially came across as quite quiet and seemed a little nervous, I was concerned that I may do more or the talking than I had wanted to. I already had preconceived ideas that interviewing boys may be more difficult as they may say less. I think as the pilot interview had gone so well I felt that I may have been worried that this wouldn’t go so well for some reason. My thoughts were unfounded and the interview went really well.

The felt that although I asked all of the questions on the interview schedule, the interview was still tailored to my participant’s discussion by moving in the direction that he spoke and exploring the ideas that he had. I was able to pick up and discuss aspects that he spoke about and gain a deeper understanding. I was conscious that early on in the interview I had made a comment about my experience but quickly realised that and was able to adapt for the rest of the interview and manage to bracket my own experiences more successfully. I feel however that many of my subsequent questions, even though prompted by what he said, may equally have been prompted by subconscious experiences of my own.

Generally his experiences were less positive than the pilot interview, however there appeared to be an instant theme that had come out of my pilot interview and my discussion with my mentor about it.

I also kept catching myself asking multiple questions in one sentence although I felt he managed to explain his thoughts very carefully. I felt he was very careful to be respectful about the children that had been in his parent’s care, while showing a real insight into how he viewed fostering and his relationships with the young people. I was unsure if he was keeping some of his negative thoughts to himself as I had the feeling that he was holding back slightly.

Towards the end of the interview he mentioned his younger brother and that I could interview him too and that I would probably get a very different picture. His brother had been on the list of young people, but I had decided to only interview one participant per family, providing I had the number of participants, however I felt that if his brother wanted to talk then I would interview him providing at outset I explained that I may not use the data. His brother wanted to talk to me so I interviewed him too but have not used the interview within the research as I wanted to interview unrelated siblings.

**NSF 2**

She came across as very young and more immature than her age. My initial thoughts were almost of protection of her and I remember feeling that I possibly talked to her as a younger child. Initially I think she may have been nervous as there was a lot of what appeared to be nervous laughter. She was very sweet natured. As soon as she said that the family had had over 180 children and described the household as busy I realised that I would need to be really careful to continue the interview with epochè and try to bracket aside my own feelings as straight away this household resonated more with my own upbringing. Equally as she was the youngest sibling (although there were only three siblings) this also stirred feelings with myself being the youngest sibling. She was very accepting of her mum fostering and it seemed like a very positive experience for her.

As the interview progressed she appeared much less immature at times and had a really good insight into the role that she may play as support for foster children, while at others seemingly dropping back into sounding quite young. She wasn’t always able to elaborate on what she was saying and did say ‘I don’t know’ quite a lot.

She was already working in a nursery and it struck me that her whole experience of growing up with foster children may be shaping her future especially as she has already considered fostering herself. Considering her mum was only 21 when she started fostering it would be interesting that she may go down the same route.

The interview felt more like a mother daughter interview, possibly because she was a similar age to my own daughter. I almost had a sense of pride for her that it has been such a good experience for her and couldn’t help but think about my own early experiences of fostering as to lots of them being good times too, something which during the interview I was constantly trying to bracket as to stay true to the IPA methodology. I do wonder if my feelings of the younger/older person may have resulted in me not allowing those silences that are beneficial for her to voice her thoughts and me feeling the need to ‘help and rescue her’ may have limited what she has said. On listening back to the tapes there were times that I think I interrupted when I shouldn’t have done.

It also went through my mind that I may see this participant again as she worked at one of the nurseries that I supported and how nice that may be for both of us.

**NSF 3**

My initial impressions were that she appeared very mature. I could hear an American accent and later in the interview found out that she has been living in New York. I felt an instant warmth towards her and again almost felt that I wanted to protect her through the interview. She came across as a little sad but very, very articulate and clever. I was able to build up an instant rapport with her. Initially when she began to talk to me about her mum fostering babies I felt that I may not find out experiences in relation to my research question but this turned out not to be the case. I was happy with the way this interview went as I felt that she did lots of the talking with a lot less prompts from me. When we got the part of the interview where she got upset, I really felt for her, she didn’t go into detail about the incident but it was clear that there had been some sort of allegation that had not been confirmed. It had clearly left some emotional scares which I could really relate to, as there had been a number of incidents throughout my own childhood/adulthood in relation to fostering. I found it difficult not to cry with her as I really understood her emotions although I was able to bracket my own experiences off at this point and concentrate on her. She was able to continue with the interview and managed really well to compose herself and carry on. I was really pleased how I handled it, as although it was a very sensitive issue, it was one that I wanted to hear more about. I felt I left sufficient time between her composing herself and then coming back to the issue to allow her to open up more if she felt she could, which she did. I equally related to how she described her experience in relation to the older child that may become long term and felt that although continually trying to bracket my own experiences, again sub-consciously my own thoughts may have reflected what type of questions I asked. Although again we talked about all of the questions on the interview schedule I felt I was naturally able to explore the topics and subjects that she talked about. I felt that in some way this participant had been more affected by her family fostering. There seemed to be a little more sadness attached to how she spoke.

I also felt that I managed to listen better with this participant and interrupt less. This may have had something to do with the sadness that she portrayed and that she spoke very calmly and slowly which I feel may have helped me to slow down my approach and my thinking.

**NSM 4**

My initial impressions were that he was unsure of what he should and shouldn’t say. The CLA had only fairly recently left the household after a long stay of seven years, in a placement that had been intended to be long term. As the interview progressed I felt that NS 4 relaxed more and also revealed more, however I felt that I had to do lots more questioning and consider how I asked the questions to enable full responses. He actually appeared quite sad at the outcome of the CLA leaving although relieved as he was concerned at how it had impacted on the family, especially his mum. Again I really felt for him when he was describing the difficulties in relation to how it had impacted on his family however I felt that I was able to keep my emotions more intact, possibly because he was quite matter of fact about it and showed his emotions less than NS 3 did. I also thought about how can such experiences not have an impact on someone’s future relationships but felt that I managed well to push these thoughts out of my mind to try and concentrate on the immediate experience of interviewing him and it being his experiences and not mine. As the interview progressed I really feel that I was able to delve deeper into the experiences that he had by asking questions that helped him to explore those experiences deeper. I felt I was able to sit with the silences more which helped the participant think and gather his thoughts together. He appeared to genuinely like talking to me and I feel that towards the end of the interview he was feeling relieved to just talk through some of the difficulties with fostering with someone else who understood. He was very protective over his mum and clearly the difficulties that they had faced with the CLA had left negative feelings. Feelings that he may benefit from talking through with the social worker.

**NSF5**

This participant had expressed an interest in the research from very early on while she was employed as an Au Pair in Spain. Her parents had contacted her and then we proceeded to communication via email. She was prepared to have an interview over skype, which I considered but felt that I would prefer to complete the interview face to face. As she was returning to the UK to start her University studies in the September, we agreed to arrange a date on her return. From the start of the interview I felt easy talking to her. She could articulate very well what she wanted to say and was very insightful into her experiences. The experience of fostering for her has been an extremely positive one although she still described finding the first child to leave very difficult. She described fostering as ‘life changing’ as she appreciated how naïve she was and how the fostering experience has opened her eyes to a different world that she was not used to. She felt that it had had a positive experience on the whole of her family and described a very warm loving family. I felt most of the time I was able to complete this interview with epochè and was quickly able to bracket my own thoughts and bring myself back to the interview in hand. I felt that I was able to help her reflect back on her own experiences and assist her to consider more deeply some of the initial thoughts that she had by using follow up questions, using her own words. This interview felt very natural and comfortable and I felt that although everything on the schedule was covered it was covered depending on how the conversation went.

**NSM6**

I anticipated that this interview would possibly entail me doing more of the talking as during my initial phone calls with NSM6’s mum she had said she thought that he would not want to take part, but when she asked him, he agreed. She had said that she was unsure of how much he would speak to me. He did give shorter answers than most of the other participants; however I still felt that this was a really good interview. We seemed to be able to build up a rapport early on in the conversation and I felt that he relaxed as the conversation went on. When NSM 6 started to describe his family, he really appeared to be thinking who was who. The family tree discussion was quite complicated as there were NS, adopted children, CLA and step-siblings from a previous marriage, prior to and after NSM 6 being born. The interview was fairly short in length and in this particular family the parents had adopted a number of children and most of the long term foster children have lived with the family beyond the age that a child is deemed to be fostered. There had also been two deaths in the family; one adopted son and half sibling, which NSM 6 was able to talk about. The Foster Carers had moved on to supporting short term baby placements and have since taken a break from fostering after 45 years. NSM6 was extremely positive in relation to the fostering and just sees all of the foster children that his parents have looked after long term or adopted as being his brothers and sisters; apart from the babies as they were only there for a short period of time. I felt while this interview stuck to the schedule more in line with how the questions were written, although we still discussed specifics of his family life and experiences.

## Appendix 10 – An example of a transcript with initial ideas & coding

### *Step 1 & 2 of the analysis*

Participant 3 – Female Aged 24 Length 51 minutes

Descriptive comments – Standard text, Linguistic comments – *Italic text,* - Conceptual/Interpretive comments - Underlined text,

Relating to my own personal experience – Green Text

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Coding |  | Transcript | Noting down initial ideas |
| Differentiate between NS, Adopted and FC  Can’t remember a life before fostering.  Fostering Babies & children with disabilities  Mum that wanted to foster.  Short Term fostering  Different relationship when its babies  Knowledge of the NS (or lack of)  FC that are younger than NS  Not Dads thing but Mums  Dad just went along with it  Mostly positive – not a lot has affected me (but throughout the interview I feel it has) Affected – not being asked to do things  Not considering how it has made her feel but just thinking about practical things like what she has been asked to do, with regareds to being ‘affected’?  Children coming for a short time and then they stay longer – hard to build up relationships when you don’t know  Respite carer but unsure if short term long term due to babies/children staying longer  Knowledge of different age groups  Will need to consider how she can relate to the child  Actively thinking about how to relate to child  Babies different to older children  Children’s past issues prior to coming into care affect how NS can relate.  Effect on NS – Hiding in her room/backing off  Lack of own space  Not knowing everything about the FC – difficult relationships  Whole other life of FC  Being in contact with own family and how that affects their behaviour.  Not knowing the FC background  Not being Part of the decision for children to stay longer  FC being let down affects the NS (different with babies)  Dealing with difficult behaviours  Contact for FC & how that affects the NS  Getting to grips with FC past life  NS having no choice re FC coming to stay  Lack of notice for FC – possibility of resentment  Children coming for a short period of time and then staying longer.  Children coming with no warning  Impact of FC on NS own time – wanting attention (not the same for babies)  Feeling that NS was struggling to say what she really felt.  Holding back  Large age gaps between FC and NS  Better matching of FC to NS  Lack of direct information for NS that are over 18.  Reliance of info to be passed from SW to NS via mother.  Who should know what about the FC – Adults over 18 in the house?  Hesitation about relationship with older FC – not keen?  Emotional effects of difficulties that her mum has faced and how that impacts on her… with no support from anyone.  Ongoing emotional trauma  Mother in therapy – what about NS support.  NS just have to put up with their parents fostering  NS (brother) Not taking part/wanting to take part in the fostering  Positive impact on NS for taking care of FC  FC that are in care earlier when NS know where they have come from can make relationships easier  Age gap makes a difference to NS  Age difference can be both positive and negative  The family unit and the difference it works depends on the relationships that are formed  Marital split? Different cultures?  A negative experience can affect the way NS relate to FC  Dealing with the sudden ending of a placement  NS being supported in how to deal with loss on an ongoing basis  Self protection  Protection of family members – especially Mum  Holding back – Self protection  Different age group of FC depending on the family make up.  Acceptance that babies will move on  Dealing with loss  Fostering fulfilling a need in the Foster Mother  Emotional ties – keeping a child long term that hadn’t been the intention  Pressure from SS  Fostering affecting the life choices of NS ie becoming a mother or not  Practice how to look after children  Affect on NS choice of having children  Learning how to have good relationships with people  Fostering in part may have an impact on career decisions (as well as family circumstances)  Social services not considering the NS in the family when making decisions  Mum taking the NS feelings in to consideration  Mum protecting her own NS as SS don’t consider them  Comfort in knowing that her mum takes consideration about how she feels about fostering  Lack of contact from SS for the NS  NS not feeling listened to.  No support from anyone  No training – lack of training for NS  Didn’t know what support was out there?  May not have used support groups if it had been offered  Recognised the Practical support for babies  Would like support and guidance for older children  Didn’t think of herself as a supporter  Doesn’t see the support she offers ie big sister, good role model, living a stable life.  A relationship of some sort - difficulty in making a relationship with a younger FC  Unsure about the relationship  Fostering experience helping her clarify what she does and doesn’t want in her own life.  Practice run.  Understand responsibility  Impact of fostering on life choices  Generally about how you build relationships with anyone not just FC  Mum taking on the responsibility and her knowing that it’s her mums responsibility and not hers.  Knowing expectations – open conversations with NS about the responsibility of FC  Negative view of social workers – need to build up relationships with SW and NS  Involvement of SW with NS  Lack of understanding of the pressure of SW  SS not thinking of the family as a whole  Lack of organisation and coordination of SW & SS  Impact of contact for FC on the family as a whole  Frustration with SS  Possible animosity between NS & FC when contact affects family life.  Feelings of being let down associated with fostering  Communication & availability of training courses for older NS  Interested in training  Usefulness of lifelong learning associated to fostering  Mum mainly completed training  Emergency placements makes systems difficult  Age of child makes placement difficult  Circumstances  Introductions may help (clearly the nature of the circumstances affect that)  NS not being involved in introduction of the FC or when new FC come into care.  Guarded with relationships after being let down with contact after the 2nd foster child – early experiences affect how relationships are built up with subsequent FC  NS Letting go – dealing with losses  Length of stay affects relationships.  Knowledge of circumstances and possible length of stay  Increased knowledge of the legal process may help  A lack of trust in the knowledge that SS will do the ‘right thing’ by the NS when children are placed.  FM own desire to help children can be a difficulty for NS which can in turn affect relationships  A sense of NS just putting up with things – it’s all they have ever known | 486  487  488  489  490  491  492  493  494  495  496  497  498  499  500  501  502  503  504  505  506  507  508  509  510  511  512  513  514  515  516  517  518  519  520  521  522  523  524  525  526  527  528  529  530  531  532  533  534  535  536  537  538  539  540  541  542  543  544  545  546  547  548  549  550  551  552  553  554  555  556  557  558  559  560  561  562  563  564  565  566  567  568  569  570  571  572  573  574  575  576  577  578  579  580  581  582  583  584  585  586  587  588  589  590  591  592  593  594  595  596  597  598  599  600  601  602  603  604  605  606  607  608  609  610  611  612  613  614  615  616  617  618  619  620  621  622  623  624  625  626  627  628  629  630  631  632  633  634  635  636  637  638  639  640  641  642  643  644  645  646  647  648  649  650  651  652  653  654  655  656  657  658  659  660  661  662  663  664  665  666  667  668  669  670  671  672  673  674  675  676  677  678  679  680  681  682  683  684  685  686  687  688  689  690  691  692  693  694  695  696  697  698  699  700  701  702  703  704  705  706  707  708  709  710  711  712  713  714  715  716  717  718  719  720  721  722  723  724  725  726  727  728  729  730  731  732  733  734  735  736  737  738  739  740  741  742  743  744  745  746  747  748  749  750  751  752  753  754  755  756  757  758  759  760  761  762  763  764  765  766  767  768  769  770  771  772  773  774  775  776  777  778  779  780  781  782  783  784  785  786  787  788  789  790  791  792  793  794  795  796  797  798  799  800  801  802  803  804  805  806  807  808  809  810  811  812  813  814  815  816  817  818  819  820  821  822  823  824  825  826  827  828  829  830  831  832 | I: So I will start by asking you who you class as family?  P: Who I class as my family… well my immediate family, I have my mum, I’ve got two brothers, one older, one younger, who is adopted. I have a father, whom I haven’t lived with since I was 7. He is over in China. I have some extended family as well, but I barely see them because.… I barely see the ones in England even though there in England…. I barely see the others because there in Hong Kong but I see them more often than I do the English family because we go over there and they come over here, so… I: So you are the middle child? How old is your older sibling?  P: Yep I’m the middle child, the older one is three years older than I am so he is 27 almost 28 now, and the younger one is three years younger so he is 21 almost 22. Almost exactly, I’m the end of October, I a week or two later and the other is two weeks after that.  I: Do you know how old you were when your mum started fostering?  P: Ah let’s see.. I know that they used to foster back in Hong Kong, at least they looked after kids and that’s how they came to adopt my younger brother in the first place…. I think. I’m not entirely sure, because I was about 4 at that time. We’ve sort of semi always had someone in, whether it was respite.. We had a little girl who came into respite after we moved back here, a small child, my mum used to mainly have kids who had disabilities, like learning disabilities and stuff like that. Fostering at this point where my mum is currently doing it, she started when I was in 6th form, so I was 17 when we had our first baby.  I: Ah have they been babies that you have mostly had? Through choice?  P: Yes they have been mostly babies and yes it was a conscious choice for my mum, I think at that point she had three like children who had grown up and she was like, ah ok, it’s enough children, I’ll just deal with the babies… because they don’t generally stay that long, I don’t think...the babies.. because we have had a few of them from birth.. and they either go back to their families or they get adopted.  I: So the three that she had a long time, did they start young and then  P: Let’s see.. the ones that stayed the longest.. I think the first one that we had generally.. she was from 9 days old and the other girl was from a few days old as well.. we have had quite a few of them… she has got a wall that is covered in pictures of babies that she has had that has been like…. It’s been in the double digits in the past few years… so some of them have only stayed for a week or two.. but for most of them it’s been at least a few months.  I: Wow.. so it may be slightly different how you would build up a relationship with babies maybe?  P: Yeah, it’s always been a strange thing.. because I was so old when we started with those ones… I wasn’t ever sure.. like are they a foster sibling or are they a baby that we happen to be looking after…not that I have ever quantified it.  I: When you were younger, were any children a similar age to you?  P: Erm.. when I was younger, they were mostly my younger brothers age or younger than that.  I: Ah so you are not quite sure how many your mum and dad have had. Is it just your mum that fosters now?  P: Yeah it’s just my mum now. Technically when we were in Hong Kong it was my dad as well, but it was never his thing, it was my mums. He had a job and I’m not so sure how seriously he took it. Erm but.. yeah it is pretty much my mum that’s.. it’s her personality I think.  I: What would you describe is your overall experience of fostering? Positive or negative.  P: Overall experience.. well.. I’m not sure.. It’s mostly been positive… just a lot of it hasn’t affected me too much. I’m not really sure…  I: When you say affected, what do you mean by that?  P: Erm.. with the babies and the 10 yr old we have now.. occasionally we would babysit, but apart from that my mum used to do everything and I just continued to do my own teenager thing.  I: How does it make you feel having a… how long have you had the 10 yr old?  P: We have had her much longer than we thought we would. She was only going to be there.. I think she came on an emergency placement for like a weekend, and this was two or three months ago I think. In fact a few weeks before the summer holidays, and she stayed and she is going to be here until at least November, as far as I know and they are possibly talking about long term, but we are not sure.  I: Is your mum short term or long term fostering?  P: I think she… ,my mum hasn’t done long term… its always been.. what’s the term for it… its always been like bridging ones…or something… because she has mostly done under 3’s and its never something that’s meant to be until they are 18.. So this is a new development.  I: Right.. so does that make you feel/think any differently about this particular child or…?  P: With this particular one.. I get a bit nervous because I don’t necessarily know how to interact with the older children… she has a lot like.. and I never thought they would be more than a few years at a time.. and if its long term.. she will be around for at least another… let’s see if she is 10 now it will be like another 8 years at least… and that’s a very different situation.  I: Very different to babies, isn’t it?  P: Very, very different, erm.. because we have had a couple of kids.. we had one.. I think the second year when I was about 18, who was around 2 or 3 and she had emotional attachment issues and every minute that I was in sight it was Nina..Nina…Nina… Nina..Nina.. Nina[name changed] , look at this.. look at this. Most of them haven’t been like that but the one we have got now, I walk through the door after being at work all day and it will be ‘I’ve done this and I’ve done that.. look at this… look at that’ .. I’ve possibly taken to hiding in my room sometimes..[laughs…we both laugh] but yeah its.. its…  I: How does it make you feel having almost a younger sibling that you did know was going to be?  P: yeah.. it’s very odd [laughs].  I: In what way?  P: Erm… it’s just because even with my younger brother, we adopted him and so it was going to end up being long term.. I was very small and he was a baby at the time so I have grown up knowing pretty much everything that he knows but she’s had a whole other life before she came to us that she is aware of and still sees and…  I: Do you know about her other life?  P: I know parts of it, what she’s said, its mostly what she has said rather than occasional like you should be aware of this has happened.  I: So is she still in contact with her own family?  P: Yep.  I: I guess that’s very different from babies.  P: Yeah, they have contact but it’s different, they don’t get disappointed when people don’t show up or if they have fights with their siblings… and as I understand it these particular siblings are very volatile with each other.  I: And so do you see her get upset?  P: She doesn’t show it in front of me…Well, I know that she is upset because she will start to get very very silly and laughs a lot more a lot harder and yeah there is a lot of things that she has told me about that aren’t on the television that are far too expressive for me to have but that her sibling broke it, so she doesn’t have it anymore… yeah that’s the sort of.. yeah… ooh I can’t remember what I was going to say [laughs]  I: How do you find out when your mum is getting a new foster child?  P: she just tells me; she just says ok, we’ve got this happening. As soon as she knows that something is happening or could possibly happen she will tell me. Well at least while I wasn’t living at home she would just tell me oh.. we’ve got these new people….well like with C\*\*\*\* we knew sort of a day or two before or something like that… she said that there was a group of people that they were originally helping them but they then said they wanted to split them up, so she said it’s possible we might have a child coming at some point in the next few days… and then a few hours later it was….she’s coming tonight. She should only be here for a weekend… and then it just…  I: How does it make you feel when you get a foster child?  P: It depends on the child [laughs]…erm because most of them have been babies so sometimes they are very loud and sometimes they are very smiley… and it also depends on how much time I have to put in at work and what my schedules is like. At the moment the 10 year old is on her summer holidays. I, because it’s the summer holidays and I work at a cinema, I have more hours than usual so I’m a lot more tired.. but she has got a lot more time to fill. It’s very different from term time, she is more occupied and less all over the place and I less tiredness.  I: Do you see that as being any different from if she was a natural sibling.  P: Its possible, I think a lot of it is simply because I am 14 years older than her and I just have a different chill…but because it is still new to us and we haven’t figured everything out about each other and I think I would maybe be more used to it if she had grown up the whole time with us.  I: You get a bit of pre warning from you mum what about social services?  P: Oh no, I get all of my information through my mum.  I: Ok, so do you know anything about the child life yourself before they come?  P: It’s only what my mum shares with me. If it’s something that going to be necessary to know, I think, just within the context so I know not to do certain things.  I: You have already said it is different with younger but thinking of this child how would you describe your relationship with her?  P: Its er.. amicable..[pause] I’m not really sure as I’ve not really had a relationship with someone who is so much younger than me… I’m not sure what it’s usually like…  I: Ah ok you have nothing to compare it to. Going back to when I asked you at about the overall experience, you said you weren’t sure. Do you think there are any negatives?  P: I mean, yes there are some negatives, my mum has had some issues a few years ago, not that I think were her fault at all and she has been exonerated of anything but it was very traumatic for her and I wasn’t in the country at the time. And that is one of the things that makes me angry [participant cried].  I: I can see how it has upset you. How did you deal with that as a family, and how did you deal with it personally?  P: I had just moved to New York.. so I sort of.. acting classes actually do seem to have a lot of release… so I sort of used it there. I know my mother has been in therapy ever since which is paid for by \*\*\* but yeah it’s not changed much how we do things much we just talk about things a bit….  I: What about your brothers? Were they at home at the time?  P: My older brother hasn’t… we didn’t start fostering again until my older brother was at university and I think if he was still there we wouldn’t have as he is really really not a child person. So he came back from University at the Christmas and the first few years the babies would be there and he would sort of go like… [she pulls a face]. And then he came back the next year with his girlfriend...first girlfriend… but she has been there since so it’s a long term thing.. so it’s good. They were both sitting in the car next to the baby, my younger brother was in the back. Bearing in mind my younger brother was 15 at the time and he has Downs Syndrome, er the baby started crying, they both stared at her and it was \*\*\*\* his girlfriend who said ‘its crying, what do we do?’ [we both laugh] My younger brother reaches forward with a sigh, plumps the dummy in her mouth and was like [she puts up her hands and pulls a face][And he is Downs syndrome]. Yep.. It was just like…aww this is what you do.  I: So do you think that there is anything that does or could affect your relationship with the children that your mum looks after?  P: Er not sure, I guess I understand I have had a different kind of relationship with the kids to others, if they started fostering when they were very small. I’ve always had an age gap between me and the children.  I: Do you think having an age gap helps?  P: In some ways Yes, in some ways it might just be also that our family is quite…. It’s not that we are distant from each other but we are not very touchy feely like I know I have got a lot of friends who their siblings are their best friends and their parents are like an extension of friendships. I’ve got a friend who talks to her mother on the phone for at least two hours and they talk about everything. It’s very confusing for me because we just don’t do that and we never had.  I: Going back to the difficulty that your mum had and I’m sorry as I know you got a little bit upset, but do you think that would or could affect your relationships with any foster children that come into care?  P: Its possible…erm because the result of that was that the little girl was taken from us, I think my mum was actually thinking about adopting her.. or taking her on long time… we had had her since she was born. It’s always a weird dance anyway trying to figure out how attached to get to someone and how not to because with foster kids they are always going to move on somewhere pretty much… so…  I: Do you feel there is an almost holding back then.. sometimes.  P: I think there is a lot of that, yeah.. I have also got the added, wonderfulness of we have moved around a lot and I’ve moved schools a lot and I make friends but there are only very few who have actually have stayed my friends to this day because you go in and you know you are going to leave at some point.  I: Do you think that helps with the way you are with foster children or I don’t know?  P: Again.. it’s mostly been babies… so you know, you sing to them… you coo with them and then they go on and have their lives and they grow up from this big and then they form their new family….well their permanent family.  I: Do you know why your mum chose to have babies?  P: I think a lot of it was an energy thing… my mum loves babies and she has quite an impressive collection of prams, like coach built, like silver cross prams, like we have.. I think there are two or three of them in the garage, there’s two of them in the conservatory, she might have some more hiding somewhere that I’m not sure about, she has got a lot of prams and there are old ones that she has restored or… she takes great pride in pushing babies around in those. If we did take on the 10 year old long term, it’s on the condition that we can still have babies, I think my mums had enough of children mostly.  I: So I know I feel like we may have discussed this one to death but do you that there is anything that you thinks makes the relationship positive with children in your mums care?  P: I’m really not sure…. erm.. I’m not sure.  I: Just thinking again what we have talked about, do you think the experience of, your experience of fostering has or will make a difference to the way you have or will form relationships in the future.  P: Maybe… I do know that for the foreseeable future I have no plans to have my own family… but I’ve also maintained, partially because I have grown up around it and partially because I don’t want to push a child out. If I ever did have a family, I might want to adopt them rather than carry them myself because first of all I don’t think you need to carry your own child for it to be a good relationship and also because there are so many children there that need homes not just in this country but all over the place  I: Do you think you mum fostering has helped you come to that conclusion or do you just think you did anyway?  P: Who knows… who knows…. It’s one of those chicken and egg kind of questions.... I think yeah…because growing up… I think… and it might just be because as part of society you think that you grow up… you have a family… and you do all of this stuff… I’ve also, because of the profession that I have chosen, because it quite often requires a lot of moving around and not much stability… I also don’t know if I want to have a family because of that….because it wouldn’t be fair necessarily. There are a lot of factors… its very confusing.  I: We have touched upon this.. if you have had a problem, I know its slightly different for you with the children being younger or something where you feel any difficulties to do with fostering, who do you go to and how is it resolved?  P: Again, it’s just my mother, the babies...they come whatever, especially with this long term possibility my mum was very clear that… because apparently social services don’t always think about what the actual people that are doing the fostering have going on in their own lives… erm my mum had to remind them that she does have a family and we live there as well and that any decision that she makes will also have to be also based on what we feel.  I: And does your mum have those discussions with you about what you feel… does that make a difference to if the child stays?  P: Yes it does make a difference, because if I wasn’t comfortable with it, she would say no.  I: And do you feel that social services take that into account? Your feelings?  P: I don’t know, I… the last time I really spoke with someone from social services was before I move away and I think I was about 18 years old, maybe 19 and no one has really sat down one on one with me to have a discussion about any other stuff, it was more ok, so you are over 18 so we need to get a CRB check done because you are living in the house… that was pretty much…. I guess its DBS now.  I: So does anybody give you support in how you should react with these children, how you should/could form friendships with these children… I know the babies are slightly different, but the 10 year old might not be.  P: No.  I: Any training that you have had access to?  P: No, I think… the only training that I did was again when I was still in 6th form.. me and my mum went to a first aid course, which included first aid of small children…but apart from that.. I think that was the only thing.  I: And when you were younger did you know or did you have the option of going to any sort of sibling support groups or people that foster?  P: I wasn’t aware of any… so..  I: If you had been would you have gone?  P: I don’t know… I’m not one for social situations… so who knows.  I: What about support in a different way… do you feel that you support the young people that your mum fosters?  P: Well the babies, I play with them… feed them when needed to, change them if needed… but it was mostly just sort of… well babies are just there they are kind of easy in some ways.. Difficult in others… but you know they are easy to please and keep happy. Honestly I’m not sure with c\*\*\* (the 10 year old) now, I think she likes me.  I: Have you ever looked upon yourself as a supporter and a carer?  P: Not really, it’s always been like my mum is the carer.. and sort of..  I: But you are in the house too and are still doing some of the caring role.  P: I mean… I haven’t really done much… I sort of babysit occasionally… but mostly just…. I don’t think C\*\*\*\*\* looks to me as…. I think she sees me as an adult... but not like an adult… but I think… maybe it might just be because I am younger so….it’s different.  I: you already mentioned that… I don’t think it was C\*\*\*\* that you were talking about but another child, who when you came in they were showing you things all the time  P: Ah yes….  I: Do you see that as any sort of support for the child.. or a relationship with the child?  P: I suppose it is a relationship and some sort of support when you give them any attention and I try to give a due amount of attention but also not…. I don’t want to build up some expectations that when I am around all I will focus on is them. I also don’t think that that is any healthier than completely ignoring anyone. I also am trying to avoid getting to the point where I either… what am I saying…. I don’t want to build up some sort of expectation that I will always play, because quite frankly I’m not always in a correct mood to… and I need to be able to disappear if I need to. That’s also why I also have plans ever of being a foster carer myself….none. I couldn’t do it.  I: Do you think that is because of your experience of being within a foster family?  P: I think I’m just… I really like being able to do what I want to do… I don’t know if it’s because I’m stubborn or set in my ways but it’s just sort of the same reasons that I don’t want, not to equate children to animals but it’s also a reason I don’t want to have a pet of my own, I like playing with other peoples pets but I don’t want to be responsible for another life and making sure they’re happy, its feeding them its walking them, you know it’s everything that comes with it and I just don’t want that responsibility.  I: Do you think your experience of being in a foster family has led you to some of those conclusions?  P: It’s probable that some of it is that, yes very probable.  I: Is there anything that you think, I know a lot of the children have been younger, but thinking of the 10 year old as well, but that might help natural siblings build positive relationships with foster children?  P: I’m not really sure what, because it’s building relationships with anyone and I guess most people that foster their kids themselves possibly knows.  I: I’m thinking of your parents.. is there anything that your mum could do or does do that helps you to build relationships up with foster children?  P: I think, my mum has always been helpful in that for example my younger brother, he has always had health problems and at the moment he has a tube or something that he has that washes down with saline and all that stuff and she has always made it very clear that that is not my responsibility at all and that she has set up or has been talking about setting up for years but just hasn’t got round to it, the what would happen to my younger brother if anything happened to her and that she does not want the responsibility to go to me or my older brother because it’s not our responsibility and I think that that is also something that she has brought into the fostering where she is saying it’s not my responsibility but occasionally she will want me to babysit.  I: But that helps her making it clear that it’s not your responsibility?  P: Yes, she says that she is the one being the primary care giver, yes occasionally help out, but she is the primary care giver and that’s not expected of me.  I: And what about anybody else? What about the social worker, do you think that there is anything that they could do to help build positive relationships with children?  P: I just, I don’t know if you have picked up on my feelings towards social workers? and they have been the same for a number of years. They just need to listen, to actually listen to people when they are saying things to them because I think they can be very short sighted and basically some of the decisions that I am aware have been made don’t appear to have been made in the best interests of the child at all. Erm like at the moment C\*\*\*\* is having a lot of contact. She’s had so many contacts this Summer because she’s got two siblings to have contact with as well as two parents where she has to have contact separately and the people who set all this stuff up sent an initial schedule and then they sent another schedule that was different and then another schedule that was different; so it was very difficult for anyone to make any plans as to what to do over the summer. She ended up having several contacts every week to the point where… you know… you know… kids need to have time to actually….you know… have fun and to be able to do something that’s…..because if there is a contact happening, then it’s pretty much we have to stay in \*\*\*\*\*\*\* in the area, which means being in the house with not much to do except what’s in the house for that day. I know sometimes my mum has made plans to go places with like a friend of C\*\*\*\*\*\* and then they would go to do a fun thing but then they would have to cancel or move it because a contact has popped up, which then ended up being cancelled anyway…So it’s just a lot of messing around and they don’t necessarily… seem to care.  I: I wonder what the experience would be for a birth child…. I mean I don’t think you would have been going out with them… I don’t know were you going out on those dates with them?  P: Not personally on those ones no.  I: But I wonder if you were a similar age and you were…. how that may affect your relationship with a foster child when things have to be cancelled.  P: Yeah because you would think… oh.. that could promote some sort of animosity if everything gets cancelled because of you. I personally haven’t had that but I can see how that would be a thing. Because it’s pre-planned in your diary and it has to get cancelled… its… I don’t even like when you make plans to go to a restaurant and then the restaurant is closed or you go to someone else. It’s like you have already built up like, I’m going to have a steak, but now I can’t have a steak so I’m going to have to have pasta… That’s bad enough without thinking… oh I’m not really going to get to go.  I: Going back to things that social services might be able to help birth siblings with… I’m thinking about when you said that you had been on one training course. Is there any other training that you know is available to you? Would you go if you had the option?  P: I don’t know what things are available; I’ve not done that much research to be honest. I don’t know what I would go to if there was something out there. I went on the first aid course.. Because I thought.. at that point I had done first aid through the army cadet force and had learnt a certain amount but none of it could really be applied to babies because it’s a completely different way of doing CPR, although I think that’s probably outdated too… I probably need to refresh it. I took that one.. because.. can’t remember if it was required… but also it was sort of a good thing to know in life.  I: Have your brothers done any training as well, because you’ve got three adults there really as well as your mum.  P: My younger brother as far as I know has not done any training. He still goes to.. or at least he did.. I’m not sure if this was last year.. like a college of sorts. He has a schedule where he goes to places and they teach them life skills, or they go bowling or shopping. My older brother, because he has been living in Manchester since she started. As far as I know he hasn’t, he doesn’t live at home. He stays in Manchester the whole time.  I: What about the systems and the way the children come into your mums care. We have already touched upon this. Do you think there is anything that could be changed that would help the relationships with foster children and natural siblings?  P: Erm.. I think… well we have mostly had emergency placements or babies who like have just been born. We find out about a baby if they are about to be born or if they are emergency placements. I think that’s the only way we have ever had kids come in but if you know about a placement that is going to come obviously there has to be some sort of…. Well I say obviously but it might not be obvious, but there should be some sort of meeting beforehand like introductions I think they do introductions.  I: Are you involved in those?  P: Erm… I’ve not been involved. Well apart from er J\*\*\*\* our first baby when she was getting adopted. I was still living at home and her new parents came and we did introductions at the house and like a week of them popping in and then them going on day trips and popping back and then she was off with them down south.  I: Do you hear from any of them?  P: We do hear from J\*\*\*\*’s, erm… I think it’s her father that sends…because they have since divorced as far as I know. We hear from some. We get told we are going to hear from some and then never do. I think there are two or three who I know my mum gets up dates from. I think we got a bit guarded after the second one went off for adoption because they said they would keep in contact, but then they didn’t really. So we had to sort of let it go a little bit. And occasionally we will get like a little picture, or something, I think. But I can’t remember the last time when we got anything from them was.  I: When you say guarded, that sounds almost similar to what you were talking about earlier on, when you were talking about relationships with children that might not stay. It almost sounds similar.  P: Yeah….  I: We are just about at the end of the interview now, is there anything else that you might want to add, anything else you think you think might be beneficial to know about how foster children and natural siblings can have positive relationships  P: Erm… not sure, it depends how long they are going to stay…. if you know how long they are going to stay….if you don’t know it’s difficult to form a relationship.  I: Yeah and I suppose with some children, that is a difficult question isn’t it? It’s hard to know.  P: Yes, because, you don’t know, they don’t know, no one knows until they go to court and sometimes they get moved. Like we were supposed to go to court in September I think and now it’s in November I think, so that’s an extra two months.  I: And I wonder how much that affects the child themselves? And if there was, I don’t know whether it is slightly different because you are older, but if there was a natural sibling that was the same age, how that might make the child feel and then how that might impact on…  P: I don’t think that we would have the placement we do if me and my brother were the same age as C\*\*\*\*. Because the three siblings had split up because they had a volatile relationship, erm I don’t think they would have placed her with us in the first place. Who knows, its social services… who knows.  I: Is there anything else you would want to say about fostering, being a birth child about relationships?  P: Not particularly, I think, it is what it is and you just get on with it. It’s not odd to me because we have always had a kid in every now and then even if it was only for a weekend, which it usually was before I was 17. We had a regular respite care when we lived in Hong Kong. So before I was….well between the ages of 8 and 11or 12 we had like a regular respite. And my younger brother, well I don’t think he goes anymore but up until 18 he went on respite weekends every month as well, so they have always been around.  I: Ok, is there anything else that you would like to say  P: Nope. | Differentiate from NS, adopted S and FS. Could there be a cultural influence on the family.  4 when her parents started fostering – can’t really remember before fostering. Always had some children.  Fostering children with disabilities…… then babies when NS3 was 17.  Predominantly babies  Mum likes babies – so babies through choice after her own had grown up.  Matter of fact that the babies only stay a short period of time.  Short Term fostering  Misunderstanding ( I think the 3 that she was talking about in three last paragraph were her mums own children)  That many babies, can’t really remember each in detail  From a few weeks to a few month.  Different to making relationships with older children.  Confusion over what babies are classed as FC or just a baby that they are looking after…. Why is it seen as different……  FC younger than her  Mum that fosters  Not really Dads thing…. Mums personality  *Mostly* a positive experience  Hasn’t affected me *too much*, sense of not really been sure. I felt that the way in which she spoke she had been affected more  When she is talking about it affecting her she is thinking more in terms of practically i.e. her only having to babysit and still being able to do her own things like being a teenager rather than thinking about the effect it may have on her personally, how she thinks about things, how she feels, the general life choices.  Moving from short term to long term - Children coming for a short term and staying a long time – difficulties with building up long term relationships with someone when you don’t know how long someone is staying. Maybe the choice is taken away, maybe that affect friendships.  Unsure if long term or short term but have had children for long periods of time.  Respite carer.  A different skill to know how to react to older children. … less sense of the child being a sibling….. nervous may affect friendships. Worry in relation to forming a different type of relationship that may be longer term.  Considering how long term may affect the situation.  Makes a difference depending on the issues that the children have had before coming onto care. Thinking about a previous child and how she wanted attention and how this child that may be staying for a longer period of time wants her attention too as she walks through the door – backing off – keeping out of the way. Doesn’t want the hassle of a younger child in the house – did she have any say in it?  *Odd* having a younger sibling.  Difficult due to her having a *whole other life* that we don’t know about. Different now as she grew up knowing about her adoptive brother and knew no different but this is different.  She is still in contact with her other life  Not knowing about her other life – up to the child to say – as an adult in the house, should she know as much as her Mum? Should she be part of the decision process for the children to stay longer? Maybe she has been.  Concern for the FC when they are let down and the consequences of that and possibly how the FC may behave after that and how she will be there to have to deal with the behaviour.  Sees the behaviours after contact with her family.  Concerns for the FC.  Getting to grips with the foster childs previous life and finds that difficult  Doesn’t appear that the NS has any choice over who lives in the house. And when children do come into care often the NS gets to find out that day, even when they think that they have some notice – that may build up resentment for FC building up relationships with NS – the age may too… this NS was a lot older than the FC  Difficulty with chn coming for a short period of time and then stay longer.  Difficulty with child coming without prior warning – too quickly  Babies are ok. Relationship with FC depends on her own commitments and time. FC impacting on her own time and how she feels depending on what she had going on in her life at the time.  Almost embarrassed to say how it makes her feel  *10 year old* use of the words 10 yr old rather than the child’s name – felt slightly more detached  Learnt not to say what you really feel for fear of upsetting someone  Due to the age gap – may be again matching children to families may help.  Different stages in their lives  Difficulty with FC having a background that NS doesn’t know  NS having a say in who comes to stay at their house.  All information regarding foster children through mum  Should people over 18 in the house know everything about the youngsters in the house?  Hesitation ----- *amicable* seems like she is quite unsure of the relationship – I don’t feel she is very keen about it  Very emotional at this point – the incident was a *few years ago* yet it was still affecting the participant emotionally - I suspect because of how the incident affected her mother and how it has subsequently affected her – equally she mentioned that *she wasn’t in the country at the time* maybe that she felt that she couldn’t help or protect her mum through it all.  Mother has been in therapy ever since – yet she is continuing to foster – *it’s not changed much how we do things* it’s like she is almost feeling as if she has to defend her family that they don’t need to change how they do things as they have done nothing wrong.  Consideration taken for her brother in relation to not fostering until he went to university as he *was not a child person*.  A sense of her brother not really playing any part in supporting the children or her mother with the babies. Did he make a relationship up with any of the babies? Might they have felt that? There may be a positive impact on her younger brother as he is able to take some small responsibilities to do some things for the babies – ie comforting them by putting the dummy in.  She had a sense of awe that her older brother didn’t know what to do, as if he instinctively should have.  The desire to want to interact may affect relationships with FC  Having FC from the NS being small and growing up with them… knowing their background may help with relationships  The age gap with FC makes a difference to how you form relationships.  Age difference can be both positive and negative.  The way the family as a whole family unit can make a difference to the way the NS relate to the FC depending on how the family is. Different parenting styles.  Could this also be connected to a family that has moved from aboard? Or one that has had a marital split? Or due to it being a different culture?  Breakdowns in previous foster placements and how that affects NS and relationships with new FC – How care may need to be taken how difficulties are handled  Dealing with loss on an ongoing basis  *weird dance anyway trying to figure out how attached to get to someone and how not to because with foster kids they are always going to move on somewhere pretty much* – sense of self protection/self-preservation.  *Holding back* – self-protection Is this due to the fostering or moving around a lot with the family – could be both.  Babies may possibly have been a good option for this family as they may not notice people keeping a distance – equally their seems to be an acceptance that the babies will move on but not the older ones that have come into care.  Dealing with loss on an ongoing basis  The fostering fulfils a need in her mum….as well as helping the children – could be described as a way of displaying her prams.  Does the family really want to take on the 10 yr old? Or is it because the young girl has been with the family for a period of time and they feel obliged/emotionally attached and or are feeling a little pressure from social services.  *Partly due to fostering*  Fostering may affect if NS have their own children, by seeing the amount of children that have needed to be cared for over the years. Also it feels like she also sees this as a positive as she feels that good relationships can be formed with children that are not your own – I feel that this is possibly due to her seeing positive relationships with FC and FC going on to have other families with positive results  Maybe her moving around and non stability is to do with her upbringing and move from HK, maybe it does have to do with fostering, maybe it’s to do with her career. Maybe fostering isn’t the sole reason but it may have paid a part in her decision making.  Reference to social services not thinking about the NS in the family but that her mum does consider them and takes into account their feelings – As was mentioned above re starting fostering when the eldest brother had gone to Uni.  This rears a strong feeling in me in relation to how I felt as I grew older – it never really dawned on me until I was older. My feelings were never taken into account  Reference to *mum having to remind them (social services)* that there are other family members living there.  Feeling comfortable that what she thinks makes a difference and that her mum makes decisions taking into account what she thinks  I don’t feel that my feelings were ever taken into account  Doesn’t feel listened to by social services. Doesn’t get a chance to sit down with anyone, only the DBS completion.  It feels like she feels neglected….as if social services aren’t interested in her I don’t feel I was ever talked to, many a time I was sent out of the room so that the social worker could speak to my mum. We were never consulted.  No support from anyone  No training  Unaware of any support, did not know about any support groups that may have been available  Although probably wouldn’t have used one anyway.  For babies it more practical support and they will probably never know about it.  She is clearly not sure with an older child and may benefit from some support and guidance and training.  Doesn’t realise the part that she plays in supporting the children.  She clearly does not appreciate what she does do. She probably sees her as a big sister, a good role model, someone else who is stable in her life.  *A relationship of some sort* – *try to give then a due amount of attention –* quite formal language. I feel that she really struggles to know how to behave with a younger sibling  Not wanting to build up expectations but not wanting to *completely ignore either.*  The sense that she doesn’t really like it – *quite frankly I’m not always in the correct mood – and I need to be able to disappear if I can.*  No plans to be a foster carer herself – *I feel that the experience of being a NS has had a negative impact on her view of children. It may also have helped her to come to that decision as she may not have known how she felt had she not had the experience.*  The experience has helped her really, as it has helped her appreciate what she doesn’t want. She has had the chance to realise (if she didn’t already) just how difficult bringing children up can be , and how tying it can be.  *Doesn’t want the responsibility for another life.*  She acknowledges that some of her thoughts and feelings have *probably* come from her experiences of fostering  It’s not about building relationships with foster kids, but *building relationships with anyone.*  Her mum making sure that she doesn’t feel responsible for the foster children as she hasn’t her youngest brother  When I was younger I never felt responsible either but as I got older, my mum asked us to do other things so that she could then take responsibility for the foster kids, she took on too much and then expected that we would help her out with it, she struggled with being able to say no – which is something I struggle with too on a professional and personal basis.  Knowing expectations has helped her not feel resentment possibly – having that conversation out in the open  In our family there wasn’t open communication in relation to expectations  *I don’t know if you have picked up on my feelings towards social workers* – she has a very negative view of social workers, she feels that *they just don’t listen, are very short sighted and don’t make decisions with the best interests of the child*. she may benefit from understanding the reasons why some of the decisions have been made – maybe her mum knows these reasons, maybe she doesn’t, but it might be helpful.  She is concerned with the effect that contact is having on the 10 yr old that they foster now.  Lack of communication within social services – effect on the family as a whole – lack of consideration for NS  Feelings for the FC and how the impact of a lack of organisation and coordination of social workers and/or  When they are let down by the FC’s parents not keeping contact dates.  Impact of contact for FC on the family as a whole  A feeling of frustration that SS don’t care about the impact of fostering on everyone in the family  Not personally felt animosity but thinks that it might happen when things are I your diary and they get cancelled  Possibility of feeling let down.  Not knowing what training is available. Not done any research – she shouldn’t have to, but maybe her mum knows what training is on and what is available.  Seemed interested to go to training  Wasn’t just about learning for fostering but for life too  *Also it was sort of a good thing to know in life*  The main person that has completed any training is Mum.  The older brother stays in Manchester. Is he staying out of the way too? As his sister has already said that he doesn’t like and isn’t good with children.  Emergency placements or babies – babies are different to looking after older children.  Children coming in from birth, some sort of introduction or meeting beforehand helps  NS not being involved in the introductions.  Significance with the first FC that left, maybe support should be put in regarding the first loss  Guarded after the 2nd child – said they would keep in touch but didn’t. This probably affects how they are with subsequent FC.  *Had to let it go* – getting attached to children and then having to let them go, having to deal with losses when children move on and how that might affect how they are with the next child  Knowing that they are going to stay longer may help, even though it is not always possible – as I believe the intention is generally to try to get children back to their families or a stable home….. maybe FC having a couple of moves is necessary to enable them to get the correct the placement, but if it can be done when they are babies it may make it less harmful.  The legal process, which is necessary takes its time – maybe all adults in the house need help in knowing and being reminded of it.  A distrust in social services and possibly a lack of understanding as to how difficult it is to place children. Tinged with an unsureness as to whether social services would place the children. I feel even if the NS were younger the children would still have possibly been placed there if there was no where else to place them and the foster mother said yes. As poss all foster mothers foster for their love and desire to help children they struggle to say no even at the detriment of their own children. It is maybe expected that older NS feel differently… but maybe they don’t. I feel there may also be different feeling associate when NS grow older and have their own children  I often felt like this and still do… even though I can appreciate how difficult it is to place children.  It’s always been like that – said with a tinge of sadness. It’s not odd to me as we have always had a kid in every now and then.  *It is what it is and you just get on with it!* |
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## Appendix 11 – Coding the entire data set

### *Phase 2 & 3 of the Analysis*

**Theme 1 – Family as a system**

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| **NSM 1**  Family as a system  Family systems   * Difficulty being part of a foster family (FF) * Not dealing with issues as a family * Difficult for the whole family * Thinks it does good but would prefer it to be someone else’s family   Support by parents   * Protection by Foster Parents (FP) to NS * Supportive parents Foster Carers (FCa)   Parenting style   * Comfortable that parents would sort out problems * Fairness and no preferential treatment | **NSF2**  Family as a system   * Who is family * Amount of children   Family involvement   * Whole family involvement * Family Activities * Family cohesiveness * Dad not mentioned in the support –passive father/husband?   Foster Mother   * Age of the foster mum * FM sorts out difficulties * FM being a role model for NS & how they are with the FC * Mother being a central figure – for FC & NS (strong Mother) * Mum being central * Turn to FM for help   Family environment   * Busy house - positive * Enjoy busy house full * FC & NS having their own space * Always someone to talk to.   Family systems   * Parents supporting their own children * Open discussions/Family meeting * Close knit family * Issues dealt with individually * Family outings/socialising – togetherness * Opt out clause – no bad feelings | **NSF 3**  Family as a system  Family involvement (lack of)   * Dad just went along with it * NS (brother) Not taking part/wanting to take part in the fostering\*   Family environment   * The family unit and the difference it works depends on the relationships that are formed * Marital split? Different cultures? * Different age group of FC   depending on the family make up\*  Foster Mother   * Mum that wanted to foster. * Not Dads thing but Mums * Emotional effects of difficulties that her mum has faced and how that impacts on her… with no support from anyone\* * Ongoing emotional trauma\* * Mother in therapy – what about NS support\*. * Protection of family members – especially Mum\* * Fostering fulfilling a need in the Foster Mother * Mum taking the NS feelings in to consideration\* * Mum protecting her own NS as SS don’t consider them \* * Comfort in knowing that her mum takes consideration about how she feels about fostering\* * Mum taking on the responsibility and her knowing that it’s her mum’s responsibility and not hers\* * FM own desire to help children can be a difficulty for NS which can in turn affect relationships\*   Family systems   * Knowing expectations – open conversations with NS about the responsibility of FC\* * Protection of family members – especially Mum\* * NS just have to put up with their parents fostering\* |
| **NSM 4**  Family as a system  Family environment   * Brought life back into the family – as a new birth of a younger sibling would * FC Brought excitement back to the house * FC was Youngest sibling in the family, change in place since placement breakdown   Family systems   * Difficult decisions – would a NS be given the option of not going on holiday? * Family agreement to foster – all involved * Their own needs first\* * Security at knowing their feelings would be taken into account\* * Security of knowing they can talk to their parents and something would happen\* * Difficulties being dealt with open and honestly and discussed with NS   Parenting style   * Parents being open and honest\* * Difficulties resolved, sorted by parents. * Usual parenting – both children supported\* * Acting just like a ‘normal family’ – parenting values * General good parenting * Explicitly knew that they came first – open communication\*   Foster Mother   * Turned to FM to sort out differences * Protection of his mum * Protection of his mum * Feeling of can’t cope – but resolved with Mums support. * Mum resolves issues – with support of SS if necessary. * Open and honest communication between NS and FM\* * Affecting FM * Protection for FM from NS * FM being unhappy, NS being unhappy – knock on affect\*   Major placement breakdown – see placement breakdown | **NSF 5**  Family as system  Family Environment   * Very, very stable, calm environment. Friendly people, good routines, * Family defined by the FC as a positive * Rich experience for the whole family – joint mutual positive discussion * Really spiced up family life * Fun household   Family involvement   * Siblings that didn’t live at home involved * Whole family impact – positive * Whole wider family involvement * FC being part of the family like other grandchildren would   Family systems   * Parents decision to foster but open discussions with NS\* * Parents facilitating relationships – conversations etc. * Watching parents with FC – learning from her parents   Supportive Foster Parents   * Parents waiting to foster when their youngest child was older * Delayed due to their own children’s age. * Mum and Dad both wanted to foster * Parents decision to foster but open discussions with NS\* * Lots of reassurance for NS from parents\* * Parents help to make and set up times for FC and NS to spend time together to have positive experiences\*   Family considerations   * Conscious decision re FC age, depending on NS age * Chose FC age range depending on their own daughter’s stage in life. * Chose FC age range depending on their own daughter’s stage in life. * Protecting their own daughters time at home and school * Parents were conscious of the effects volatile teenagers may have on their own child so chose to foster younger children | **NSM 6**  Family as a system  Family Makeup   * A complicated family tree, with one NS, adopted brothers, FC and two early deaths in the family. * Unsure of who is in his family * FC a similar age to NS (within a year) Half brother from mums first marriage (who died in an accident) * Two adopted boys (but one of them died)   Parenting Style   * General good parenting – whoever was wrong got told off * No favours for NS * Successful FC   Family Involvement   * Support from own family\* * Family outings help, everyone together   Death   * Death of a FC –after leaving care.   Lengths of stay   * FC have *stuck around* over the age that they would be classed as fostered – must have felt they belonged * Stayed passed the age of being fostered.   Foster Mother   * Mum fostered before he was born with first husband – two older FS * Foster Mum the drive behind the fostering – she has fostered during both her marriages * Mostly turned to mum during conflict for help as she would be more understanding * Mum who NS mostly turned to for help with FC * Mum more sympathetic * Positive relationship with Foster Mum and Birth mum (role models) |

**Theme 2 – How Fostering Impacted on NS Personal Impact**

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| **NSM 1**  Personal Impact  Type of fostering   * Supposed to be long term fostering   Coming to terms with fostering   * Can’t remember a life without fostering * Thinks it does good but would prefer it to be someone else\* * No affect   Lack of attention   * Attention away from NS   Exposure (loss of innocence)   * Exposure to circumstances that they wouldn’t usually be exposed to * Exposure * Sense of relief when a difficult child moves on   Self protection/holding back   * Detachment * Holding back/lack of involvement to protect oneself – more difficult after the first FC * Self-protection * Protection for themselves and parents * Sense of protection for themselves and parents * Holding back NS * Sense of holding back FC * Detached * Hopelessness * Sense of no hope * Holding back (reduced) * Detachment * NS seeing themselves different * No point – Whats in it for me * No point – What in it for me   Differences   * Differences between FC & NS * Difference – them and us - people * NS seeing themselves different | **NSF 2**  Personal Impact  Not knowing any different   * Long Time – can’t remember prior to fostering – all she has ever known   Enjoyment   * Overall positive * Really enjoys fostering   Personal growth   * Positive impact on her life * Meeting lots of different people Has helped her own confidence * Enjoys meeting diff personalities/people * Interest from friends in relation to the FC * Different children, different experiences   Impact on life choices   * Fostering herself * Works at nursery * Fostering having an impact on her choice of career and life choices * Potential FC – has had the chance to experience it * Wants a big family   Negative feelings   * Empty feeling with no FC * Being judged by others * Outings with FC – would have liked to be invited more * Sense of feeling left out – when FC got to go out with SS * Disadvantage for NS not being able to spend time by themselves | **NSF 3**  Personal Impact  Type of Fostering   * Fostering Babies & children with disabilities * Short Term fostering * Respite carer but unsure if short term long term due to babies/children staying longer   Security   * Mum taking the NS feelings in to consideration\* * Comfort in knowing that her mum takes consideration about how she feels about fostering\* * Mum taking on the responsibility and her knowing that it’s her mum’s responsibility and not hers\* * Knowing expectations – open conversations with NS about the responsibility of FC\*   Coming to terms with fostering   * A sense of NS just putting up with things – it’s all they have ever known * Can’t remember a life before fostering.   Personal growth   * Positive impact on NS for taking care of FC\* * Mostly positive – not a lot has affected me (but throughout the interview I feel it has) Affected – not being asked to do things * Practice how to look after children * Learning how to have good relationships   with people\*   * Understand responsibility   Impact on life choices   * Fostering affecting the life choices of NS i.e. becoming a mother or not * Effect on NS choice of having children * Fostering in part may have an impact on career decisions (as well as family circumstances) * Impact of fostering on life choices * Fostering experience helping her clarify what she does and doesn’t want in her own life. * Practice run.   Lack of own space   * Effect on NS – Hiding in her room/backing off \* * Lack of own space\* * Impact of FC on NS own time – wanting attention (not the same for babies)\*   Emotional Upset   * Not considering how it has made her feel but just thinking about practical things like what she has been asked to do, with regards to being ‘affected’? * FC being let down affects the NS (different with babies) * Dealing with difficult behaviours\* * Contact for FC & how that affects the NS\* * Feeling that NS was struggling to say what she really felt. * Emotional effects of difficulties that her mum has faced and how that impacts on her… with no support from anyone\* * Ongoing emotional trauma\* * Mother in therapy – what about NS support\*. * Dealing with the sudden ending of a placement * Dealing with loss\* * Emotional ties – keeping a child long term that hadn’t been the intention\* * Feelings of being let down associated with fostering   Self protection/holding back   * Holding back * Effect on NS – Hiding in her room/backing off \* * Self-protection * Holding back – Self-protection\* |
| **NSM 4**  Personal Impact  Type of Fostering   * Long term fostering * Changing from long term fostering to respite fostering – due to placement breakdown. * Intentional long term fostering   Enjoyement/positive   * Time passed by quickly * Positive experience * Fostering Positive overall   Security   * Explicitly knew that they came first – open communication\* * Their own needs first\* * Security at knowing their feelings would be taken into account\* * Security of knowing they can talk to their parents and something would happen\* * Open and honest communication between NS and FM   Impact on life choices   * Practice with fostering has reaffirmed thoughts of not wanting children * Fostering affecting future life choices – i.e. having children * Fosterling affected work choice – similar job, caring job   Loss/Emotional upset   * Sad and angry feelings * Relief at the FC leaving * FM being unhappy, NS being unhappy – knock on affect\* * Coming to terms with loss\* | **NSF 5**  Personal Impact  Type of fostering   * Short term babies – moving to longer term older children * Changed with the circumstances of the house * Younger children and toddlers needing more time * Younger children and toddlers needing more time   Enjoyment/positive   * Overall experience, very, very positive.   Change in family position   * Youngest child * Youngest sibling, change in place in the family * Experience of having a younger sibling. * Experiencing being an older sibling – would never have had this other wise   Dealing with Loss   * Dealing with lots of losses * Placement endings difficult – especially the first one * Getting very attached to the FC\*   Sense of loss/first foster child   * Sense of loss * More difficult when the first FC leaves * Not being prepared for when the FC leaves * Not being prepared for when the FC leaves * Placement endings difficult – especially the first one * As if the FC had died * Dealing with lots of losses   Impact on life choices   * Doesn’t feel it has shaped her future   Coming to terms with fostering   * In time NS just get used to the way it is. * Accepting of the way fostering is * Took some time to get used to it – but really enjoys it now.   Security   * Lots of reassurance for NS from parents\* * Parents facilitating relationships – conversations etc. * Turn to parents for support with conflict\*   Personal Growth   * Positive effect on her as a person – life changing experience * Experienced things that she wouldn’t have. * Helps with all relationships in the future – better appreciation of society as a whole * Experience that she wouldn’t have had * More empathy with why some children are like they are – may help with relationships.\* * Positive for her relationship with others, especially children. * Being part of bringing them up * Enjoyed the experience   Knowledge and understanding   * Learnt lots about people * Lots of beneficial life skills * Understanding of different behaviours and how children are affected so young * Building up her own confidence of dealing with children, knowing how to support them best. * Lifelong learning from her experiences * Fostering has made her appreciate how time consuming having children is   Emotional upset   * No one else at school understanding fostering * Lots of uncertainty when a new FC comes into care, both emotionally and physically\* * Emotional toil for the NS   Self-protection   * Keeping an emotional distance from being involved in a relationship due to NS knowing that a placement will end. * Self-protection * Self-protection – early experience of fostering affecting future placement | **NSM 6**  Personal Impact  Type of fostering   * Long term fostering with a view to adoption & then moved on to short term fostering of babies.   Not knowing any different   * Growing up with it, not knowing any difference * Can’t remember a time before FC – always being there * Growing up with it, not knowing any difference. * Not knowing anyone else at school that fosters – although not an issue for him   Just like other siblings   * Regard them all as brothers and sisters (not the babies as they aren’t there long enough\* * Just like having lots of brothers and sisters\*   Enjoyment/Positive   * Fostering a positive experience |

**Theme 3 –Making Relationships with CLA**

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| **NSF1 1**  Relationships   * Friendships not important * Friendships not important   Self protect/Holding back – see above after first FC   * More difficult after the first FC   Not being good enough   * Not being good enough * Not being good enough friend   Just like a sibling/sister   * Like a brother (sibling)   Age (helpful)   * Age * Age barrier * Age barrier * Age factor * Similar interests * Friendships * Know the NS & FC and match better   Make friends naturally   * No need for support for NS or FC to make friends No support needed to help form relationships * No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships   Barriers to friendships   * Age\* * NS seeing themselves different   Foster child’s difficulties   * Foster child with too many problems * Bringing it on themselves * Not accepting being part of the family (torn) * Not helping themselves * Serious emotional problems * Aggressive behaviour * Pushing the boundaries   Related to FC family   * Difficulties attached to FC own family   Circumstances (FC coming into care | **NSF 2**  Relationships  Acceptance   * Positive/accepting NS – age doesn’t matter * NS getting along with all FC   Just like a sibling/sister   * FC just like another sibling * Just like a sister * Normal and natural – just like another sister   True friendships   * Making friendships * Lasting friendships * Friends * Natural friendship * True friendships   Age (positive)   * Similar age * Similar age – a positive thing * Similar interests * FC being friends with NS – younger or same age   Going out together   * Go out together * Family outings/socialising – togetherness\* * Generally friendly and want the FC to be there.   Resentment   * Possible resentment when FC get to go out on outings and NS don’t | **NSF 3**  Relationships  Being able to relate to the child   * Will need to consider how she can relate to the child * Unsure about the relationship * Actively thinking about how to relate to child   Natural Friendships   * Generally about how you build Friendships with anyone not just FC   Things that are helpful  Age   * Hesitation about relationship with older FC – not keen? * A relationship of some sort - difficulty in making a relationship with a younger FC * Age difference can be both positive and negative * FC that are younger than NS * Large age gaps between FC and NS – *better matching of FC to NS* * Age gap makes a difference to NS\*   Barriers to friendships   * Age gap makes a difference to NS\*   Holding back/Self-protection – see above after first FC   * Guarded with relationships after being let down with contact after the 2nd foster child – early experiences affect how relationships are built up with subsequent * NS just have to put up with their parents fostering\* * A negative experience can affect the way NS relate to FC * Dealing with loss\*   Length of stay/Knowledge of circumstances   * Length of stay affects relationships. * Knowledge of circumstances and possible length of stay\* * FM own desire to help children can be a difficulty for NS which can in turn affect relationships\* * FC that are in care earlier when NS know where they have come from can make relationships easier * Getting to grips with FC past life\* * Children coming for a short period of time and then staying longer\*– hard to build up relationships when you don’t know * Not knowing everything about the FC – difficult relationships * Emotional ties – keeping a child long term that hadn’t been the intention\* |

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|  |  | Lack of control   * NS having no choice re FC coming to stay * Not being part of the decision for children to stay longer * Children coming with no warning\*   Contact   * FC being let down affects the NS (different with babies)\* * Dealing with difficult behaviours\* * Contact for FC & how that affects the NS\* * Impact of contact for FC on the family as a whole\* Possible animosity between NS & FC when contact affects family life.   Foster child’s difficulties   * Children’s past issues prior to coming into care affect how NS can relate. * Whole other life of FC\* * Being in contact with own family and how that affects their behaviour\* * FC being let down affects the NS (different with babies)\* * Getting to grips with FC past life\* * Ongoing emotional trauma\* * Holding back – Self protection\* * Dealing with loss\*   Differences   * Differentiate between NS, Adopted and FC   Babies   * Different relationship when its babies * Babies different to older children * Acceptance that babies will move on * FC being let down affects the NS (different with babies)\* * Impact of FC on NS own time – wanting attention (not the same for babies)\* |
| **NSM 4**  Relationships  Natural sibling relationship   * Usual sibling disputes * Usual parenting – both children supported\* * Different stages in life * Difference in relationship with FC due to their behaviour – but accepts that relationships with different NS would be different\* * Different relationship with siblings, talked about him as if he was is NS * Bond with FC like any other sibling – different with different siblings Special relationship with siblings – spoke very fondly of his relationship with FC   Natural friendships   * Felt natural…….good relationship with FC   Acceptance   * Recognised good qualities in FC * Acceptance of fostering * Accepts the FC differences – it’s just him\* * NS recognises his own unreasonable behaviour – accepted   Helpful   * NS need a little push to help build up their relationship with FC from other than their own parents\* * Different schools – good thing * Age difference, different interests, positive and negative \* * Having their own space helps * Outings with NS & FC * Parents being open and honest\*   Barriers   * Different stages in life * Different interests\* * Age gap may have affected relationship\* * Age difference, different interests, positive and negative \*   Differences   * Differentiate between NS & FS * Different bond with NS – grew up together, more similarities * Different interests\* * Difference in relationship with FC due to their behaviour – but accepts that relationships with different NS would be different * Accepts the FC differences – it’s just him\*   Foster child’s difficulties   * Did lots of annoying things * Difficult behaviour * Feeling of FC being ungrateful – disappointed in relation to how his parents had supported him\* * FC difficult behaviour affecting relationship\* * Deliberately winding up | **NSF 5**  Relationships  Natural sibling relationship   * Like a second FM or an older sister * Like being an older sibling\* * Feeling that older children would benefit from having an older sibling in the house   Natural Friendship feelings   * Very close relationship with the FC – more involved as they got older * Getting very attached to the FC\*   Like a parent   * Being part of bringing them up * Being patient when resolving difficulties   Spending time together   * Nurtured them * Doing things together and having positive experiences * Spending time together * Having time to play * Getting involved with day to day experiences helped her to build up knowledge and relationships\*   Self-protection   * Self-protection when subsequent FC come to the house   Foster child’s difficulties   * Children that are less damaged (removed earlier) being easier for NS to form relationships with   Babies/Adoption   * Fostering babies who are adopted may be easier * Very good success rate with the babies being adopted * Totally positive outcomes * Hard work looking after babies (but new skills learnt) | **NSM 6**  Relationships  Just like a sibling   * Got on with all except 1 FC, * Regard them all as brothers and sisters (not the babies as they aren’t there long enough\* * Pretty much grew up with him – younger brother * Like having a brother the same age * Just like a sibling – saw the FC as no different to his other siblings * Just like having lots of brothers and sisters\*   Genuine Friendship   * Genuine friendships with FC and NS   Spending time together   * Organised trips for NS, FC and family can help with relationships\* * Family holidays and doing stuff together helps * Activities may help relationships - having positive experiences together. * Family outings help, everyone together\*   Age   * FC a similar age to NS (within a year) * Positive that the FC is the same age as the NS – depending on personality * Same school helps   Minor difficulties (when younger)   * Minor inequalities - Presents from parents and FP * Animosity could have built up over time * Different choice of school for FC and NS, NS-Private, FC-state maintained – could have caused resentment (but didn’t appear to)   Foster child’s difficulties   * Just a bit annoying   FC own family relationships   * Early into care, more positive relationships with NS * Long Term FC having a positive relationship with his birth mum though out his time in care. * Visits to FC parents with FC * FC knowing Birth mum – positive outcome * FC knowing where they belong, having contact with birth mum   Babies   * Babies, different with babies |

**Theme 4 – Increased Knowledge & Training**

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| **Participant 1**  Knowledge & Training  Lack of trust – not knowing   * Lack of trust – not knowing how long a child will stay   Knowledge regarding FC not known by NS   * Protecting FC over NS by not telling them info * Lack of knowledge given to NS (when adults)   Support by NS  NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Not recognising himself as being any help * Not recognising friendship as support * NS not recognising themselves as being a supporter   Belief that it’s the FCa that gives all the support   * F Carer being the main carer * Only F Carer give support * F Carer being the main carer * NS not recognising their own value   Support not needed   * No support needed to help form relationships\* * No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships\* * No need for support for NS or FC to make friends\* | **NSF 2**  Knowledge & Training  Knowledge regarding FC not known by NS   * NS gets very little details about a new FC * NS not knowing why the child has come into care (even when older) * Who needs to know what about FC   Training opportunities   * Training needs and willing to attend but not invited | **NSF 3**  Knowledge & Training  Knowledge of past life.   * Not knowing the FC background * Getting to grips with FC past life\* * Lack of direct information for NS that are over 18. * Reliance of info to be passed from SW to NS via mother. * Who should know what about the FC – Adults over 18 in the house * Knowledge of circumstances and possible length of * stay   Training needs   * Knowledge of the NS (or lack of) * Knowledge of different age groups (lack of) * Would like support and guidance for older children\* * No training – lack of training for NS * Lack of understanding of the pressure of SW \* * Communication & availability of training courses for older NS * Interested in training * Usefulness of lifelong learning associated to fostering * Mum mainly completed training * Increased knowledge of the legal process may help |
| **NSM 4**  Knowledge & Training  Knowledge regarding FC not known by NS   * No need to know about past life of FC apart from something ‘horrific’ * Should have more knowledge about the FC now that he is older * More info to NS   Training   * Some info prior to fostering, but not much since. * Lack of information/training continued through fostering for NS * No support and training after FC came\* * Open to training – especially as he has got older * Life long benefits of training – unsure if he would attend a group * Interested in training and self-development * Would like to complete training sessions * More training | **NSF 5**  Knowledge & Training  Knowledge regarding FC not known by NS   * Didn’t get to know all the details about the FC – even when she was older * Important for her to know the details Getting involved with day to day experiences helped her to build up knowledge and relationships\*   Learning from parents   * Watching parents with FC – learning from her parents | **NSM 6**  Knowledge & Training   * Difference in what a NS needs to know about the past life of a FC depending on the FC age and maturity. * When young and FC comes into care, don’t need to know the details - When older, that’s different. |

**Theme 5 – Levels of Support**

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| **Participant 1**  Support by NS  NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Not recognising himself as being any help * Not recognising friendship as support * NS not recognising themselves as being a supporter * Age (support)   Belief that it’s the FCa that gives all the support   * F Carer being the main carer * Only F Carer give support * F Carer being the main carer * NS not recognising their own value   Support not needed   * No support needed to help form relationships\* * No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships\* * No need for support for NS or FC to make friends\*   Support from Social Worker  Lack of Social worker involvement   * Lack of Social work input * No social work contact * Like more involvement with Social Workers   NS unaware of Support available   * Not aware of support | **NSF 2**  Support by NS  NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Not seeing herself as support * Didn’t see herself as support for the FC   Role model   * Being a role model   Practical support   * Helping with practical aspects of looking after   Social Worker  FC support   * View that FC got help from SS   Lack of Social worker involvement   * Lack of contact personally from SW * Would like more contact with SW * Talk to SW * Just to be listened to. * Social workers not seen as support for the NS * Rarely see a SW * Would like to see SW * Only see SW once a year * Probably wouldn’t take up offer of seeing the SW | **NSF 3**  Support for – NS  Emotional support   * Ongoing emotional trauma\* * Mother in therapy – what about NS support\*. * NS being supported in how to deal with loss on an ongoing basis * No support from anyone * Didn’t know what support was out there? * May not have used support groups if it had been offered * Would like support and guidance for older children\* * NS Letting go – dealing with losses   Social Services/Worker  Lack of social worker involvement   * Reliance of info to be passed from SW to NS via mother. \* * Lack of contact from SS for the NS   Frustration with SW/SS   * NS not feeling listened to. * Negative view of social workers – need to build up relationships with SW and NS * Involvement of SW with NS * Lack of organisation and coordination of SW & SS * Frustration with SS * SS not thinking of the family as a whole * SS not thinking of the family as a whole\* |
| **NSM 4**  Support by NS  NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Doesn’t recognise his part in supporting the FC. * Not really thought of himself as giving the FC support   Support suggestions   * Could have done more * Befriender for FC (poss NS paid work – recognise what they already do)   Support for NS   * More support from SS might help, especially at the difficult times\* * No support and training after FC came\* * More support would be appreciated * Groups for NS may be a positive step. * Might not attend groups for NS now but may have done when younger * Support needed through difficult break ups…… support for whole FF following a FC breakdown in relationships\* * Coming to terms with loss\*   Social Services /Social Worker   * NS need a little push to help build up their relationship with FC from other than their own parents\* * More support from SS might help, especially at the difficult times\* * Limited involvement with SS * Lack of involvement with SS * Knew he could go to SS if needed. * SS to help NS build relationships – take an interest in how they are managing * Lack of contact with SS * More contact for NS with SS (especially older ones) * Lack of support from SS | **NSF 5**  Support by NS  Recognising the support she gave   * Happy to be a supporter for older FC * Like being an older sibling\* * Feeling like a third FCarer * Feeling that older children would benefit from having an older sibling in the house\*   Support for NS  Group and individual support   * Develop more support for NS as in group and individual support * Better planned and organised groups with people a similar age * When there was a group, not enough people attended * Supporter for NS, someone their own age   Support for loss   * Needing extra support for the losses   Social Worker /Social Services   * Mum and Dad doing the chasing up rather than the SW   Lack of social worker/social services involvement   * Would welcome more chance to speak to SW * Not enough SS involvement * Don’t see SS very often * SS see parents not them * Views only sought by questionnaire of survey * Not even seen annually * Questionnaire or survey – but no follow up or feedback | **NSM 6**  Support by NS   * No support from any one to make relationships   NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Doesn’t recognise himself as support for the FC – just like a brother   Support for NS  Groups   * NS support groups may be of help – but not for him.   Own Family   * Support from own family\*   Social Worker/Social Services  Lack of social worker/social services involvement   * SW at the house but didn’t specifically talk to NS * No contact with SW, doesn’t think there has been annual support * Lack of presence of SW * Doesn’t t receive any support from SW and didn’t know about any support groups. * More organised events may help. |

**Theme 6 – The difficulty of Transitions**

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| **Participant 1**  Placement  Initial placement   * Concept of damaged children & why they come into care   Endings   * Foster child leaving because of their own problems * Sense of relief when a difficult child moves on   Need   * Need rather than age   Match the family   * Know the NS & FC and match better\* | **NSF 2**  Placement  Consideration regarding who/type of household   * Amount of children\* * From quiet homes to busy homes * No children have left the household\*   NS no control   * No say who comes   Slower integration   * Introducing children to families slowly may help relationships   Matching   * Matching children to families | **NSF 3**  Placement  Initial placement details   * Children coming for a short period of time and then staying longer.\* * Children coming with no warning\* * Lack of notice for FC – possibility of resentment\* * Introductions may help (clearly the nature of the circumstances affect that) * NS not being involved in introduction of the FC or when new FC come into care.   Matching FC to placement   * Better matching of FC to NS * Different age group of FC   depending on the family make up\*   * Emergency placements makes systems difficult * Circumstances   Endings   * Dealing with the sudden ending of a placement   Lack of consideration for whole family   * Pressure from SS * Social services not considering the NS in the family when making decisions * Mum protecting her own NS as SS don’t consider them \* * A lack of trust in the knowledge that SS will do the ‘right thing’ by the NS when children are placed. |
| **NSM 4**  Placement  Endings/Breakdown   * Placement breakdown\* * FC previous breakdown in placement * Traumatic breakdown of FC\* * Breakdown incident happened quickly after 7 good years\* * Multiple placement breakdowns * Placement breakdown preventable * Impact on the family as a whole when there is a FC breakdown\* * Lack of support for family\* * Coming to terms with loss\*   General   * Gradual introduction to FC where possible | **NSF 5**  Placement  Initial placement   * NS time to adjust to FC (often it’s only an hour or two notice) * Lots of uncertainty when a new FC comes into care, both emotionally and physically\*   Endings   * Sad for FC that stays short term then goes home * Placement endings difficult – especially the first one * Even difficult when planned adoption. * Keeping in touch is an issue | **NSM 6**  Placement  Initial placement   * Pre warning for a family that a baby was due to come - Sometimes before the baby was born. |

## Appendix 12 – Collating codes into potential themes and Defining and naming themes

### *Step 3 - 5 of the analysis*

Participant NSM1

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| **Codes** | **Collating codes into potential themes & reviewing themes**  **Phase 3 & 4** | **Defining and naming themes**  **Phase 5** |
| **Participant 1 M**  Differences between Foster Child (FC) & Natural Sibling (NS)  Difficulty being part of a foster family (FF)    Can’t remember a life without fostering  Detachment  Holding back/lack of involvement to protect oneself  Self-protection  Lack of trust – not knowing how long a child will stay  FC bringing it on themselves  Not being good enough friend  Difference – them and us – people  Supposed to be long term fostering  Foster child leaving because of their own problems  Sense of relief when a difficult child moves on  Foster child with too many problems  Protection for themselves and parents  Sense of protection for themselves and parents  Not dealing with issues as a family  Holding back NS  Difficult for the whole family  FC not accepting being part of the family (torn)  Sense of holding back  Detached  FC not helping themselves  Hoplessness  Difficulties attached to FC own family  Sense of no hope  Protecting FC over NS by not telling them info  Protection by FP to NS  Lack of knowledge given to NS (when adults)  Like a brother (sibling)  More difficult after the first FC  Circumstances (FC coming into care)  Holding back (reduced)  Age  General Friendship rules  Holding back  No point – Whats in it for me  No point – What in it for me  Similar interests  FC with Serious emotional problems  Exposure to  Circumstances that they wouldn’t usually be exposed to  Not recognising himself as being any help  Exposure  No affect  Lack of Social work input  Detachment  No social work contact  Lack on knowledge for NS  No social worker contact  Supportive parents FCa  Comfortable that parents would sort out problems  Fairness and no preferential treatment  No support needed to help form relationships  No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships  Only FCa give support – needs a parental figure not a friend  Not recognising friendship as support  Age barrier (support)  NS seeing themselves different  FCa being the main carer  NS not recognising their own value  Friendships  NS not recognising themselves as being a supporter  No need for support for NS or FC to make friends  Friendships not important  Friendships not important  Thinks it does good but would prefer it to be someone else.  Attention away from NS  Like more involvement with Social Workers  Not aware of support  Concept of damaged children & why they come into care  Age factor  Need rather than age  Know the NS & FC and match better  FC aggressive behaviour  Pushing the boundaries  Friends as supporters  Differences | Family  Family systems   * Difficulty being part of a foster family (FF) * Not dealing with issues as a family * Difficult for the whole family * Thinks it does good but would prefer it to be someone else’s family   Support by parents   * Protection by Foster Parents (FP) to NS * Supportive parents Foster Carers (FCa)   Parenting style   * Comfortable that parents would sort out problems * Fairness and no preferential treatment   Personal Impact on NS  Type of fostering   * Supposed to be long term fostering   Coming to terms with fostering   * Can’t remember a life without fostering * Thinks it does good but would prefer it to be someone else\* * No affect   Lack of attention   * Attention away from NS   Exposure (loss of innocence)   * Exposure to circumstances that they wouldn’t usually be exposed to * Exposure   Self protection/holding back   * Detachment * Holding back/lack of involvement to protect oneself – more difficult after the first FC * Self-protection * Protection for themselves and parents * Sense of protection for themselves and parents * Holding back NS * Sense of holding back FC * Detached * Hopelessness * Sense of no hope * Holding back (reduced) * Detachment * NS seeing themselves different * No point – Whats in it for me * No point – What in it for me   Differences   * Differences between FC & NS * Difference – them and us - people * NS seeing themselves different   Relationships/Friendships   * Friendships not important * Friendships not important   Self protect/Holding back – see above after first FC   * More difficult after the first FC   Not being good enough   * Not being good enough * Not being good enough friend   Just like a sibling/sister   * Like a brother (sibling)   Age (helpful)   * Age * Age barrier * Age factor * Similar interests * Friendships * Know the NS & FC and match better   Make friends naturally   * No need for support for NS or FC to make friends No support needed to help form relationships * No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships   Barriers to friendships   * Age\* * NS seeing themselves different   Foster child’s difficulties   * Foster child with too many problems * Bringing it on themselves * Not accepting being part of the family (torn) * Not helping themselves * Serious emotional problems * Concept of damaged children & why they come into care * Aggressive behaviour * Pushing the boundaries   Related to FC family   * Difficulties attached to FC own family   Circumstances (FC coming into care  Knowledge  Lack of trust – not knowing   * Lack of trust – not knowing how long a child will stay   Knowledge regarding FC not known by NS   * Protecting FC over NS by not telling them info * Lack of knowledge given to NS (when adults)   Support by NS  NS not recognising self as support for FC   * Not recognising himself as being any help * Not recognising friendship as support * Age barrier (support) * NS not recognising themselves as being a supporter   Belief that it’s the FCa that gives all the support   * F Carer being the main carer * Only F Carer give support * F Carer being the main carer * NS not recognising their own value   Support not needed   * No support needed to help form relationships\* * No help needed for NS and FC to form relationships\* * No need for support for NS or FC to make friends\*   Support from Social Worker  Lack of Social worker involvement   * Lack of Social work input * No social work contact * Like more involvement with Social Workers   NS unaware of Support available   * Not aware of support   Placement  Ending   * Foster child leaving because of their own problems * Sense of relief when a difficult child moves on   Need   * Need rather than age   Match the family   * Know the NS & FC and match better\* | **1.Family as a system**  **Family Environment**  **Family Systems/Parenting style**  **Foster Mothers**  **Family involvement**  **2.How fostering impacted on NS Personally**  **Type of fostering** – (*Babies - different*  *All he/she has ever known/Coming to terms with fostering)*  **Losses** - *Exposure/Lack of attention/Lack of own space/Negative Feelings/Emotional upset/Dealing with loss/first child*  **Self-protection**/holding back  **Personal Growth**– (*Personal Growth*  *Enjoyment/Positive*  *Knowldege)*  **Impact on Life choices**  **Security**  **3.Making relationships with CLA**  **Sibling like** - *Just like a sibling/sister/ brother*  **Age/Babies & Toddlers**  **Spending time together**  **Natural friendships**  **Foster child and relational difficulties** - *Foster child’s difficulties*  *Foster child’s own family difficulties*   1. **Increased Knowledge and Training**   **Knowledge**  **Training**   1. **Levels of Support**   **Who supports?** - *Belief that it’s the FCa that gives all the support v Role model, Practical support*  **Lack of Social care**  **Emotional Support** - *Emotional Support for NS/Support around loss/endings*   1. **The difficulty of transitions**   **Initial placements/Matching**  *Consideration regarding who/type of household*  **Placement Endings/Breakdown** |

## Appendix 13 – Data relevant to each Code within the Themes

**Mater Table of Data relevant for each themes for the group with page numbers.**

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| **1. Family as a system**  **Family Environment**  NSF2 **– ‘**Well I’ve been brought up with it and I like having a busy household. I didn’t like it when we didn’t have people’  NSF3 – ‘In some ways Yes, in some ways it might just be also that our family is quite…. It’s not that we are distant from each other but we are not very touchy feely…….’  NSM4 – ‘It was nice, we started celebrating Christmas again and doing more family things together. When we got him me and my sister were teenagers, so yeah it was just doing things with a younger child again.’  NSF5 – ‘Mmm, I think it’s just a very, very stable calm environment here.’  NSM6 - Well, yeah, they all stuck around… yeah. (the environment must have been good).  **Family Systems/Parenting style**  NSM1- ‘Erm…. I don’t….well it’s er…..difficult to describe that…I mean…it’s difficult to unveil what it was beforehand..[fine]…so… I don’t think I mind that much…like’  ‘Just the same way as you would resolve any argument, I guess. Probably since there was an argument we would both get told off…because…. Its erm… I would probably get told off because I would be told to be more responsible and they would get told off for starting the argument.’  NSF2 – ‘My mum, and then we would probably have a little family meeting’…….. ‘Mainly stuff like house stuff and chores, if we have got any, but if it was something like that it would be just me my mum and the foster child to just sort things out if we needed to.’  NSF3 - and I think that that is also something that she has brought into the fostering where she is saying it’s not my responsibility but occasionally she will want me to babysit.  NSM4 - Yeah, so long as I know what’s been done and as I have got older, I have got joined in those discussions and asked what’s been done, she’s been able to tell me and I’ve said… ok.  NSF5 - No….. I think they……mmm. I remember them stating very, very clearly, like I know they very reassured me very much. They said, I know that we are going to have foster children, but by no means will that take away anything from you…….  NSM6 - Well no. I certainly didn’t get any favours or anything, no.  **Foster Mothers**  NSF2 – *‘*I think my mum is quite a bit part of it… like she always gets us all…. Like sometimes if they are really shy my mum will try and get them to talk a little bit and then they always come out of their shell, more and more and then….’  NSF3 - Technically when we were in Hong Kong it was my dad as well, but it was never his thing, it was my mums…….. yeah it is pretty much my mum that’s.. it’s her personality I think…….  NSM4 - Well my mum resolves it as the foster carer. She obviously goes off and tells social services what’s happened and…  NSM6 - Well mum did it before she met my dad, but then she met my dad and still did it.  **Family involvement**  NSF2 – *‘*We all go on family holidays and family meals, and they all come with us… we go out for meals.’  NSM4 - My parents asked him because my sister lives in China, they asked him if he wanted to come with us and he said no, so he went in respite at the start of the year for two weeks while they were off.  NSF5 - Yeah of course, yeah, and whenever to visit the family we will always take the foster children with us. It really nice actually, our wider family, we don’t have a big family but at Christmas time they will buy a little present for the foster child and everything. They are very very included, yeah they are really nice.  NSM6 - we went on holidays and stuff together, no… well we went to the same school, obviously.   1. **How fostering impacted on NS Personally**   **Type of fostering**  NSM1 – No.. they are long term ish….but it depends because it always starts out with….Can you look after this person for a week while we sort out their family….and then its…oh we can’t sort it out and then maybe they stay for a month…and then it can kind of be a year…and then people don’t go.  NSF3 - my mum used to mainly have kids who had disabilities, like learning disabilities and stuff like that……… Yes they have been mostly babies…… and the 10 yr old we have now………. and if its long term.. she will be around for at least another… let’s see if she is 10 now it will be like another 8 years at least… and that’s a very different situation.  NSM4 - I think my mum has expressed an interest in doing, erm.. what do you call it? Respite………….. It was intended to be long term yeah they definitely wanted long term, something stable.  NSF5 - Oooh I think we went into it for short term but due to the nature of some of the court cases and things, they take ages so we ended up looking after some for a very long term.  So originally, it was, we had just young babies, who were almost a few months old or just toddlers, and most until recently my parents have started doing teenagers or young, sort of like eight to 12 year old  NSM6 - I think it was pretty much, sort of like fostering, but all the time…….. Yeah, had them from young all the way up, yeah.  **Losses**  NSM1 – No, I try and stay out of the way a bit. ‘……sometimes I kind of wish it hadn’t happened because it’s a lot of attention that gets taken away.’  …Er one left because he threatened to attack my brother, one left because he got abusive all the time and kept running off.  NSF2 - I didn’t like it when we didn’t have people.  NSF3 - I’ve possibly taken to hiding in my room sometimes  .. erm because the result of that was that the little girl was taken from us, I think my mum was actually thinking about adopting her.. or taking her on long time… we had had her since she was born………. I know my mother has been in therapy ever since  NSM4 - It’s defiantly affected my mum. She is devastated. She brought him up for seven years.  NSF5 - I think many birth children could be very affected by having a long term relationship and they just go. The hardest thing is that you can’t see them again or at least for several, several years because it’s the whole attachment of the child to the foster, you can’t disrupt that…….  **Self-protection**  NSM1 – ‘Yeah, because erm…you don’t know how long someone is going to be there. Its…you don’t want to get involved…..’ ‘I don’t like making friends with people if it’s only going to be for a week because I don’t see that there is any point in doing that’  NSF3 - It’s always a weird dance anyway trying to figure out how attached to get to someone and how not to because with foster kids they are always going to move on somewhere pretty much… so…  NSF5 – ‘I think I never got as close to the other ones, to the consecutive children.’  ‘I didn’t want to feel the pain of… because you knew that they were going to go. I think, yes because I knew that the fist little girl was going to go but until you experience the hurt, it never really hits you.’  **Personal Growth**  NSF1 – Understanding of behaviours associated with children who have had a difficult start in life \*\* my interpretation, not his words  NSF2 – ‘I don’t know… normally I am quite shy [laughs] when I first meet people.. but I think the more I’ve met new people come in and out.. I think it has helped me be a bit more confident….’  NSF3 - I play with them… feed them when needed to, change them if needed…..  NSF4 – Experience of having a younger sibling \*\* my interpretation, not his words  NSF5 - I think it has definitely helped, I mean it has definitely opened my eyes. I think before I was so ignorant and naïve as to what went on in the world really. So yeah definitely helped. Now I have a whole new appreciation of society, I guess  NSM6 – empathy, understanding and ease of getting on with the FC. \*\* my interpretation, not his words  **Influence on Future Thinking**  NSF2 – *‘*It could do.. I want at least a couple of children myself and I also want to foster as well. I wouldn’t mind a big family.’  NSF3 - I do know that for the foreseeable future I have no plans to have my own family..’  NSM4 - Yeah, that’s *(transcript was unclear*) my personal career, it’s similar…well not too dis similar to this  **Security**  NSF3 - Yes it does make a difference, because if I wasn’t comfortable with it, she would say no.  NSM4 - Yeah, I think a few times early on my mum said obviously me and my sister, as our birth children, you do come first…….That if the foster child was an absolute terror or hurting us, then our needs before them.  NSF5 - I think that they just didn’t want it to affect me at all. I think they had heard that and know that teenagers can be a little bit volatile and could be leaving the house or causing upset in the house and maybe a little disruptive to my school work and they just didn’t want anything to affect that….so   1. **Making relationships with CLA**   **Sibling like**  NSM1 – ‘Erm…with the first one that came, we are pretty good friends… like he stayed with us for over 10 years [right] so he was pretty much like a brother….’  NSF2 I: So do you see it any different to your other sister? P:‘No.. it just feels normal and natural’ \*\* my interpretation - like a sister,  NSM4 - You know you have like a special relationship don’t you between your siblings, like you can say a word and you parents don’t know what you’re on about.. and you laughing like… that was his way  NSF5 - at one point I felt like a second mum or just second older sister or something like that and definitely for the following children, it did, yeah.  NSM6 - Well I just regard them as my brothers and sisters really. Not the little kids, because they weren’t here very long, but all my older brothers and sisters and stuff……………. Yeah, yeah, it was just like having a brother really, about the same age, yeah ……He was just like an annoying older brother really  **Age**  NSM1 – ‘Some have been older…ones now are younger [right ok, do you think that is different to build up relationships with them?] yeah one of them is nearly half my age… so that is different [ok, how is it different?] well.. he has like different interests to what I have.. so there is not much common ground there.’    NSF2 – ‘She was the same age as us….yeah same age…. I don’t know… erm… we just got…….. along…..’ ‘With the younger children I used to play with them all the time and help mum, because I used to love kids…. Well I still do. I love playing with kids and stuff.’  NSF3 - With this particular one.. I get a bit nervous because I don’t necessarily know how to interact with the older children… (10 yr old)……  ….it’s mostly been babies… so you know, you sing to them… you coo with them and then they go on and have their lives and they grow up from this big and then they form their new family….well their permanent family  NSM4 - Erm, just different personalities, he wanted to different things with his own friends or he just wasn’t interested at all. Then sometimes, we just went out and I wasn’t interested in going to watch cars racing at all.  NSF5 – (older children)…. I guess it is a very different form of fostering in that they are more a part of your family that can interact. Like sit down at the table and like have conversations and things……..  I remember there were days when you are looking after a baby and it’s such hard work. I remember times when we had a baby and there was absolute…. never much adult conversation at the table and it was just baby, baby, it’s just like ahh, I miss just talking about adult conversation or something like… yeah but even that it’s just a tiny thing in contrast to anything else.  I just think with the toddlers we would be playing and doing lots of games and stuff.  NSM6 - They had some little babies.. about five of them in a row. The last one left about two years ago, I think…….Not the little kids, because they weren’t here very long,  **Spending Time Together**  NSF2 – Yes… she used to come out with me and my friends and things on a weekend. ‘Yeah.. not so much now… like my brother and sister have moved out now… but we still all go away on holiday together as a family once a year and birthdays we always go out for a meal, every birthday and sometimes barbeques other stuff’  Day trips… like going to the beach…. Cinema.. bowling..  NSF5 - And because you have seen them grow up, it’s almost as if you have nurtured them and it’s almost as if your family have shaped who they have become as well, and they have been very much part of your family  NSM6 - Not that I can think of, we went on holidays and stuff together, no… well we went to the same school, obviously.  **Natural Relationships**  NSM1 - I mean…they can be friends… but that’s quite rare..  Erm…with the er first one that came, we are pretty good friends…  NSF2 - yeah, I am still friends with one of the girls that lived here. We are still quite good friends.  NSM4 - yeah, well for us it was sort of almost natural him coming into the family after a bit, yeah he was just one of the family  NSF5 - , very, close to them. I think, I remember the very first foster child, I didn’t get too closely involved but when she started getting older, after a couple of months or so I could start to get more involved.  NSM6 - Mmm, not really I don’t think, No. No, because we had pretty much just the same friends at school anyway even though he was in the year below.  **Relational difficulties**  NSM1 – because usually they have because they have been too much of a problem… like they have had too many problems that my parents can’t deal with… so they have had to leave because of that...….really verbally abusive or just really annoying.  ‘Erm…if they don’t have as much serious problems… that helps…[why do you think that helps] because they don’t… like they are not as emotionally scared or psychologically scared….*’*  If people come in when they’re maybe already over the age 11, then it’s kind of too late.  NSF3 - …..who was around 2 or 3 and she had emotional attachment issues and every minute that I was in sight it was Nina..Nina…….. I’ve possibly taken to hiding in my room sometimes..…..  NSM4 - yeah he did a lot of things that would annoy me, like talking with his mouth open and stomping about and talking like at eight o’clock in the morning when I was fast asleep.. yeah.  NSF5 - You would see sort of a behavioural trait in them which you just thought, who has taught them that or why are they like that. (understanding behaviour of babies helps with future relationships)  NSM6 - I don’t know, we disagreed a lot. Ted wasn’t too fond of him either. He was just a bit annoying really   1. **Increased Knowledge and Training**   **Knowledge and understanding**  NSM1 – ‘Yeah, because erm…you don’t know how long someone is going to be there. Its…you don’t want to get involved…so…..’  ‘No.. they are long term ish….but it depends because it always starts out with….Can you look after this person for a week while we sort out their family….and then its…oh we can’t sort it out and then maybe they stay for a month…and then it can kind of be a year…and then people don’t go.’  ‘…….but I think they don’t let themselves get helped. I think that’s why it’s difficult…they don’t want to be helped…most of the time’  ‘Erm…No…but we haven’t had any new in a while. [ok] since I’ve been to university….but I still don’t think that they would tell me*…’*  NSF2 – ‘No we don’t get to know unless the child tells us.’  NSF3 - with my younger brother, we adopted him…………. so I have grown up knowing pretty much everything that he knows but she’s had a whole other life before she came to us that she is aware of……….  ‘…..because apparently social services don’t always think about what the actual people that are doing the fostering have going on in their own lives… erm my mum had to remind them that she does have a family and we live there as well and that any decision that she makes will also have to be also based on what we feel.’  ‘Oh no, I get all of my information through my mum.’  ‘…… I think they can be very short sighted and basically some of the decisions that I am aware have been made don’t appear to have been made in the best interests of the child at all. Erm like at the moment C\*\*\*\* is having a lot of contact. She’s had so many contacts this Summer because she’s got two siblings to have contact with as well as two parents where she has to have contact separately…..’  NSM4 - I think as an adult I can obviously comprehend stronger subjects and I have an understanding of what goes on in the world more, I think so.  NSF5 - I think it’s important that I knew some of it because I am living with them and it helps me understand their behaviour a lot as well. In a way it helps me to empathise with them as well, I think.  NSM6 - Mmm no not really. I just knew obviously that they had been taken away from their mothers and stuff………………. Well when he came, I was only very young so.. but I knew about his mum and his dad. Yeah.  **Training**  NSF2 - No I haven’t but Yeah… my mum goes on lots of training and she still does go on training courses and things now.  NSF3 – No, I think… the only training that I did was again when I was still in 6th form.. me and my mum went to a first aid course, which included first aid of small children…but apart from that.. I think that was the only thing.  ‘I don’t know what things are available; I’ve not done that much research to be honest. I don’t know what I would go to if there was something out there’  NSM4 - No, no support or training… which sounds like a good idea… but no, I might  have because there were some sessions that all blurred into one.   1. **Levels of support**   **Who Support?**  NSM1 – ‘No…just like friends…. I think it helps….’ ‘but it’s not the support that they need. I think that mostly they need a parental figure, more than anything else…so I think that’s what they look for.’  NSF2 - I don’t know, erm I think sometimes we can be seen as some sort of a role model. The two that we have in now are 17 and 18. Like I don’t know, show them.. and help them with independence.. I mean like, they are in semi-independence like showing them how to use the washing machine and stuff like that. I don’t know…  NSF3 - Well the babies, I play with them… feed them when needed to, change them if needed… but it was mostly just sort of… well babies are just there they are kind of easy in some ways.  NSM4 - Unofficially I suppose so, yeah, suppose we are part of their life.  NSF5 - Yeah I think so, I wish I could stay longer to get to know these two girls better but I can imagine that being younger, I mean my parents can support them a lot and they are very supportive of them but there is a limit to how much… well there is such a big age gap between them and do those two girls, do they really want to confide in a 50 year old man. As nice and friendly as he is, I mean, I think that they would... in some situations they might find me more approachable.  NSM6 - Maybe, I suppose, I haven’t really thought about it like that to be honest……(in relation to supporting the FC)  **Lack of Social worker involvement**  NSM1 – ‘Erm…basically none, they come like every year, I think, or every other year and maybe fill out a form asking me how I feel about it, but that’s all really. They don’t really ask my opinion so much.’  ‘I would go to my parents.’  ‘I think if I want to there is someone I can call… but I don’t really think they would even know who I was.’  NSF2 - I don’t really see them or get to speak to them…….No very rarely  ‘…..but for some reason if it something big then I would go and tell my mum.’  ‘Yes, I always go to my mum’  Yeah, well I rarely see them…they come for meeting and see the foster children.. but I usually just say ‘Hi’ and ‘bye’…mainly  NSF3 – ‘I don’t know, I… the last time I really spoke with someone from social services was before I move away and I think I was about 18 years old, maybe 19 and no one has really sat down one on one with me to have a discussion about any other stuff, it was more ok, so you are over 18 so we need to get a CRB check done because you are living in the house… that was pretty much…. I guess its DBS now.’  I don’t know if you have picked up on my feelings towards social workers?.......... They just need to listen, to actually listen to people when they are saying things to them……..  NSM4 - Mmmm I don’t think I have ever had a one to one but I have seen them and I’m sure I have spoken to them once or twice.  NSF5 - Er…. I think they do have an annual visit, but I don’t really remember, No I don’t think I have seen them annually. No I haven’t.  NSM6 - Erm, not that I can remember. I might have been talked to once or twice, but I can’t really think……  **Emotional Support**  NSM1 – No, I try and stay out of the way a bit..... really verbally abusive or just really annoying……I feel that it can be quite difficult on everybody….. I think they don’t let themselves get helped. I think that’s why it’s difficult…they don’t want to be helped…most of the time.  NSF3 - my mum has had some issues a few years ago, not that I think were her fault at all and she has been exonerated of anything but it was very traumatic for her………. I know my mother has been in therapy ever since (no emotional support for FC)  NSM4 - She’s my mum, if she’s unhappy, then I’m not happy. I have supported her as best as I can, yeah.  NSF5 - So I remember feeling very upset by that and I’m wondering if there could be maybe some sort of support service for that or that for when a child leaves a family   1. **The difficulty of Transitions**   **Initial placements**  NSM1 –*‘*I think…erm… I don’t think that was the reason it was easier… I think… I think it was… erm… he had less things like holding him back [right] so it was just easier for him to become part of a new family, I think’  ‘I have heard a lot of people complaining about how people get into care; that it usually takes too long and by that point people are maybe too damaged to be helped. So like if they come into foster care too late… like the two older ones, it’s too late to help them.’  Perhaps interview the birth children beforehand and find out what sort of people they are and then try and match children that need help with those. Because then I feel like if they get on better, they are more likely to get the help they need and are less likely to want to leave.  NSF2 – The way they come to the house? [yep].. I think it helps when they have little visits before… but that can’t always happen.. like emergencies…but to be fair…I don’t know….  Sometimes people have had to come in and their like…woow…because sometimes they are not use to having busy houses…  NSF3 - We have had her much longer than we thought we would. She was only going to be there.. I think she came on an emergency placement for like a weekend, and this was two or three months ago I think……….. and they are possibly talking about long term  Its possible, I think a lot of it is simply because I am 14 years older than her and I just have a different chill…  NSF5 - Oh like you have got a six year old child that has just been removed and we don’t know the details of anything. We don’t know if they are going to be very, very upset when they come to us. They are going to be coming round to us in like an hours’ time and we haven’t got the bedroom sorted or the house sorted and we don’t know what to expect and we don’t know how long they are going to stay with us. It’s all the absolute uncertainty of it all.  NSM6 - Well they would just say a new baby will be coming soon. Well mostly they would be told before the baby was born.  **Placement endings/Breakdowns**  NSM1 – ‘I generally don’t mind…because usually they have because they have been too much of a problem… like they have had too many problems that my parents can’t deal with… so they have had to leave because of that....so it more just… it’s kind of relief then [relief?] either they were like….really verbally abusive or just really annoying’.  NSF3 - Its possible…erm because the result of that was that the little girl was taken from us, I think my mum was actually thinking about adopting her.. or taking her on long time… we had had her since she was born.  NSM4 - ‘As harsh as it sounds, after everything that has happened it’s been a bit of a breather to have him leave…after the way he has acted towards mostly my parents and especially my mum.’  ‘Sad really and my anger towards the person who is partly responsible.’  NSF5 - It sounds so dramatic really but it felt as though she had died in a way because you can’t see her at all. One minute she is in your life and then she just goes. | 353, 354  626,627  869. 870  1271  1599  13 - 15  169-171  382 - 387  740,741  1100 - 1101  1128 - 1129  1710  364 – 366  521 - 523  1097 - 1098  1587  399  943 - 945  1470 - 1472  1690 - 1691  26 – 28  500, 501  504  541-543  851, 857  1219 - 1220  1227, 1228  1595  1597  19, 215, 216  251, 252  353.354  550  633,634  608  1185  1539 -1541  20, 22  127, 128  634 - 636  1554  1556 - 1557  437 - 438  700  1326 - 1328  482 - 483  657  1056  679  1079, 1080  1082  1317 -1319  97. 98  468  1011, 1012  .  1343, 1344  1615, 1616  1624, 1641  114 - 116  .  328 & 332  330  540 - 541  642 - 644  1123 - 1125  1231`, 1232  1306 - 1309  1381 - 1382  1575, 1576, 1616  330  341 - 343  345  1241 - 1242  1690, 1691  81  97  315  1163  1341 -1343  1695, 1696  49 - 52  134-135  232  545 - 550  889 - 890  1353, 1354  1643  21 - 22  26 – 28  71  92 – 93  389  554 -556  673 - 676  592  749 - 752  959 - 960  1361 - 1362  1675  1677  424, 425  690 - 692  776, 777  1040, 1041  200 - 203  386 - 388  700, 701  1115  1422 - 1426  1739  153 – 154  158  161  365 & 367  404.405  681 - 684  747  748  1145, 1146  1509, 1510  1745  19, 51, 52, 65  70,71  602, 603  608  1189  1541 - 1542  110 - 111  227 – 229  247 - 249  471 - 472  474, 475  531 – 534  588. 589  1523 - 1527  1670, 1671  49 – 52  633, 634  922, 923  1172  1542 - 1544 |