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Listening to Male Foster Carers' Experiences of Fostering

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Abstract

This research considers how male foster carers experience the role when fostering in a male-female partnership and the gendered discourses of parenting that is present due to patriarchal and hegemonic beliefs around child nurturement. I will identify the influences which have shaped fostering practices including reference to the gender/sex binary, early socialisation, family, parenting, and societal expectations to consider how this impacts how male foster carers position themselves and how they are positioned by others.

Adopting an insider outsider positionality, this relativist and relational ontological study is supported by a narrative methodology. I draw from a psycho-social constructionism and feminist research paradigm to underpin the research. Furthermore, I utilise the Listening Guide which is a feminist method of narrative analysis to interpret the stories of three male foster carers privileging their voices.

The interpretation highlights that men play an active role in fostering, experiencing a sense of satisfaction, pride and enjoyment in the role. Expressions of 'doing gender' can be identified in response to household responsibilities but redressed when changes in the family system occur or concerns about how they are positioned by others identified, thus dominant discourses prevalent in fostering are questioned. Furthermore, concepts of permanence, belonging, and love are explored. As the male foster carers identify high levels of commitment to the children placed with them which extends to other family members and into adulthood for the young person, discourses of family are also questioned. The research considers how Educational Psychologists (EPs) through an awareness of the self and intersectionality can support foster carers and indeed parents, during all stages of an assessment and how care must be taken to ensure that what is written about young people and their families is accurate and authentic.

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1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background for the study

Childhood is a socially constructed concept (Ariès, 1962, Jenks, 2004) dominant cultural and political ideological assumptions within a society (Fawcett, 2000). Therefore, the experiences of children vary wildly (Morrow, 2011) and the public's often nostalgic view of this period (Irving, 2018) is neither accurate nor helpful (Morrow, 2011). Indeed, for some, it is a time of familial disruption (McClung and Gayle, 2010), multiple placement moves, and uncertainty (Konijn et al., 2021). There are 83,840 children and young people currently being cared for by local authorities in England (GOV.UK, 2023) as cited in (Nelson, 2023). According to Coman and Devaney (2011), abuse and neglect are common reasons why children and young people enter foster care. Many have experienced significant loss, developmental trauma, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Chambers and Palmer, 2010). To grow and thrive, children and young people within the care system need a secure base where they can feel safe (Steenbakkers et al, 2018). Successive Governments' preferred placement option for children and young people who cannot live with their families is foster care (Nutt, 2002) as this imitates the idealised notion of a nuclear family (Heslop, 2014). Indeed, around 60% of fostered children and young people live with either foster or kinship carers (Ofsted, 2021).

Whilst the landscape of fostering is changing in line with the structure of families within society, in 2012 around 79% of fostering households comprised of a married or cohabiting couple (McDermid et al., 2012). This data does not identify family composition however lesbian and gay men were only afforded the same rights as heterosexual couples in 2002, through the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 (Brown and Cocker, 2008). Plus it has also been suggested that since the 1980s, there has been no discernible change in the characteristics of foster carers, with a white heteronormative discourse of fostering prevalent (Sharples, 2017). Research which considers the experiences of lesbian and gay foster carers is steadily accumulating (Kaasbøll et al., 2022), however, the experiences of bisexual and transexual foster carers is sparse (McDermott and Hicks, 2018). Reflections about this body of research will be discussed further within Section 2.2.2.

I believe it is pertinent to highlight that studies examining foster carers whilst heteronormative in nature (Sharples, 2017) are also highly gendered and often only focus on the woman's role (Heslop, 2016). Indeed, some researchers describe an intentionality to only report issues about fostering families "through the eyes of female carers" (Sinclair et al., 2004 p. 23). Additionally, researchers have proposed there is a large disparity between the number of women who express an interest in participating in studies when compared to men (Blythe et al., 2014), potentially suggesting a gendered difference in the perceived importance of the fostering role. It is suggested that societal values and beliefs which govern our culture are based on capitalist and patriarchal views which seek to instil clearly defined roles based on gender (Sear, 2021), identifying the woman's domain within the home (Anderson, 2014). Thus, whilst men's role within the public sphere is celebrated (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2016), not much is known about their lives within the private sphere (Burgess, 1997). I believe this is concerning, especially in reference to fostering, as foster carers do not work in isolation but in a blurred space that is both private and public (Nutt, 2006). With limited literature that focuses on men (Heslop, 2014), it is difficult to conceptualise how men may experience the role.

My husband and I have fostered for 15 years and whilst we have always regarded ourselves to be equal partners, there have been instances in which wider systems such as social care and education have only engaged with or credited me for the role we both play in our children's lives. These lived experiences strongly motivated my desire to undertake the research, plus influenced decisions taken throughout the process as I wanted to explore this social phenomenon within one subsection of society, through questioning how men position themselves and how they feel they are positioned by others when they foster alongside a woman. Whilst I acknowledge gender is socially constructed (Ghisleni et al., 2016), I recognise that by using the dichotomous variables; man and woman, and through focusing on heterosexual couples, I am maintaining a binary view of sex, sexuality, and gender (Lindqvist et al., 2021). This said, I hope that by exploring how genders are performed (Butler, 2002) within this specific familial context, I can consider how gender is negotiated and constructed within fostering, which perpetuates an imagined 'traditional' view of family (Burman, 2008, Sear, 2021). Due to my ontological and epistemological stance, plus awareness of issues around intersectionality (Flores Niemann, 2020), I am not looking to

generalise the stories heard to all men but through interviewing a small sample of men in heterosexual couplings, I hope to value their stories as told and give voice to their experiences (Hanlon, 2012). This thesis will hopefully add to the small body of work that has been carried out privileging male foster carers' voices by focusing on their lived experiences of fostering. It will also look to explore concepts of masculinity, family, belonging, and love.

1.2. Insider-outsider perspective

I adopted an insider-outsider perspective (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) as whilst I am part of the fostering community and may have similar shared experiences to those I interviewed, knowledge is bound by our culture and history (Braun and Clarke, 2013), therefore no two fostering households will be the same. Furthermore, as a woman interviewing men, I also questioned if I could understand their experiences (Merriam et al, 2001 p.405). I accepted that by assuming an insider-outsider perspective my role within the research process was not passive (Bukamal, 2022), thus issues around positionality and power (Merriam et al., 2001), plus identity and reflexivity (Chhabra, 2020) need to be explored.

1.2.1. Identity

Bukamal (2022) suggested that in order to ensure credibility when using interpretivist research, researchers should be transparent about their identity, as after all interpretation of dialogue is based on our own personal histories, values, and beliefs (Karsten, 2024). I found the personal and social GgRRAAACCEEESSS model (Burnham and Nolte, 2019) which includes Gender, geography, Race, Religion, Age, Abilities, Appearance, Class, Culture, Ethnicity, Education, Employment, Sexuality, Sexual orientation, and Spirituality, useful to base my thinking around. With this in mind, I am a middle-aged, heterosexual, disabled, white, British, ciswoman who identifies as agnostic and struggles with constructs around class (Hoskins, 2015). I believe my upbringing was working-class but notice an uncomfortableness when I suggest this may still be the case. My early life included periods of instability due to familial mental ill-health. This is important as although my sibling and I were never fostered, it proved to be a personal motivating factor for me to want to pursue the role in adulthood. Fostering is and always will be a part of my identity that I value. Whilst I would not describe myself as academic, I have always engaged in lifelong learning. I

am currently enrolled on a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Sheffield and once complete I will be a qualified Educational Psychologist (EP).

1.2.2. Research within the hyphen

Early researchers often made a conscious choice between an insider and an outsider identity (Merriam et al., 2001). Being an insider is often seen as beneficial as it brings authenticity to the process, offering researchers a privileged position whereby they strongly identify with the experiences of those within the study (Merriam et al., 2001), whereas outsiders are at a distance and can approach the research and interviews with a naive curiosity (Chhabra, 2020). This said it is now recognised that an 'either-or' approach (Merriam et al., 2001) does not appreciate the complexity of our identities within the research (Sharma, 2024), and that it is possible to identify with both (Moore, 2005).

Within an insider-outsider positionality, researchers can take a polarised view, identifying points of membership and non-membership with those being researched (Chhabra, 2020). However, I felt it was important to go beyond this view as membership to a group does not mean that all experiences will be the same, with "difference to be expected" (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.56). I was encouraged by other researchers to work within the space between my insider and outsider status (Chhabra, 2020) and "at the hyphen" (Kanuha, 2000, p. 444). Indeed, my identity and sense of connectedness to the stories shifted throughout the dialogue (Sharma, 2024). There were moments where my insider positionality heightened, for instance during discussions around adoption and education. Additionally, there were experiences identified with which I was less familiar. This included discussions around faith, plus fostering babies and unaccompanied children. Through harnessing my outsider positionality, I listened with curiosity and had an openness to the experience of others, thus widening my personal viewpoint.

1.2.3. Power

To build trust through transparency, I ensured that participants understood my positionality from the start, including my dual role as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) and foster carer in the participant information sheet. I do wonder how my role as a TEP influenced

discussions with my participants. Whilst I may reject the expert model (Moore, 2005), I am conscious that others may see me in a different light. I have noted that when meeting with parents, the view is often that I know best. I try to redress such assumptions, however it does demonstrate that there is a power imbalance that cannot be denied (Jortveit, 2023).

1.2.4. Reflectivity

I accepted very early in the research that I may influence and be influenced within the space of the interview and during the analysis (Patton, 2002) but I now recognise that I underestimated the impact the research would have (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The process gave rise to some interesting and occasionally difficult personal thoughts and feelings which I was able to work through during supervision (Hanlon, 2012). The need for bracketing is suggested by some researchers (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) but I found this incredibly difficult to put into practice as I could not always identify where the participants' voices ended and mine began. This said, to centralise my participants' stories, there are some personal reflections which I have decided to not include in my final thesis.

1.3. Focus on terminology

Foster carers are individuals who act as substitute parents for children who are unable to live with their birth families. Foster carers' roles can vary and they may be requested to support emergency, respite/support, mainstream short-term, and mainstream long-term placements (Baginsky et al., 2017). This research will draw attention to the experiences of mainstream foster carers. Throughout the thesis, I have used the terms male and female foster carers rather than foster fathers, foster mothers, and foster parents, to emulate current discourses in fostering (Eitzen and McIntosh, 2004) and to denote the level of professionalism needed to fulfil the role (Kirkton et al, 2007). I have considered the terminology I used in-depth as Lindqvist et al., (2021) warn against using terms that define sex (i.e. male and female) and gender (i.e. man and woman) interchangeably. Lindqvist and colleagues helpfully suggested that a focus on gender allows for more freedom in identity. Additionally, as my thesis attends to issues around socialisation rather than biology (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021), this distinction seems appropriate. This has proven problematic as for the reasons identified above, I feel that it is important that my

participants are identified as foster carers rather than ‘men who foster’, therefore, I have decided not to shift between the terms male and men or female and women when discussing gender but have used male and female when defining the specific fostering job role. From this point on, I will also refer to children and young people within the care system as children, although I understand that within the ‘staying put’ system, this may include young people who are no longer classified as fostered, up to the age of 21 (DfE, 2013)

It is understood that there is no universal truth regarding gender, expression of masculinity and femininity, or how this may relate to parenting (Music, 2017), however as my specific focus was on fostering to contextualise my participants’ experiences, I have tried where possible to select research conducted in the UK, as there are disparities in practices and legislation between countries (Sharples, 2017). For instance, trends in adoption within Australia fell during the 1990s (Wright et al., 2021) as the policies and practices which promoted the forced adoption of Indigenous children between 1910 and 1970s (Wright et al., 2021) were formally acknowledged. Known as the ‘Stolen Generation’ up to three children in ten were forcibly removed from their families and communities, causing detrimental and long-term effects for all (Haebich, 2011). As a consequence Australia continues to have a relatively low adoption rate in comparison to the UK, favouring permanent care (Collings and Wright, 2022). Furthermore, when it is agreed adoption is in the child’s best interest, continued contact with the child’s birth family is expected (Wright et al., 2021). With this in mind, whilst I have made every effort to balance my research, offering examples of cultures whereby patriarchal and capitalist structures do not monopolise societies’ view of family, the research is largely situated within the English/UK context.

Within this thesis, I have deliberately not used the term ‘mothering’ to denote parenting practices. Despite the word being established as a gender-neutral phrase (Burman, 2008), some scholars wish to reclaim the term (Benn, 1993) as cited in (Burman, 2008) and others wish to offer alternatives through a paternal lens (Chopra, 2001). Additionally, researchers exploring parenting reported that when interviewed men identified as fathers, (Doucet, 2018), and equally women identified their husbands as fathers, *“He wasn’t mothering the kids, he was fathering the kids”* (p. 379).

2. Chapter Two: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The background of the study is one in which the child is increasingly politicised (Thomas, 2018). Whilst child-rearing may be seen as the family's responsibility, the state is also a stakeholder in the nurturement of its young (Nelson, 2023), insomuch as age restrictions are set for children's actions and parents are deprived full autonomy around aspects of their child's life such as education. The distinction between private and public domains of family life is removed in reference to safeguarding (Burman, 2008). The Children Act 1989, established thresholds for service involvement and the point at which care proceedings should be initiated, to ensure the safety and protection of children and young people (Montgomery, 2018). Practitioners such as social workers are instructed to carry out a dual role of "punishment and rehabilitation" (Burham, 2008, p. 116) through assessments and required to take decisive action if it is thought a child is suffering from significant harm. Removing a child from the care of their family is seen as a "last resort" (Grey, 2024, p. 1), which requires a court order issued by a family court (Masson et al., 2017). The outcome for children following care proceedings usually falls under one of four options: reunification, kinship care, fostering and adoption, all of which offer differing legal status, involvement with wider services, and financial remuneration thus affecting the felt experience of permanence and belonging. If the decision is made that foster care is in a child's best interest, it is believed that the local authority should act as a corporate parent, ensuring that the child receives better care than before they were placed (McClung and Gayle, 2010).

Fostering services have been, and continue to be heavily influenced by Bowlby's theory of attachment (Solvi et al., 2024), therefore the preferred placement option for children who are unable to live with their birth family is foster care (Nutt, 2002) as this imitates the idealised notion of a traditional nuclear family (Heslop, 2014). Foster carers work within a space that is both private and public, with the home central to this (Heslop, 2014). For heterosexual couples, it is often assumed that male foster carers play a secondary role to that of female foster carers (Newstone, 2000) because, within patriarchal societies, the dominant discourse has positioned the home as the domain of women (Cabrera et al., 2018), a view similar to that found within parenting practices (Hanlon, 2012). I am

interested in exploring this phenomenon further as this view is limiting for both men and women. Thus, following an introduction into fostering exploring notions of permanence, belonging, and love, I will utilise articles written by feminist and critical studies on men and masculinity (CSMM) researchers to consider discourses around gender and family, plus shifts in masculinity and parenting. I hope by doing this I can begin to identify the constructs that have shaped fostering practices. Finally, I will return to the fostering role to explore perceived differences and similarities between male and female foster carers, plus highlight where men situate themselves and are positioned by others.

2.2. Fostering

In this first section, I shall consider changes in expectation found within fostering, the composition of fostering families and how placement stability can be achieved through permanence. I believe this gives rise to an interesting consideration of the experience of love.

2.2.1. Changes in expectation

Discourses surrounding foster care have changed. What was seen as a voluntary role (Heslop, 2014) for stay-at-home mothers to undertake (Bebbington and Miles, 1990) has become increasingly professionalised. This notion has been met with a sense of unease by some within the fostering community due to changes in the language used, employment status, and financial contributions (Blythe et al., 2014). Foster carers are often still positioned as volunteers who receive remuneration to meet the needs of children placed with them (Butcher, 2005), have no employment rights (Heslop, 2014) plus the role is still promoted as 'having a spare room' (FosterCare, nd). However, paradoxically, as a result of legislative changes, there has been a shift in expectations centrally from the government and locally from fostering services. Current practices dictate that all prospective foster carers are required to attend pre-approval training and must complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD Standards) (DfE, 2012) as outlined in the National Minimum Standards (NMS) within 12-18 months of approval (DfE, 2011a). Foster carers are also expected to participate in reviews, support contact arrangements, and help with life

story work (Kirton, 2007). This is reflected in the change of title from foster parent to foster carer.

2.2.2. Who chooses to foster

According to a statistical release by Ofsted (2022), which compiled information from 428 fostering services, there are 36,050 mainstream fostering households in England. These fostering households offer 74,660 fostering places, which when compared to 2018 is a decrease of 5% (Ofsted, 2022). Most foster carers are approved to offer multiple types of foster care (62%), care for two or more children (71%), up to the age of 18 (87%) (Ofsted, 2022). The release suggested that the ethnicity of the fostering population was largely representative of England's general population, but it is an ageing workforce, with 68% of carers aged 50 or above (Ofsted, 2022). Furthermore, most fostering households include two carers (Ofsted, 2022) both of whom must be approved. As discussed in Section 1.1. a white heteronormative discourse of fostering remains prevalent (Sharples, 2017), with "carers who do not fit the majority characteristics" obscured from view (Baginsky et al., 2017 p. 108). I was shocked to read that as recently as the 1980s women were discriminated against and removed from their roles in social care due to their sexuality (Brown and Cocker, 2008). Legislative changes have gone some way in addressing equal rights for lesbian and gay men with respect to fostering and adoption (Wood, 2016), however, Sharples (2017) believes societal perceptions remain largely unchanged. Gay and lesbian couples have remarked that their ability to parent is closely scrutinised more so than heterosexual couples (Kaasbøll et al., 2022), with some suggesting that there was an overemphasis placed on their sexuality by practitioners (Wood, 2016). This resulted in individuals feeling they needed to amplify certain gendered identities and moderate others in order to demonstrate their suitability (Kaasbøll et al., 2022). Furthermore, McDermott and Hicks (2018) are critical of studies conducted to date as whilst there is a small body of research which explores the views of lesbian and gay foster carers, there is an absence of research into bisexual and transgender foster carers. McDermott and Hicks proposed that the focus on looking for sameness rather than difference maintains heteronormative values which do not value or legitimise lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual (LGBT) individuals' experiences of family. I feel that existing prejudices around gender roles are addressed within my study.

2.2.3. A sense of belonging

Fostering is much more than meeting a child's basic needs (Maslow, 1943) but providing a safe and secure base from which children can begin to develop a sense of trust and connection (Purcell and Gratzke, 2022). There is a governmental drive to improve placement stability through permanence (Department for Education, 2013), as inconsistencies in care and multiple placement moves are detrimental to fostered children's well-being (Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011), educational attainment (Biehal et al., 2013), and future life chances (Ward, 2009). In England, around 30 per cent of fostered children experienced two or more placement moves during 2023 (GOV.UK, 2023), with one per cent experiencing as many as seven. To change these poor outcomes, it is important that children experience a sense of belonging and that their foster carers are supported (Munford and Sanders, 2016), so all parties are in a position to navigate difficulties together and move towards alternative possibilities, rather than placement breakdown.

Foster carers are required to offer attuned and sensitive care which is consistent over time (Harkness, 2019). However, despite foster carers best attempts, the commitment demonstrated (Evans, 2020) can sometimes feel too scary or difficult for the child to reciprocate (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Biehal (2014) argued that the experience of belonging is not determined by the child's foster carers' feelings towards them, or the length of time spent in a family. Wilson et al., (2013) proposed conditions which could predict placement stability over instability. This included the degree of responsive care the child is in receipt of, characteristics of both the child and foster carers, and level of support from the wider system such as relationship with the birth family and social worker (Wilson et al., 2003). In addition, Biehal (2014) offered a model with four variations: 'as if', 'just like', 'qualified belonging', and 'provisional belonging' to contextualise children's connections to their foster and birth families. Children reported a greater sense of belonging to their foster families when they were included in family activities such as traditions and rituals and experienced a 'felt' sense of fairness to the way they were treated in comparison to other children in the home (Biehal, 2014).

2.2.4. Expressions of love

This raises the debated issue of love. Love is difficult to define as it holds different connotations and feelings associated with love can be deeply personal (hooks, 2020). Love cannot be forced and within any context, it is something that develops, grows, and blossoms over time. Whilst the components of love such as care, respect, and trust (hooks, 2020) are customary and accepted in professional practice, the term love can raise uncomfortable feelings (Vincent, 2016) and cannot be used to meet the professional's needs (Purcell et al., 2022). There has been a rise in researchers referring to 'professional love' or 'pedagogical love' within health care, education, and social care including foster carers to denote the reciprocity found within relational practices (Purcell et al., 2022). The tension for foster carers relates to the debate around working within a space that is both public and private (Nutt, 2002). With the discourse of professionalism tied into the fostering role (Wilson and Evetts, 2006), foster carers are encouraged to consider 'safer caring' in a bid to prevent allegations (Plumridge and Sebba, 2016). Evan's (2020) paper explores the "taboo of love for children in care" (p. 73) beautifully, highlighting the difficulties children and foster carers may have in offering and accepting love, the cultural and societal expectations around the concept of love, and how this discourse influences the narrative in fostering which often "implies warning against any deep emotional involvement" (Goldstein et al., 1973) as cited in (Evans, 2020, p.77) due to perceived concerns over loss and fear.

2.3. Constructs that have shaped fostering practices

In this section, I will identify constructs that have shaped fostering practices. I shall first consider the performative role of gender in shaping men and women before moving on to explore the construct of family, deconstructing the 'traditional' view of the nuclear family. It has been suggested that issues around housework and childcare should be considered in isolation as each role holds a different meaning and value (Geist and Ruppanner, 2018). In practice separating the two concepts was challenging as they seem intrinsically linked within research, thus it should be noted that the context on which discussions are based within Section 2.3.4. relates to families with children, unless otherwise stated. When reviewing research on childcare arrangements, I will identify gendered constructs of parenting,

psychological theories which have influenced parenting, and changes in parenting practices, alongside societal expectations regarding men.

2.3.1. Gender/sex binary and early socialisation

Whilst there are biological differences between the sexes (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021), gender is not biologically predetermined (Music, 2017) and does not follow sex (Lindqvist et al., 2021). It is a concept which is socially constructed, thus in line with hegemonic discourses of particular epochs and cultures (Ghisleni et al., 2016), change across time and contexts occurs (Kakroda and Sole, 2023). Gender is learned through a process of socialisation in which ways of performing within a culture are transmitted (Grbich, 1994, Butler, 2002). Systems such as the political system, education, religion, and the mass media all have a role (Parke and Buriel, 2008) in the integration of infants into the social world (Jenks, 1996), with the gender/sex binary serving to reinforce patriarchal gendered stereotypes (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021). In addition, primary socialisation which is developed through the “interdependent asymmetry” (Parke and Buriel, 2008, p. 96) of relationships found within families (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2010), is instrumental in promoting gendered identities. Robertson-Elliott (1986) proposed that the process of socialisation is initiated from birth. From as young as twelve months old (Wingrave, 2018), infants learn the allowances and constrictions associated with their gender through processes of reinforcement and modelling (Morawska, 2020) as described in social learning theory.

In some cultures women are seen to be the aggressor and more assertive sex (Music, 2017), demonstrating gender is learned through exposure to specific values, traditions, and rituals (Parke and Buriel, 2008). However, within Westernised societies, the message often conveyed to girls expresses a need to be caring (Luxton and Fox, 2009), whereas boys are encouraged to emulate masculine traits (Peate, 2020). Thus girls tend to form intimate bonds of friendship (Stockard, 2006), whereas boys have been shown to demonstrate more aggressive behaviours (Endendijk et al., 2017). Research has been carried out to explore children’s constructs of gender. In an Italian study, it was suggested that just over half of the girls interviewed aged ten, believed there were some roles that only women could perform

(Cerbara et al., 2022). The authors discussed that this demonstrated the sexist views prevalent in society and highlighted the lasting negative impact such narratives may have on the future life choices of the girls interviewed (Cerbara et al., 2022). In a further American study the role of parents in affirming gender normative behaviours was identified as gender differences thought to be symbiotic with the child's sex were frequently noted and discussed by a group of parents at a football match (Messner, 2015). Indeed, Messner reported that similarities between the children, although all the same age, were never raised. This is an important reflection, as the Gender Similarity Hypothesis proposes that men and women share more similarities than differences (Hyde, 2005, Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021), and thus poses the question of whether a focus on gender is even necessary (Lindqvist et al., 2021). Furthermore, through fixating on differences, cultural norms are maintained (Geller, 2009).

As genders are not binary or constrained to men or women (Kakroda and Sole, 2023), there is an exchange between an individual's gendered identity and societal expectations (Pink, 2020). Morgenroth and Ryan (2021) have explored this further, developing Butler's influential concept of gender performativity into a model by identifying four areas of performativity. This includes the character that is played, the costume which is worn, the scripts which are practised, and the stage on which the audience, including the self, can observe. Morgenroth and Ryan suggested that if there is a coherence between the four categories the gender/sex binary is maintained, which perpetuates a society which oppresses women and disregards intersecting identities. Furthermore, if the performance is misaligned, individuals are 'Othered' and face discrimination as experienced by many individuals within marginalised groups such as the LGBT community (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021).

2.3.2. Shifts in constructs of masculinity

There has been a notable shift in the way the expression of masculinity is understood as the notion of gender has changed. Researchers in critical studies on men and masculinity (CSMM) suggest that the understanding of masculinity has moved from a singular view, which is within the individual and biologically determined, to multiple forms of masculinities which are dependent on context (Smiler, 2004).

One of the earliest models which explored masculinity was Brannon's (1977) Sex Role Theory, which proposed that all men must play specific roles in our society (Smiler, 2004). Indeed, as already discussed it is suggested that gender is bound by constraints of societal expectations which implies men and women should conduct themselves in a particular way (Robb and Ruxton, 2018). Brannon's view determined that masculinity was manly, strong, self-sufficient, and risk-taking (Smiler, 2004), and defined masculinity through four distinct norms (Thompson et al., 1985); 'No Sissy Stuff', 'The Big Wheel', 'The Sturdy Oak', and 'Give' Em Hell' (Brannon and David, 1976). This view was heavily criticised as it was felt it homogenised men's experiences of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), forcing them to prescribe to a singular notion of what it means to be a man (Elliott, 2016). It is interesting to note that around the same time, there was also a similar backlash against feminism as it was recognised that wave one and two generalised women's experience through a lens which was white, heterosexual, and middle class (Delmar, 2018), rather than acknowledge the role intersectionality plays (Kakroda and Sole, 2023). Smiler (2004) also suggested that Brannon's was limiting for men, as it was seen as desirable to suppress any expression of emotions. The Mental Health Foundation (n.d.) suggests that men are three times more likely to commit suicide, are less content in their lives, and less likely to accept help through talking therapies. This is a worrying example of perceived traditional gendered behaviours affecting men's health.

Connell's hierarchy of masculinities was developed in response to discrimination and violence acted out by heterosexual men, towards gay men emphasising the power asymmetry perceived by some (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell proposed that whilst all men held power over all women, variations in masculinity were present, suggesting that there was not one form of masculinity but multiple hierarchical masculinities (Elliott, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity was identified as the dominant expression of masculinities expected within a society (Connell, 1987) and whilst it was perceived most men would find this standard unattainable, their silence in challenging the system meant that they were classed as complicit (Elliott, 2016), and able to benefit from the rewards of domination over women, marginalised masculinities and subordinate masculinities within a society (Connell, 1987). The notion of multiple masculinities suggests that there are numerous ways to be a man and that depending on setting and context, masculinities may take many forms (Smiler,

2004). This has given rise to theories around caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016) and hybrid masculinities (Hanlon, 2022) which explore how men accommodate feminine attributes, alongside traditional notions of masculinity, maintaining their status as men (Hanlon, 2022). This view seems to align closely with current thinking on gender performativity (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021, Butler, 2002).

2.3.3. Discourses around family

I will now move on to discourses around family to consider how fostering has been shaped. As families are visible within society, it is often assumed that there is a shared consensus about what the term 'family' implies (Luxton and Fox, 2009). The 'traditional' view within westernised societies is that families are a unit, consisting of a married couple and their biological offspring (Howe, 2011). This positivist, heteronormative presentation of 'family' is often seen as natural and universal (Geller, 2009). Functionalists such as Parsons, championed the homemaker-breadwinner family structure within the nuclear family as the most favourable scenario to undertake functions such as reproduction and nurturance (Burman, 2008), roles which are necessary for the "survival of a society" (Robertson-Elliott, 1986, p. 10). This dominant discourse is so persuasive, policies and legislation are developed within societies around this worldview (Luxton and Fox, 2009). Plus representations of families which do not meet this ideological expectation are perceived as different (Robertson-Elliott, 1986) and of concern (Luxton and Fox, 2009). For instance, families who foster would be considered an "economic family" (Luxton and Fox, 2009, p. 7) rather than a "nuclear family". Additionally, the term "fragile families" (Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2010, p. 415) was coined for children growing up in single-parent families as it was viewed to have a negative intergenerational effect, in comparison to the stability a two-parent family brings (Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2010).

I oppose this perspective and struggle to see how the nuclear family can be considered universal when there are so many variations of 'families' both from a historical and cultural standpoint. Indeed, it is well documented that discourses around "home and hearth" (Collier et al., 2009, p. 30) did not become a dominant narrative within Westernised societies until around the nineteenth century, and examples of female-centred families which provided

security and connection for women evidenced in early modern England (O'Brien, 2014). The concept of the nuclear family sought to erode social networks which previously offered reciprocal support, as families were seen to be able to function independently and without support, which was not only problematic but unrealistic (Sear, 2021).

The composition of families culturally is dependent on work that is available locally (Luxton and Fox, 2009), and internationally (Oxfeldt, 2017), religion (Heaton et al., 2012), family structure (Garfield, 2009), and situational factors (Goodman and Silverstein, 2002).

Furthermore, changes within Westernised societies in terms of family dynamics and working patterns mean the notion of a nuclear family is becoming increasingly fictitious (Burman, 2008). Collier et al (2009) put forward that whilst it is difficult to conceptualise societies without families due to their very existence, they denied there was a causal link between the two (Collier et al., 2009). Family is therefore not natural or universal but constantly constructed and reconstructed. Robertson-Elliott (1986) warned that the family should not be seen as something that is fixed and suggested that "'The family' is what a particular social group believes it to be" (Robertson-Elliott, 1986, p. 5).

2.3.4. Division of labour

In Westernised societies, it has been suggested that whilst women's engagement in the workplace has increased dramatically over the last thirty years, men's involvement in household tasks has failed to keep pace (Van Hooff, 2011). Thus, although it is accepted men are doing more (Treas, 2010), women often still hold responsibility for the majority of routinised tasks within the home, undertaking the 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung, 2012). This can have unfortunate consequences as women are often unable to fulfil the demands of their jobs alongside these responsibilities (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). A recent article on the BBC emphasised this issue as it suggested that as women were more likely than men to take advantage of flexible and hybrid working patterns, their lack of visibility in the office meant they were often overlooked and missed out on opportunities, negatively affecting their careers (Sri-Pathma, 2024). The Covid-19 pandemic propelled the concept of division of labour further into the public forum, with the majority of research indicating gender inequalities disproportionately affected women (Fisher and Ryan, 2021,

Fortier, 2020). In studies which focused on families with and without children, it was proposed that around 70% of the total time spent on housework was carried out by women (Sánchez et al., 2021). Additionally, women were more expected to juggle domestic duties alongside their existing employment (Garcia, 2022). This suggested there was a return to traditional gendered roles. (Chung et al., 2022). Although writing about the 9/11 terrorist attack, Anderson (2015) used terror management theory to propose that societies shift towards “traditional patriarchal patterns of men as breadwinners/protectors and women as homemakers/victims” (p. 28) during periods of uncertainty and shock, with ideals of equality dismissed. This view equally could be applied to the pandemic as the sense of fear around mortality was palpable.

In line with the research presented on gender performativity (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021, Butler, 2002) and caring masculinities (Elliott, 2016), the term ‘doing gender’ as described by West and Zimmerman (2009) helps to contextualise gender normative behaviours displayed within the home (Pinho and Gaunt, 2021). Pinho and Gaunt suggested that examples of ‘doing gender’ can be found even when families do not follow the ‘traditional’ view of family with working fathers and stay-at-home mothers. Indeed, working mothers carry out more housework when compared to working fathers, plus stay-at-home fathers undertake roles which include manual labour (Doucet, 2018). This said, caution should be taken when viewing such information as research cannot account for the experiences of all men and women, therefore with such a reductionist view presented it fails to account for intersectionality, individual differences, and personal circumstances (Sayer, 2010). Furthermore, there are several research papers which explore the concept of “undoing gender”, in which gender normative behaviours are rejected in favour of new identities (Pinho and Gaunt, 2021). Some couples within egalitarian relationships expressed that they share responsibilities, although it is recognised that this often varies by class (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Interestingly, Lyonette and Crompton identified respondents ‘undoing gender’ whilst simultaneously ‘doing gender’ with women often claiming that their partners should do more but excused this due to their perceived incompetence in such tasks. The view that couples often engage in shared tasks has been contended as it is argued that within most relationships specific tasks are carried out by certain individuals (Kelly and Hauck, 2015). There is an assumption that lesbian and gay couples express values which

align closely to egalitarian relationships with shared responsibilities (Goldberg et al., 2012). Kelly and Hauck proposed that there is more negotiation between same-sex couples regarding housework as the binary of male and female cannot be used as a medium to differentiate tasks. Both views are regarded to be focused on the experiences of middle-class families (McDermott and Hicks, 2018) and an oversimplification of most families' experiences (Goldberg, 2013).

2.3.5. Gendered constructs around parenting

Despite evidence to suggest that fathers are spending more time with their children in contemporary westernised societies (Fagan and Lee, 2014) and the acknowledgement that both parents exert influence on their child's development, research across the USA and Europe into child rearing largely focuses on the mother (Cabrera et al., 2018). Fathers are often positioned as being uninterested (Mitchell and Lashewicz, 2019). Burgess (1997) proposed that due to men's notions of masculinity, they do not feel freely able to express their desires for children and need their partners to voice their longing. Furthermore, as caring for children is often regarded as 'feminine' and 'women's work', (Hochschild and Machung, 2012), mothers are often seen as the primary caregiver. Daniel and Taylor (1999) argued that, unlike motherhood, there is not a dominant discourse surrounding the role of a father, with Johnson (1988), as cited in (Daniel and Taylor, 1999) seeing little role beyond impregnation. Both views are contested by many with Borchorst (1990) as cited in (Nutt, 2002) countering this argument by suggesting that women's mothering role ends with weaning and anything beyond this is a result of societal and cultural expectations. Indeed, research suggests that infants are just as responsive to others as their mothers (Ariès, 1962) and fathers can be just as sensitive and attuned to the needs of their children (Music, 2017). Geller (2009) takes Borchorst's position further by claiming that there are multiple options available to nurse infants, with "breastfeeding as much a cultural practice as a physiological process" (p. 510). Geller cites the work of Tronick et al. (1985) whose cross-cultural study of The Efe identified a pattern of multiple relationships rather than a focus on a single caregiver.

From a historical perspective, it was not until the nineteenth century that women's roles as mothers became intrinsically linked to that of nurturance (Margolis, 2009), as before this there was little differentiation between roles undertaken within a family (Burman, 2008). Within a hegemonic discourse, industrialisation changed the way families were structured, as there was a focus on institutions such as the family to bring order to society. A clear hierarchy from, "God to King to Father in the home" (Fee, 1974) as cited in (Collier et al., 2009, p. 33) was established, thus whilst men held responsibility for social change in the public sphere (Collier et al., 2009), motherhood became synonymous with marriage, providing the only opportunity for many women to gain social mobility (Burman, 2008). Whilst there were variations in experience, many women reported the dual role of housewife and mother left them feeling unsatisfied as possibilities were stifled (Delmar, 2018) and vulnerable as they were dependent upon their husbands (Luxton and Fox, 2009) and excluded from other functions within society (Collier et al., 2009).

Researchers from the USA and Europe suggest that there has been a shift in discourse over the last 50 years in line with changes to the workforce, towards an egalitarian style of parenting (Collier et al., 2009). As families are an interconnected system this shift has not only influenced how marriage is perceived within couples, as it is suggested that there is greater emphasis placed on an equal partnership founded on friendship (Luxton, 2009), but also how fathers parent, with a rise of 'new fathers' (Hook and Wolfe, 2012). It is interesting to note how much societal views have changed. For instance, a recent trend has seen young women post about the benefits of being a traditional wife or 'trad wife' on social media (Sky News, 2024). However, comments around "serving their husbands" have led to a backlash, as there are concerns and fears that other young women might be attracted to a lifestyle that is perceived as harmful, subservient, and toxic (Sky News, 2024).

2.3.6. Theories which have influenced parenting practices

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby draws emphasis to the role primary caregivers have in ensuring infants develop a sense of safety (Harlow, 2021). It was proposed that infants cultivate an internal working model based on the quality of relationships which creates an internalised view of the self, others, and the world around them (Smith et al.,

2017). This theory was further developed by Mary Ainsworth, who through the strange situation procedure, formed categories on which attachment could be measured (Harlow, 2021), namely secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant (Smith et al., 2017). During Ainsworth's research it was acknowledged that for some children, the behaviours observed did not correlate with the three categories prescribed (Landa and Duschinsky, 2013). Therefore, a fourth category disorganised, was added by a student of Ainsworth's, Mary Main alongside Judith Soloman in 1990 (Main, 1996).

Whilst attachment theory has been an incredibly influential theory of human development, helping to change policies and practices within hospitals, social care, and education (Smith et al., 2017), it has been heavily criticised as it steered the perception that all women naturally possess maternal instincts (Nutt, 2002), thus is thought to promote conservative values which hold mothers to account (Duschinsky et al., 2015). Whilst it is acknowledged that attachment theory no longer accentuates the mother's role in parenting, concepts such as maternal deprivation led feminists to believe attachment was introduced to endorse women's place within the home (Fonagy and Campbell, 2016). It is important to note that Bowlby's post-war work was developed during a time when returning soldiers sought to reestablish their dominance within the workplace, which had been successfully fulfilled by women in their absence (Sear, 2021). This said, it has also been suggested that some of Bowlby's work may have been misinterpreted with terms such as monotropy applied to contextualise the infant's need to seek proximity to a single person, rather than multiple caregivers as the term was intended (Dagan and Sagi-Schwartz, 2021). Further concerns focus on the prevalence of attachment theory and the apprehension that now it has become a "master theory" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 1606), other potential theories are not given the attention they deserve. Critics of Ainsworth stressed that the strange situation procedure was based on the responses of middle-class infants (Landa and Duschinsky, 2013) and suggested that is not culturally sensitive, with researchers unable replicate the study in countries such as Japan (Smith et al., 2017) and Uganda (Fearon and Roisman, 2017).

The dynamic maturation model was developed by another of Ainsworth's students, Patricia Crittenden (Crittenden, 2006). Landa and Duschinsky (2013) suggested that Main and Crittenden's interpretation of Ainsworth's work was remarkably different which resulted in

their research taking opposing directions. Whilst Main remained closer to Ainsworth's original findings, Crittenden believed that attachment focused on protecting the self (Crittenden, 2006), and thus could not be considered disorganised. Fundamental to Crittenden's assumption, was the view that patterns of behaviour were learnt and once the threat or need to display such strategies was reduced, the behaviour would be modified (Crittenden, 2006). The dynamic maturation model also focuses on the importance of adulthood in conceptualising experiences felt, rather than focusing on a critical period within infancy, plus suggests that during each stage of childhood, there are opportunities to "correct past error and generate more adaptive behaviours" (Crittenden, 2006, p. 110), demonstrating a more hopeful future, full of possibilities. Indeed Dynamic Maturation Theory is acknowledged for its consideration of attachment strategies used throughout the life course rather than just infancy (Wilcox and Baim, 2016). Criticisms of Dynamic Maturation Theory question why sexual desires are linked to heterosexuality only (Landa and Duschinsky, 2013). Landa and Duschinsky suggested that the model needs to take account of differing societal and cultural views around the expression of sexuality, rather than focus on a hegemonic discourse that may have been present within a particular society.

Multiple attachments was developed by Rudolph Schaffer and Peggy Emerson in 1964. Similarly to Bowlby's theory of attachment, they were interested in "the tendency of young to seek proximity of certain other members of the species." (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964, p. 6). However, after observing 60 Scottish-born infants at set intervals until they were 18 months old, Schaffer and Emerson's exploration of attachment proposed several fundamental differences to that offered by Bowlby (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964). It is first important to highlight that whilst parents varied in terms of job role and social class, Schaffer and Emerson described that all had strong social networks. For some, this included extended family who lived nearby and for others, it was neighbours who were able to offer mutual support (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964). Furthermore, Schaffer and Emerson emphasised that fathers were heavily invested in the family. Schaffer and Emerson proposed that infants were active participants in the development and maintenance of attachments. They also suggested that contrary to the dominant discourse of parenting at the time, the mother was not always the primary attachment figure with multiple attachments possible such as fathers, siblings, and grandparents (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964). Indeed, Schaffer

and Emerson expressed caution around the viability of studies which explored parenting or early childhood development that only focused on the mother-infant dyad, as “To focus one's enquiry on the child's relationship with the mother alone therefore give a misleading impression of the attachment function” (p. 70).

Schaffer and Emerson proposed three reasons why mothers were identified as sole and primary carers. Firstly, as the primary function of caring for infants was intrinsically linked to meeting physiological needs, those who had no role in meeting these needs were not seen to provide a function. Secondly, there was a belief that those who spent the most time with infants must automatically indicate that they were the primary attachment figure. As during this time, care tended to be provided by the mother, this role was prescribed. Schaffer and Emerson felt this understanding failed to account for personal circumstances. Finally, it was suggested that the view of the family was based on historical patriarchal discourses that were no longer relevant (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964).

Whilst reading Smith and colleagues' (2017) article, I was introduced to Axel Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) which offered an alternative worldview to conceptualise relationships. Based on the humanistic approach, Honneth's focus lies in the importance of interdependence found within relationships (Smith et al., 2017) as indeed, identity is coconstructed through dialogue and interactions with others (Fraser, 2000). Whilst Honneth developed the theory with adults in mind, due to the belief that recognition does not need to be experienced through familial ties (Smith et al., 2017), the theory has been reconceptualised around children and used within social care, for instance, foster care (Smith et al., 2017), residential care (Marshall et al., 2020), and family services (Houston and Dolan, 2008). The theory has also been reworked to consider well-being in schools (Graham et al., 2017) and as a model of participation applied to the experiences of students and staff in schools (Thomas, 2012).

Honneth was deeply influenced by the writing of Winnicott (1971). Winnicott suggested that infants are driven by two competing instincts; to identify as separate from others' whilst remaining dependent (Houston and Dolan, 2008). If this process is managed well then infants can develop trust in the self and others (Honneth, 1995) thus developing confidence.

Honneth proposed three forms of recognition which were fundamental to the development of the self, specifically love, rights, and solidarity (Thomas, 2012). For Honneth, love emphasises the need to matter to others (Smith et al., 2017). Honneth stressed the requirement for safe, trusting, and reciprocal relationships (Marshall et al., 2020) built through “strong emotional attachments among a small number of people” (Honneth, 1995, p. 95). Smith and colleagues (2017) suggested that this can be achieved by “knowing the other” (p. 1616) through reciprocal exchanges. Rights denote the need to be respected by others and socially recognised for self-respect to flourish (Houston and Dolan, 2008). Interestingly, Graham and colleagues (2017) found that staff in schools often demanded respect but did not offer this in return. Rights can be fostered by ensuring hopes and wishes are sought, with decisions coproduced rather than enforced (Smith et al., 2017). Marshall and colleagues (2020) draw caution to this statement, outlining that there are instances where concerns around safety and child protection outweigh recognition of rights. Solidarity highlights the need for children to be recognised within a society so they can develop agency (Houston and Dolan, 2008). It also suggests that children should have the opportunity to share interests with others and for specific skills to be acknowledged (Smith et al., 2017).

Criticisms around Honneth’s theory of recognition centre on Honneth’s focus on adults (Smith et al., 2017) with Thomas (2012) suggesting that Honneth perceives children as “adults in waiting” (p. 10). Thomas maintains that children are active participants within cultures and should be given the same recognition as adults. In light of this, Houston (2015) called for a fourth form of recognition, namely personal recognition to be added, instilling hope for the future.

2.3.7. Changes in parenting practices

Within Westernised societies, the father’s role is often conceptualised as providing financially for the family (Mitchell and Lashewicz, 2019), thus contributing to care (Hunter et al., 2017). Hanlon (2012) suggested that the feminised perception surrounding nurturement was a “major block to how men engage with care” (Hanlon, 2012, p. 44), concluding that men often “seem more willing to be intensively involved in supportive secondary roles” (Hanlon, 2012, p. 45), with fathers often positioned as offering emotional support to the

mother, so she can tend to the infant's needs (Music, 2017). This view has been challenged with many arguing that the social norms and defined ways of parenting, is not reflective of today's complex society with an increase in children living across multiple homes (Meah and Jackson, 2016) and dual-earning households (Cabrera et al., 2018). Meah and Jackson's ethnographical study of three fathers emphasised relational practices with love and care often expressed. Burgess (1997) suggested that whilst the histories of men in public life have been well documented, their private lives have been largely ignored and that men are much more affectionate and caring at home than they are given credit for.

2.3.8. Societal expectations

Societal expectations for mothers and fathers are contradictory, holding males and females to account at differing standards. Daniel and Taylor (1999) maintained that society has minimal expectations for fathers regarding parenting and that men are idolised if they show even limited interest (Elliott, 2016). Mothers often infantilise fathers when they provide care for children, offering praise for what is parenting (Daniel and Taylor, 1999) but conversely regard fathers to be bottom of the list when considering options for childcare (Leach, 2009). Research into parenting also often positions men as 'playmates' (Bretherton, 2014), demonstrating a societal shift away from a discourse of men as disciplinarians (Henwood et al., 2010). This is a positive step forward, but at the same time, this view remains limiting as the narrative that fathers are 'playmates' to their children, minimises their role and the importance they have in their children's lives (Mitchell and Lashewicz, 2019).

2.4. Fostering

The role of fostering is distinct and brings with it challenges that are not typically experienced in non-fostering families (Richardson and Futris, 2019). Foster carers often exhibit higher levels of stress when compared to non-fostering families (Bergsund et al., 2020). Indeed, these pressures do not just affect the foster carers but the fostering household (Richardson and Futris, 2019). This said the demands of household responsibilities are not remarkably dissimilar to those faced by non-fostering families. I find this point interesting as whilst there is a large body of research about foster carers' and young people's experiences of fostering, there is very little which specifically describes the

division of labour between family members as found within research around parenting. I feel this demonstrates the blurred boundary between the private and public spheres in which the demands of fostering are intrinsically linked to the care of children and negate to acknowledge other demands such as household responsibilities. In this section, I will begin to identify the gendered constructs placed on foster carers by first considering gender differences between male and female carers' views on professionalism plus the influences individuals have on others within the family system. I will then identify perceived differences in expectations for foster carers.

2.4.1. Gendered differences in discourses surrounding professionalisation

Heslop (2014) suggested that there is a gendered discourse surrounding professionalism with care attributed to women. Butcher (2005) interviewed 40 foster carers, of which 82% of female carers suggested foster care should be regarded as a professional role, with associated links to qualifications and a professional body. Interestingly, this was not a view shared by the male foster carers interviewed. Butcher (2005) hypothesised that this could be because male carers viewed the role as 'women's work', conveying a caring role as low status (Kirton, 2007, Hanlon, 2022), whereas female carers wanted more recognition for the role they played in their children's lives. In support of Butcher's study, Inch (1999) interviewed 15 men and suggested that the value of fostering was linked to emotional gains rather than financial. It could be suggested that these men held this view as they had little regard for the role being professionalised (Kirton, 2007) as they gained recognition through paid employment. Burgess (1999) suggested that the connection between home and work is experienced differently for men and women, with women gaining social status and recognition from both, whereas for men they are competing areas. In contrast to Butcher's study, Blythe et al., (2013) interviewed 20 long-term female foster carers who identified themselves as mothers and not professionals, a view that transcended beyond that of financial incentives. Blythe et al., (2013) proposed that the space between professionalism and emotional investment could be attributed to the time children spent in placement, a view supported by Shdaimah and Rosen (2020). It is suggested that whilst foster carers need financial support to care for children placed with them, this does not provide the incentive to foster (Baginsky et al., 2017). It has been argued that this could be due to foster carers

undertaking a public role within a private space and the blurred boundaries between the two (Kirton, 2007). Indeed, Wilson and Evetts (2006) suggested that whilst there are roles where people are 'paid to care' (Wilson and Evetts, 2006, p. 41), there is an uncomfortable feeling associated with this when care is provided within the home.

2.4.2. Interconnected family systems

Due to the complexity of the systems foster carers work within, it is thought foster carers need skills beyond that typically associated with good parenting (Berrick and Skivenes, 2012) and are often required to provide therapeutic care, supporting children to deal with past traumas and futures that are uncertain (Combs-Orme and Orme, 2014), as such the marital relationship is very important (Inch, 1998). The male foster carer is positioned as providing support for his partner (Dando and Minty, 1987), however, this view does not account for the notion that a family consists of various subsystems, which have influence on and are influenced by one another (Fagan and Lee, 2014) and fostering households work within a system that is continually changing (Mallette et al., 2021) and influenced by external systems to a greater extent than non-fostering households (Inch, 1998). Thus, this view minimises the exchange of support which is present within a couple's relationship (Richardson and Futris, 2019). Vanderfaeille et al (2016) suggested that couples who completed relationship questionnaires reported a high level of commitment to each other and the fostering role. It has been reported that male foster carers are less involved with children if they are unsure of the role they are required to perform (Mallette et al., 2021), and if the family are experiencing stress (Richardson and Futris, 2019). Vanderfaeille et al., (2016) suggested that it may be that men need more support when the family face challenges and Richardson and Futris (2014) hypothesised that female foster carers may view stress as an inevitable part of the job as opposed to male carers.

One such stressful event is the potential for placement breakdown. Male foster carers are often positioned as objective and able to give a detached perspective (Gilligan, 2000). It has been suggested that male foster carers give a more accurate portrayal of a family's difficulties and are quick to suggest that a placement may be at risk (Vanderfaeillie et al., 2016). In contrast, women are positioned as more emotional as it was proposed they want the placement to succeed (Orme and Combs-Orme, 2014). Newstone (2000) was critical of

this binary view and suggested that men can be nurturing, caring, and able to express emotions. Inch (1999) reported that male foster carers expressed feelings of love and affection describing feelings of fulfilment in the fostering role and extreme sadness when placement breakdowns occur, with one male foster carer identifying the experience as heart-breaking, comparing the loss to death.

2.4.3. Differences in expectation for foster carers

Whilst the female foster carer's role is inescapably linked to nurturement (Nutt, 2002), Gilligan (2000) assigned male foster carers the role of 'protector', supporting the dominant narrative that men are 'breadwinners' (Heslop, 2016, Heslop, 2019). Heslop (2014) suggested that this is a reductionist view, with men given little scope to grow into the fostering role. This is an interesting point to consider, as within parenting it is suggested that providing for the family is how fathers demonstrate care (Hunter et al., 2017) and how they define their masculinity (Hanlon, 2012). Therefore, it could be questioned what role male foster carers can negotiate within fostering, once the identity of 'provider' is removed. Researchers often position male foster carers as positive role models (Heslop, 2016) with male foster carers undertaking a symbolic function of offering their values and beliefs to children placed with them (Inch, 1998) which emulates the transmission of social and cultural capital to offspring (Bourdieu, 1986) as cited in (Sullivan, 2001). However, this view has been contested as it presents a specific gendered perception of parenting and being a man (Riggs et al., 2010), with male foster carers tasked with 'resetting' the functions of a father (Newstone, 2000) from a lived experience that may regard men as unreliable, untrustworthy, and abusive (Gilligan, 2000). Riggs et al., (2010) suggested that this is achieved by modelling specific masculine behaviours, which do not allow children to see the different ways a man can be (Newstone, 2000).

As discussed earlier, fathers are positioned to willingly accept "supportive secondary roles" (Hanlon, 2012, p. 45), but within fostering this is usually prescribed. Nutt (2002) used biographies as a research tool, asking male foster carers to discuss whatever felt important to them. Interestingly, all the men suggested that their wives were the primary carers, however, they all commented that they had needed to take time off work to support the

fostering role, when their child was ill or not attending school, and several male foster carers expressed a desire to reduce hours at work or stop work in its entirety to support the children in placement. Therefore, I wonder if perceptions of masculinities were renegotiated and reconstructed (Elliott, 2016) through ‘undoing gender’ (Pinho and Gaunt, 2021) in light of the fostering role. Nutt (2002) reported that one man suggested that he had been offered a promotion, but his company accepted his desire to be demoted as he could not fulfil both roles and his family came first. This narrative is very similar to that reported about the struggle women face when required to manage responsibilities both within the home and at work (Lyonette and Crompton, 2015). Yet it has also been proposed that men who have achieved employment goals, thus gained associated status, find the transition to caring responsibilities easier (Doucet, 2004). Therefore I wonder if an ageing workforce (Ofsted, 2022) may be a contributing factor for some male foster carers’ desire to reduce or stop working.

2.5. Focus on men

Men have largely been overlooked and marginalised in fostering (Combs-Orme and Orme, 2014, Mallette et al., 2021) and their contribution minimised (Gilligan, 2000). I was surprised to read that Fanshel (1966) as cited in (Heslop, 2019) described male carers as passive. Whilst fostering is incredibly rewarding, the challenges and stresses are profound (Richardson and Futris, 2019) and it could be argued there is little opportunity to be a spectator, especially as care is provided within the home “24/7” (Shdaimah and Rosen, 2020, p. 1). The lack of interest regarding male foster carers for practitioners and researchers (Gilligan, 2000) demonstrates the lack of societal expectation for men when caring for children (Daniel and Taylor, 1999) but more importantly, it means there is little understanding of how men who foster are positioned. Research indicates that male foster carers are incredibly important to their partners as a source of support (Dando and Minty, 1987) and to their children’s development (Gilligan, 2012), but what of the men? Heslop (2014) rightly suggested that our knowledge of fostering is insufficient as we have not conceptualised what half of the workforce thinks and feels. This section will begin to explore how male foster carers are positioned by others, how they see themselves, and what contribution to fostering they make.

2.5.1 How male foster carers are positioned

Societal views suggest an apprehension or suspicion around men having direct involvement in childcare practices (Burgess, 1997). Therefore, men are said to ‘do gender’, by following a performative script alongside an appropriate costume (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021) which helps to maintain a framework, which is bound by traditional normative gendered expectations (Heslop, 2016), as this meets societal approval (Mallette et al., 2021). This includes enforcing boundaries and providing discipline (Newstone, 2000). Newstone (2000) reported that the media positions men who foster into two distinct categories. They are either seen as awe-inspiring, a similar view to Daniel and Taylor (1999) when considering fathers who show interest in their children, or effeminate. As such men are seen as risky when they move too far from accepted ways of being a man, which links back to the risk-led view of men (Gilligan, 2000). However, it could also be argued that due to fear of allegations, male foster carers may consciously or unconsciously step back (Gilligan, 2000, Heslop, 2014). The risk of allegation is considered one of the main concerns for foster carers and this unease is reported to extend to others within the home such as teenage sons (Gilligan, 2000, Heslop, 2014). Whilst the experiences of children must be heard and believed (The Fostering Network, 2022), the prevalence of allegations against foster carers is higher when compared to birth families (Minty and Bray, 2001) and slightly more so for male foster carers (Roberts et al., 2024). It has been reported that almost one in five foster carers will receive an allegation against them at some point during their career (Minty and Bray, 2001). Indeed, between 2021 and 2022, 3010 allegations were registered against foster carers (Roberts et al., 2024).

Male foster carers are also perceived as ‘hard to reach’ (Dickerson and Tomas, 2009) as cited in (Heslop, 2014). However, Gilligan (2000) suggested that this reflected social workers’ lack of skill in engaging male foster carers. Gilligan (2000) used focus groups to explore men’s role in fostering, reporting that men feel that social workers do not know how to connect with them and wait for their partners to discuss important information, thus blocking them out of the conversation. Therefore, support is not always seen as helpful in meeting the needs of men (Piel et al., 2017). Alternatively, rather than becoming allies (Drury and Kaiser, 2014),

men are also sometimes viewed as controlling as they attempt to take over and infiltrate what is seen as feminised spaces (Hanlon, 2022).

2.5.2. How male foster carers see themselves

Conversely, men who foster share very different views about their experience of fostering in comparison to how they are positioned. Male foster carers are reported to find joy in fostering (Buehler et al., 2003), and believe that they play an active role (Riggs et al., 2010). Wilson et al., (2006) utilised questionnaires to explore male foster carers' experiences and were surprised to find that men reported they were part of the decision-making process to foster and participated in all aspects of fostering. This view is shared by Rhodes et al., (2003) and Vanderfaeille et al 2015 who found no gender differences in the role foster carers were playing in their children's lives. Hence, it is possible for male foster carers to 'undo' gender and challenge traditional gendered norms, forming an alternative view of men (Heslop, 2014, Hanlon, 2012). Controversially, however, the social workers interviewed in Rhodes et al., (2003) study misjudged the male foster carers' level of involvement, believing that the female foster carer did more.

2.6. Reflections

I have been saddened and angered by, not only the lack of literature around men's contribution to fostering. The dominant narrative seems to view men as passive (Fanshel (1966) as cited in (Heslop, 2014), providers, and playmates (Gilligan, 2000). This limited and limiting view is detrimental to both male and female carers, as if women are always conceived to be the primary carer it creates and maintains a view which perpetuates women's subservience to the family (Clarke and Popay, 2002, Grbich, 1994). Furthermore, men are vital in supporting children and their contribution seems to be minimised by researchers and practitioners alike. Research in this area is desperately needed as it is important we can conceptualise men's experiences and understand what they think and feel (Heslop, 2014). Thankfully there is a body of work that privileges men's voices (Heslop, 2014, Nutt, 2002, Riggs et al., 2010, Newstone, 2000); celebrating and strengthening the narrative that there is a role for men in foster care. Whilst gender is bound by constraints of societal expectations which implies males and females should conduct themselves in a particular way (Robb and Ruxton, 2018) research in this area will hopefully convey that men do not

need to subscribe to a singular view of masculinity, opening the possibilities of different ways to be a man.

It is concerning that male foster carers feel that other professionals do not know how to engage with them (Gilligan, 2000) and professionals continually underestimate male foster carers' contributions (Rhodes et al., 2003). I wonder if this is a lived experience for other men and would like to explore this further. I am also particularly interested in the differences between men's public and private lives and men's lived experiences of fostering; what were their motivations to foster, do they feel emotionally supported, how do they celebrate joy in day-to-day interactions, develop feelings of affection and care or deal with uncertainty and placement breakdowns.

2.7. Research question

Once I had completed my literature review, I recognised that I was interested in exploring my participants' motivations to foster, how they navigate fostering as a man, and how they feel they are seen. I toyed with the idea of setting several research questions but through reflexivity I recognised that whilst containing, this approach would have felt limited, constricting the interviews to predetermined ideas of what I wanted to 'find', thus opposing the principles of the research paradigm that underpins the study. Therefore, I decided to embrace the unknown and considered one research question; What are the lived experiences of men who foster?

3. Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1. Overview

The research I have undertaken holds meaning for me both personally and professionally. From conception, it was important that I approached and conducted the research with integrity, care, and curiosity. Whilst I have been open to possibilities, these guiding principles have influenced my thoughts throughout the process. In this chapter I will look to explain the decisions I have made during the study, by first outlining my research paradigm; psycho-social constructionism, which forms the foundation of my thesis. I will then describe the methodology, detailing why a feminist, narrative approach using The Listening Guide (LG) as a form of analysis was selected.

3.2. Qualitative research

When designing my research, I felt it was important to privilege the voices of individuals who have undertaken the fostering role so knew my project would involve speaking with men directly, in contrast to early research which relied on comments made by practitioners who supported them (Nutt, 2002). In the initial stages of the process, I toyed with the idea of a mixed methods study (Almeida, 2018) using a Q-methodology (Rost, 2021). However, through reflection, I recognised that this was due to reading literature which discussed the labour division of household tasks (Wilson et al., 2007, Vanderfaeillie et al., 2016) Indeed, I had become preoccupied with the jobs men perform within the household rather than their experience of fostering. This was an interesting diversion, but not the route that I wanted my research to take. I feel that this serves to demonstrate my connection to the material and the influence the research had over me (Higgs, 2001). I returned to my guiding principles and opted to undertake a purely qualitative study. Qualitative research does not look to find truths or make claims that either prove or disprove a hypothesis, rather it seeks to value the views of those interviewed (Patton, 2002), gaining a richer, thicker understanding of the subject matter (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Qualitative research can help to find meaning (Willig, 2013), when exploring the nuances of family life (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). Willig (2013) highlighted the subjective nature of qualitative research, placing the researcher within the research. I have acknowledged my insider-outsider positioning throughout the

thesis and appreciate that my personal and professional history is not disregarded but through a process of reflexivity can be embraced.

3.3. Positioning my research in terms of ontology and epistemology

In this research, I have adopted a relativist and relational ontology, as such the underpinning assumption is that knowledge is socially constructed (Clarke and Braun, 2013), through relationships with others (Vall Castelló, 2016). Epistemologically I believe that personal histories, values, and beliefs combined during the interview process to co-create a shared meaning. I feel this process did not end with the interviews and consideration of what was said extended to my interpretation of the stories (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) as it is difficult to make sense of others' experiences without first drawing from our own (Sikes, 2010, Bartle and Eloquin, 2021). Preissle (2006) stated, "We are studying ourselves, studying ourselves and others." (pp. 691).

Social constructionism supports the view that there are multiple realities (Burr, 2005) and that individuals are shaped by and through engagement within sociocultural practices (Lock and Strong, 2010). Language is how information is shared and understanding constructed (Burr, 2015). Within a research context, social constructionism encourages collaboration in which meaning can be co-constructed (McNamee, 2012). Whilst its popularity has increased (Holstein et al., 2013), there are different views about what social constructionism is (McNamee, 2012). It has been referred to as a position of "not knowing" (Losantos et al., 2016, pp. 32), whereas Willig (2013) suggested, "that there are 'knowledges' rather than 'knowledge'" (pp. 7). This has led to the belief that it has somewhat lost its identity as almost all research could be construed as social constructionist (Holstein et al., 2013). Many researchers have refuted this and the notion of 'anything goes' (Burr, 2015, Holstein et al., 2013). It is maintained that the research paradigm does accept that there are social systems that individuals must work within and "truth within traditions" (Gergen, 2021. P.422) but in contrast to critical realism, those systems are socially constructed (Edwards et al., 1995).

Life experiences are not static and passive, but fluid and our relationship with them changeable. As discussed in my research proposal, "[There have been] moments where we

experienced profound love and joy, moments of anger and rage and moments of utter sadness, which have been experienced as overwhelming grief.” (Nelson, 2023). Thus, at stages in our career, our thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards fostering would have reflected these qualities, influencing what we would have wanted to discuss. Furthermore, information shared is always subjective and influenced by what is known now, therefore when individuals consider the past, they are interpreting the events from an alternative space and may describe their experience in a different way to how they felt at the time. Parker (2005) suggested that through reflection, events can be viewed as new thus changing the understanding of the present and relationship with the past. Multiple researchers refer to the notion of, “reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future”, as cited in (McAdams et al., 1997), pp. 678) which is a useful concept to bear in mind. Equally, memory is dependent on exchanges of information and relationships with others (Parker, 2005). A sense of meaning can alter through dialogue as a comment made may incite various responses, creating multiple possibilities (Vall Castelló, 2016). During the interviews, I believe a reflective, collaborative space was created in which our histories up until that point influenced the discussion and exchange of information which generated co-constructed meaning. The information shared during the interviews can only be considered an expression of each participant’s feelings at that specific time. As such, interviews cannot be generalised or repeated (Burr and Dick, 2017).

Losantos et al., (2016) suggested that social constructionism rejects the notion that individuals have a “unique nature that can be discovered”, (p.31). It proposes that reductionist measures such as personality and intelligence are social constructions (Burr, 2015). Whilst I appreciate this view and recognise that individuals have the capacity to change, there is a tension as social constructionism grapples to contextualise the concept of ‘self’ (Burr and Dick, 2017), and embodied meaning behind words (Burr, 2015) . Burr and Dick, (2017) suggested that many researchers have adopted a psycho-social approach to manage this, meaning that they can reflect on experiences of subjectivity. This approach is not without its critics. Edley (2006) suggested that psychoanalysis attends to the “interior workings of the human mind” (pp. 602) whereas discourse analysis relies on language. Thus, Edley maintains that a psycho-social approach is incompatible and believes researchers should decide between them. I found Edley’s comments initially blocked my progression

(D'Cruz, 2001) as I could not see that social constructionism alone could attend to the experience of subjectivity but also questioned my decision to combine psycho and social approaches. Fortunately, others maintain that psycho-social approaches are workable (Rustin, 2008), and praise the inclusion of the psyche in the study of social constructionism (Stenner, 2015), suggesting that psychoanalysis is a means to “go beyond the language” (Billington, 2000), p.43). Through a process of reflexivity, I decided it was important for me to adopt a methodology that allowed for the exploration of feelings associated with the past, present, and future (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2017). Therefore, I decided to adopt a psycho-social approach.

3.4. Feminism

Since the first wave in the 1840s, feminism has shifted and divided (Delmar, 2018) to the point where Delmar suggested it may be more appropriate to discuss feminisms rather than feminism. During wave one and two, the focus was on achieving political, domestic, and sexual freedom (Rampton, 2015). Whilst some goals were successful, such as women’s right to vote (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2016), feminism faced a backlash (Anderson, 2014). Feminism promoted a ‘sisterhood’ based on shared values (Delmar, 2018) in which they fought to change hegemonic, patriarchal discourses which created barriers to women’s inclusion in the social world (Kakroda and Sole, 2023). However, this identity was based on the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class women and sadly ignored the experiences of women from intersected identities (Delmar, 2018). The third wave, therefore, attempted to promote equality and inclusivity (Anderson, 2014) by acknowledging that experiences were different (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2016). Expressions of ‘we’ was no longer permissible and factions grew (Delmar, 2018). Building on the power of popular culture and social media as used by the Riot Grrrl during the third wave (Rosenberg and Garofalo, 1998), the fourth wave of feminism utilises a strong social media presence (Kakroda and Sole, 2023) to look beyond the sex/gender binary of women (Phillips and Cree, 2014) and challenge societal views around diversity (Munro, 2013). Hashtag activism such as the Me Too Movement (Me too, n.d.) and Black Lives Matter Campaign (Black Lives Matter, n.d.) empowered women and marginalised groups (Nartey, 2023) to bring light to lived experiences of oppression, misogyny, and racism, forcing a wider audience to bear witness to the injustices which were suffered and help to change the moral positioning of many, as

they began to recognise privileges held. This said, despite the goal of #Me Too, it has been found that equal representation was not achieved with women of colour largely hidden from view (Mueller et al., 2021). A further contested issue is the call 'safe spaces' for women. Opinions regarding such spaces range from viewing them as unnecessary because it is wrongly assumed women have achieved equality, discriminatory as the term 'women' often dismisses trans women's freedom, or essential as to protect women against violence and misogyny (Lewis et al., 2015). Additionally, there are also warnings that these spaces are not safe for all women and that shared spaces may feel less threatening (Tsjeng, 2024). I feel this demonstrates the degree to which feminisms have "separated from and hardened against each other...each group with its own preserved identity" (Delmar, 2018, p. 9).

Feminist research which includes or is conducted by men seems to be a contentious issue. Whilst some feminists propose that men should not be the subject or object of feminist research (Delmar, 2018), some see the value in exploring men's experiences through a feminist lens but emphasise that to be a feminist individuals must be a woman (Letherby, 2003), whereas others welcome the contributions of men. Based on my understanding, I am aligned with the latter view. I believe patriarchy has led to societal inequalities, which feminism is looking to redress. This can only be challenged by creating opportunities to explore social phenomena through those who have lived experience, irrespective of gender. This is discussed further in section 3.7.2.

3.5. Rejecting Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

I am aware that other forms of analysis could have been used to interpret my interviews. One such approach underpinned by a phenomenological research paradigm (Alase, 2017) as opposed to the social constructionism approach I have adopted, is Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). I maintain that whilst there are some elements of IPA which could have attended to my interviews with the care I wanted, there are some fundamental features which I felt uncomfortable with and did not gain a sense a congruence with my research principles. Indeed, IPA is interpretative and focuses on how people make sense of their lived experiences (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). IPA values subjects which matter to the participant (Smith, 2011) including everyday experiences, which I was keen to reflect on and explore (Eatough and Smith, 2017) in relation to fostering families. This said, when considering

which analysis to select, there were two factors that I felt were important to the integrity of my research and me as a researcher. Firstly, I wanted to value participants' stories as they were told and secondly, I wanted to listen to and reflect on beliefs, thoughts, and views without a fixed gaze. Very simply, I wanted to spend time immersed in the stories and did not want to feel rushed or experience an immediacy to focus on themes (Alase, 2017). Equally, I wanted to read through the stories rather than move in and out, through a hermeneutic circle (Tomkins and Eatough, 2010) as I fear I would have felt disconnected (Eatough and Smith, 2017). I also did not feel it was necessary to examine male foster carers' experiences to the point of saturation (Eatough and Smith, 2017), and believe that within my research I have reconstructed the coconstructed views (McKenzie et al., 2021) which three male foster carers shared during individual interviews, at one point in time (Parker, 2005). As such, I would not look to generalise my interpretations or make claims about all men who foster. Finally, whilst my participants were all male foster carers and in relationships with women, there was no attempt to find homogeneity amongst the participants, by looking for shared characteristics or life experiences. In relation to fostering, I feel this would be rather challenging as the experience of fostering is so subjective. Subsequently, I rejected IPA and found that I was drawn to the LG as this example of narrative analysis (Doucet, 2019) values the uniqueness of stories and actively encourages researchers to listen. The LG is discussed in more detail in Section 3.7.

3.6. Storied narratives

I used a narrative methodology (Patton, 2002) to explore individuals' lived experiences. Through language (Billington, 2000), stories are used to make sense of actions taken (McAdams et al., 1997), within social and cultural constraints to which individuals are bound (Bathmaker, 2010). Thus, by using this methodology, male foster carers' reflections and contributions to fostering could be considered (Larkin et al., 2021). As narrative emphasises sociocultural context (Gergen, 2005), it has the potential to empower, provoke thought, and motivate change (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Dyson and Genishi (1994) warn that if stories are not shared, societies cannot reflect on what is known and possible alternatives cannot be considered. I feel it is important that stories about the lived experiences of foster carers are shared with a wider audience.

I opted to undertake unstructured interviews as I wanted participants to have the freedom

to discuss matters of personal importance (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008) rather than meet what they perceived my agenda to be. I based my technique on free association narrative interviews (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) with participants encouraged to explore their histories. I began each interview by saying, *“I’ll open it up to you. I’m really interested just to hear about your experiences of fostering”* (T, 3-5). This said, it is important to highlight that I had suggested participants could make notes or create a timeline about key moments, thus they had the opportunity to self-edit and consider what stories they felt they wanted to privilege. I feel that this demonstrates my interest in capturing life stories and lived experiences (Chase, 2011). I believe that the LG closely aligns with the purpose of free association (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) as I examined the polyphonic voices within the transcripts (Tolman and Head, 2021), and parts of the conscious which were known and unknown (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021).

It can be difficult to know where to start with the analysis when using a narrative methodology (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) which is one reason why I selected the LG as I felt it offered supportive guidance. During analysis, researchers do not present objective findings as that would assume that there is a definitive answer to be found. Rather, researchers offer subjective interpretations of the interaction (Lock and Strong, 2010). Peshkin (1985) as cited in (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) suggested that his work offered positions of thinking for others to consider, rather than a truth.

3.7. The Listening Guide

The LG was developed by Lyn Brown and Carol Gilligan (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). Brown and Gilligan wanted to create an alternative research approach based on relational connection, in contrast to traditional methodologies which privileged positivist desires for truth (Gilligan, 2015). Since the LG’s development some thirty years ago, there have been many adaptations within its application to dialogue (Doucet, 2019, Kiegelmann, 2021) and text (Petrovic et al., 2015) with voice remaining at the forefront. I decided to be guided by Brown and Gilligan’s (1992), workings of the LG which was initially referred to as The Listener’s Guide and further guidance offered by authors aligned to this format (Gilligan, 2015, Gilligan and Eddy, 2017, Gilligan and Eddy, 2021, Cruz, 2021, Harel-Shalev and Daphna-

Tekoah, 2021, Woodcock, 2016). Within this section, I will continue to explore the LG further, firstly by highlighting why I felt it was well suited for my research. I will then consider the LG's connection with feminism, before discussing the concept of voice in more detail.

3.7.1. The success of the LG

After using the LG I believe that the key to its success is the requirement to listen to transcripts multiple times to hear different information rather than reducing text to themes (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). Furthermore, a fundamental process within the LG is open curiosity in which researchers are invited to engage with the text and wonder (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017). Its interpretative stance means that it is not looking to discover an ultimate truth, maintaining that through a relational approach, meaning can be co-constructed. Indeed, it is unlikely that two researchers would make the same sense of a transcript as knowledge and histories are subjective and drive our understanding of what is known (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021, Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008). I felt that the LG complemented my insider-outsider positioning as there was no requirement to bracket my own experiences and I did not sense there was an enforced line between where I ended and my research began, rather I was somewhere within it (Tolman and Head, 2021, Cruz, 2021). I also felt that the LG was aligned to my research paradigm as it was developed as a feminist and psychoanalytical methodology (McKenzie et al., 2021), and closely relates to social constructionism (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). McKenzie et al., (2021) suggested that feminism and social constructionism agree that rather than uncovering a 'real self', identity is a "relational phenomenon; it is constituted through our relationships and social interactions" (p. 280).

3.7.2. Rooted in feminism

Not all methodological approaches can be considered as feminist as notions of reflexivity and intersectionality are central to feminist research. Clarke and Braun's review of feminist publications found that Thematic Analysis, Grounded Theory, and Discourse Analysis were the most commonly used, with the LG only accounting for 2% of the papers reviewed (Clarke and Braun, 2019). This said Clarke and Braun expressed concern that whilst feminist research was "often framed in terms of 'giving voice', particularly to marginalised or vulnerable

groups” (p. 16), some researchers used markers linked to positivist quality criteria such as reliability and objectivity (Schwandt et al., 2007). This restricted experiences of subjectivity and led to a lack of reflexivity (Clarke and Braun, 2019). The term ‘giving voice’ is frequently used within the LG and is discussed in more detail in Section 3.5.3. Mauthner (2017) explained that one of the reasons they were drawn to the LG was the potential to give voice to “perspectives which were being devalued or going unheard by dominant approaches” (p. 75). To ensure cohesion within my research I incorporated alternative quality criteria based on Whittemore et al. (2001) work, which I believe was more appropriate. This is discussed in more detail in Section 4.7.

The LG is rooted in feminism and was developed during the second wave (Mauthner, 2017). Gilligan and Brown spoke about the negative effects traditional research methods had on women and girls as they failed to recognise them and the factors which mattered (Mauthner, 2017). As such, Brown and Gilligan focused their energies on the voices of young women in a private girls’ school whilst developing the LG (Brown and Gilligan, 1992), however, this is not to say the LG use is restricted to the life experiences of women. Indeed, Doucet (2018) used the LG, interviewing over 100 men for her book ‘Do Men Mother’. Delmar (2018) suggested that when women are both the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of feminist research, it creates a “circling self-conforming rhetoric and a hermetic closure of thought” (p. 27). Equally, some feminist academics warn that if research ignores men’s contribution to certain topics, such as reproduction, it then becomes a women’s problem with blame inappropriately apportioned (Letherby, 2003). In relation to my focus, whilst the histories of men in public life have been well documented, their private lives have been largely ignored (Burgess, 1997). Hutton and Lystor (2021) proposed this is because there is little public interest in individuals’ private lives, with the topic often overlooked. However, as foster carers occupy a unique space that is somewhere in between public and private (Nutt, 2006, Heslop, 2019), research in this area has been carried out but it has largely focused on the woman’s role, disregarding the man’s (Orme and Combs-Orme, 2014, Mallette et al., 2021). This study will form part of a growing body of evidence that looks to privilege men’s experiences of fostering (Nutt, 2002, Nutt, 2006, Heslop, 2014, Heslop, 2016, Heslop, 2019), with the LG well suited to attend to the boundaries in which fostering lies (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998).

3.7.3. The expression of voice

The LG focuses on voice to consider “ *the interplay of inner and outer worlds.*” (Gilligan, 2015 pp. 69). It maintains that the psyche is multifaceted and responsive to sociocultural experiences and expressed through polyphonic voices (Cruz, 2021). Polyphony is a musical term taken from the Greek language meaning ‘many sounds’ (Jabri, 2015). It describes the inclusion of multiple melodies within a composition (Naot-Ofarim and Solomonic, 2016) and was offered by Bakhtin as a metaphor to describe the dialogical nature of interactions. Bakhtin suggested that there are multiple versions of self which are characterised as voices (Bamberg and Zielke, 2007), defining them as a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses...with equal rights and each with its own world” (Bakhtin, 1987. p.6). These voices are shaped through past interactions whereby concepts are interiorised (Karsten, 2024). Due to the dialogical nature of speech, (Matveev, 2015) every act is regarded as distinctive (Karsten, 2024) with meaning co-created within the dialogue (Lazzarato, 2006). Indeed, whilst the narrator has a role in conveying information about a given subject, based on their experiences (Günthner, 1998), the listener, interprets what has been said and based on their understanding, communicates to the narrator their position (Lazzarato, 2006).

Voice holds meaning and can express thoughts, beliefs, and desires, which may be known or unknown to the narrator (Tolman and Head, 2021). Edwards and Ribbens (1998) suggested that care should be taken when listening to voices, as favouring one may suppress another. To reiterate, voice does not hold an ultimate truth (Doucet and Mauthner, 2002). Stories are told about experiences, they are not static and as we can never really know a person as they do not uncover their “*real selves*” (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). There is not an answer, rather the experience is embodied by the researcher (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) with the researcher considering the voices which hold meaning to them (Tolman and Head, 2021). This again calls for a reflective and reflexive approach when reading the transcripts and forming the analysis (Hutton and Lystor, 2021).

4. Chapter Four: Procedure

In this chapter I will begin by explaining my thoughts about my sampling, plus how my participants were selected and recruited. I will then consider the pilot study and how changes to my ethics application were made. Following this I will discuss how the interviews were facilitated and how I applied my theoretical understanding of the LG in practice. Finally, I will explore ethical considerations taken during the research and outline quality criteria which I feel underpin the study.

4.1. Design

I was interested in exploring men's lived experiences of fostering and adopted a narrative methodology (Patton, 2002) to interview three male foster carers; Tom, Mr X, and Lee. My positionality as an insider-outsider researcher (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) offered some shared understanding of the joys and challenges associated with the role on which to build our dialogue, but as the LG maintains that the self cannot be known and is situated in social and cultural contexts (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) I felt that my research was exploratory utilising a feminist, psycho-social constructionist ontological and epistemological stance (Clarke and Braun, 2013).

4.2. Participants

4.2.1. Sampling

In my research proposal, I remember thinking that I would be inundated with expressions of interest and devised a strategy to manage the number of requests, by indicating that I would hold a list of potential participants and interview in order of first contact (Nelson, 2023). There was a slight apprehension as by not wanting to disappoint individuals, I was concerned that I may accept too many men to be part of my study. I looked to academic research to provide a figure which was widely accepted. I knew that within qualitative research the sample size is often quite small (Patton, 2002) but found it surprising that an agreement has not been reached (Boddy, 2016, Marshall et al., 2013, Subedi, 2021). Brody (2016) suggested that there are examples of qualitative research using positivist criteria and as such sample size may be considered as an important factor in the design of the study but equally there is frustration that there are no guidelines and that sample size is not given

more attention by some qualitative researchers (Marshall et al., 2013). Indeed, Marshall et al., suggested the illogical sample size by some is just seen as a “reflection of the qualitative orientation to research” (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 12). Reports and articles have been produced to help researchers plan sampling (Guest et al., 2006, Baker and Edwards, 2012) however figures can range from a single participant to 40 (Marshall et al., 2013) with that figure reducing to 20 for those completing post-graduate studies (Subedi, 2021).

Saturation is often seen as a strong factor in determining participant numbers (Marshall et al., 2013) as generalisations can be made with some level of confidence. In line with my research paradigm and positionality (Whittemore et al., 2001), I was not looking to generalise the stories heard, therefore advice around reaching saturation (Marshall et al., 2013) did not seem relevant. As such when considering sampling, I decided to be guided by considerations which centred on practical implications, for instance, the time needed to complete the interviews and analysis, the restricted word count, plus my wish to honour the stories ensuring that they were considered in depth. Subedi (2021) revealed that she included six participants in her PhD. With this in mind, I proposed a sample size of between three and six participants as I believed this would be manageable. I reviewed other theses completed by trainees who were on the Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology and found that this figure was within a similar range. Following my recruitment, which is discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.3, I received expressions of interest from three men, which included the participant who agreed to undertake the pilot study. I recognised that during the interviewing stage, I felt a little despondent as I would have preferred to have been closer to my maximum number of participants, but this quickly turned into relief once I began the analysis as I realised how time-consuming the process was.

4.2.2. Inclusion criteria

I am interested in the experiences of all foster carers but for this specific study, I wanted to focus my research on male foster carers in a male-female partnership. Through my lived experience, I noticed a social phenomenon whereby gendered roles are often prescribed rather than negotiated. I similarly found numerous studies which supported this view within my literature search (Heslop, 2014, Nutt, 2002). Indeed, it is argued that fostering maintains

a 'traditional' view of family life (Sear, 2021, Sinclair et al., 2004) giving little attention to the man's 'secondary' role (Combe-Orme and Orme, 2014) which I wanted to draw attention to. I recognise that in making this decision, my study excluded many foster carers who may have wished to share their experiences, including women, individuals from the LGBT community, and single men. In future research, I would like to extend my focus to listen to voices from different groups to highlight how fostering can be influenced by societal expectations of gender roles.

It could be argued that there are differences between foster carers who foster for Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) in relation to support, training, and remuneration. Research suggests that IFAs have advocated and championed the recruitment and retention of men (Sellick, 2007) and that foster carers who work for IFAs potentially view their role differently (Nutt, 2002) in line with discourses around professionalism (Kirton, 2007). For this reason, I decided to focus on the experiences of Local Authority foster carers as I felt they may be more likely to be marginalised, with little research specifically designed to explore their experiences. This said, I recognise that within the inclusion criteria, I did not stipulate that foster carers must only have 'worked' for a Local Authority, thus I did interview one man who had transferred from an IFA.

Finally, I felt it was important that participants should have been fostering for a minimum of three years as mainstream foster carers. I wanted to speak to participants who had lived experiences associated with the ebb and flow of caring for children. Additionally, from supporting pre and post-approval training, I am aware of the external systemic pressures that newly approved foster carers are under, such as enhanced mandatory training within the first three years, the requirement to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD Standards) (DfE, 2012) within the first year of approval alongside adjusting to new routines and demands. Thus, I did not want my research to add to this pressure.

4.2.3. Recruitment

I approached an organisation that supports foster carers for help in recruiting participants. I

felt this was advantageous as participants had access to support if required. This was an important consideration as through creating inclusion criteria, I am aware that some individuals may have been upset that they could not participate and may have needed to share this frustration. Additionally, for those who were interviewed, issues may have been raised that they wished to discuss further. It also removed the focus away from one Local Authority which I felt was beneficial as I could centralise discussions around my participants' experiences and did not need to hold in mind potentially competing thoughts regarding the system they work within (Bartle, 2021). I met with a contact from the organisation online to discuss my research and identify how the organisation could support me. Following the meeting, I sent the contact some information about my research in an email (See section 8.1.) and they approached a subgroup within the organisation in the first instance from which all of my participants were members. A convenience sample was used as multiple individuals were included in the initial email and interested parties self-selected to be involved (Patton, 2002). Due to the small scale of my research, this was the most time-efficient way to recruit participants. I believe that the interest and uptake from this group was high as individuals were already heavily invested in the fostering role, volunteering their time to help shape the service and support other foster carers. Those who expressed interest in the research were then forwarded the participant information sheet (See section 8.2.) by my contact. This is where the involvement of my contact ended as interested parties were encouraged to contact me directly if they felt they wanted to be involved and believed they met the criteria. The organisation is unaware of who contacted me, as this information has not been shared. Demographic data was not collated by either the organisation or myself as it was not deemed necessary (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Once I received an expression of interest, I then emailed the foster carer to check that they were happy to proceed and consent forms (See section 8.3.) were issued and signed.

4.3. Pilot study

I conducted a pilot study, with the first person who initially made contact, Tom. This was a genuine pilot as there were many aspects of the interview process I wanted to consider, such as whether the unstructured interview felt supportive, if my interactions felt appropriate and whether an hour felt long enough for participants to feel heard. That said,

once I had scheduled the pilot interview I felt strongly that Tom's voice should be included in the study and that his contribution to my research should be valued. I did not consider this when I initially completed the ethics application but as it was an important factor, I followed this up by submitting a minor amendment form to The Sheffield University Ethics Board to suggest that if my pilot study went as expected I would ask Tom if he would like his comments to be included as part of the main study. A revised participant information sheet (See section 8.4.) and consent form (See section 8.5.) were completed, which were subsequently signed by Tom and ethics approval was granted.

4.4. Interviews

4.4.1. Preparation

Tom, Lee, and Mr X were asked to prepare for the interview by thinking about their fostering career. I suggested that they may want to make a few notes or create a timeline of significant events to help visualise their experiences (Sheridan et al., 2011). However, I did not check whether the task was carried out as I viewed this to be a supportive document for them rather than an additional piece of work to meet my agenda (Clarke and Braun, 2013). One participant commented that although through the interview he considered the fostering journey in more depth, the story was well rehearsed, possibly indicating that he did not feel the need to make notes.

4.4.2. The interviews

All interviews took place over three weeks, at a date and time that was convenient to the participants. I anticipated that this may be in the evening or during the weekend due to work commitments, but Tom, Lee, and Mr X requested a time during the school day when their children were at school or out of the house. Interviews were held online using Google Meet Video Conferencing, as this is a secure university platform. Participants all gave consent to be voice and video recorded. Furthermore, the transcription tool within the application was utilised, so both the recordings and transcripts were forwarded automatically to my university's Google Drive. I allocated sufficient time in my schedule to ensure that the interviews were not rushed and whilst I gave an indication that interviews may last about an hour, this was a guide rather than a goal. Indeed, the three interviews

took between 30 minutes and 53 minutes. The interviews were unstructured. Participants were encouraged to discuss their stories (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008) and I occasionally followed this with questions to check for meaning and to thicken the thread of a narrative, offering a richer and deeper understanding (Mensinga, 2009). Participants were thanked for their time and informed about the next steps.

4.5. Analysis

4.5.1. Reflecting on the stories

Considering the in-depth and involved process the LG demands, I felt that it was vital that the analysis process was held in mind throughout the research project (Edwards and Weller, 2012). I ensured that I had time following the interviews to sit with my thoughts and think, paying close attention to what I had heard and how I felt (Scaife, 2010), which I noted down in my research journal. When privileged and trusted to be told such personal accounts of family life, it would be insensitive to rush into the next task as that would suggest that the conversations were inconsequential, whereas I was moved by the depth of thought and honesty, thus needed time to reflect on the experience.

4.5.2. Transcription

When generating transcripts, I initially used the transcribing tool with Google Meet video conferencing as a starting point, however, the transcripts were not accurate. I therefore worked through each transcript, ensuring that the dialogue was recorded verbatim. I understand that transcription services are available (Silverman, 2010) and that my interest in minutiae may be seen as an inefficient use of time, however, I believe that this level of involvement is necessary to become absorbed by the stories and so to listen to what is being said (Nagy and Sharma, 2014, Shay, 2010). For ease of reading a standard orthography was adopted (Nagy and Sharma, 2014), using an adapted version of Jefferson's (2004) transcription symbols (See section 8.6.). Although I see changes in intonation and speed need to be recorded, I wanted the words to remain intact and did not want the transcripts to be too far removed from the dialogue.

4.5.3. The LG – first reading

The first reading involved listening to the plot (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) such as identifying the individuals important to the narrator, plus changes and shifts within the story. I utilised the worksheet technique (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008) by formatting a table with two columns, placing the transcripts to the left and adding my comments to the right. I read the text with curiosity, exploring the different stories, considering my initial response (Woodcock, 2016). I tried to challenge what, due to my positioning I was more inclined to hear and remained open to possibilities (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). The benefit of the LG is that it invites researchers to consider the dialogue as a whole, thinking about moments that are surprising, insightful, and profound but also paying close attention to the mundane (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). I found myself drawn to and moved by particular moments such as Tom's description of his motivation to foster, Mr X's comments about the importance of family and belonging, and Lee's discussion of placing babies with their adoptive parents, to the point I could see the interactions in my mind and almost recite the words verbatim. That said, I appreciated the LG's guidance and felt that it refocused my attention to what was being said about day-to-day experiences of family life within a fostering household (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). I felt that this offered a richer and thicker thread of the stories told, developing a co-constructed sense of meaning-making (Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah, 2021). Woodcock (2016) suggested that it is *"helpful to create a master list of the themes to later examine overlapping patterns across participants"* (p. 3). However, as it was important for me to keep participants' stories whole, I did not feel the need to make comparisons between stories during the first reading.

Through a process of reflection and reflexivity, I felt it was appropriate to consider my practice as a foster carer and how I may work with foster carers within my dual role as a TEP. I realised that when making notes my experience of the text evoked different responses in me and I was faced with different versions of 'self' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). My reflections ranged from quite practical comments to personal explorations of beliefs. Although I did not feel it was necessary to ignore or bracket my assumptions, I did want to acknowledge this difference. After reading Willig's (2013) explanation of two types of reflexivity, namely personal and epistemological, I felt it would be useful to apply this understanding to

comments I felt drawn to. Whilst personal reflexivity fitted well, I did not feel the same way about epistemological reflexivity, plus I did not feel either type of reflexivity addressed my practical annotations. I therefore decided to adapt the approach slightly by replacing epistemological reflexivity with praxis reflexivity. I highlighted personal reflections in green and praxis reflections in blue. I found this process worked the majority of the time. There were some thoughts which I found more difficult to separate. I toyed with the idea of creating a third heading to encapsulate both personal and praxis reflections but felt this did not force me to make full use of the sense-making process I wanted to explore. Therefore, I decided to persist with the two headings and apply in-the-moment reflexivity to decide which felt most appropriate.

4.5.4. The LG – second reading

The second reading involved listening for “I” to understand the participants’ inner worlds (Tolman and Head, 2021) . I highlighted all uses of “I”, recording them in the same order that they were said (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017). I found that “I” quickly shifted between “we”; when participants spoke about decisions made with their partners, “she/he”; when speaking directly about their partners or others, “they”; when speaking about their families or services that surrounded them and “you”; when the participants felt they were imparting knowledge which they thought we would have a shared understanding, or indeed when the subject matter became too difficult to conceptualise. As the LG suggests that the self is constructed within a social and cultural context (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021) and as the premise within fostering is that the role is shared (Shdaimah and Rosen, 2020), it seemed important to capture and incorporate not only the participant’s view of themselves but also how they construed others. Thus, following Woodcock (2016) I adopted the notion of ‘voice poems’ rather than ‘I poems’. I highlighted each time “I”, “you”, “we”, “she/he”, or “they” was used, applying a different colour. I then created a table, allocating each subjective pronoun to a column, and again recorded the words in order. I was surprised by the visual effect the voice poems created and when considered together with the movement of words between knowing and unknowing plus wanting and not wanting (Gilligan, 2015), I believe they create something incredibly powerful, akin to pattern poetry (Glaz, 2012). Whilst I included some

personal interpretations about the movement of the subjective pronouns, I also wanted to invite the reader to have the space to reflect and construct their own meaning.

Tolman and Head (2021) suggested that there are no limits to the number of words that can be included within a voice poem. Indeed, I have noted some papers opt to include full sentences (Harel-Shalev and Daphna-Tekoah, 2021). This practice has been questioned by Gilligan and Eddy (2021) who suggested that the purpose of the poem is to highlight what is beneath the dialogue, rather than repeat it, thus only the verb following 'I' should be included (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021) except "*to have or to be*" (Tolman and Head, 2021, pp. 157). On the whole, I decided to follow Gilligan and Eddy's guidance. However, I did find instances where this did not seem appropriate. Gilligan (2015) highlighted that often there is an "associative stream that flows throughout the narrative" (p. 72) in which the 'I' moves from a position of knowing to unknowing or wanting and not wanting and vice versa. I found the movement of the 'I' interesting to follow and almost predict. However, when Tom declared, "*I don't know what we're waiting for*" (T, 106-107) the voice poem would have suggested that the self was doubting or questioning the action to foster, which was not the case and as such I decided to include the full sentence.

4.5.5. The LG – third reading

The third reading involved listening for contrapuntal voices. This term relates to music when two or more sounds independent of each other can be heard within a melody (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). Often it is understood that individuals express themselves through a singular story (Sorsoli and Tolman, 2008). The LG methodology refutes this notion in favour of attending to the multitude of voices that reside within the self (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). Through this process, it is possible to identify parts of the self which are known on a conscious level and parts which are hidden from the individual (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). I began with reading the transcripts and once I felt I had found a distinct voice, I tracked it throughout the dialogue (Tolman and Head, 2021). After practising the process, I started to sense the difference between the tone and presentation of different voices. I found the relationship between the voices interesting. Gilligan (2015) suggested that at times the voices can be harmonious and at other times dissonant, demonstrating opposing and

conflicting views that are often present within the inner world. Indeed, noting points in the transcripts where there was dissonance helped to identify the contrapuntal voices at play. At times I found it easier to begin where there was a disagreement or rupture within the story. Once I had identified voices within that specific speech act, I then tracked the separate voices from that point to the beginning and end of the transcript.

I did not feel there was much guidance on how to demonstrate the movement of contrapuntal voices in the literature, which is surprising given the depth of meaning it brings to the interpretation of the stories told (Tolman and Head, 2021). Due to the close association with music, I decided to create a visual map based on a musical stave, with each voice given a discrete line (See sections 8.8.4., 8.9.4., and 8.10.4.). Once I had collated the relevant quotes, I placed them in order, on the appropriate line, and took the opportunity to consider whether I felt the voices I heard were harmonious or dissonant, adding a continuous or broken arrow respectively. Once I had populated a map, I gave it a title to help me contextualise and convey what story the map was telling.

4.5.6. The LG – five step process

Tolman and Head (2021) suggested that all too often researchers tend to stop once they have completed the first three steps, missing out on the latter two stages of the process. Indeed, the first three stages are well documented, with minimal direction offered on how to complete steps four and five. Tolman and Head suggested that the task associated with step four; assembling the evidence, is to track the 'I' alongside the conceptual voices and plot, thus opening up the process to interpretation. I added both elements to the bottom of the contrapuntal maps, however, at this point in the process I felt the voice poems were too long to include and seemed almost distracting. Thus, I decided to revert to the I poem for this part only. When exploring the landscapes on each map, I noticed that there were some similarities and so to complete the process, I added the landscapes from each map to an overview and began to generate ideas of what I wanted to include in my interpretation and discussion chapter.

Step five assumes that the researcher will use the interpretations to form an analysis (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021) which is well-sourced and researched (Tolman and Head, 2021). When writing up each section, I was able to incorporate voice poems and contrapuntal maps where appropriate and also opted to include the discussion alongside my interpretation, creating a detailed understanding of the narratives. Whilst it would be highly unlikely participants were able to fully explore all stories related to their fostering journey (White and Epston, 1990), I too was faced with a similar dilemma of what to include and deciphering which stories to privilege was a difficult process as there were so many possibilities. I acknowledge that some stories were included as they resonated with my own experience. I did not feel the need to bracket my assumptions through reflection boxes as it was difficult to distinguish where I ended and my research began, and due to my methodology, I did not feel this was necessary. Other stories were included as they captured my interest and made me wonder. I have had to accept that some stories remain untold and may be revisited in the future.

4.6. Ethics

The Code of Human Research Ethics (British Psychological Society, 2021a) and the overarching Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2021b) have been adhered to and underpin every aspect of the research undertaken. I understand that I hold responsibility for ethical considerations within my research and ensured that in line with policy (University of Sheffield, 2022), I followed the steps proposed within my research ethics application (See section 8.7). When I felt that a slight revision was required, I submitted a minor amendment request.

4.6.1. Minimising risk

Potential risks to the participants (British Psychological Society, 2021a) were considered and detailed in the participant information sheet (Sections 8.2. and 8.4.). I believe the most significant risk posed in my research was the requirement for participants to discuss personal experiences. I reminded Tom, Lee, and Mr X to only discuss what they felt comfortable sharing. Whilst neither I nor the participants opted to take a break, some conversations were difficult to hear and hence could have been upsetting to recall. In these

moments I tried to acknowledge and sit with the feelings to ensure I validated what was said (Szczygiel, 2020). I also offered an opportunity to debrief following each interview. I sought supervision following the interviews with my supervisor. I also found supervision was necessary during the interpretation stage as I experienced an emotional toil. The support of my supervisor helped me to process and make sense of the meanings my participants gave to their experiences (Kim, 2015).

4.6.2. Minimising harm

Within the LG methodology, Gilligan and Eddy (2021) interpret “do no harm” (p. 145) as “do not betray.” (p. 145), especially when representing the voices of others in text, suggesting that participants need to feel at ease with what is written about them. A benefit of LG is that the requirement to immediately analyse data is discouraged, in favour of a reflexive, attuned approach which values the dialogue in its entirety (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). Throughout the process, I held participants in mind and wanted them to feel I had remained authentic to their narratives (Kim, 2015). To ensure Tom, Lee, and Mr X were happy with my representation of their voices I had planned to forward them their voice poems but once I had finished the interpretation chapter, I realised the poems did not capture the depth of the stories told. Therefore, I decided to offer to forward each participant their story.

As discussed in Section 4.2.3. I am also aware that as a researcher I also hold responsibility for those who are excluded from research. I shared my contact information in the initial email which was sent to the subgroup as I was more than happy to discuss my research with anyone who made contact, regardless of whether they wished to take part in the research or not. It should be noted that I was only contacted by the three male foster carers who agreed to take part in the research. I also believe that the involvement of the organisation meant that anyone who was upset by my inclusion criteria was able to seek support if needed, thus minimising harm.

4.6.3. Consent

After expressing interest to my contact, participants were then forwarded a copy of the participant information sheet which detailed the aims of the research, what involvement in

the research project would look like, plus the potential risks and benefits of agreeing to take part. Participants then emailed me directly to submit an expression of interest. Two participants requested additional information, so I arranged a brief telephone conversation to answer their questions. Once participants had agreed that they were happy to proceed, I forwarded the consent form which was signed and returned to me. All participants agreed to be voice and video-recorded. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw during the data collection stage which I estimated to be at the beginning of December 2023. No reimbursement or incentive was offered for involvement in the research (British Psychological Society, 2021a).

4.6.4. Degree of anonymity

Participants were offered anonymity and confidentiality. Throughout the research process, I considered what degree of anonymity could be achieved (Cheshire and Fox, 2016). I did not collate any demographic data, as I did not feel this was necessary. I encouraged participants to select a pseudonym and suggested that they should only discuss information that they felt comfortable sharing. This required the participants to self-edit parts of their story, indeed throughout the interviews, participants generally referred to their partners as “my wife” and their children using an initial, therefore I did not need to amend names. This said, during the interpretation stage, I noticed that I made frequent references to partners. Using the term “wife” throughout the chapter felt somewhat detached, so I contacted my participants and asked if they could suggest a pseudonym for their wives.

Cheshire and Fox (2016) described a tension around removing references to place names as their study was geographically situated within two London Boroughs leading to the development of a list of terms that were considered “allowable” and “should be anonymised” (p. 293). In contrast, as the three participants could have fostered for any Local Authority, the locations were not central to the stories, so I decided to remove all references to place names. I also decided to remove the mention of an event within one of the transcripts, and the life history of a young person in another as I felt they were prominent stories and may be identifiable. My difficulty lay in the mention of systems in place to

support placement stability as each Local Authority seems to use different terminology for the teams involved. I therefore tried to summarise the roles mentioned.

4.6.5. Deception

It was important that I was transparent about my positionality to the participants from the start as I wanted to have an honest dialogue about their experiences and did not want it to be perceived that I was misleading (British Psychological Society, 2021a). I included information about my fostering status in the initial email that was forwarded to the group and in the participant information sheet.

4.6.6. Debriefing

Debriefing was offered but for two of the interviews, I noted that the conversations from the discussion continued and narratives which may have thickened the participants' stories were not captured. In hindsight, I may have suggested that we continue with the recording and would have been clearer about the ending of the interview. I approached Mr X's interview slightly differently offering multiple opportunities to consider if there was more, he would like to say. This did lead to a slight confusion as I wondered if Mr X felt that he had not given me the information I was 'looking for', which was not my intention. This said, the conversations which followed were incredibly interesting and added to the richness of my study.

4.7. Quality in research

Whilst it has been suggested that quality criteria developed for quantitative research could be applied to qualitative research (Mays and Pope, 2000), I strongly believe that my thesis is not an empirical study, thus markers around validity, reliability, objectivity (Schwandt et al., 2007), replicability, and generalisability (Cassell and Symon, 2011) are incompatible (Tracy, 2010, Fade, 2003). When selecting an appropriate framework to ensure research quality had been considered, I first explored Guba and Lincoln as I understand they developed alternative criteria around trustworthiness and authenticity to support qualitative researchers (Schwandt et al., 2007). Fade (2003) proposed that researchers have continued to develop criteria which Whitemore et al. (2001) reconceptualised. I opted to use

Whittemore et al. (2001) terms of credibility, criticality, authenticity, and integrity, as I feel these criteria underpin my research. Whilst these terms are implied and flow throughout my thesis, to ensure quality I adopted techniques which I would like to discuss further.

4.7.1. Credibility and authenticity

Credibility and authenticity are often considered together as they are indicators of trustworthiness (Whittemore et al., 2001). I believe my research is trustworthy as I endeavoured to demonstrate transparency with every decision made. The design of my research allowed Tom, Lee, and Mr X to share stories which were important to them (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). This said, it is important to acknowledge that whilst I wanted to remain open to possibilities, narrative methodology can be 'messy' (Andrews, 2021). Participants may want to please, offering the information they feel the researcher needs, which Mr X demonstrated when he said, "*[I] don't know what you're after because there's so much stuff that's happening in 20 years* (X, 665-666). Furthermore, whilst I understand the importance of checking for meaning in the moment, in practice I found this difficult to do. I wonder if this was due to my insider positioning (Chhabra, 2020) and a perceived 'shared understanding' of the nuances found within fostering. I maintain that a different researcher would have questioned some comments further. As Andrews suggested, "We do the best we can" (2021, p. 357).

I feel my research closely aligns with my participants' experiences of fostering as I held them in mind when thinking and writing about them, used their voices in the form of quotations where possible, plus I included full transcripts and worked readings to demonstrate the steps I took (Fade, 2003). I used reflexivity to consider where my personal biases lay but due to my insider-outsider positioning found that bracketing my assumptions was incredibly difficult and not necessary within the LG guidance (Tolman and Head, 2021). Once I had finalised Chapter Five, I emailed Tom, Lee, and Mr X to ask if they would like to read my interpretation of their stories as member checking is a technique which is strongly endorsed in qualitative research (Whittemore et al., 2001). One participant replied by saying he was "*not precious about these things*" but was interested in the big picture so would read the

thesis once complete. The other two participants requested their stories, and I received feedback from one who said I had captured many salient points of his story.

4.7.2. Criticality and integrity

Criticality and integrity were important quality measures in my study. I wanted to challenge my thoughts by carefully considering my personal biases and identities throughout (Clarke and Braun, 2019). As discussed in Section 4.5.3 I noted that during reading one, different versions of 'self' became apparent (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), which I attended to through the inclusion of personal and praxis reflections (Willig, 2013). In keeping with my insider-outsider position I feel I paid careful attention to moments where I felt either a shared understanding with or distance from my participants (Sharma, 2024) (See Section 1.1.2.). Through a process of reflexivity, I leaned into uncertainty to consider my participants' lived experiences, thus giving narrative meaning to my interpretations (Kim, 2015). Additionally, I frequently revisited my comprehensive literature review to reauthor parts of my thesis (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001), which I believe demonstrates a synergy between practice and theory on which I found a balance (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008).

In accordance with my feminist psycho-social research paradigm, I was conscious that the voices I presented were reconstructed from my readings of the narrative (McKenzie et al., 2021). I did not take this responsibility lightly. I sought regular supervision to discuss my interpretations and spent an inordinate amount of time reflecting on the meaning my participants gave to their experiences (Kim, 2015). This process was supported by the LG as I did not feel rushed to make formulations but remained within the stories (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). I valued my participants' accounts and believe that the storytelling process was an important aspect of the LG as it is possible to focus on the mundane alongside the exceptional (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). As such I resisted the temptation to condense the stories through a process of narrative smoothing as I felt that this would not be an accurate representation of our coconstructed conversation (Kim, 2015). As discussed in Section 4.5.6 this created a tension in me as I knew that similarly to the participants, I would have to prioritise some stories over others. To mitigate against this somewhat I included a document (Appendix 11 - Section 8.11) which guides the reader to the stories which were only partially

or untold, rather than ignoring them. Whilst I appreciate that a different researcher may have emphasised different points (Andrews, 2021), by doing this, I believe that it is possible to follow my thoughts during every step of the process.

5. Chapter Five: Interpretation of stories and discussion

Within this chapter I will present step five of the LG by bringing together the four readings, to form my interpretation of the three narratives (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). I shall show each narrative as a separate, standalone story, considering discussion points referring to research, alongside my description of what was said. I feel that this ‘in the moment’ approach provides a more reflective and considered understanding of my participants’ lived experiences. Furthermore, I want my interpretation of each story to be accessible to the reader and believe the most appropriate way to achieve this is through headings and subheadings. As my research is a narrative study, the headings are not to be confused with themes, but rather separate stories in which my participants’ experiences are explored as part of a sense-making process. The headings are based on the overviews I developed during step four of the LG process. I feel it is important to highlight that whilst I hope my interpretations are detailed, due to the restricted word count, some stories remain untold or only partially told.

Throughout the chapter, I will refer to ‘voice’ as detailed in step three of the LG process. Again, my intention was not to create themes but rather acknowledge distinct voices that I felt I heard. I feel it may be helpful to include my thoughts around these voices.

Tom

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| - Practitioner | Police, foster carer, social worker |
| - Purpose | Religion, faith, calling |
| - Joking | Sometimes funny, sometimes used to explain a difficult situation |
| - Challenge | Concern, frustration, challenge to system and own thinking |

Lee

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| - Moralistic | Good citizen |
| - Idealistic voice | Perfect world |
| - Hidden voice | Thoughts |
| - Matter of fact | Sometimes dismissing but other times reassuring, often offers a resolution |
| - Giving advice | Imparting information |

Mr X

- Pride Admiration
- Reflecting Looking back
- Information Factual
- Critical Questioning, frustrated, and at times confrontational
- Determined Clear vision of goals
- Humour Laughing, joking, funny
- Affection Love

The contrapuntal maps are designed to help demonstrate the multitude of voices (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021) I felt I heard surrounding each story. I have incorporated the maps along with the voice poems where I feel necessary. Whilst the voice poems are always situated within a specific subheading, the contrapuntal maps may also be at the beginning of a heading to denote relevance to the whole section. All voice poems and contrapuntal maps are available to view in the appendices.

	Voice Poems	Maps of the contrapuntal voices
Tom	Section 8.8.3	Section 8.8.4
Lee	Section 8.9.3	Section 8.9.4
Mr X	Section 8.10.3	Section 8.10.4

5.1. Tom's story

Tom and Steph met when they were teenagers through their church. Their faith has guided them towards fostering and following the birth of their two children it was a role that they actively pursued. Tom initially worked for the police however has since retrained to become a social worker. Tom and Steph offer long-term care for hard-to-place children. Over the past ten years, they have fostered four children; K, M, R, and J. K and R have been part of the family for ten and six years respectively and due to J's age, J was adopted by Tom and Steph three years ago. M was the only child to leave the family as he returned to his birth family after six months. Tom and Steph plan to extend their family in the future.

5.1.1. Motivations to foster

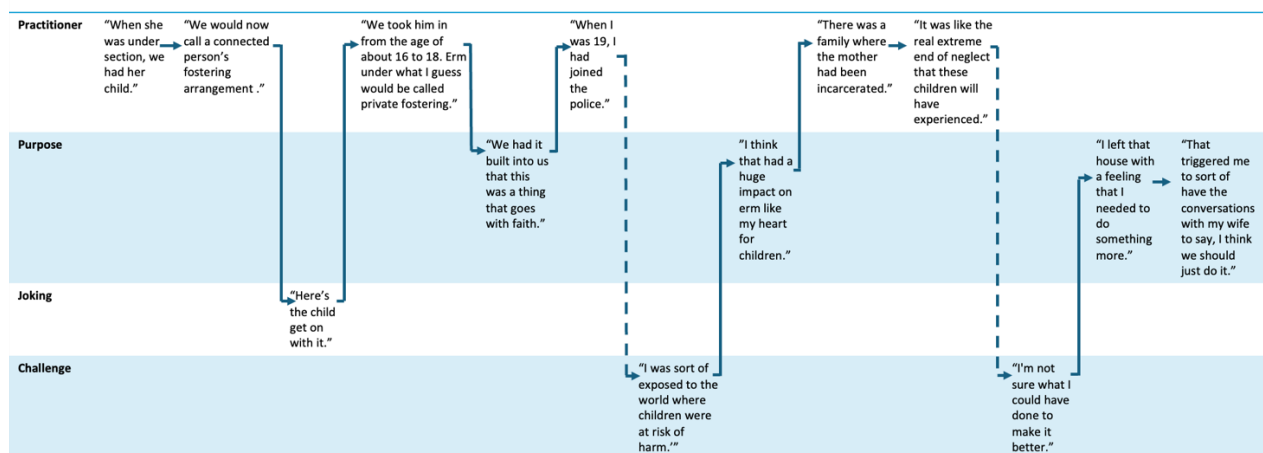


Figure 1. T1: Motivation to foster

5.1.1.1. Prior experience

As mapped onto Figure 1. Tom suggested that he first experienced fostering when he was a child as there were two instances his family cared for other people's children as part of a "connected person's fostering arrangement" (T, 16) and "private fostering [agreement]" (T, 31). I felt that whilst Tom's memory of the first placement was "relatively fleetingly" (T, 13-14) due to his age, he used a 'practitioner' voice to explain the circumstances for both situations. This was interspersed with a harmonised 'joking' voice which said, "Here's the child get on with it." (T, 19-20) and "I think then it was just, a family friend. "Do what you like", you know" (T, 33-36). This is further demonstrated through the voice poem below as Tom's use of language regarding the self is tentative in comparison to when speaking about his mother. I feel it draws on an experience in which Tom felt connected to the fostering lifestyle but as he was a child, was not the driving force for decisions made.

I was
I had two

I kind
I think
I would
I remember

I didn't know

She was

She had to
She'd bought

I was

They moved

We took

I guess

I think

You know

I'd had some

I was not

(T, 5-37)

5.1.1.2. Professionalisation

Tom's comment, *"I remember my mum, she had to fight really hard just to get some shoes refunded that she'd bought, because he didn't have school shoes"* (T, 22-23) highlights the changing landscape of fostering. I believe this feeds into the debate around fostering discourses and whether it should be considered a professional or voluntary role (Kirton et al., 2007). Whilst the demands placed on foster carers have changed which has led to a call for a shift towards a professional workforce (Wilson and Evetts, 2006, Hutchinson et al., 2003, Kirton, 2007), some foster carers reject the notion of professionalisation (Narey and Owers, 2018) and see this discourse as damaging to the relationships they form with children in their care (Wilson and Evetts, 2006).

5.1.1.3. Faith

I heard in Tom's 'purpose' voice that faith was a key driving force for the couple in wanting to foster. This voice was rarely silenced throughout the interview as Tom emphasised that he was *"committed"* (T, 573) to the task of fostering. I sensed that for Tom and Steph, fostering was a vocation. Tom discussed that they had *"it built into us that this [fostering] was a thing that goes with faith"* (T, 41-41). Tom and Steph envisaged that fostering would be part of their life, *"early into our relationship before we were adults, we were talking about the fact that at some point in the future, we thought we wanted to foster"* (T, 41-44). This was, however, interrupted by a 'joking' voice which said, *"She wanted five children that was her plan in her head...that's a lot of children"* (T, 44-47). I felt the 'joking' voice seemed a little younger and wondered if it served to highlight a slight tension. As both the storyteller and audience (Ryan and Irie, 2014), Tom reflected on his perceived past, recognising a

potential future self as a parent (Yaremko and Lawson, 2007), alongside his actual self as a teenager on the cusp of an adult world (McAdams, 2001). This said, it seems Tom was quick to accept membership of his 'hoped-for-self' (Ryan and Irie, 2014) as he joined the police during late adolescence and married Steph when he was 21 years old. Tom acknowledged that his role with the police had "*a huge impact*" (T, 60). I felt I heard harmonising 'practitioner', 'purpose', and 'challenge' contrapuntal voices to communicate the emotional toil of witnessing "*all sorts of things*" (T, 56), whilst working in the force.

5.1.1.4. A calling

Tom and Steph were inspired to foster through a colleague of Tom's and when meeting the couple once approved and fostering K, they experienced a moment which "*reinforced for us, the sense this wasn't just something we wanted to do. This was a calling, you know from a religious sense*" (T, 223-224). As someone without a religious affiliation, I was interested in exploring the influence of religion on fostering and found the link between the two has long been established (Sinclair et al., 2004, Buehler et al., 2003) with some fostering services specifically targeting churches and faith groups during recruitment drives (Cox et al., 2002). Buehler et al., suggested that 81% of foster carers interviewed identified faith and belonging to a church as a protective factor.

Buehler reported that for some foster carers, faith had led to a "deep concern for children" (p. 71) and presumably motivation to want to help. As mapped onto Appendix T8:

Continued motivation to foster (See section 8.8.4), Tom similarly suggested that his motivations of wanting to foster, "*came from a place of wanting to rescue*" (T, 551). Whilst this may be attributed to Tom's faith or his experiences whilst serving in the police force, literature suggests that narratives around rescuing are often identified in foster carers' stories (Nutt, 2002) and may demonstrate hegemonic masculinity through "perform(ing) gender as heroes who rescue children" (Heslop, 2014, p. 180). This voice was silenced, however, by a dissonant 'challenge' voice which questioned his ongoing motivation. Tom concluded that he didn't "*have an answer for that*" (T, 555) identifying that, "*you almost don't need an ongoing motivation*" (T, 568) for caring for children because "*they are in your family*" (T, 570). When looking at the voice poem below I feel it is possible to identify the

extent to which Tom found it difficult to contextualise his feelings around his ongoing motivation. I noted 'I' shifted between knowing and unknowing, and was eventually replaced with 'you', which in this instance I believe was used to protect the self. Tom's dialogue returned to 'I' once he focused on thoughts about his fostered children.

I think

I

I think

I'm motivated

I don't

I don't

You that

They don't

You still

You might

You've had

You that

You almost don't

You know

You need

You don't need

They are

They are

I'm motivated

I'm excited

(T, 540-573)

5.1.1.5. The spark

Whilst it could be suggested that Tom's motivation to foster was linked to prior experiences, faith, and inspiration from others who already fostered, it seemed that the spark to inquire came from an incident whilst Tom was working for the police, where Tom had to use "*police protection powers to remove those children*" (T, 87). Whilst I do not feel it is necessary to retell the story, I have included a voice poem which captures the event.

I went

I mean

I want

I used

I shared

I'd be

I'd be

		<i>We were</i>
	<i>He lunged</i>	
	<i>He grabbed</i>	
<i>I used</i>		
<i>I was</i>		
<i>I had access</i>		
	<i>He tries</i>	
<i>I flattened</i>		
<i>I drag</i>		
<i>I'm not sure</i>		
<i>I'm not sure</i>		
<i>I could</i>		
<i>I left</i>		
<i>I needed</i>		
<i>I think</i>		
		<i>We should</i>
<i>I don't know what we're waiting for</i>		

(T, 72-107)

During this discussion, I really sensed Tom's "*heart for children*" (T, 60-61) which I interpreted as his 'purpose' voice. I feel there was a shift within the voice poem as Tom presented as confident and self-assured surrounding his actions in response to the father and his policing role but questioned the experience for the children and seemed unsure, "*what I could have done to make it better*" (T, 102). This made me consider research around the indirect impact men have on children, as it is often the police who bring children into care and a judge who makes decisions about care proceedings, both roles of which are typically associated with men (Gilligan, 2000). Male foster carers have a role in challenging these negative associations and helping children to make sense of their experiences (Gilligan, 2000). Tom continued, "*I left that house with a feeling that I needed to do something erm more*" (T, 103), which led to a conversation with Steph, "*I think we should just do it. I don't know what we're waiting for*" (T, 106-107).

5.1.1.6. Public service

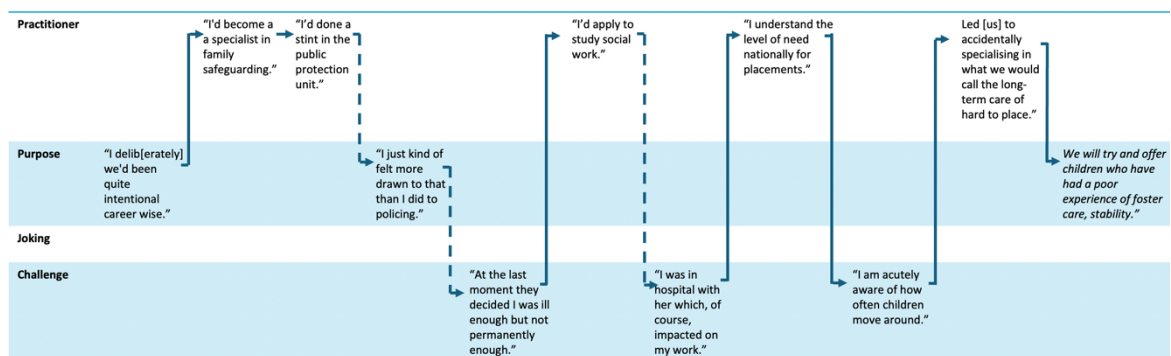


Figure 2. T2: Move towards a dual role

Tom and Steph actively pursued a role in fostering. They approached their local authority but when they shared *"we planned on having children"* (T, 109), they were told to *"come back once you have"* (T, 110). Tom used a 'challenge' voice to express his disappointment and said that he *"didn't really understand"* (T, 112-113) this decision. As mapped onto Figure 2. when Tom and Steph expressed an interest in fostering for the second time, Tom was able to offer the service a wealth of knowledge and experience in *"family safeguarding"* (T, 156) as he had been *"quite intentional career-wise"* (T, 154-155). I felt I heard these comments through a mixture of a determined 'purpose' and 'practitioner' voice.

Due to issues around capacity, (Baginsky et al., 2017) there has been a growth in IFAs (Kirton et al., 2007). Tom and Steph were adamant that they wanted to foster for the local authority, *"We want to come to you"* (T, 124). However, Tom found it difficult to verbalise why this decision was made. I feel that the voice poem below highlights Tom's uncertainty about the difference between the two.

I don't think

We knew

I say

I don't think

We didn't know

We did know

I'm not sure

I knew

I certainly knew

I'm not really

I can't remember

(T, 128-135)

After much deliberation, I heard a 'purpose' voice state, *"Somehow it felt like what you're supposed to do"* (T, 134). I feel that this response is similar to many people who work within the public sector as they see their role as a public service which implies an ethical and moral responsibility (Perry and Wise, 1990). I believe this sense of duty could also be heard when Tom discussed caring for a baby. I initially heard a 'practitioner' voice which suggested that *"I'd always been very clear, not interested in babies"* (T, 410-411), this harmonised with a 'joking' voice stating, *"Not my thing"* (T, 411). However, both voices were quickly silenced by a 'purpose' voice which said, *"I am someone who responds to need and the need was babies"* (T412-414). Even when Tom tried to identify other factors such as Steph's part-time job, which *"would have been very difficult to do with a baby"* (T, 415-416), Tom returned to, *"We were foster carers first"* (T, 416).

5.1.2. Family

5.1.2.1. What is family?

Tom's construct of family embraces all and his description of feelings towards his children suggests that this is not hierarchical through birthright or legal status. Indeed, in the interview, Tom, stated that *"surnames don't mean anything to us"* (T, 515), that his love for his children was not different, and that his foster children were as equally involved in fostering as his birth children. Tom's 'purpose' voice during his account around love for his children was challenged by a 'practitioner' voice which acknowledged that some people may *"think that it's different with birth children"* (T, 606) but returned to a 'purpose' voice which stated, *"It is not different for me"* (T, 606). Tom's 'joking' voice added that J's adoption was an *"anticlimactic day cause nothing happened, nothing changed...we put her to bed like usual, and she had a breakfast like usual"* (T, 610-612). The voice poem below demonstrates the difficulty Tom has in accepting that love may be different between his children.

*I struggled
I understand
I struggled*

	<i>They were</i>
	<i>They were</i>
<i>I have</i>	
<i>I think</i>	
<i>I mean</i>	
<i>I understand</i>	
<i>I understand</i>	
	<i>They are</i>
<i>I don't</i>	
<i>I think</i>	
<i>I can't</i>	
<i>I know</i>	

(T, 601-605)

Tom and Steph's commitment to fostering extends to their children's birth family with family time prioritised. Whilst Tom suggested that he understands the need for permanence, ideologically he disagrees with the UK system in *that "in adoption, you sever the relationship with the birth family entirely"* (T, 579-560). Tom described the heartache that those surrounding J faced when she was gravely ill and the relationship, they developed with J's birth parents, which I feel the voice poem below captures. It should be noted that apart from the first two instances Tom used 'we', Tom is referring to J's birth father as they stayed together in accommodation close to the hospital whilst J was receiving lifesaving treatment.

<i>I arrived</i>		
<i>I was</i>		
<i>I arrived</i>		
<i>I'm here</i>		
<i>I'm the</i>		
<i>I go</i>		
<i>I do</i>		
	<i>She had</i>	
<i>I didn't know</i>		
<i>I could</i>		
		<i>We take</i>
		<i>We discover</i>
	<i>She's in</i>	
	<i>You know</i>	
<i>I spent</i>		
<i>I mean</i>		
	<i>You add</i>	
<i>I've spent</i>		

<i>I was</i>			
	<i>You know</i>		
<i>I was</i>		<i>She had surgery</i>	
			<i>They fixed</i>
<i>I was</i>			<i>They let</i>
<i>I think</i>			
		<i>We did</i>	
	<i>He and</i>		
<i>I would</i>			
		<i>We'd walk</i>	
		<i>We were</i>	
		<i>We'd eat</i>	
		<i>We did</i>	
			<i>They phoned</i>
	<i>He and</i>		
<i>I rushed</i>		<i>We met</i>	
	<i>She said</i>		
	<i>You're the</i>		
	<i>You</i>		
		<i>We'll go</i>	
	<i>She says</i>		
	<i>She made it</i>		
<i>I said</i>			
	<i>She says</i>		
	<i>She had a</i>		
	<i>She couldn't breathe</i>		

Tom said, “*That was the turning point, and things have got better and better*” (T, 469-490) to the point that the local authority wanted to consider permanency options. The couple agreed to adopt J “*on the condition that you allow us to do it openly*” (T, 491) with J “*being raised to understand that she has two mums and two dads*” (T, 509-510). Tom and Steph have maintained J’s relationship with her birth parents and six of her eight siblings. A further salient point is that during J’s prolonged hospital stays, Tom stayed with her which, “*impacted on my work you know because I was not able to do social work erm (.) whilst that was all going on*” (T, 442-443). Tom quickly changed the conversation to emphasise the difficulties J was having, which silenced his concern for work. I feel this is an interesting point as Tom’s commitment to fostering and family seems to be a core value, furthermore, it resonates with earlier studies by Nutt (2002) in that family comes first.

5.1.2.2. Commitment to family

Tom and Steph have experienced challenges and when describing his motivation to continue caring for R, Tom used a 'purpose' voice to express his commitment to marriage and how for him it is the same as *"when I commit to permanence of a child. It's like, (.) you know, you don't (.) you don't stop."* (T, 350-351). This was followed by a dissonant 'practitioner' voice which acknowledged times when it was *"right for the child (.) for people to stop"* (T, 355). Tom's 'challenge' voice then seemed to make sense of the two opposing voices by suggesting how difficult it was to convey to the service that whilst they were struggling, they were still committed to R. This demonstrates a dislocation within the system as Tom and Steph were trying to manage the practical aspects of fostering alongside the emotionality associated with caring for a child within the home, by providing responsive parenting (Wilson et al., 2003). It made me wonder if in the moment practitioners possibly only heard, were used to hearing, or wanted to hear parts of what the couple were saying as they went ahead with *"placement planning in parallel"* (T, 358).

Tom's comments highlight a tension when placements are close to breakdown as the wider system's approach to the family seems to shift. Children's social workers often operate somewhere within the micro and mesosystem (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011). When placements are established and seem settled they are only required to visit the child once every three to six months (GOV.UK, n.d.) with foster carers expected to manage all day-to-day tasks (Fulcher and McGladdery, 2011, Munford and Sanders, 2016). However, once placements face disruption the synergy between the child, foster carer and social worker is paramount (Wilson et al., 2000) and the child social worker often becomes enmeshed in family life. It has been identified that placement breakdowns can be devastating for children (Rostill-Brookes et al., 2011) and in the case of R unfortunately form a working model where, *"I do my stint and then I go, and I have something new"* (T, 333). To mitigate against this, services often manage the situation by exploring alternative arrangements alongside supporting the child in placement, but this is not always transparent or what the foster carers want. Foster carers often need time to consider their options (Wilson et al., 2000) and feel that they can express their thoughts openly and honestly about the challenges they face. This may make foster carers feel vulnerable and exposed, as they explore feelings of

love and concern for the child, alongside guilt if they are considering ending the placement (Khoo and Skoog, 2014).

Tom commented that the fostering service was able to offer placement support through a team that was able to “swoop in and try and fix things” (T, 373) which seemed to be welcomed but “*partly it was just time*” (T, 377). Using a ‘challenge’ voice Tom said, “*One of the team managers told me off because I’d said to R, “You live with us unconditionally right”*” (T, 389-390). The manager believed that this message would influence R’s decision making, “*she’s going to think now she can behave how she likes*” (T, 391). Continuing to use a ‘challenge’ voice, Tom expressed surprise that the fostering service was encouraging them to “*almost threaten a child with having to move, if they carry on behaving badly*” (T, 398). He offered a dissonant ‘joking’ voice to state, “*No. ((smiling)). That wasn’t where we were at*” (T, 399-400). The voice poem below demonstrates Tom’s frustration as he retold what the service manager said and reflected on his ability to offer an alternative narrative to the situation.

<i>I remember</i>			
<i>I’d said</i>			
	<i>You live</i>		
		<i>She’s going</i>	
		<i>She’s going</i>	
		<i>She can</i>	
		<i>She likes</i>	
		<i>She’s gonna</i>	
<i>I said</i>			
		<i>She’s gonna</i>	
		<i>She’s secure</i>	
		<i>She’s stable</i>	
		<i>She’s gonna</i>	
	<i>You know</i>		
		<i>She’s gonna</i>	
<i>I found</i>			
			<i>They carry</i>
		<i>We were</i>	
	<i>You know</i>		
		<i>We were</i>	
<i>I suppose</i>			

(T, 388-401)

When thinking of this conversation, I am reminded of different theories of parenting as for instance, dynamic maturation model places less emphasis on infancy and proposes that responses are modified once the threat is reduced (Crittenden, 2006). As discussed in section 2.3.6, this seems to generate hope and possibility for fostering families.

Having reflected a great deal on Tom's narrative around commitment and permanence, I find his views inspirational. Models of permanence such as Sinclair (2005) and Biehal (2014) do not quite fit with Tom's description as he seems to indicate an 'uncontested permanence' (Sinclair, 2005) or 'as if' perception of permanence (Biehal, 2014). However, as Tom suggested that the children identify as belonging to two families he therefore described an 'enacted permanence' (Sinclair, 2005) or 'just as' perception of permanence (Biehal, 2014). This said, as Tom is not concerned with claiming the children as solely his and championed birth families' rights as parents throughout the interview, it seems that the latter perception is not adequate in describing his view of permanence.

I understand that ensuring children feel safe and secure through permanence is a key governmental objective (DfE, 2023) but in practice, I wonder how many children in the care system actually experience a felt sense of unconditional love and acceptance (Munford and Sanders, 2016) as described by Tom. When moving into a new family a state of trust (Erikson, 1950) and feelings of belonging (Biehal, 2014) are not inherent. The automatic membership into a family bestowed upon an infant, when born, (Schofield and Beek, 2005) has to be earned and negotiated with permissions needed from all within the system before they can be rehearsed (Eitzen and McIntosh, 2004). Children have to quickly learn the norms and expectations of a new family, and can only rely on strategies developed in response to previous caregivers' care, which may have been inconsistent and conditional (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Even with the most sensitive and attuned foster carers, some children may find the adjustment difficult (Stovall and Dozier, 1998, Evans, 2020). Added to this, is the constant concern of "*having to move house*" (T, 398) if behaviour does not meet expectations, reinforcing a position of conditional love and acceptance. Therefore, the experience of a sense of permanence cannot be assumed and is not guaranteed. It is an aspirational concept that may be strived for but not always achieved.

5.1.2.3. Not understood

Tom identified that the role of practitioners within the social care system has not always been that helpful. Indeed, the lack of clarity around the minimum age for birth children would have been sufficient to detract some potential foster carers from continuing (See section 8.8.4.: T4). Tom also suggested that the couple moved to a different authority as their previous supervising social worker wrote such negative reports about them. Tom used a 'practitioner' voice to describe that what was written "sounded awful" (T, 257). This was harmonised with a 'challenge' voice which stated, "[they] just weren't right about us" (T, 258) and a 'purpose' voice which said, "We hadn't been understood at all" (T, 257). Tom tried to 'challenge' his views by suggesting that, "perhaps she didn't mean it to sound erm negative" (T, 259-260) but concluded that, "it really did" (T, 260).

I feel that due to shifts within the workforce, fostering has become increasingly bureaucratic (Nutt, 2006) with tighter controls and regulations (Kirton, 2007). Reports about foster carers' capacity are regularly produced by supervising social workers to support the Annual Review process and children's social workers to support the Looked After Child Review process. Tom's comments highlight how little control foster carers have over what is written about them in such documents, as the reports are not co-produced and there is no opportunity to counter comments made.

5.1.3. The driving force

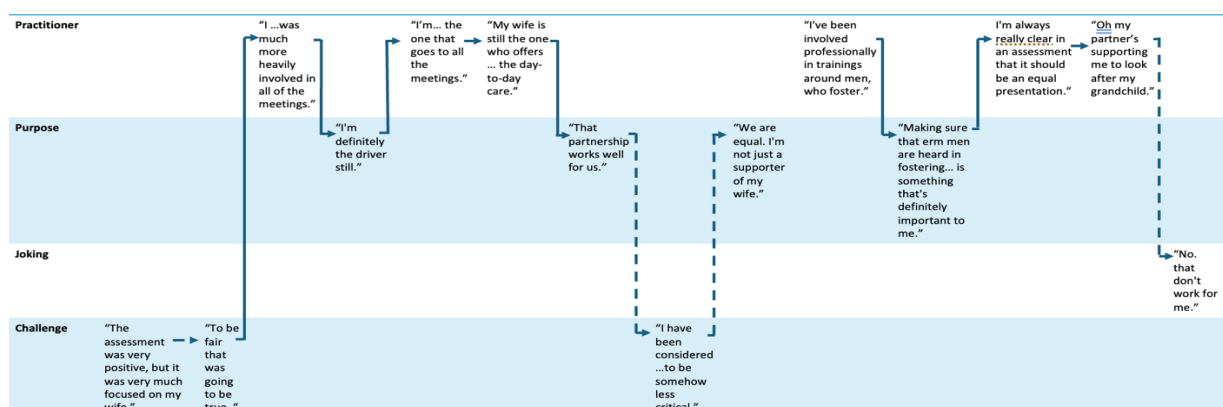


Figure 3. T3: How Tom feels he is seen in fostering and how he sees other men who foster

5.1.3.1. Division of labour

In Figure 3. I have mapped how Tom used a ‘purpose’ voice to suggest that he was “*definitely the driver*” (T, 617). This harmonised with a ‘practitioner’ voice which acknowledged that the couple carried out different tasks but that they were happy with the partnership they had developed as “*it works well for the family*” (T, 621). Tom returned to a ‘purpose’ voice to emphasise, “*We are equally involved. I’m not just a support of my wife*” (T, 632-633). The voice poem below demonstrates Tom’s certainty in his role as a foster carer and his partnership with Steph.

<i>I’m definitely</i>		
<i>I’m still</i>		
<i>I’m still</i>		
<i>I’m still</i>		
<i>I think</i>		
<i>I have</i>		
		<i>We were</i>
<i>I couldn’t</i>		
		<i>We would</i>
		<i>We would</i>
		<i>We’re [very] equal</i>
		<i>We do</i>
	<i>She does</i>	
<i>I do</i>		
<i>I’m the</i>		
		<i>They will</i>
		<i>We are</i>
<i>I’m not</i>		
		<i>We are</i>
		(T, 616-635)

Tom’s comments reminded me of my initial frustration when undertaking research for the literature review. Whilst it is suggested that fostering couples often assume more traditional roles (Hochschild, 1990) when compared to the general population (Sinclair et al., 2004), researchers seemed shocked to report that when asked, most fostering couples felt that there was an equal distribution of labour within their household (Vanderfaellie et al., 2016). I have considered this at length and concluded that as fostering encompasses an inordinate amount of tasks above and beyond that of parenting (Shdaimah and Rosen, 2020). It may be that whilst the jobs undertaken are not the same (Wilson et al., 2007, Newstone, 2000), an

overall equity is reached. It must be highlighted, however, that the roles described by Tom are highly gendered and demonstrate the concept of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 2009). Whilst research suggests that it is common for couples to have specific jobs roles (Kelly and Hauck, 2015), it may also be that a sense of masculinity can be sustained whilst a caring role is performed (Elliott, 2016).

5.1.3.2. Role not seen as critical

Tom views his contribution to fostering as “equal” (T, 629), however, he used a ‘challenge’ voice to highlight that he feels he is *“considered by the fostering service to be (.) somehow less critical”* (T, 622-623) and added, *“My wife is definitely viewed as being (.) still the main carer”* (T, 635-636). Tom used a harmonising ‘practitioner’ voice to offer examples, such as the assessment as it *“was very much weighted to my wife”* (T, 141) and supervision *“If I couldn't make a date we would carry on and hold the visit. If my wife couldn't make the date, we would not carry on”* (T, 623-625). I feel quite saddened by this and believe that fostering is hindered by the traditional ideological belief that fostering households should emulate a nuclear family (Heslop, 2014). As women are seen to be naturally nurturing, offering care without default (Mallette et al., 2021), the expectation is that fostering is a female occupation (Nutt, 2002). Tom’s desire to challenge this discourse and wish to undo gender is palpable. In practice, women are usually identified as the primary carer (McDermid et al., 2012) meaning that all information regarding placements is held under the female carer’s name. Thus, if a child experiences several placement moves, information regarding secondary carers may be lost. This emphasises the fact that male carers are not just ignored in research (Combs-Orme and Orme, 2014) but invisible in the life histories of children placed with them. Alongside dated gendered constructions of caring, assumptions that male carers are disengaged (Davids, 1971) and hard to reach (Dickerson and Thomas, 2009) have fuelled practitioners’ assumptions of men. Social workers have been reported to underestimate the role of men (Rhodes et al., 2003) and are not able to recall their positive qualities (Cautley, 1980). The result is that men are often not valued for their contribution and are not consulted in decisions made (Gilligan, 2000).

5.1.3.3. Giving voice to men

Tom has retrained as a social worker. As detailed in Figure. 3, Tom discussed his role and explained how *“making sure that erm men (.) are heard in fostering (.) households is something that's definitely important to me on a personal level”* (T, 643-645). I felt that this was said through a ‘purpose’ voice. It was accompanied by a harmonising ‘practitioner’ voice which suggested that he feels he is intentional in his casework to offer an *“equal presentation”* (T, 646). There was a dissonant ‘critical’ voice which suggested that he believed some prospective carers had *“the impression that it will be okay (.) for the female applicant to do more of the visits than the male applicant”* (T, 648-649) which was rebuked with a ‘joking’ voice that stated, *“No, that don't work for me, you're both starting up to foster”* (T, 658). I feel that Tom has reflected on his experiences of fostering and applied this to his work as a social worker ensuring that men are equally represented. This is essential as without men’s views being accounted for, the fostering assessment is incomplete (Heslop, 2014). From the voice poem below, I feel it is possible to identify where Tom moved from ‘I’ to ‘you’ to indicate when he was addressing others. These comments were made using a ‘practitioner’ voice.

<i>I think</i>	
<i>I've been involved</i>	
<i>I'm always</i>	
<i>I come</i>	
<i>I sort</i>	
<i>I'm gonna</i>	
	<i>You individually</i>
<i>I have</i>	
	<i>You</i>
	<i>You</i>
<i>I do</i>	
	<i>You're both</i>
	<i>You can't</i>
	<i>We might</i>
	<i>You know</i>
<i>I'd like</i>	
<i>I produce</i>	
<i>I'm quite</i>	
<i>I work</i>	
<i>I get</i>	
	<i>You're both</i>
	<i>They think</i>

I'm like

You're signing

You're signing

You are

You are

You are

We all

I always

(T, 640-666)

5.1.4. Summary of Tom's story

Throughout Tom's story, there is a strong emphasis on commitment which Tom attributed to his faith. Tom suggested that he and Steph are "*foster carers first*" (T, 416), adapting their family to the needs of the service. Tom identified his motivation came from wanting to rescue which when situated in existing literature may be considered as an example of gender performativity (Butler, 2002) and expression of hegemonic masculinity (Heslop, 2014). However, as we are influenced and shaped by our experiences (Parker, 2005), this could also be a response to traumatic experiences which challenged Tom to consider what more he could have done to help. This said, Tom admitted he did not have "*an answer*" (T, 555) for his ongoing motivation to foster suggesting that the children "*are in your family*" (T, 570). Indeed, Tom described an unconditional love for his children regardless of birthright or legal status. This love transcended to those surrounding their children and as such I found it difficult to apply models of permanence such as Sinclair (2005) and Biehal (2014). This is because relationships within each birth family was promoted rather than contested. I do admire Tom's views around unconditional love, but sadly question in practice how many children experience the same level of acceptance as Tom described. Indeed, research suggests that constructs of love and permanence are often conditional and cannot always be achieved (Evans, 2020). This shall be addressed further in section 6.2.3.

Tom described the involvement of others making specific reference to a lack of clarity within the role and not being understood. These instances harmed Tom's confidence in the services that support him. This is discussed further within section 6.3.2. Tom also described an incident with a service manager whereby he refused to accept their understanding of attachment and belonging. Literature does support alternative views of attachment such as

dynamic maturation model (Crittenden, 2006), whereby behaviours adapt once the threat is reduced. Within Tom’s story, he expresses that he and Steph undertake gender normative roles, in line with West and Zimmerman’s (2009) view of doing gender, but this is undone in his challenge to those supporting the family. Tom sees himself as the “*driver*” (T, 617) but perceives his role is seen as “*less critical*” (T, 623) by practitioners. This has been well documented in research with Tom’s experiences closely resonating with earlier studies (Nutt, 2002, Heslop, 2014). Male foster carers are often assigned the role of secondary carer with little recognition about the contributions they make (Rhodes et al., 2003) and attempts by practitioners to engage with them is considered concerning (Gilligan, 2000). This is discussed further in section 6.2.1.

5.2. Lee’s story

Lee and Jane have two birth children and have fostered for 12 years. They were initially approved to care for children under two years old. Most were babies which they collected from the hospital. Lee and Jane supported reunification back to the birth family or if that option was not viable, helped to place the babies with their adoptive families. Once established they offered respite care to two brothers, who have remained with the family. They also fostered a baby who they have since adopted. The family of six are settled and there are no immediate plans to change the family system.

5.2.1. Motivation to foster and changing role

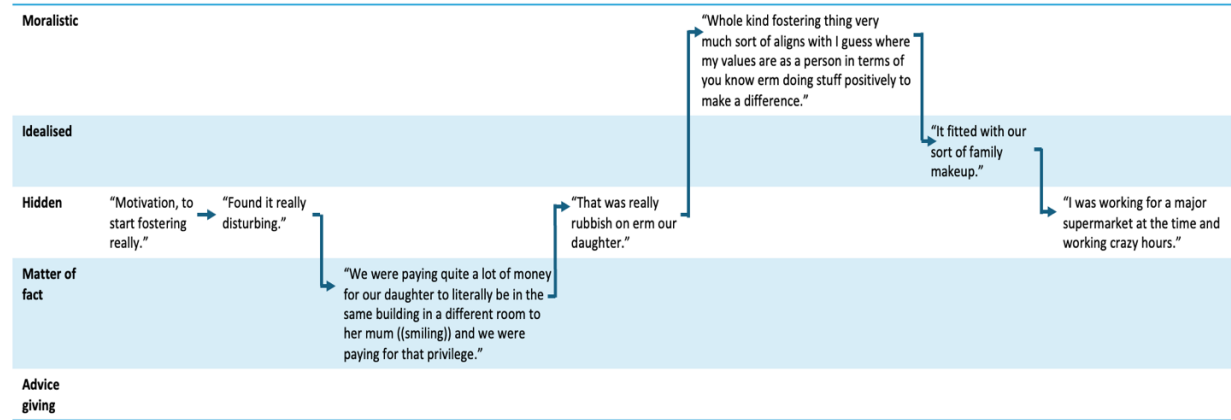


Figure 4. L1: Decision to foster

5.2.1.1. Balancing family life and work

As mapped onto Figure 4. Lee began by suggesting that his birth children provided the motivation to foster. Once Jane returned to work, their daughter attended the same nursery provider but, *“in a different room to her mum”* (L, 16). At this point, I felt there was an interplay of voices between an emotional ‘hidden’ voice which suggested that the experience was *“disturbing”* (L, 14), and *“rubbish on our daughter”* (L, 19) and a ‘matter of fact’ voice which agreed, *“We were paying for that privilege”* (L, 16). Whilst financially there may be benefits to both adults working (Hanson and Ooms, 1991), and in some cases, due to the rising cost of living, this may be a necessity (ONS, 2022b), there are implications to family life which must be considered. Ecological systems theorists suggest that by exploring the interrelationship between the two microsystems; work and family at a mesosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is possible to examine the impact on wellbeing (Perry-Jenkins and Wadsworth, 2017). It is suggested that multiple roles such as, “spouse, parent, and worker” can be beneficial (Voydanoff, 2002 pp. 143) to wellbeing, offering increased social and cultural capital, and a sense of purpose. This said, there is a limit and too many demands in either of the microsystems can lead to “overload and distress.” (Barnett and Hyde, pp.789).

5.2.1.2. Confidence in the role

I feel that the main driving force to foster was Jane initially. *“She must have always had fostering in her mind, I suppose”* (L, 21). Whilst Lee suggested that “It’s difficult for me to speak to that” (L, 24), I wondered if Jane felt conflicted about caring for two young children, alongside working compressed hours as a manager (Sullivan, 2015, Guendouzi, 2006, Wattis et al., 2013). I believe this offers a more plausible explanation than the dated view that women are driven to foster due to a desire to have children (Dando and Minty, 1987). I feel that Jane’s experience of caring for children and her exposure to, *“quite a few sort of adopted nieces and nephews”* (L, 24), gave her confidence and knowledge of the role. Whilst prior experience is not a prerequisite to foster, it is generally recognised that this underpinning knowledge is valuable (Fosterplus, n.d.). It has been suggested that men usually do not express a desire to foster but support their partner’s initial interest (Gilligan, 2000) and often play an active role in the process (Wilson et al., 2007). Burgess (1999) suggested the same was apparent in parenting with men having to rely on their partner to

express their desire to have children. I feel that Lee's voice poem helps to contextualise how he was potentially feeling at that time, showing the joint decisions made.

		<i>She worked</i>	
	<i>You know</i>		
			<i>We were</i>
			<i>We were</i>
	<i>You know</i>		
<i>I think</i>		<i>She did</i>	
			<i>We decided</i>
		<i>She must</i>	
<i>I suppose</i>			
<i>I</i>			
<i>I</i>			
<i>I know</i>			
		<i>She's got</i>	
	<i>You know</i>		
		<i>She was</i>	
		<i>She came</i>	
	<i>You know</i>		
			<i>We'd been talking</i>

(L, 10-27)

5.2.1.3. Values and family life align

I noticed a shift in the story once Lee had attended the information evening. Through a 'moralistic' voice I heard that fostering "*aligns with (.) I guess where my values are as a person*" (L, 36-37) and "*it does take all of us to do our bit*" (L, 41-42). Lee also moved into an 'idealised' voice which suggested that fostering "*fitted with our sort of family make-up*" (L, 43). Lee expressed joy that Jane, "*could also go along to every school play and all the rest of it*" (L, 46-47). I felt that this part of the narrative included three harmonised contrapuntal voices which ascertained that fostering was right for the family. My interpretation of the voice poem concurs, suggesting a tentativeness towards fostering initially which moves towards the realm of possibilities.

		<i>We don't</i>
<i>I guess</i>		
<i>I remember</i>		
<i>I guess</i>		
	<i>You know</i>	

		<i>They are</i>
		<i>They can</i>
	<i>We go</i>	
<i>I wanted</i>		
<i>I loved</i>		
	<i>She could</i>	
<i>I was</i>		

(L, 34-46)

I felt I understood how important family was to Lee and that the children could spend time with Jane as he was, *“working crazy hours and all the rest of it. So, I really wasn't in the house very much (.) at that point”* (L, 47-48). I felt this ‘hidden’ voice was in dissonance with the others as whilst Lee believed fostering would benefit his family, he could not be as involved as he wished. It could be suggested that Lee identified his role in the family as a ‘provider’. The view that men should be the “breadwinner” is a dominant narrative in research (Heslop, 2016, pp. 44) and is regarded as a way men care for their families (Hanlon, 2012).

5.2.1.4. Navigating the approval process

Once Lee and Jane had decided to foster, they faced what Lee referred to as the *“dreaded approval process”* (L, 49-50). I felt I heard a ‘hidden’ voice express how challenging it was to share such personal information with another person, *“That was really, really difficult erm very intrusive, you know more kind of sharing of (.) thoughts and feelings, than (.) you know as an adult, I'd probably done with anybody ever. Really.”* (L, 52-54). Lee then used a ‘moralistic’ voice suggesting, *“I don't think you kind of share the stuff in the way in which the the approval process does because it asks it so directly”* (L, 57-58). This harmonised with a ‘idealised’ voice which shared that in a relationship, *“it becomes a more organic sharing of getting to know each other”* (L, 59). Lee returned to a ‘hidden’ voice to summarise *“so that was (.) quite difficult, you know to get through”* (L, 60) but added in a dissonant ‘matter of fact’ voice *“but that was okay”* (L, 60). Potentially the aim was to silence the other voices as the difficulties in sharing the information was in the past and rewarded as *“We passed that and went to panel”* (L, 61-62). Lee’s comments made me think about sharing thoughts and feelings as in my role I am accustomed to doing this, often seeking supervision when necessary, but for others, I speak with, especially parents, carers, and staff within school, it

may be that they feel incredibly unsettled and unsure of my motivations behind such questioning.

5.2.1.5. Shift in working patterns

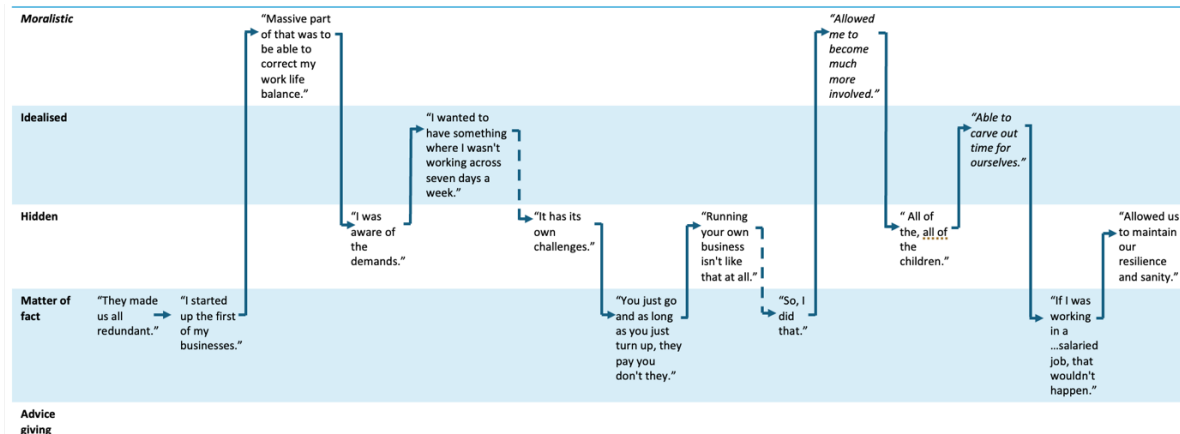


Figure 5. L4: Changing role

Lee explained that around seven years ago, he was made redundant. In Figure 5. I have recorded the harmonising 'moralistic', 'idealised', and 'hidden' voices I heard, which suggested that this event gave him a new opportunity, *"I started up (.) the first of my businesses at that point and a massive part of that was to be able to correct my work-life balance"* (L, 192-194). Whilst Lee offered dissonance, in the form of a 'hidden voice', which suggested, *"challenges"* (L, 202), he seemed positive about the changes in his life, and I sensed a feeling of satisfaction in terms of being *"much more involved"* (L, 208) with family. Nutt (2002) reported foster carers' concerns when self-employed as participants felt conflicted managing the demands between the two roles. I also heard a 'matter of fact' voice which stated that with paid employment, *"You just have to turn up"* (L, 206). This is in contrast to Lee's previous comments about working long hours as this suggested to me that he was dedicated and committed to his job. I wondered whether Lee's family life acted to buffer his experience of working, *"across seven days a week"* (L, 198) (Barnett and Hyde, 2001), or if he was driven by his perceived role as a 'provider' to undertake this workload (Heslop, 2019, Hanlon, 2012). Interestingly, there was also a shift from 'I' to 'you' when Lee discussed paid employment. I wondered whether this was because Lee was hurt by redundancy as despite working hard, his efforts had not been recognised or appreciated and if this temporary split from the self (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021) acted as a protection from recalling the past.

I was
I wanted
I wasn't
I started

You're not
You know
You just
You just

They pay

You
You know
You don't even
You just

(L, 196-206)

5.2.2. Caring for children

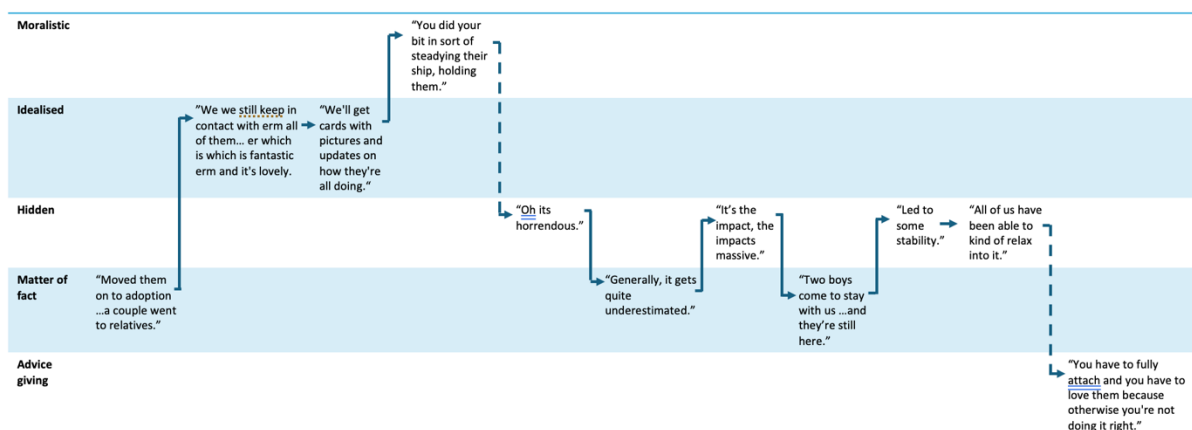


Figure 6. L3: Moving on

5.2.2.1. Caring for babies

Lee and Jane were initially approved to care for children under two years old because they "didn't have a spare room" (L, 62). Most babies were, "from the hospital" (L, 295) and "tended to (.) move on from us, you know (.) at around somewhere between one and two" (L, 298). Lee expressed values such as "pride" (L, 288) and "a sense of achievement" (L, 75-76) associated with fostering. As mapped onto Figure 6. I felt Lee used an 'idealised' voice to consider the babies' lives now they were with their families which harmonised with a 'moralistic' voice which emphasised that, "You did your bit" (L, 81). When Lee expressed an 'idealised' voice that many of the families "keep in contact" (L, 72), I noticed a response in

me, as this has not always been my experience of fostering. I wondered if this is linked to how the receiving family positions the previous family and whether adoptive parents express gratitude (Boswell and Cudmore, 2014), whereas foster carers question the previous carers' capacity if the reason for the move is as a result of a placement breakdown.

I also found the dissonant 'hidden' voice, "*Oh it's horrendous*" (L, 85) about 'moving children on' incredibly powerful. Interestingly, at this point, I did not choose to ask any further questions to clarify or gain more information; my response was simply, "*Yes*" (L, 86). Sense-making during interactions is interpretative and based on each member's lived experience (Blumer, 1979), therefore, whilst "moved on" (L, 89), and "moved out to independence" (L, 106) are terms used to describe a complex process and possibly help to normalise and simplify this practice, paradoxically for those who have experience of this, the words are heavily laden with meaning. In this instance, I felt my response demonstrated a shared understanding and reflection of the feelings associated with placing children with another family, whether this be a birth family, foster family, or adoptive family. This said, our experiences are different as through fostering, I am more accustomed to moving children on relatively quickly once family members have been identified or as suggested above, through a placement breakdown. Therefore, we have had several children remain with us until adulthood. However, for Lee and Jane, they often cared for infants for the first eighteen months of life, with the understanding that adoptive placements would be found. Lyons and Siteo's (2019) qualitative study explored the views of 22 foster carers about 'moving children on'. They suggested that most foster carers expressed love for their child and when they moved on, experienced a term Lyons and Siteo coined, "disenfranchised grief" (Lynes and Siteo, 2019, pp. 22), whereby the foster carers felt their experience of grief was not considered valid or legitimate by practitioners within the mesosystem. At this point, there was a shift in the conversation, away from Lee, and possibly our shared feelings. As demonstrated by the voice poem, Lee found 'we' statements easier, whilst he discussed his birth children's experience. He repeated, "*We kind of dealt with it and moved on, but we didn't realise the impact on our birth children*" (L, 89-91). Family is an interconnected system (Bowen, 1966) and each time a child is placed or leaves a family, the entire system changes (Mallette et al., 2021, Younes and Harp, 2007). This highlights the potential effects fostering may have for foster carers' birth children who have to continually adapt to a changing

landscape (Sutton and Stack, 2013, Twigg and Swan, 2007), with researchers highlighting that children need time to grieve (Sutton and Stack, 2013). Lee suggested that this led them to consider alternative types of fostering, with their two long term foster children and adopted daughter, offering the stability the family needed. I heard a ‘hidden’ voice which stated, *“all of us have been able to kind of relax into it”* (L, 119-120), which is also captured towards the end of the voice poem.

*I say
I
I think*

You know

*We didn’t realise
We [kind of] dealt
We didn’t realise*

*She had
She ended
She had*

You know

We had

*They were
They’re still here
(L, 87-100)*

5.2.2.2. Strategies used to support the placements

I felt that throughout the story Lee tended to focus on the children’s needs and whilst he suggested coping strategies, he did not delve into the toil of caring for children for him. For instance, Lee used an ‘advice giving’ voice to suggest that *“You have to fully attach and you have to love them because otherwise you’re not doing it right”* (L, 123) and a ‘hidden’ voice which suggested that challenging behaviours were, *“difficult in the moment...only ever in the moment”* (L, 161). Other voices which may have acknowledged difficulties were silenced by the ‘matter of fact’ voice which stated, *“You just need to deal with whatever has happened”* (L, 162). Caring for children who have experienced early developmental trauma and significant loss often requires a different approach to parenting (Berrick and Skivenes, 2012). As Lee suggested through an understanding of attachment (Bowlby, 1969), foster carers are encouraged to offer therapeutic care, this is often achieved by parenting using strategies such as emotion coaching (Gottman, 2001) and PACE/PLACE (Playful, (Loving/Liking), Accepting, Curious, and Empathy) to support the attachment between adult and child

(Hughes and Golding, 2012). Both strategies need attuned and emotionally available adults to help children make sense of difficult and painful emotions (Ironsides, 2004). This high level of containment can be traumatic for foster carers and may lead to compassion fatigue or blocked care (Ottaway and Selwyn, 2016).

Lee and Jane have adopted various beneficial strategies to support them as foster carers. Lee suggested that when they were “*really struggling*” (L, 252), they accessed support through the fostering service, which I believe they saw as valuable. As mapped onto Appendix L7 (See section 8.9.4.), I heard a ‘hidden’ voice, “*It’s too much*” (L, 262), and he reiterated that of the worker’s voice, when he said, “*It’s too overwhelming*” (L, 259-260) when you think of 10 years in the future.” Lee added in an ‘advice giving’ voice that said, “*you’ve got to hold it a bit more lightly than that and just sort of think about (.) well today, this week, that’s it*” (L, 263-264). I heard a moralistic voice that rejected any notion of perfection, “*we don’t live in an Instagram world*” (L, 153) and he said that he found it helpful to “be mindful and present in the moment” (L, 145) Lee also discussed that he felt, “time for ourselves” (L, 218) was important to him and Jane as individuals and as a couple.

5.2.3. Gender and how this influences male foster carers

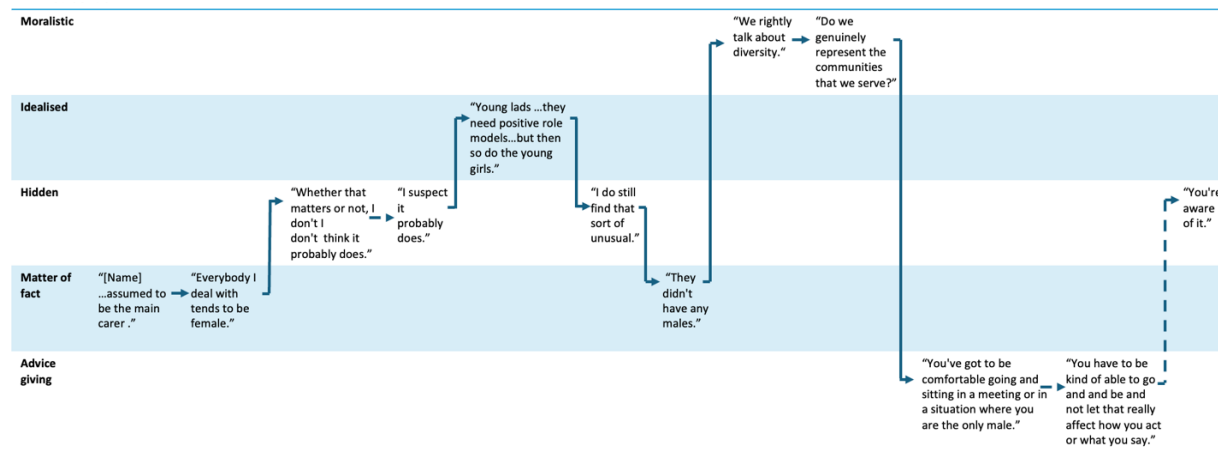


Figure 7. L9: Gender

5.2.3.1. Working within female-dominated systems

As mapped onto Figure 7. since Lee’s involvement in fostering has increased, he discussed how it was “*interesting*” (L, 307), that Jane was considered to be the main carer. He

acknowledged that the systems he works within, for example, education and social care, tended to be female-dominated roles. I heard a questioning and almost conflicted 'hidden' voice within Lee's response as to "*whether this matters or not*" (L, 313-314) as he seemed to grapple with an answer that was reflective of the situation as it stands and his values. I have decided to use an 'I poem' rather than a 'voice poem', in this instance to demonstrate Lee's movement from uncertainty into a position of knowing.

I don't know
I don't think
I suspect
I mean
I think

(L, 314-315)

Lee concluded in a 'hidden' voice that, "*it probably does*" (L, 135) matter. I heard an 'idealised' voice which suggested that it was important to be a role model for children. Lee initially considered the boys in his care and, "*keeping them on the (.) right track*" (L, 317) (Peate, 2020). He then added that girls in foster care, "*may well have had some very negative perceptions of what male role models (.) can be.*" (L, 320-321), and discussed how changing the narrative so girls understood, "*what is acceptable behaviour (.) from a male, you know in terms of behaviours, language, just what they expect other people to do*" (L, 321-323), was central. Research supports Lee's views that male foster carers can be positive role models, helping to show appropriate ways to manage conflict and levels of affection (Gilligan, 2000, Riggs et al., 2010). Furthermore, the fostering couple's relationship can also help to model mutual respect and affection, which children may internalise for future relationships (Gilligan, 2000). This said I wonder if, within this narrative, there is a danger of trivialising the male foster carers' role (Heslop, 2016). Aside from the focus on the fostering couple's relationship, research with female foster carers does not suggest that women identify with being a 'role model' rather than 'mothers' (Blythe et al., 2013), perpetuating gendered stereotypes. Some research with male foster carers identified that male foster carers do not distinguish between their role as parents or foster carers (Inch, 1998) and indeed, through a 'hidden' voice this was also suggested by Lee, "*because that's the thing isn't it when you've got foster kids and birth kids, and we've got an adopted child, that*

they're just all the children" (L, 213-214). Thus, whilst I am suggesting that Lee sees personal value in being a role model for his children, I feel that this is just part of a wider conversation around parenting and should not be seen as distinct. For me, this highlights a strength of the LG as I have been able to carefully listen to what Lee said as part of a whole story, and was not driven by the need to find themes (Shay, 2010), which in this situation would have offered a reductionist view of the role.

I heard numerous, contrapuntal voices surrounding the notion of being "the only guy" (L, 367) in meetings. Lee spent time exploring what he felt about this and again there was dissonance within his responses. Lee began with a 'hidden' voice which suggested that whilst it was reminiscent of his previous role, the lack of male representation in foster care was "*unusual*" (L, 324), the 'matter of fact' voice agreed, indicating that in life, "*there will be a mix*" (L, 352) and that he had supported a fostering panel as "*they didn't have any males*" (L, 326). Lee then moved to a 'moralised' voice which criticised the lack of diversity and representation in fostering and shifted towards an 'advice-giving' voice, which suggested that in meetings, it was advisable to, "*not let that really affect how you act or what you say*" (L, 358). Again, I feel Lee's voice poem emphasises the use of 'you' as a way to distance and depersonalise his response, but the repetition of, "*You're aware*", (L, 367) may demonstrate Lee's hidden uncomfortable feeling associated with such meetings.

I do
I support

You know
You see
You go
You as a
You're working

They just

You
You know

They're doing
They just don't

You would

I think
I suppose
I have

You have to

I suppose

	<i>You've got</i>	
	<i>You are</i>	
	<i>You know</i>	
<i>I say</i>		
	<i>You know</i>	
<i>I mean</i>		
<i>I've got</i>	<i>You know</i>	
	<i>You have to</i>	
<i>I suppose</i>		
	<i>You're aware</i>	
		<i>She probably would</i>
<i>I mean</i>		
	<i>You're certainly aware</i>	

(L, 340-367)

5.2.3.2. Representation within fostering services

I heard a 'moralistic' voice when Lee discussed representation within the fostering service, *"At the most fundamental level of gender split, actually, you know it can quite easily not be right before you even start getting around to ethnicity and all the rest of it"* (L, 328-329). It has been reported that 81% of the fostering workforce is white (Ofsted, 2022). Whilst this is in line with the UK's general population (ONS, 2022a), it means that there are only 11,380 foster carers from minority or unknown groups (Ofsted, 2022). Furthermore, whilst the population of same-sex couples has been recorded for adoption at 18.3% (GOV.UK, 2023), the same information is not readily available for fostering. Therefore, it could be suggested that in terms of representation, fostering services *"do not represent the communities that we serve"* (L, 338). However, I do not feel the same can be said about male foster carers. Research suggests that most fostering households consist of a married or cohabiting couple (McDermid et al., 2012, Wilson et al., 2007). Therefore, the issue around it not being "right" (L, 329) may be linked to visibility rather than statistics. The concern Lee raises about gender is echoed in research as male foster carers are unvalued and underrepresented (Nutt, 2002). Fostering services and researchers often make a distinction between primary and secondary foster carers, with women tending to hold the primary role, therefore research predominantly focuses on the female-child dyad (Heslop, 2016, McDermid et al., 2012). Parallels have been made to the lack of interest in fatherhood and men as parents (Daniel and Taylor, 1999).

5.2.4. Summary of Lee's story

Lee's love for his family is central to his story. Whilst fostering alighted with "*where my values are as a person*" (L, 37), it was made with his family's best interest in mind. Lee wanted Jane to be able to spend time with their children as he recognised his role at work often took him away from home. Several years ago, Lee was able to challenge his work/life balance after setting up his own business. He suggested that whilst he enjoyed his increased involvement with the children and fostering, there were added pressures associated with running a business. The discourse of the 'male breadwinner' has been heavily researched both in terms of fostering and parenting (Anderson, 2014, Heslop, 2019, Doucet, 2020, Sear, 2021) and described as a way that men care for their families (Hanlon, 2012) and how gender is often performed (Butler, 2002). Lee's description of caring for babies was incredibly moving as he discussed the need to "*fully attach*" (L, 123), alongside the challenge of knowing placements would end. The impact was felt by all family members and again with their best interest in mind, influenced the couple's decision to move to long-term fostering. When situated in research this brings a different perspective to the notion of a double-bind situation (Twigg and Swan, 2007), as the risk of 'losing' a child is almost anticipated rather than a possibility, as found in other forms of fostering. The term disenfranchised grief (Lynes and Siteo, 2019) also helps to capture the experience of foster carers when feelings of loss and grief feel invalidated by practitioners. As foster carers often experience higher levels of stress in comparison to non-fostering couples (Adams et al., 2018, Bergsund et al., 2020), I particularly like Lee's focus on strategies that have helped him and Jane, as he was quick to suggest that support from his fostering service was available, plus emphasised the importance of staying in the moment and spending time together as a couple.

Lee discussed his views about working in a female-orientated environment. He expressed that when thinking about the gender divide it was "*quite easily not be right*" (L, 328), suggesting that he was often "*the only guy*" (L, 367) which he was "*certainly aware*" (L, 367) of. Furthermore, the "*dreaded approval process*" (L, 49-50), alongside meetings such as supervision and annual reviews often necessitate a need to share incredibly personal information. When situating this in theory, I wonder if it emphasises a gendered discourse in fostering as it could be suggested that through socialisation boys and men are expected to

perform gender in certain ways which may make expressing their emotions more difficult (Randell et al., 2016).

5.3. Mr X's story

Mr X and Lucy have adult children and have fostered for 20 years. They both worked in education and were initially motivated to foster as they wanted to care for large sibling groups. During their fostering career, they moved from an IFA to their Local Authority. Mr X and Lucy have undertaken various types of fostering roles including short-term, long-term, respite, bridging placements, and more recently unaccompanied children. They regularly have up to five young people placed with them at any given time. Mr X and Lucy continue to support many of the children they have fostered into adulthood.

5.3.1. Motivation to foster

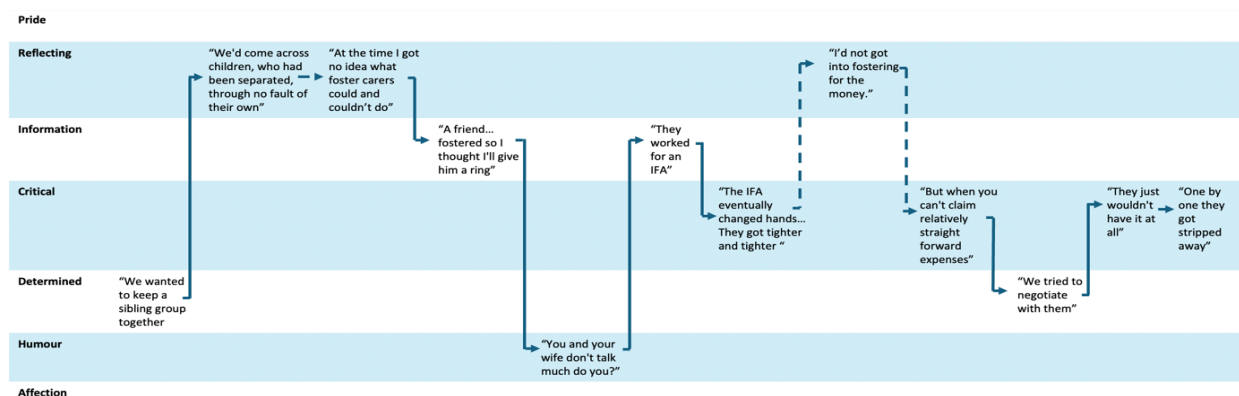


Figure 8. X1 - Motivation to foster and the decision to move to a Local Authority

5.3.1.1. Motivation to foster

Mr X and Lucy's background in education meant that throughout their careers, they had taught children who were fostered. As mapped onto Figure 8. I heard a 'determined' voice suggest they had gone into fostering to *"keep a sibling group together"* (X, 33) as they knew children *"who had been separated, (.) through no fault of their own"* (X, 34). I feel it is also pertinent to add that Mr X and Lucy are from large families, *"I've got four brothers and a sister, my wife's got three sisters, you know we've got family coming out our ears"* (X, 456-457). This may have added to the motivation to actively pursue a large sibling group as it

may have been seen as a way to replicate their own experiences of growing up (Régnier-Loilier and Depledge, 2006).

5.3.1.2. Word of mouth

After seeing an advertisement to foster Mr X contacted a friend who was a foster carer to ask about the role. Coincidentally, Lucy had a similar experience and called Mr X's friend's wife before they discussed the idea as a couple. I heard a 'humour' voice which responded to comments made by his friend, "*Me mate was quite right, we don't talk to each other properly [Laughing]*" (X, 261). I feel Mr X's voice poem highlights the independent process Mr X went through, alongside the interconnectivity of others that were important to the decision made.

*I was
I fancied
I was
I'd been*

*He was
He was*

*I think
I got
I saw
I just
I remembered
I got*

He

They fostered

*I thought
I'll give
I did*

He said

You mean

I said

*He said
She was
She'd seen
She was
She had
He was*

We don't talk

(X, 241-261)

The comments raised by Mr X highlight the importance of ‘word of mouth’ in the recruitment of new foster carers (Shuker, 2012, Triseliotis et al., 1998). I found it fascinating to learn that before the advancement of technology and social networking, researchers were able to study the dispersion of foster carers and found that they tended to live nearby, with the longest-serving foster carer central (Coyne, 1978). Abbey (1974) as cited in Coyne suggested a ‘neighbourhood effect’, whereby individuals were influenced by others who foster. Indeed, many fostering services recognise this, offering existing foster carers financial incentives for ‘recommending a friend’ (Sellick and Howell, 2004). Mr X was fortunate as he had someone he could contact informally, to discuss the role with, but some individuals have no such social network. Existing foster carers are often invited to recruitment drives such as information evenings, plus asked to attend pre-approval training to offer an insight into the role (Thomson et al., 2016). Existing foster carers are an incredibly valuable resource, as their lived experience is legitimate (Cox et al., 2002), with prospective foster carers appreciating their time (Wilson et al., 2004). This said, it is important to remember that whilst existing foster carers may help persuade others into fostering, comments made can also have the opposite effect, if it is felt that their experience is overly demanding, insufficiently funded, or not supported (McGuinness and Arney, 2012).

5.3.1.3. Retention

Mr X and Lucy approached an organisation recommended by their friends. Mr X suggested that the IFA was originally non-profit, but it was taken over by a hedge-fund company who were *“looking to invest for return”* (X, 278). Over time, the financial support the couple received was significantly reduced, therefore they decided to transfer to their Local Authority. There was a dissonant ‘reflecting’ voice which emphasised that, *“And (I’m not) don’t get me wrong, I’d not got into fostering for the money.”* (X, 271-272) but this was silenced by a ‘critical’ voice which stated, *“Nothing for holidays. Nothing for clothing. Nothing for school uniform.”* (X, 296-297). I was interested in the repetition of the word *“Nothing”* and believe it may demonstrate an emotional hotspot (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017, Tolman and Head, 2021). I also noted in the voice poem below that Mr X moved from using ‘I’ to ‘we’ to express the couple’s shared frustrations around financial changes, plus ‘they’

rather than 'he' or 'she' to identify the IFA as an institution which enforced the changes, rather than a single person.

		<i>They got</i>
<i>I'm not</i>		
<i>I'd not got</i>		
	<i>We did</i>	
	<i>You know</i>	
	<i>You can't claim</i>	
<i>I understand</i>		
		<i>They were</i>
<i>I think</i>		
	<i>We got</i>	
		<i>They call</i>
		(X, 270-280)

Once Mr X and Lucy handed in their notice, the IFA stopped the Christmas payment. Mr X referred to the changes as “*nonsensical*” (LX308), describing the act as “*the final nail in the coffin*” (X, 316). He repeated the sentence about the Christmas funding several times, which again I believe demonstrates how frustrated and undervalued the experience made Mr X feel. At this point Mr X moved away from using ‘we’ and ‘they’, rather adopted ‘you’. In this instance, I feel the shift to ‘you’ highlighted a dissonance within the dialogue as Mr X began to separate himself from the story (Woodcock, 2016).

		<i>We left</i>
		<i>We put</i>
		<i>They stopped</i>
	<i>We were</i>	
	<i>We still</i>	
	<i>We were</i>	
	<i>We'd handed</i>	
		<i>They stopped</i>
<i>I mean</i>		
	<i>You know</i>	
		<i>They think</i>
	<i>You've got</i>	
	<i>You've got</i>	
	<i>You must</i>	

Mr X's comments made me consider the fostering role and support received from fostering services. As foster carers have no employment rights or contracts of employment (BASW, 2024), payments can be changed without consultation or notice. There are reports of foster carers being forced to transfer from IFAs to their local authorities or face the placement ending and incidents of child-specific fees being removed once improvements to a child's wellbeing were noted (Baginsky et al., 2017), disregarding the hard work it took and continued effort needed to sustain this. As Mr X explained this can not only bring about financial hardship but also evoke feelings of resentment towards the service as foster carers have little choice but to accept a lower payment if they wish to continue caring for the children they are responsible for (Kirton, 2001). This practice not only demotivates foster carers as they are made to feel undervalued and unappreciated, but it also seems alarmingly unethical as financial strategies are prioritised over the welfare of children.

As evidenced by Mr X, foster carers can and will ask to transfer to a different fostering service, if necessary. Low levels of satisfaction in response to support, training, and financial contribution are usually the reasons cited (Thomson et al., 2016), however, some foster carers have transferred from an IFA to their local authority as they perceived they would be better placed to receive placements (Baginsky et al., 2017).

5.3.2. Importance of family

5.3.2.1. Admiration for Lucy

Mr X described Lucy as "*quite remarkable*" (X, 382). I felt I heard a 'pride' voice harmonise with an 'affection' voice whenever Lucy was mentioned. Mr X suggested that the fostering role within their family is not equal and that Lucy, "*does the bulk of it*" (X, 342). In line with CSMM whereby fathers are suggested to enjoy the secondary role of caring (Hanlon, 2012), Mr X added that he was "*the dogsbody really. Quite happy of it*" (X, 359). Mr X said that practitioners often use phrases like "*excellent and committed*" (X, 369) to describe Lucy's work ethos but despite this, Mr X does not feel that fostering or indeed Lucy gets the recognition she deserves and suggested that he would "*put her forward for an OBE*" (X,

375). I feel that the voice poem below demonstrates Mr X's views towards Lucy and his pride in her ability.

	<i>She tends</i>	
	<i>She has</i>	
		<i>We're obviously</i>
	<i>She does</i>	
<i>I'm the</i>	<i>She does</i>	
	<i>She does</i>	
<i>I wish</i>		
<i>I could</i>		
<i>I wish</i>		
	<i>She has</i>	
	<i>She gets</i>	
		<i>They're invited</i>
		<i>They are</i>
		<i>We've had</i>
<i>I think</i>		
	<i>She should</i>	
<i>I don't think</i>		
<i>I'd ever</i>		
<i>I'd put</i>		
<i>I certainly</i>		
<i>I think</i>		
<i>I'm very thrilled</i>		
	<i>She does</i>	
	<i>She's quite remarkable</i>	

(X, 356-382)

Mr X discussed specific events where Lucy was able to provide support, for instance, despite taking an active role in personally identifying the sibling group of five, Mr X acknowledged that it was “*daunting*” (X, 94) when they arrived and that he relied on Lucy during this transitional phase. Mr X also identified Lucy as a source of support during the allegation, which is discussed in more detail in section 5.3.3.2, as he recognised that she “*thought a bit better, better on her feet than I did*” (X, 150-151). Equally, I felt I heard times when Mr X reciprocated this support as he used a ‘reflecting’ voice to say, “*I took retirement when she got Covid and it was obvious she’d got Long Covid and couldn’t do things...just so I could help out with the fostering and the running around*” (X, 343-345). I felt Mr X returned to his ‘pride’ voice when he indicated that Lucy had fully recovered, “*she’s going great guns again, she doesn’t need me at all*” (X, 346-347). I have reflected on the symbiotic nature of the

relationship Mr X described and found it offered an alternative perspective to what is often presented in research in that it is usually the male foster carer who is assigned the 'role' of supporting the female carer (Combs-Orme and Orme, 2014, Gilligan, 2000) with little emphasis on interdependence. The extracts also highlight discourses around masculinity as Mr X seemed to express a construct of male identity in which he identified limitations but when needed was able to respond flexibly, suggesting that his view of self is not fixed (Edley, 2006). In this instance, Mr X was undoing gender to carry out caring responsibilities (West and Zimmerman, 2009). This said, once Lucy had recovered, the family system returned to what was known, regaining its equilibrium (Murray et al., 2015).

5.3.2.2. The extended family

Mr X reflected on the sibling group of five throughout the interview however there is one speech act which I found particularly interesting as I heard various voices competing against each other. Mr X tried to make sense of his experience of caring for the siblings. Initially, I felt I heard an 'affection' voice which declared that *"We'd loved them as our own"* (X, 104) however this was challenged by a 'reflecting' voice questioning if this was a mistake as Mr X wondered in a 'critical' voice if it was helpful to *"be a bit professionally aloof"* (X, 105). This voice was silenced by a 'reflecting' voice which stated, *"We weren't able to be. (.) And I don't apologise for that."* (X, 105-106). Mr X suggested *"We had more than one social worker try to tell us that, that you know that wasn't the way to do it. And I just said, "I just don't know any other way to be a parent"* (X, 106-108). I wonder if the "professional love" (Blackburn and Matchett, 2022. pp. 393) social workers refer to, is in place to protect both foster carers and children, but question how attainable it is in practice. I feel that Mr X has acknowledged the contradiction inherent within fostering which Twigg and Swann (2007) refer to as a double-bind situation as on the one hand the expectation is to provide membership to a family encompassing love and acceptance (Munford and Sanders, 2016) so that children can develop a sense of permanence (Biehal, 2014) but on the other acknowledge that placements may and often do end (Twigg and Swan, 2007).

5.3.2.3. Caring for unaccompanied children

Once all members of the sibling group moved on, Mr X and Lucy began to foster

unaccompanied children and this has continued to be the focus of their fostering role ever since. Mr X suggested that this change in direction was due to a *“very canny social worker”* (X, 178) and a young man who came on respite for one week. Mr X reflected on the young man affectionately, stating, *“he came to live with us eventually”* (X, 198-199). Very sadly Mr X explained the young man had passed away very recently and when speaking to his widow Mr X heartfully expressed *“You’ve got to understand the impact that he had on us. As a consequence of him we have now fostered over 20 refugees”* (X, 209-210).

Mr X discussed how he has found looking after Muslim boys *“fascinating”* (X, 668). I heard a ‘reflecting’ voice say, *“It’s been (.) lovely to support them in trying to er follow their beliefs”* (X, 674-675) and a harmonising ‘information’ voice which indicated he did this by *“taking them to Friday prayers, helping them celebrate Eid, and helping them when they are going through fasting”* (X, 668-669). Mr X outlined that there have been some differences in beliefs and expectations, with some boys not quite able to *“adjust so easily”* (X, 687). I felt I heard a ‘critical’ voice discuss issues such as women’s role in society, religion, and the welfare system within the UK. I feel Mr X believes it is his responsibility to *“gently”* (X, 691) challenge these assumptions to offer alternative narratives but also listen to the views of children in his care as, *“Unless we learn to live amongst each other. The world’s gonna have problems, isn’t it?”* (X, 680-681). During this speech act, I identified the expression of several values such as the importance of women’s equality and respect for religion, alongside a position of Britishness. Mr X suggested that many of the adults they were still in contact with were *“getting on with being British”* (X, 720). I was interested in this comment and wondered what *“being British”* implied. Although there has been a shift in national identity from assimilation to integration to multiculturalism (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017), I believe it reflects a discourse in society which may be fearful of difference (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017). I remember that when undertaking the first reading, I was drawn to fundamental British values (FBV) as similarly to Mr X, I was working in education when they were first introduced. FBVs include *“democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance”* (DfE, 2014, p. 5). Whilst it is suggested that these are British morals, other Westernised countries also highlight similar core values (Jerome et al., 2021). Institutions such as schools were identified as a system which could teach FBVs alongside the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) curriculum (Winter et al., 2022), with teachers required to

“not undermine fundamental British values” (DfE 2011, p. 14). It is interesting to note that prior to 2012 when changes to the Teaching Standards were introduced (Jerome et al., 2021), in comparison to other countries, national values were not taught explicitly as constructs of Britishness were just assumed (Heath and Roberts, 2008).

5.3.2.4. Gendered constructs of fostering

Mr X explored the skills he had passed on to children in his care. Mr X’s ‘reflecting’ voice was accompanied by a harmonising ‘pride’ voice which listed various tasks young people had been involved in to *“make, and build, and repair things”* (X, 467). I felt I heard a ‘humour’ voice which added, *“You’d think yeah, the heart-to-heart talk with the arm around the shoulder, the compassion, the love. No. “Thanks for teaching me how to put a plug on a (.) bit of wire”* (X, 474-476). We both laughed at this comment, but it does highlight the importance of learning practical skills that are needed in adulthood. Mr X also discussed his love for music and how it was a skill he was keen to impart, insisting that all children placed with him played an instrument for *“six weeks”* (X, 500). This resulted in a few accomplished musicians within the family. Mr X seemed excited when his passion for music was shared as *“the foster kids and my son”* (X, 486-487) set up a band, and Mr X was *“the roadie, the manager”* (X, 487). I enjoyed this conversation and felt that it demonstrated Mr X’s pride in passing on lifelong skills, plus his love of sharing personal interests and spending time with children in his care (Buehler et al., 2003). However, when I looked to research, I became slightly despondent. As discussed in Section 2.4.3, the gendered constructs of fostering hold male and female foster carers to differing accounts (Heslop, 2014). Thus, whilst women’s role in fostering is seen as whole, alongside holding responsibility for the transmission of skills men are assigned different characteristics such as “provider”, ‘protector”, and “activity leader” (Gilligan, 2000. p.67). I believe the fragmentation of the fostering role for men, into functions is problematic as it presents a gendered perception of parenting and being a man in which specific masculine behaviours are demonstrated (Riggs et al., 2010) and does not allow for other identities (Newstone, 2000). Furthermore, it does not account for the love and care displayed, nor the personal enjoyment and satisfaction experienced.

5.3.2.5. Permanence into adulthood

When discussing Mr X's views around permanence I noticed a shift in the conversation between an 'affection' voice that described a young man he had cared for and a 'critical' voice which described his situation and his previous carers who *"have nothing to do with him"* (X, 415). Mr X said the man described his time with Mr X and Lucy as *"the best two weeks of his life"* (X, 411) which Mr X didn't feel should be *"any child's experience of growing up"* (X, 412-413). Mr X suggested that he struggles to be *"pleasant (.) and polite"* (X, 419) to the previous foster carers as they are not involved in his life, whereas Mr X and Lucy are *"grandparents to his son"* (X, 413), have helped him set up a business, and helped him find accommodation. Mr X expressed, *"And that's just what you do for kids. That's what you do for your children"* (X, 437-440). I feel the voice poem below emphasises Mr X's difficulty in understanding the actions of the man's previous foster carers and even suggested that *"I can't even find the words"* (X, 429).

<i>I find</i>		
<i>I can't</i>		
<i>I just don't</i>		
<i>I can't</i>		
<i>I have</i>		
<i>I just don't</i>		
	<i>You don't</i>	
	<i>You don't</i>	
	<i>You looked</i>	
<i>I do not understand</i>		
		<i>They aren't grandparents</i>
<i>I do not understand</i>		
		<i>They don't</i>
		<i>We do</i>
	<i>You do that</i>	
	<i>You tell</i>	
<i>I've got no</i>		
<i>I honestly</i>		
<i>I can't</i>		
<i>I can't even</i>		

(X, 417-429)

Mr X followed this by describing the philosophical thought that if a tree falls in a forest, it doesn't make a sound. I felt I heard a 'reflecting' voice suggest how *"It's so profoundly awful. Such a cataclysmic thing to happens without any reaction or response. And I think that's*

what it must be like when you've got no family" (X, 452-454). I was deeply moved by this sentiment and feel that Mr X expressed a core belief on which his fostering career has been based. Indeed, Mr X frequently referred to himself as a dad throughout the interview, irrespective of whether he was discussing his adult children or previously fostered children. Mr X's comments made me consider whether in adulthood, those with care-experienced backgrounds continue to enjoy relationships with their foster carers and what these bonds look like. Whilst there is a large evidence base on which to draw from relating to the importance of permanence and belonging for children who are fostered, alongside research which considers the lived experiences of both children and foster carers (Biehal, 2014), I do not feel the same can be said for adults. Once a young person reaches adulthood, there are several choices available, as young people can move into independent or supported living (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019), return to their birth family (GOV.UK, 2023) or remain with their foster family. There is some ambiguity in the latter option as whilst the staying put arrangement supports young people to live with their foster family for longer (DfE, 2013), as they are 18, they are no longer fostered (The Fostering Network, n.d.). This can change the dynamics within the fostering household as foster carers become 'former foster carers' (DfE, 2013) and the systems which have supported the family are somewhat reduced (The Fostering Network, n.d.). Furthermore, due to the changes in the financial contribution, it may be something some foster carers feel is not financially viable, especially when fostering services are inundated with placement requests (Beek and Schofield, 2002). Therefore, there is no guarantee, with the longevity of placements largely dependent on the depth of connection between the young adult and foster carers (Biehal et al., 2013), plus the foster carers' financial status. In adulthood, relationships are maintained through negotiation, with the young person's views and wishes taking precedence. This said, views of foster carers must also be respected if they do not wish to maintain the relationship. I do wonder in such situations as Mr X described how much support is available for young people as the rejection of a parental figure must be difficult to make sense of. Equally, whilst the hope for all children is long-term, stable homes, fostering is a temporary arrangement and does not offer legal rights to their foster families (Mitchell, 2020), thus relationships are ultimately dependent on whether all parties wish to sustain membership to the family unit (Beek and Schofield, 2002).

5.3.2.6. Full circle

Towards the end of the interview, Mr X used the opportunity to reflect on his relationships with individual members of the sibling group. He used a 'reflecting' voice to acknowledge that some of the behaviours were difficult to manage but this shifted to an 'affection' voice which recognised *"they were comfortable enough with us"* (X, 741) and *"they knew they were loved and cared for"* (X, 742). Mr X returned to a 'reflecting' voice to suggest, *"At the time, you don't see that for what it is"* (X, 742-743). I feel this was a profound statement as with time and perspective, situations often can feel very different from how they were experienced in the moment (Parker, 2005). Mr X seemed proud that all his children had *"come back to us and apologised for their behaviour"* (X, 744). Whilst Mr X suggested that these moments allowed him to feel *"vindicated"* (X, 748), it also allowed him to say, *"We got it wrong too. We made mistakes"* (X, 755). Through a 'reflecting voice' Mr X admitted that *"It was actually quite moving on a couple of those occasions"* (765-766). As the title of this section suggests Mr X's experience has reached a full circle as his children have *"got children of their own, so they then start to see things as I'm sure you're aware, from a completely different perspective"* (X, 769-770). I heard a 'pride voice' suggest that *"they're now coming back to Grandma and Grandpa for advice"* (X, 771-772), interspersed with a 'humour' voice, *"You know. It's because there's no manual"* (X, 773). It seems that for Mr X, a sense of humour is important and something that he values. *"We've got (.) just that humour is there. It underpins just about everything we've been through"* (X, 569-570).

When Mr X discussed his 65th birthday party which was held in a village hall, I felt that I heard a 'pride' voice identify different family members who attended. Mr X described a discussion with some friends who were in awe of their extended family, to which Mr X responded, *"If this is heaven. Then I'm fine with it. I don't need anything else"* (X, 228-229).

5.3.3. Involvement from the wider system

5.3.3.1. Practitioners involvement

I feel that Mr X's views about other practitioners seem quite polarised. At times he used a 'reflecting' voice to describe social workers as *"absolutely brilliant"* (X, 323) and *"tremendous. Just the salt of the earth"* (X, 331) but also as a *"waste of space"* (X, 322) and

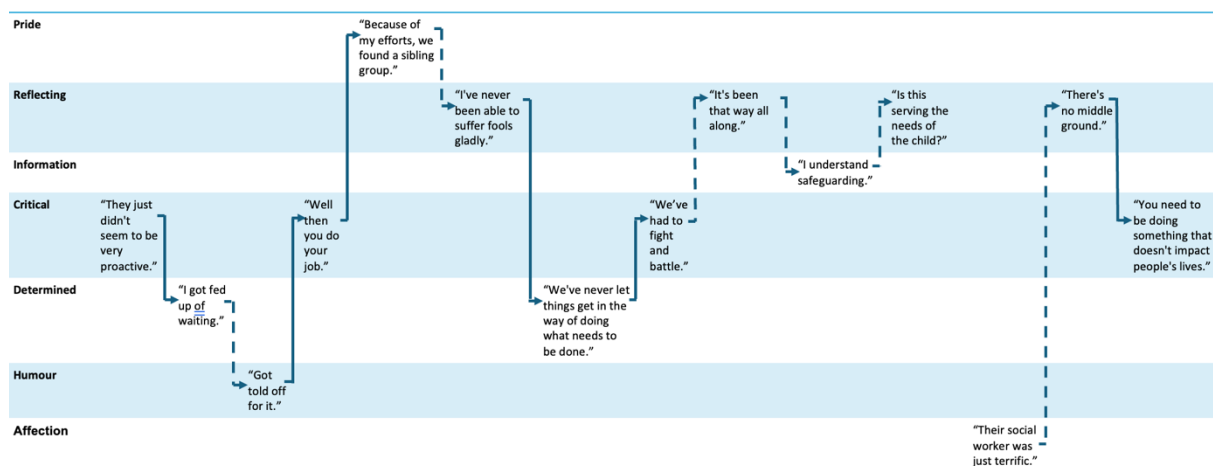


Figure 9. X2 – Team around the child

“jobsworths” (X, 80). From looking at Figure 9. it seems Mr X seemed to acknowledge this difference by suggesting that there was a *“contrast”* (X, 324) between social workers, with *“no middle ground”* (X, 325) or *“anywhere to hide”* (X, 326). I wonder if the barriers they faced when trying to offer a placement to a large sibling group affected the couple’s trust in the system, leaving them with the feeling that they needed to *“fight and battle”* (X, 68). Mr X suggested that this feeling applied to all institutions including health, education, and social care as *“they all seem to have rules and protocols in place that in some cases are simply counterproductive”* (X, 74-75). There was a dissonant ‘information’ voice which stated, *“I understand safeguarding”* (X, 75) but this was countered with a ‘critical’ voice which said, *“My view has always been, you know, is this serving the needs of the child (.) and if not, then why we’re doing it?”* (X, 76-77). This comment made me consider whether Mr X and Lucy’s background in education had given them confidence in a system, where they felt able to question practices and procedures.

5.3.3.2. The impact of an allegation

I was pleased that Mr X felt comfortable sharing a difficult experience surrounding an allegation. I have decided to include a voice poem, which describes the incident, rather than repeating what was said.

*I want
I want
I didn’t think*

She agreed

*I wouldn't let
I literally
I said*

You phone

I will

You to

*I'm meeting
I'd said*

We'd agreed

She assaulted

*I tried
I could*

She actually

I (.) tried

She trapped

I had

*She fell
She got*

I just let

She'd stopped

We reported

(X, 114-130)

Whilst Mr X used a 'reflecting' voice to suggest that the allegation made against him ended up being "*a real storm in a teacup*" (X, 175) and that whilst he had Lucy's support, he acknowledged in the same 'reflecting' voice that it was "*the worst experience (.) of my life*" (X, 135-136) and "*the loneliest time in the world*" (X, 147-148). This was accompanied by a harmonising 'pride' voice which worried about the outcomes for the children in his care and his job prospects if the allegation had "*gone through to prosecution*" (X, 147)", citing "*I would have been lucky to get a job at a checkout in a supermarket somewhere*" (X, 148-149). Mr X expressed that "*it wasn't so much what the girl did*" (X, 143-144) but the lack of support for him and his family during this time. He used a 'critical' voice to suggest that his "*own social worker wouldn't be drawn on any comments when I was asking for advice*" (X, 145-146). I feel that this experience alongside the challenges of caring for a large sibling group had a lasting impact on Mr X and Lucy to the point that, "*We decided collectively that, that was it. Once these children had gone, we would do no more. We'd had enough*" (X, 176-177). This was expressed through a 'determined' voice which harmonised with a 'reflecting' voice that described feelings of burnout.

“We’re finished, we’re exhausted, we’ve no. (.) our stress levels are where they shouldn’t be. We’re in our late 50s. I am not dying of a heart attack (.) in two weeks’ time because of it” (X, 181-183).

Upon hearing that an allegation has been made foster carers have reported feelings closely associated with the grief cycle such as shock, anger, and depression (Plumridge and Sebba, 2016) which I felt was reiterated during Mr X’s interview. The impact on foster carers and the family is devastating (Guishard-Pine et al., 2007), with concerns about job prospects, relationships, and the potential for prosecution front and centre in their minds (Minty and Bray, 2001). Feelings of loneliness and isolation are reported as foster carers are unable to discuss these thoughts with others for fear of judgement (Plumridge and Sebba, 2016). In such instances, it is hoped that a balanced investigation which supports the foster carer (Guishard-Pine et al., 2007) alongside safeguarding the child is carried out (Roberts et al., 2024) but unfortunately, this is not often the experience for many foster carers (Minty and Bray, 2001). The comments made by Mr X are very similar to those found in research, with information about rights and the allegation itself not made clear (Minty and Bray, 2001), practitioners told to withdraw support (Bray and Minty, 2001, Plumridge and Sebba, 2016), exclusion from meetings (Sinclair et al., 2004), plus information about independent support rarely signposted (Roberts et al., 2024). Roberts et al., (2024) said 57% of those who responded were not given information about organisations that could offer support and advocacy. This response does not seem parsimonious as services are at risk of losing experienced foster carers who could go on to support the service further. Furthermore, those who decide to stay may resent the service as support was not forthcoming when needed. Plumridge and Sebba’s study (2016) explored the outcomes for 190 foster carers following an allegation. They found that whilst three foster carers were deregistered immediately, 20 chose to resign. One foster carer said, *“It destroyed my faith in the actual fostering system to be truthful with you.”* (Plumridge and Sebba, 2016. pp. 25). A further two foster carers were deregistered following an investigation and three decided to resign. Plumridge and Sebba said that out of 160 foster carers who continued with fostering, there were only six who indicated that they had never considered leaving the role. In a similar study, it was the identity of being a foster carer that motivated the foster carers to continue, despite viewing the decision as “crazy” (Minty and Bray, 2001, PP. 364).

5.3.4. Summary of Mr X's story

A core value expressed during the interview was Mr X's desire for children to grow up surrounded by family, which strongly influenced the couple's decision to foster a large sibling group. Mr X admitted that caring for the five siblings was "*daunting*" (X, 94) and that some of the behaviours were challenging, but with time and numerous restorative conversations, an alternative perspective had been found (Parker, 2005). Mr X believes that part of the challenge was managing their feelings towards the children and he grappled with the construct of love. Mr X questioned whether they should have been more "*professionally aloof*" (X, 105) but didn't know how to parent in another way. This internal dilemma was not helped by social workers as they suggested that there was a "*way*" (X, 106) to manage such complex feelings. When situated in research it is agreed that the concept of love is contentious in systems such as social care, education, and health care (Evans, 2020), with terms such as professional love (Blackburn and Matchett, 2022) introduced to help define boundaries. This said as foster care is a system which permeates both private and public spheres of social life, conditions surrounding the notion of 'professional love' may be blurred. Furthermore, foster carers are left in a double-bind situation with the acknowledgement that placements may and do end (Twigg and Swan, 2007). Mr X described their continuing commitment to young people beyond fostering and into adulthood for those who wanted to maintain membership with the family. Whilst there is a large body of evidence to draw from relating to the need for permanence and belonging in childhood, research into the experience of care leavers and the relationship with their former foster carers is limited.

Mr X described his role in caring for unaccompanied children, expressing how much joy the change in fostering direction had brought. Throughout the interview, I felt Mr X expressed values of love, care, and respect alongside a construct of nationalism and pride. I feel that Mr X believes it is their responsibility to help young people understand differences in customs and beliefs so that life in the UK feels easier. There is an extensive literature base surrounding discourses of race, religion, and immigration which I felt was not something that could be explored fully. However, as Mr X worked in education it felt appropriate to consider FBVs as there is such a disparity. FBVs could be delivered through an ethno-cultural gaze

which emphasises national superiority through the marginalisation of others (Jerome et al., 2021) or a civic nationalism gaze which looks at ways a society can live together through shared rules and interests (Jerome et al., 2021). I feel that Mr X's expression of nationalism is more in keeping with the latter position.

Mr X described his admiration for Lucy and the fostering role she performs suggesting that she "*does the bulk of it*" (X, 342). This comment closely resonates with existing literature regarding fostering and parenting with men often positioned as willing to undertake supportive secondary roles (Hanlon, 2012). I feel this undermines Mr X's contribution to fostering and the unique contribution he brings to the role. Mr X also highlighted times where Lucy was able to support him such as the allegation, but this is through a reciprocal exchange as Mr X also supported the fostering role when Lucy suffered from long covid. Thus, whilst the family maintain a traditional view of gendered roles, there is some degree of flexibility in which roles can change (Edley, 2006).

6. Chapter Six: Further discussion and implications

6.1. Overview

The purpose of this research was to explore male foster carers' experiences of fostering from an insider-outsider perspective (Corbin-Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Within the following chapter, I will first examine contributions I feel this thesis has made towards theory, particularly around constructs relating to gendered roles in fostering, family, belonging, and love. I will then move on to explore personal reflections surrounding the research process, making recommendations for professional practice. In both sections, I will refer to comments made by Tom, Lee, and Mr X. Up until this point I have resisted the need to merge stories as I wanted to centre what was said around the individual. This said, research must offer an understanding of 'so what?' and 'what next?' in terms of implications for practice and to do this a shared sense of meaning-making is often needed (Currie and Brown, 2003). Currie and Brown state, "One way in which we collectively make sense of our social world is through jointly negotiated narratives" (p. 564). This will be achieved by outlining commonalities across the participants, alongside identifying individual considerations. I will finish by highlighting limitations and potential future directions.

6.2. Contributions to theory

6.2.1. Gendered roles in fostering

Tom, Lee, and Mr X's comments demonstrate that male foster carers are not a homogenous group (McDermid et al., 2012), with variations found in the level of involvement and commitment to the fostering role. Indeed, whilst Mr X is "*quite happy*" (X, 359) fulfilling a secondary role (Hanlon, 2012), Tom sees himself as the "*driving force*" (T, 617). Furthermore, Tom and Lee expressed disappointment and surprise that their wives were seen as the primary carers, with Tom suggesting, "*We are equally involved. I'm not just a supporter of my wife*" (T, 632-633). Despite this difference and in contrast to previous research (Fanshel, 1966) as cited in (Heslop, 2014), I feel that all three foster carers described an active role in fostering. This suggests that men's experience of fostering is not bound by a prescriptive, predetermined view of what their role should include and that intersectionality, individual differences, and personal circumstances (Sayer, 2010) are all significant factors when considering how men foster.

Feminist and CSMM researchers critically oppose the singular notion of masculinity, with no definitive way to be a man (Kakroda and Sole, 2023), therefore what is performed is constructed through an individual's gendered identity and societal expectations (Pink, 2020). Caring masculinities emphasise the relational and loving qualities men adopt in caring roles (Elliott, 2016). I feel my research has added to this emerging discourse as each foster carer described responsive and attuned care (Hanlon, 2012). They also identified feelings of commitment, pride, achievement, and satisfaction, associated with fostering, demonstrating the benefits to self when undertaking caring roles. This said Tom, Lee, and Mr X simultaneously held on to notions of masculinity and male identity (Hunter et al., 2017) and actively engaged in 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 2009), maintaining the gender/sex binary (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2021). Traditional gendered roles performed within the home were discussed within the interviews by all three foster carers, with Tom suggesting, *"It works well for the family"* (T, 621). This may support Hanlon's (2012) proposal that the societal feminised view of care blocks men from participating. Additionally, Hanlon (2012) cautioned against the negative association with the term 'breadwinner' as this role is seen as important to men and how they can demonstrate care to their families. I feel I heard this narrative when Lee spoke about his work as a manager and the tension setting up a small business caused.

It is essential practitioners explore personal biases around constructs of what roles they expect male and female foster carers to play. By challenging singular notions of gender, it is hoped a more flexible workforce can emerge, in which male foster carers are recognised for the role they play in their children's lives. For EPs, in line with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) requirements for practice, this begins within the self, achieved through a process of reflection and reflexivity (Andrews, 2018) in and on practice (Schön, 1979). For instance, EPs could consider which carer they routinely contact, who attends meetings such as consultations, and whether views are heard from all individuals important to the child. Furthermore, EPs can also have some level of control in the environment in which assessments take place. I believe this includes the welcome received, the information shared such as the purpose of the meeting, and the care taken to listen to what is said with

curiosity. There is further discussion on this point in Section 6.3.2. Exploration could also take the form of supervision. Two frameworks which I feel would be advantageous are the personal and social GgRRAAACCEEESSS model (Burnham and Nolte, 2019) and Transcultural Supervision whereby practitioners are encouraged to critically consider their biases, values, and beliefs (Soni et al., 2022). The aim, however, is not to just reflect on ways of working but consciously act, thus EPs' identities and practices are continuously renegotiated (O'Reilly-Carroll, 2013)

6.2.2. Constructs of family in fostering households

Discourses around families are often contentious. Whilst researchers suggest that the traditional notion of a nuclear family is idolised within Westernised societies, there are considerable variations within a historical (Collier et al., 2009) and cultural context (Sear, 2021). Furthermore, due to changes in family set-up, it seems in practice that this is becoming increasingly imagined (Burman, 2008). Due to the influence of attachment theory (Solvi et al., 2024), and dominant hegemonic discourses (Ghisleni et al., 2016) fostering services place value upon this 'traditional' family set-up (Heslop, 2016). However in contrast to the idea that non-fostering families have become increasingly insular (Margolis, 2009), Tom, Lee, and Mr X describe extending membership to all, to the point where, "*surnames don't mean anything to us*" (T, 515) and the differences between birth, adopted, and fostered children become inconsequential. I feel that this offers a different notion of what membership to family means (Schofield and Beek, 2005), emphasising the often complex nature of fostering families. Indeed, Tom described that they maintained separate contact with J's birth parents and six of her eight siblings, Lee discussed receiving updates from the adopted parents of the babies they fostered, and Mr X explained that they needed to hire a village hall for family gatherings as there were so many members of the family. I wonder if this experience is normalised within fostering families and not something that is often discussed as it is seen as typical. I believe the main implications for EPs when undertaking assessments for fostered children or indeed birth children of foster carers, is capturing the family unit and felt relationship of those within it. In social care, this is achieved through the development of genograms (DeMaria et al., 2013) but for children, information recorded can

quickly seem incredibly complicated, with creative resources more accessible (Treisman, 2017).

I believe this study acknowledges that families are not static but dynamic systems with individual members interdependently responding to the system during periods of stability and change (Burnham, 1988). In support of researchers who suggested that due to the changing landscape of foster care, birth children need to continually adapt (Sutton and Stack, 2013, Twigg and Swan, 2007), I feel that Lee and Jane were open to their family's needs, shifting their focus away from caring for babies. Whilst I acknowledge that fostering encompasses greater instability when compared to traditional families, transitions and turning points such as Lee's redundancy, and Lucy's ill health meant that Lee and Mr X responded proactively to maintain the functioning of the family (Murray et al., 2015). It is important to add that for Tom, Lee, and Mr X core beliefs around faith, social justice, and family provide an additional element to the notion of family, motivating them to continue in the fostering role.

6.2.3. Constructs of love in foster families

Whilst Tom, Lee, and Mr X's descriptions of love seem uncomplicated, the blurred boundary between the public and private space which fostering occupies means that constructs around love are anything but. Indeed, even when we consider the responses Tom and Mr X heard from social workers, there is an acknowledgement that there are differences in expectations around love and that social workers may perceive there is a right way to love in the context of fostering. As discussed in Section 2.3.6, fostering services heavily rely on theories of attachment, however, some researchers have moved away from the work of Bowlby as they believe it can lead to rather oppressive formulations, particularly for mothers (Dallos, 2006). Furthermore, as attachment theory has become synonymous with child development (Smith et al., 2017), there are concerns that alternative theories are not considered. All three foster carers demonstrated sound knowledge of attachment theory, however, there are several alternative theories which may offer a slightly different perspective. Within this research I have selected three models which I feel could be disseminated to practitioners within education, health, and social care. The dynamic

maturation model (Crittenden, 2006) may be seen as helpful for fostered children as it focuses on the importance of adulthood in conceptualising experiences and suggests that patterns of behaviour will adapt once the threat or need to display such strategies is reduced (Crittenden, 2006), which was something Tom suggested to his service manager. Additionally, multiple attachments highlight that infants are capable of forming multiple attachments (Schaffer and Emerson, 1964) which may offer comfort to foster carers who predominately care for babies, as Lee described. Finally, Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) focuses on the importance of interdependence found within relationships (Smith et al., 2017). Honneth proposed that love, rights, and solidarity (Thomas, 2012) were the basis for safe, trusting relationships. Indeed, as Mr X suggested the need to matter to others is a fundamental aspect for human existence (Smith et al., 2017).

Competing discourses around attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), safeguarding (Plumridge and Sebba, 2016), and professionalism (Wilson and Evetts, 2006) alongside the dominant societal view which idealises love within a familial relationship (Vincent, 2016, Luxton and Fox, 2009) means that researchers and practitioners, including myself find it difficult to contextualise and make meaning of what love is. This is to the extent that some individuals feel the need to add the word 'professional' to love to make it feel more acceptable (Purcell and Gratzke, 2022). It is interesting that whilst I agree with foster carers being recognised as professionals, I noticed a response in me when looking at Purcell et al., (2022) model on 'professional roles for supporting children and young people' (p. 9), as foster carers are placed in the 'providing targeted, reactive services' category alongside social workers and mental health professionals, rather than within the familial roles category, which highlights my dissonant discourses around foster care and love. As discussed throughout this research foster carers are in a unique position which is neither public nor private and as such it is sometimes difficult to navigate between the two positions of 'professional carer' and 'parent'.

Love is not a given and in practical terms love and caring are not codependent (hooks, 2020). Some are concerned that love oversteps a boundary, especially in light of the power asymmetry identified within the fostering relationship (Ranahan, 1999). Furthermore, some children and foster carers may find it difficult or scary to love (Evans, 2020), thus love cannot

be assured. This said, within such close, intense relationships which can sometimes last for several years, it can be difficult to apply conditions around love and feelings may naturally grow unconsciously. One of the most helpful models when considering placement stability alongside notions of love is provided by Wilson et al., (2013) as it expresses the conditions which are needed. As discussed in section 5.3.3.2. due to the unpredictability of the role, foster carers are positioned in a double-bind situation (Twigg and Swan, 2007) which requires them to love but risk 'losing' the child (Evans, 2020) and section 5.2.2.1. where 'losing' the child is often an anticipated part of the process. From experience social workers may have witnessed the effect of this on their foster carers and subsequently encourage others to "hold back" (Evan, 2020 p.78). Equally, some foster carers may not allow themselves to fully invest to protect themselves and the child (Evans, 2020). I found it interesting to note that all three carers identified with wanting to maintain the relationship with children in their care into adulthood. Whilst there is a strong evidence base regarding research around permanence for children, this is not the same for adults.

To support foster carers, I feel it would be beneficial if training were developed for practitioners covering the nuances of permanence, belonging, and love so that supervision could extended to specifically speak about feelings towards children in the home. Practitioners must support foster carers, by understanding and recognising the intense emotional demands of fostering, and by offering space and time to talk about often competing thoughts and feelings associated with the task. Therefore, rather than suggest that *"wasn't the way to do it"* (X, 107), implying a right way to love, I feel this needs to be a safe space where foster carers are encouraged to identify feelings and possible defence mechanisms used to protect the self, such as withdrawing when placements are close to breakdown.

6.3. Further recommendations

6.3.1. The potential benefit of using the LG

I selected the LG as I liked the emphasis on listening (Hutton and Lystor, 2021) through 'open curiosity' (Gilligan and Eddy, 2017) as this is something I try to emulate during consultations and meetings with children, families, and staff in my role as a TEP.

Interestingly, I noticed an unexpected consequence of using the LG whilst tracking the use of 'I' during the second reading, as I became acutely aware each time I used the word 'I'. On a few occasions, I even stopped and laughed when I noticed my use of 'I' had shifted between 'wanting to not wanting' or 'knowing to not knowing' (Gilligan, 2015) as I was confronted with knowledge about myself which was outside of my awareness (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). Through a process of reflexivity, I recognised that I had begun to change how I spoke to others, but also how I listened, as I had become conscious of the use of "I", alongside other subjective pronouns. Added to this, reading three of the LG developed my understanding of contrapuntal voices. Whilst I would not necessarily identify polyphonic voices, dissonance within conversations stood out and was seen as an opportunity to thicken narratives through curiosity. This is a skill I would like to continue to develop within my practice but also something I feel could be explored further within the EP role. I believe knowledge of this technique could be embedded within training when using narrative frameworks and added to the 'toolbox' as a potential strategy for EPs to use during meetings. Whilst I understand that 'deconstructing narratives' is a skill included in narrative training (Boston, 2005), I feel that noticing the movement of 'I' or even where 'you' is used instead of 'I' can be enlightening as paying close attention to what is 'known' and 'unknown' alongside points of dissonance, can be explored with curiosity to help co-construct meaning (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021).

6.3.2. Working with families

I found the process of interviewing incredibly profound and was emotionally moved by many of the stories which were shared (Bondi, 2014). Furthermore, when moving into step five of the LG, I knew I would need to collate my interpretations and write about Tom, Lee, and Mr X (Gilligan and Eddy, 2021). Whilst I did not feel the need to bracket my assumptions, as the author I was able to self-edit what I included, a benefit my participants did not have. I felt a responsibility towards Tom, Lee, and Mr X and wanted to present authentic views. I felt I needed their permission to share what had been said with a wider audience and so as discussed in Section 4.6.2, I emailed each participant to ask if they would like to read my interpretation.

I feel that this experience closely reflects the EP role as we are in a privileged position to hear stories which often describe experiences of love, joy, hope, pain, fear, frustration, and sadness as part of the gathering information process (Fogg, 2017). Whilst I am familiar with this way of working, I have reflected on Lee's description of the approval process which he defined as "*very intrusive*" (L, 53) and how this may be transferred to my role. I have questioned how vulnerable and exposed parents, carers, and school staff may feel when asked to share information, especially if they are unaccustomed to this. Added to this, is the issue around visual representation as highlighted by Lee. Lee reflected on being the only man in meetings, commenting, "*You're aware*" (L, 367). Furthermore, during Tom's interview, he reflected on receiving a report from his social worker to support the annual review process which "*sounded awful*" (T, 257) and where Tom felt "*we hadn't been understood at all*" (T, 257). I can appreciate Tom's comments as through fostering I have read some reports which were not reflective of the child or our experiences of caring for them. This made me wonder what more I can do to support parents, carers, and school staff through what can be a difficult process and how I can express their views in a meaningful way. I have found the following questions helpful to personally reflect on prior, during, and following meetings.

- How do we speak of [others]?
- How do we speak with [others]?
- How do we write of [others]?
- How do we listen to [others]?
- How do we listen to ourselves (when working with others)?

(Billington, 2006, p.8)

EPs have a responsibility to ensure that care is taken when writing of others (Billington, 2000) and for recipients to feel that comments made are authentic and accurate. Furthermore, as EP reports often involve collating the views of others, there is an uncomfortableness associated with being seen to take credit for something someone else has said. I feel that when writing reports, both points can be addressed by using quotations to indicate phrases which were expressed at the time. Unfortunately, this does mean that meaningful notes need to be made during the assessment on which to reference, which

slightly affects the flow of the conversation, however, if this is discussed at the beginning of the meeting, I believe it highlights the importance of the dialogue to the assessment and privileges the voices of those who are sometimes silenced. As Billington (2006) suggested when producing a report, care must be taken to consider 'how we write of others'. Similar to the process undertaken for the research, this involves a process of editing, keeping in mind 'Who the report is for?' and 'What the purpose of the report is?' (DfE, 2015) to ensure that the information included is relevant and necessary. Finally, in the moment it is easy to mishear comments made or misinterpret the meaning of what was said. Thus, it seems good practice to contact parents and carers to see if they would like to read a copy of the draft report so that any inaccuracies can be corrected prior to distribution.

6.4. Limitations

Due to my own experiences in fostering and from undertaking a preliminary literature review, I felt men were often positioned in a negative light by researchers and practitioners (Gilligan, 2000). With this in mind, I wanted my research to explore the differences within male-female partnerships (Höjer, 2004), privileging male voices. This formed the parameters for my research as I felt that I had identified a social phenomenon within one subsection of society. I understand therefore that the views of women, individuals from the LGBT community, and single men were not explored. In addition, I did not collect demographic data as I did not see this as necessary (Clarke and Braun, 2013), however as my understanding of intersectionality has increased (Sayer, 2010), I recognise that this may have been an error and may have added to a more nuanced understanding of my participants' experiences.

Whilst I found the LG incredibly useful in interpreting Tom, Lee, and Mr X's stories, the amount of information collated was significant. Managing this was challenging and created a tension in me. The benefit of using the LG is that mundane and everyday stories can be discussed alongside inspiring and profound events (Hutton and Lystor, 2021). However, I feel due to the word count I did not have free rein to explore each story in as much detail as I would have liked, and found it was necessary to prioritise certain stories over others, meaning I was unable to thicken some narratives. This said, I do not feel this is a limitation

with respect to the methodology, as I was thrilled with the LG and the steps I took. If I were to undertake the interpretation again, I believe I would be more accepting that some stories may need to be held in mind for future consideration.

6.5. Future research

I believe my research offers a strong response to my research question, 'What are the lived experiences of men who foster?' for the three men I interviewed. As discussed in section 6.4, I am acutely aware that whilst some stories were privileged, forming a thick description, (Freeman, 2014) others remain untold. I would therefore relish the opportunity in the future to revisit my thesis and explore these untold stories further. Some of the narratives I would like to draw on are listed in section 8.11. In addition, there are partially told stories which I covered within the participants' stories but in prioritising other stories did not take further, despite identifying commonalities between them. This includes stories about participants' decision to foster, their motivation to foster, how they manage difficulties, and their experience of working with others.

In section 6.2 I focused on constructs around gendered roles, family, belonging, and love. I found the narratives incredibly interesting and worthy of further study. In a shift away from the methodology I selected, I believe this further research could be undertaken through family interviews (Eggenberger and Nelms, 2007) so that views from all key actors within the fostering household can be obtained. I feel this is particularly important for research around family and belonging, as the family system is not static (Biehal, 2014) with variations in beliefs and values between individual members of the interrelated system present. In future research, I would like to extend my focus to listen to voices from different groups to highlight how fostering can be influenced by societal expectations of gender roles.

6.6. Summary

I undertook this research as I was interested in exploring the experience of fostering for male foster carers within male-female partnerships. After conducting an extensive literature review I found that research tends to focus on the female foster carer's role in nurturement (Combs-Orme and Orme, 2014) and largely ignores the male foster carer's contribution. I

devised a narrative study, adopting a psycho-social constructionist perspective, through a feminist lens to interview three male foster carers, Tom, Lee, and Mr X. Furthermore, as I wanted to value my participants' stories rather than reduce the text to themes (Alase, 2017), I selected the LG, a feminist form of analysis, to interpret what was said. Whilst the level of involvement differed, all three men described an active role in fostering. Furthermore, Tom, Lee, and Mr X expressed a sense of satisfaction, pride, and enjoyment in the role (Hanlon, 2012). I believe that the participants engaged in 'doing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 2009) in response to household responsibilities, whilst simultaneously 'undoing gender' (West and Zimmerman, 2009) when addressing concerns about how they had been positioned by others. The concepts of permanence, belonging, and love also featured heavily but as demonstrated in literature, this remains a contentious issue (Evans, 2020). Tom, Lee, and Mr X's views indicated high levels of commitment and care to children placed with them, which extended into adulthood and to their birth families. I feel that my research will contribute towards the theoretical understanding of gendered discourses of fostering, family systems, family, belonging, and love.

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix One: Email sent to contact

Hi,

Thank you so much for meeting with me today and for your support with my research. I have attached the participant information sheet and consent form for the project so men who are interested can just email me if they would like to take part. I have also included a brief introduction to the research below.

Thanks again for everything,

Lisa

I am currently undertaking a Doctorate in Child and Educational Psychology and have just completed my second year. I will be a qualified Educational Psychologist (EP) once I finish my course and thesis in July 2024. After fostering with my local authority for almost 15 years, I recognise that I bring a unique contribution to the EP community and feel that this has been mutually beneficial to the fostering service.

As part of the doctorate, I am required to complete a thesis. I am interested in the role of foster carers and in particular that of male carers. The fostering workforce includes 36,050 mainstream fostering households and tends to consist of married or cohabiting couples. That said, research into fostering often focuses on the women's role and her interactions with the child/ren. Male foster carers' roles are often minimised, and it is sometimes assumed that male foster carers are not as involved or invested in the role as their partners. There is some research which suggests that male foster carers find joy in fostering and believe that they play an active role. This highlights that more needs to be done to listen to male foster carers to explore what they think, feel and understand their role to be.

The research is small scale as I would only like to interview one foster carer to support a pilot study and between three and six foster carers for the main study. The interviews will take around an hour and be conducted through Google Meet. I have gained ethics approval through The University of Sheffield and have been assigned a research supervisor so I believe that participants will feel supported. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout with pseudonyms given and all recognisable places and names removed. Foster carers will need to meet the following inclusion criteria.

- Are heterosexual, male foster carers.

- Live with partner (This could include married or cohabiting couples).
- Work for a local authority fostering service.
- Have fostered for 3 or more years.

8.2. Appendix Two: Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet: An Exploration of Male Foster Carers' Experiences of Fostering

You are invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please 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.

1. Background to the research

The fostering workforce includes 36,050 mainstream fostering households and tends to consist of married or cohabiting couples. That said, research into fostering often focuses on the women's role and her interactions with the child/ren. Male foster carers' roles are often minimised, and it is sometimes assumed that male foster carers are not as involved or invested in the role as their partners. There is some research which suggests that male foster carers find joy in fostering and believe that they play an active role. This highlights that more needs to be done to listen to male foster carers to explore what they think, feel and understand their role to be.

2. What is the purpose of this research?

This research is interested in exploring and listening to male foster carers talk about their role in fostering. Indeed, my husband and I have fostered for 14 years, therefore I recognise the value a partnership brings when supporting children and young people.

My aims are:

- To generate stories that capture male foster carers' experiences of fostering.
- To find out more about male foster carers' experiences with a view to informing practice.

My objectives to meet these aims are:

- To record stories told by male foster carers about their experiences of fostering.
- To make sense of the stories told in relation to my research question.

3. Why have I been chosen?

You have chosen to be part of the research. Please ensure that you meet the following inclusion criteria before signing the consent form. I am interested in the differences between men and women, and therefore I would like to recruit foster carers who:

- Are heterosexual, male foster carers.
- Live with partner (This could include married or cohabiting couples).
- Work for a local authority fostering service.
- Have fostered for 3 or more years.

4. 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 to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw up until the 1st of December 2023 without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. If you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact me using the contact details found at the end of this document.

Please note that that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

5. What will I be doing if I take part?

You are invited to take part in an interview. We will do this together and it will last for approximately one hour. I will ask you to tell me about your experiences of fostering and may occasionally prompt you with some questions, but there will be opportunities for you to include any information that you would like to share. You may find it helpful to prepare a timeline or make a few notes to help you recall key moments in your fostering career.

Please find

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below but

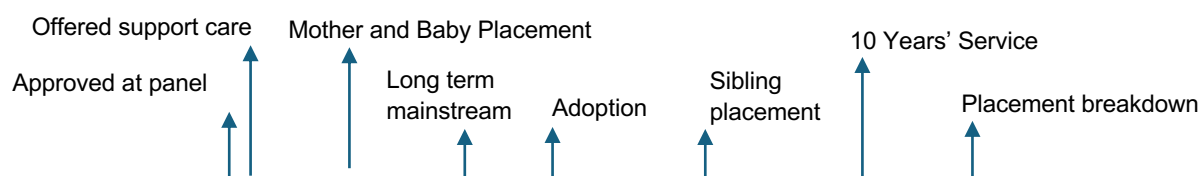
personal to

I will not look at your notes, it can take whatever form you find most useful.



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you and as



You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you should only share information that feels safe. The interviews will take place on Google Meet software which is secure through the university. Audio (and optional video) of the

interviews will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using participant codes to keep the information anonymous.

If you feel you that there is more you would like to say, there is the opportunity to arrange an optional second interview. This interview will also be recorded and last no longer than an hour. I will then analyse the recording and attempt to represent your experiences as a story. I can share this analysis with you via email, to make sure the story is accurate. You will be given the opportunity to review what you have contributed and disguise information which may identify you before your story is included in my thesis.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We will be working alone in the online one-to-one interviews. You may find the virtual aspect of the interviews tiring or cause eye strain. To minimise this comfort breaks can be taken wherever needed.

Although stories will be anonymous, it may be possible for people who know you to work out which story is yours. Please be aware of this when sharing information and only share experiences that you feel comfortable with. Your story will be presented under a pseudonym, and I will not gather any demographic data in order to limit identifiability. You will also be given the opportunity to review your story and disguise any details which may identify you.

You may also feel disadvantaged by taking time out of your day to complete the interviews. Please discuss this with me as I can be flexible and arrange interviews at a time that is convenient for you. It may be helpful for interviews to be arranged when you don't have caring responsibilities to prevent the chance of being disturbed.

I am hopeful that this will be an enjoyable experience, however sometimes discussing experiences can raise uncomfortable feelings. You are able to take breaks at any point and can withdraw from the research at any point up until 1st December 2023. You can also speak with your supervising social worker or contact FosterTalk/Fosterline if you felt you needed more support.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You might enjoy the experience of talking about your fostering role and it might be an opportunity to reflect on what you have achieved. The research will give you the opportunity to share your experiences of fostering and add to a growing body of evidence that recognises and values men's role in fostering.

8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. Where safeguarding concerns are raised, confidentiality may need to be broken and information passed to the appropriate persons i.e., university research supervisor.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

10. What will happen to the data collected?

You will have a pseudonym assigned to you once informed consent is gained. Informed consent will be saved to my secure google drive using this name. The pseudonym will be used throughout the project and in any future publications. Audio (and optional video) of the interviews will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using your pseudonym to keep the information anonymous. Your personal details will only be accessed by me; however, I may share details of our interview with my research supervisor who works at the University of Sheffield.

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

The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. 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 recordings.

12. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by the University of Sheffield; no external funding has been received.

13. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education. Ethics approval reference number 052650.

15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research please speak with me in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact my research supervisor, Dr Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the Designated Safeguarding Contact, Dr Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk and/or the University's Chair of Ethics, Dr Anna Weighall at edu.ethics@sheffield.ac.uk. If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager, Lindsay Unwin at l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk.

16. Contact for further information

Research Lead:

Lisa Nelson
Trainee Educational Psychologist
lnelson3@sheffield.ac.uk

Research Supervisor:

Dr Penny Fogg
Associate Tutor (Sheffield University DEdCPsy)
p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint, please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthom
Head of School
r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

School of Education, The University of Sheffield, The Wave, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield. S10 2AH.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if you decide to participate, a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.
Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

8.3. Appendix Three: Consent form

Consent Form		
<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Project		
I have read and understood the project participant information sheet dated 28/04/2023 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer no to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	q	q
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	q	q
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed via Google Meet video call. A follow up meeting can be arranged, if I feel there is more information I would like to share.	q	q
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview audio recordings will be made. I agree to being audio recorded and for transcripts of these anonymised audio recordings to be used in the research.	q	q
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview video recordings will be made. I agree to being video recorded and for these anonymised video recordings to be used in the research. <i>(optional)</i>	q	q
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	q	q
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time before 01.12.2023; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	q	q
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	q	q
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	q	q

I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	q	q
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	q	q
I give permission for the recording(s) of my interview to be saved in a secure Google Drive managed by the University of Sheffield. I understand that this will be destroyed by the 01.09.2024.	q	q

So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.	q	q

Name of participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Project contact details for further information:

Research Team:

Lisa Nelson

Trainee Educational Psychologist

lnelson3@sheffield.ac.uk

Project Supervisor:

Dr Penny Fogg

Associate Tutor on the Sheffield University Doctorate in Educational & Child Psychology

p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint, please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthom

Head of School

r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

School of Education, The University of Sheffield, The Wave, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2

Whitham Road, Sheffield. S10 2AH.

8.4. Appendix Four: Participant information sheet for pilot study

Participant Information Sheet for Pilot Study: An Exploration of Male Foster Carers' Experiences of Fostering

You are invited to take part in a pilot research project. Before you decide whether or not to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please 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.

1. Background to the research

The fostering workforce includes 36,050 mainstream fostering households and tends to consist of married or cohabiting couples. That said, research into fostering often focuses on the women's role and her interactions with the child/ren. Male foster carers' roles are often minimised, and it is sometimes assumed that male foster carers are not as involved or invested in the role as their partners. There is some research which suggests that male foster carers find joy in fostering and believe that they play an active role. This highlights that more needs to be done to listen to male foster carers to explore what they think, feel and understand their role to be.

2. What is the purpose of this research?

This research is interested in exploring and listening to male foster carers talk about their role in fostering. Indeed, my husband and I have fostered for 14 years, therefore I recognise the value a partnership brings when supporting children and young people.

My aims are:

- To generate stories that capture male foster carers' experiences of fostering.
- To find out more about male foster carers' experiences with a view to informing practice.

My objectives to meet these aims are:

- To record stories told by male foster carers about their experiences of fostering.
- To make sense of the stories told in relation to my research question.

3. Why have I been chosen to be part of the pilot study?

You have chosen to be part of the research. As the first person who initially made contact, I would like to invite you to be part of the pilot study. If it is agreed that the format of the interview is not going to significantly change, then I would like to include the interview in the main study. Please ensure that you meet the following inclusion criteria before signing the

consent form. I am interested in the differences between men and women, and therefore I would like to recruit foster carers who:

- Are heterosexual, male foster carers.
- Live with partner (This could include married or cohabiting couples).
- Work for a local authority fostering service.
- Have fostered for 3 or more years.

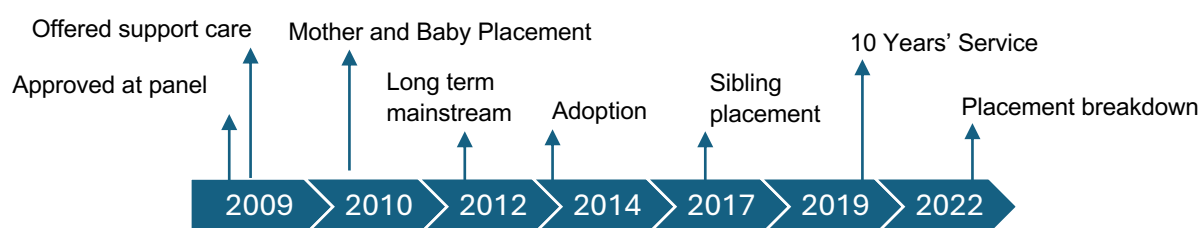
4. Do I have to take part?

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 to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form). If you do not wish to take part in the pilot study, please let me know and I will ask another participant to help with this request.

Please note that that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

5. What will I be doing if I take part?

You are invited to take part in an interview. We will do this together and it will last for approximately one hour. I will ask you to tell me about your experiences of fostering and may occasionally prompt you with some questions, but there will be opportunities for you to include any information that you would like to share. You may find it helpful to prepare a timeline or make a few notes to help you recall key moments in your fostering career. Please find an example of a timeline below but this will be personal to you and as I will not look at your notes, it can take whatever form you find most useful.



You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you should only share information that feels safe. The interviews will take place on Google Meet software which is secure through the university. Audio (and optional video) of the interviews will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using participant codes to keep the information anonymous.

It would be helpful if you could spend a few minutes following the interview to discuss, how the interview went and whether you felt it was supportive and whether the questions felt appropriate. I would also like to hear your feedback about timings and whether you believe a one-hour timeslot is sufficient. If it is agreed that the format of the interview is not going to change significantly from the pilot, then I would like to include to interview in my main research.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

We will be working alone in the online one-to-one interviews. You may find the virtual aspect of the interviews tiring or cause eye strain. To minimise this comfort breaks can be taken wherever needed.

Although stories will be anonymous, it may be possible for people who know you to work out which story is yours. Please be aware of this when sharing information and only share experiences that you feel comfortable with.

You may also feel disadvantaged by taking time out of your day to complete the interviews. Please discuss this with me as I can be flexible and arrange interviews at a time that is convenient for you. It may be helpful for interviews to be arranged when you don't have caring responsibilities to prevent the chance of being disturbed.

I am hopeful that this will be an enjoyable experience, however sometimes discussing experiences can raise uncomfortable feelings. You are able to take breaks at any point. You can also speak with your supervising social worker or contact FosterTalk/Fosterline if you felt you needed more support.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You might enjoy the experience of talking about your fostering role and it might be an opportunity to reflect on what you have achieved. The research will give you the opportunity to share your experiences of fostering and add to a growing body of evidence that recognises and values men's role in fostering.

8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Where safeguarding concerns are raised, confidentiality may need to be broken and information passed to the appropriate persons i.e., university research supervisor.

9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the

performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

10. What will happen to the data collected?

The data collected will be used to inform the main research. The consent form will be saved to my secure google drive using a pseudonym. Audio (and optional video) of the interviews will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using your pseudonym to keep the information anonymous. Your personal details will only be accessed by me; however, I may share details of our interview with my research supervisor who works at the University of Sheffield.

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

The audio and/or video recordings of your activities made during this pilot will be used to inform the main research. 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 recordings.

12. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by the University of Sheffield; no external funding has been received.

13. Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education. Ethics approval reference number 052650.

15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research please speak with me in the first instance. If you wish to make a complaint, please contact my research supervisor, Dr Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the

Designated Safeguarding Contact, Dr Penny Fogg at p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk] and/or the University's Chair of Ethics, Dr Anna Weighall at edu.ethics@sheffield.ac.uk). If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of School, Professor Rebecca Lawthom at r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager, Lindsay Unwin at l.v.unwin@sheffield.ac.uk.

16. Contact for further information

Research Lead:

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Dr Penny Fogg
Associate Tutor (Sheffield University DEdCPsy)
p.fogg@sheffield.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint, please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthom
Head of School
r.lawthom@sheffield.ac.uk

School of Education, The University of Sheffield, The Wave, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield. S10 2AH.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if you decide to participate, a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

8.5. Appendix Five: Consent form for pilot study

Consent Form for Pilot Study

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
Taking Part in the Pilot Study		
I have read and understood the project participant information sheet dated 18/09/2023 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer no to this question, please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)	q	q
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	q	q
I agree to take part in the pilot study. If it is felt that the format of the interview will not change significantly, I agree for my information to be used as part of the main study	q	q
I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed via Google Meet video call. A follow up meeting can be arranged, if I feel there is more information I would like to share.	q	q
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview audio recordings will be made. I agree to being audio recorded and for transcripts of these anonymised audio recordings to be used in the research.	q	q
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview video recordings will be made. I agree to being video recorded and for these anonymised video recordings to be used in the research. <i>(optional)</i>	q	q
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.	q	q
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time before 01.12.2023; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.	q	q
How my information will be used during and after the project		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.	q	q
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.	q	q
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	q	q
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.	q	q
I give permission for the recording(s) of my interview to be saved in a secure Google Drive managed by the University of Sheffield. I understand that this will be destroyed by the 01.09.2024.	q	q

8.6. Appendix Six: Glossary of transcript symbols

[Beginning of overlap of speech
]	End of overlap in speech
(.)	Brief pause
(guess)	Likely word/s used
()	Inaudible
(())	Non-verbal indications

adapted from (Jefferson, 2004a)

8.7. Appendix Seven: Ethics approval letter



Downloaded: 30/08/2024
Approved: 22/05/2023

Lisa Amanda Nelson
Registration number: 210103258
School of Education
Programme: DEdCPsy

Dear Lisa Amanda

PROJECT TITLE: An Exploration of Male Foster Carers' Experiences of Fostering
APPLICATION: Reference Number 052650

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 22/05/2023 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 052650 (form submission date: 28/04/2023); (expected project end date: 31/05/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1119818 version 2 (28/04/2023).
- Participant consent form 1119704 version 1 (29/03/2023).

The following amendments to this application have been approved:

- Amendment approved: 29/05/2024
- Amendment approved: 18/09/2023

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

8.8. Appendix Eight: Tom

8.8.1. Tom's transcript

- 1 Lisa: I think we're recording now.
- 2 Tom: It shows me we are, so that sounds good.
- 3 Lisa: That's perfect. Ok, erm so thank you for joining me today and I suppose really, I'll
- 4 open it up to you. I'm really interested just to hear about your experiences of
- 5 fostering.
- 6 Tom: Erm so (.) befo[re] (.) when I was a child, I had two experiences of fostering in my
- 7 birth family. The first being that my mum had a friend with mental health problems,
- 8 who was in and out of erm being held under section.
- 9 Lisa: [Uhum]
- 10 Tom: [And] when her child...And
- 11 when she was under section, we had her child.
- 12 Lisa: [Yeap]
- 13 Tom: [I kind] of remember it relatively
- 14 fleetingly, but it was on and off. I think, the longest single period was three months,
- 15 and I would have been about 10ish when that happened. Erm so (.) That was what
- 16 we would now call a connected person's fostering arrangement, although then,
- 17 we're talking about the late 90s,
- 18 Lisa: [Yeap]
- 19 Tom: [then] it would have just been, "Here's the child, get
- 20 on with it." [[[Laughing]]].
- 21 Lisa: [Yeah]
- 22 Tom: And like I remember my mum, she had to fight really hard just to get some shoes
- 23 refunded that she'd bought, because he didn't have school shoes.
- 24 Lisa: [Goodness. OK.]
- 25 Tom: [So], it's very
- 26 different from what we call connected persons now. But nonetheless, my experience
- 27 was of a child, I didn't know, appearing in the house for a few months on and off,
- 28 and becoming part of the family. And then, later on in life, when I was about 16, a
- 29 friend of the same age, his parents were missionaries, who had been living in the UK
- 30 and then they moved back to America. So, we took him in from the age of about 16
- 31 to 18. Erm (.) under what I guess would be called private fostering.
- 32 Lisa: [Okay.]
- 33 Tom: [but] again...I think then it was just, a
- 34 family friend.
- 35 Lisa: [(they can live with you)]
- 36 Tom: ["Do what you like"] you know. And so, I'd had some experience of growing up
- 37 around children that I was not related to. Erm and then around that same time,
- 38 actually when I was 17 and my now wife was 16, we met through church. We both

39 had a kind of Christian upbringing... erm...(.) and you know we'd both been involved
40 in church, all of our lives and there's a lot of...there's a theme throughout the Bible
41 around erm...orphans and adoption. And so, both of us kinda, had it built into us that
42 this was a thing that goes with faith... I suppose...(.) erm and so very early into our
43 relationship before we were adults, we were talking about the fact that at some
44 point in the future, we thought we wanted to foster or adopt. Erm, she wanted five
45 children that was her plan in her head. [[[Laughing]]]

46 Lisa: [Okay. ((Laughing))]

47 Tom: [[[Laughing]]] That's a lot of children.

48 Anyway, so we kind of had it in our minds before we were engaged you know that
49 we would end up having birth children and other children, whatever that meant erm
50 and then we got married erm young (.), I was 21, she was 19 and we just kinda
51 carried that with us. So, there was no firm plan, but it was an idea that we intended
52 to erm (.) you know have birth children but also have children in some other way I
53 suppose. And then when I was 19, I had joined the police.

54 Lisa: [Okay.]

55 Tom: Straight from school essentially. And
56 obviously, in the police, you see all sorts of things like erm, neglect and abuse and
57 parents with problems, like, alcohol and drug use. And I would use police protection
58 powers to remove children relatively frequently. So, I was sort of exposed to the
59 world where children were at risk of harm (.)...at a very young age. You know I was
60 19 doing that as I say, so, I think that had a huge impact (1) on erm like my heart for
61 children, I suppose. Anyway, when my wife and I got married, we managed to buy
62 erm a decent house to begin with, which we're still in today mainly because we just
63 had help off parents. So, erm we're talking about in 2008, as I say, I was 21, she was
64 19 and erm we managed to get a four bedroom home (.) and with just two of you in
65 it in a large house, it kind of felt like we ought to get on with having a family at some
66 point but we deliberately waited a little bit before having children erm and then a
67 couple of things happened for me at work which meant we...that kind of, triggered
68 us to actually apply to become foster carers. And the first thing was, that one of my
69 colleagues had just started fostering himself, and he taken on two brothers. And at
70 the time, it was all going swimmingly and, you know that was inspiring for us erm in
71 terms of what's stopping us. Why not get on with? You know what we waiting for?
72 And the second thing was that I went to an incident where there was a family where
73 the mother had been incarcerated very recently. The father was looking after five
74 children and erm not doing it very well.

75 **5:30 minutes**

76 Lisa: [Yeah]

77 Tom: [And] there was faeces. Faeces smeared on
78 every wall. There was erm, I mean the worst thing was that there was broken glass

79 on the kitchen floor and because the broken glass hadn't been cleared up erm the
80 children all had cuts on their feet.

81 Lisa: [OK]

82 Tom: [But,] not only that you could literally see on their
83 feet, that the skin had healed over shards of glass. (1) So, it was like the real extreme
84 end of neglect that these children [(will have experienced.)]

85 Lisa: [That must have been horrific.]

86 Tom: And so, for me that was a real kind of like I want
87 to be doing... so I use police protection powers to remove those children [and]

88 Lisa: [Yeah]

89 Tom: actually, the
90 story is a bit more complicated because when I shared with the father that I'd be I'd
91 be and erm making an arrest of him and removing his children, erm we were in the
92 kitchen and the children were in the lounge. And he lunged for a knife block, and he
93 grabbed a knife... And erm I used to have you know...when I was in the police, I had
94 access to some lovely video, body camera footage of this all unfolding. But
95 essentially, he tries to stab me and erm I flattened him, and I drag him out the house
96 erm past his children. And of course, their experience of what's just happened is that
97 a police officers, come into their house, literally dragged their father across the floor
98 out the front door and now they're entering care. So, from the child's perspective, it
99 was an awful experience [and]

100 Lisa: [Absolutely].

101 Tom: I'm not sure, looking reflecting back. I'm not
102 sure what I could have done to make it better for the children. But anyway, I left that
103 house with a feeling that I needed to do something erm more beyond, just sort of
104 intervening in those emergency moments but actually longer term to erm help
105 children... erm (.) so it was those two things that that triggered me to sort of have
106 the conversations with my wife to say, I think we should just do it. I don't know what
107 we're waiting for. So, in, it would have been the end of 2009, we approached our
108 local authority and said, "We want to apply to become foster carers." And they said,
109 "That's lovely." erm but when we shared that we planned on having children, they
110 said, "Oh come back once you have."

111 Lisa: [Right, OK.]

112 Tom: Which at the time was a decision I didn't really
113 understand and part of me still doesn't but in any case, you know that was what we
114 were told. We were told "Come back erm you know maybe when you've had
115 whatever children you want to have and, you know let's say your youngest is six
116 months old." So, we took that literally and it's exactly what we did, erm and in quite
117 quick succession after that, we got pregnant, erm we had two children within the
118 space of 21 months, And when the youngest was six months old, we went straight
119 back to them. And you know we spoke to a different person at the end of the

120 enquiry line, and they said, "All right yeah maybe when your youngest is 18 months."
 121 [[[Laughing]]]

122 Lisa: [Okay. Yeah ((Laughing))]

123 Tom: "No, you told us six months. We've done what you told us. We could phone up an
 124 independent fostering agency and they'd snap us up immediately, we don't want to
 125 do that. We want to come to you. So, can you at least come out and meet us?"

126 Lisa: Is, can I just ask, Is there a reason why you chose to work for the local authority
 127 rather than an IFA?

128 Tom: At the time, I don't think we knew better. Erm when I say better, I don't it is better
 129 by the way. But at the time we didn't know differently [and]

130 Lisa: [Yeah.]

131 Tom: but also, we did know, there
 132 were other fostering services that (.) would take us so I'm not sure I knew what the
 133 difference between them all was, but I certainly knew that [local authority] sounded
 134 like the most local and somehow it felt like what you're supposed to do. I'm not
 135 really, I can't remember well enough to be sure.

136 Lisa: [Yeah.]

137 Tom: [But] erm anyway they agreed to
 138 come out and do an initial visit and that became an assessment. And erm you know
 139 (.) the erm assessment was very positive, but it was very much focused on my wife,
 140 more than me, there were assessment visits that were booked for when I was out at
 141 work and the assessment itself was very much weighted to my wife. She was erm...
 142 You know the language was main carer. She was the main carer throughout the
 143 assessment. It wasn't carer one carer two. It was main carer erm so yeah, it was
 144 very, it was sort of implied that they expected my wife to be the one (.) who did
 145 most the stuff and to be fair that was going to be true, like she was going to be the
 146 main carer, because that's how it was from a birth children. But at the same time,
 147 like I became the one that was much more heavily involved in all of the meetings and
 148 all of the transport for family time and things like that. So, from a fostering services
 149 perspective, it was me who they saw all the time, you know. We were both there for
 150 supervisions, but (.) well when they were scheduled when I wasn't at work, but it
 151 was me, that was doing all of the children in care reviews and the PEP meetings and
 152 all those sorts of things. And I probably should have mentioned by the way that in
 153 between erm the first time we approached the local authority and the second time
 154 we approached them. I delib[erately] we'd been quite intentional career wise in sort
 155 of shifting my focus to be more relevant. So, I'd become a a specialist in family
 156 safeguarding erm not child protection but when I say family safeguarding, I mean like
 157 domestic abuse, honour-based violence erm I'd done a secondment to a local
 158 authority children services team, so I'd done, it was called the Troubled Families
 159 Initiative.

160 Lisa: [Oh yes, I remember that, yeah, yeah.]

161

162 Tom: [[)], So I'd become a key worker for families that needed early help you know, whilst
 163 being a police officer (.) erm (.) I'd done a stint in the public protection unit. So that's
 164 kind of like working with (.) erm prolific offenders who are erm released let's say
 165 they're on probation and they need support to erm (.) you know stay out of trouble,
 166 you know. So, I was kind of much more involved in the preventative, early help,
 167 family side of policing erm you know and that (.) clearly impacted on my motivations
 168 even more because I was even more heavily involved in removing children in
 169 emergency situations like in between those two times so erm yeah (.) that was (.)
 170 impacting on my motivations, I suppose. Erm and then anyway very quickly after we
 171 were approved, which would have been October 2013, erm two weeks later we got a
 172 phone call saying, "Can you take this seven-year-old?" Who I'll call K.

173 Lisa: [Yeah.]

174 Tom: [And] basically,
 175 the story was that K had entered care at the age of erm three. He'd gone
 176 immediately to an emergency placement where he'd have remained ever since
 177 which had been four years. Erm and then he had erm his... a foster mother and a
 178 foster father, Christian family, involved in church, erm but the foster mother had
 179 quite suddenly been diagnosed with breast cancer and within a space of months was
 180 dead.

181 Lisa: [Okay, gosh]
 182 [And so,] we were taking him, you know, the suggestion was that we would take him
 183 directly from that family. ((Clears throat)) And our immediate response was "No he
 184 needs a permanent family. This is our first child; you know first attempt at fostering
 185 we don't know how this is going to go. We can't offer him permanence (.) erm you
 186 should find a family that can offer him permanence." And they sort of you know
 187 laughed back at us as if that's something they can do. ((Laughing))

188 Lisa: [Yeah]

189 Tom: And said "No, no, no like we
 190 need a bed today. Like can you be that bed today? And can you bridge this gap? And
 191 we will look for a permanent family for him." So, we were like, "Yeah, we can do
 192 that. Of course, we can do that." ((Laughing)). So, so you know we had a little
 193 introduction with him, erm and he, he has a significant learning disability. But when
 194 you first meet him, this isn't obvious at all. So, we sat down and we're just having
 195 erm a bit of a play with him. Thinking what they talk about, you know, learning
 196 needs. I can't see any of that. I said, "K how old are you chum?" And he sort of
 197 counted wrongly on his fingers and then announced that he was three years old as a
 198 seven-year-old.

199 Lisa: [Okay.]

200 Tom: [And] we're like okay that's the disability I see it now. ((Intake of
 201 breath)) So, anyway he became a member of our erm (.) family ((Intake of breath))

202 and the rest is history. He's still with us today. He he's gonna turn 18 erm next year
203 (.) and erm so we've had him for coming up to 10 years now (.) ((Intake of breath))
204 but erm the three months after he arrived in our family, erm we discovered
205 something very unexpectedly because we, I remember, I mentioned the police
206 officer that had started fostering.

207 Lisa: [Yeah... you did]

208 Tom: [And] so, as a thank you to him and his wife for kind
209 of like inspiring us to get on with doing it, we took them out for a meal and erm (.)
210 during that meal, we showed a photo of the child (.) and his wife like teared up. And
211 she explained the story, which is that erm the reason they'd become foster carers,
212 was because she'd been working in a erm a nursery or some sort of childcare setting
213 when erm social workers had come and said, "Don't release that child. We're going
214 to (.) be taking him away at the end of the day." And it turns out it was the same
215 child.

216 **15.02 minutes**

217 Lisa: [Wow, okay.]

218 Tom: [and so] they had been inspired to foster by K essentially and then, K had gone
219 into this family for a few years where he'd been very well looked after but sadly, the
220 female carer died. And during that time, we were going through our process of sort
221 of, you know having children and being ready to apply. And then, of course, the
222 moment that the the foster mother dies, he he comes to us erm and so, it felt very
223 much like a circle and sort of reinforced for us, the sense that this wasn't just
224 something we wanted to do. This was a calling, you know, from a religious sense.

225 Lisa: [Aha]

226 Tom: [erm
227 ((Intake of breath))] so erm yeah, that was our first child ((smiling)) and you know we
228 just sort of kept going from there really. Erm (.) in 2014, the April of 2014, I left the
229 police (.) in order to become a social worker.

230 Lisa: [Okay.]

231 Tom: [and] I had (.) erm I'd already been erm
232 like sitting on fostering panels as a police officer since just before we started
233 fostering. Erm so, I was sort of involved with multiple fostering agencies on a
234 fostering panel level and hearing lots of different stories and I just kind of felt more
235 drawn to that than I did to policing anymore. Also, there was talk of me becoming ill
236 health retired...because I have erm fibromyalgia.

237 Lisa: [Mmh]

238 Tom: which was impacting on police work in a
239 way that it wouldn't really impact on social work.

240 Lisa: [Yeah.]

241 Tom: [So], I went through an ill health
242 retirement process, but at the last moment they decided I was ill enough but not

243 permanently enough. So, they weren't gonna, weren't you know going to retire me
 244 off, but by then, I'd applied to I'd apply to study social work. So, I decided to carry on
 245 and do that. so, I left the police to qualify as a social worker which I did over four
 246 years, part-time whilst fostering. ((Intake of breath)) erm (.) and I should also
 247 mention that two years after we were first approved, we decided to transfer from
 248 the local authority within which we live to a neighbouring local authority for
 249 fostering erm and the reason we gave at the time was that because (.) because of
 250 the county, I live in being the most obvious place for me to work as [a social worker.]
 251 Lisa: [Yes. Yeah. Yeah.]
 252 Tom: We wanted to avoid conflict of interest. That was the reason we gave. The true
 253 reason was that we didn't know how without sounding racist to (.) point out to the
 254 fostering service, that our social worker didn't speak English well enough (.) to
 255 communicate with us, effectively and that led to all sorts of like, you know we had an
 256 annual review written about us and (.) I read it with my panel member perspective
 257 thinking this sounds awful. It was just because we hadn't been understood at all by
 258 our social worker. So, she'd written things that just weren't right about us and
 259 written them in a way in which (.) you know perhaps she didn't mean it to sound erm
 260 negative, but it really did. and erm yeah, there was just this erm (.) you know blatant
 261 language barrier, but we didn't, we didn't know how to communicate that without
 262 sounding like we were the ones with the problem.
 263 Lisa: [Yeah.]
 264 Tom: [So], it was sort of like a cop-out really
 265 and we you know it was a really useless reason to transfer but we did and you know
 266 we've remained with the other local authority ever since and been very very happy
 267 ((Intake of breath)) erm (.) and of course, once we arrived in that new local
 268 authority, we took, we transferred with the child that we already had in placement
 269 from the first local authority but naturally, the second local authority wanted to
 270 place a child with us, and we were very much up for that ((nodding)) erm so child
 271 number two, we had for erm six months and he was a five-year-old M erm and he
 272 erm eventually went back to live with erm a a grandparent.
 273 Lisa: [Yeah.]
 274 Tom: [Erm] so erm you know
 275 we joke our family that "he was the one that got away" because he's the only child
 276 that's ever arrived and then left. Everybody else arrived and then got stuck with us.
 277 ((Smiling))
 278 Lisa: How did it feel erm doing the reintegration back to family?
 279 Tom: The thing is the complicating factor was that she was believed to be the paternal
 280 grandmother at the beginning of the process. But then it was established that the
 281 father wasn't the father (.) through DNA.
 282 Lisa: [Yeah.]

283 Tom: [But] she had continued, she'd always had that
284 role and the father, the reported father had always had the role of father. So, the
285 family decided that despite the DNA proving otherwise they would continue to
286 operate (.) as though he was the father and she was the maternal grandmother. And
287 the thing is that her circumstances It was a very borderline assessment (.) of her (.) It
288 was not guaranteed that this was gonna go well. It was, it was clearly something of
289 an experiment. That was not comfortable [and]

290 Lisa: [Yeah.]

291 Tom: she lived in extreme poverty and the (.)
292 erm (.) ((turning away)) the sort of like, we knew that his erm (.) opportunities would
293 be much more limited with her than they had been with us. And yet at the same
294 time we did recognise it was family. [And]

295 Lisa: [Yeah.]

296 **20.14 minutes**

297 Tom: We were able to sell it to him incredibly positively. You know
298 I cried a lot you know when we were building up to it but (.) erm another factor was
299 that in the case of this particular child, his the the (.) he presented as having an
300 extreme issue with attachment. He was not using emotions to communicate at all.
301 He was a very, very flat child, who never cried and never laughed. And you know it
302 was therefore quite challenging to bond with him. (.)

303 Lisa: [Hmm]

304 Tom: [so], as much as we loved him, erm
305 totally and utterly like it did occur to me that this is a woman who has since birth had
306 a very good bond with him.

307 Lisa: [Yeah.]

308 Tom: [and] therefore, something about the whole scenario felt right

309 Lisa: [OK]

310 Tom: [You

311 know] So erm (.) So he went back to live with her, and we wanted to maintain
312 contact and she wanted to forget that he'd ever been in foster care. And we've
313 essentially not had any communication since the day he was you know erm
314 transferred to her care erm despite, you know kind of our efforts erm so that's sad.
315 Erm but we have a, you know we gave him erm a photo album of his time with us.
316 And we kept a copy. So, our children,

317 Lisa: [Yes.]

318 Tom: [who] will remember vaguely growing up with him.

319 Erm they they have something to you know remember that time by I suppose.

320 ((Intake of breath)) (.) And then erm after that, we took on erm our third erm child

321 ((smiling)) and she is R and she was I think nine ((looking away)). No, she must have

322 been 10. I think the maths would be better if she was 10. Erm anyway she came to

323 us erm having only been in care for 18 months but had this constant change of

324 placement. She'd had like seven main placements plus respite placements in that 18
 325 months. So erm I went to collect her, it was about an hour and a half drive from
 326 where she was. And as I was driving back, she said, erm "I love being in foster care." I
 327 said, "Why is that?" She says, "I get to move house all the time."

328 Lisa: [Oh gosh, right ok]

329 Tom: [And] I just said, "Not any
 330 more love, not anymore." And erm (.) she didn't accept that, you know lite[rally]
 331 three months later she was literally packing her bags saying, "Can you let my social
 332 worker I'm ready to go." We'd had a good day. She was just like, "It's time now. This
 333 is, I do my stint and then I go, and I have something new." Erm and so, it took her
 334 many, many years to (.) accept that this was her permanent home.

335 Lisa: [Mmm]

336 Tom: [and] erm she
 337 actually happened to arrive on K's, four-year anniversary of arriving.

338 Lisa: [OK]
 339 [So], every year,
 340 when we go out for a meal on that date, that saves us a meal out every year because
 341 they're on the same date ((smiling)), but he's coming up to 10 years and she's
 342 coming up to six and so erm yeah (.), I mean, she was an incredibly challenging
 343 young person. And there were absolutely times where we talked about giving up
 344 erm I, (.) like going back to that whole kind of faith thing.

345 Lisa: [Yeah.]

346 Tom: [For me] marriage is a 100%
 347 lifelong commitment. Like (.) separating is not a (.)
 348 Lisa: [option]
 349 Tom: [consideration] for me in a marriage
 350 and I fe(el) that's the level of commitment I feel when I commit to permanence of a
 351 child. It's like, (.) you know, you don't (.) you don't stop. Now don't get me wrong
 352 because professionally I know there are circumstances where it's right for people to
 353 stop (.) [[[nodding]]]

354 Lisa: [Yeah.]

355 Tom: right for the child (.) for people to stop ((nodding)). I get it placements can
 356 break down. But (.) for me like the difficulty was I was having to communicate with
 357 the fostering service, the things were going badly wrong, and we needed help, (.) but
 358 they were sort of like placement planning in parallel to supporting us and I had to say
 359 to them, "Stop it? Like no..."

360 Lisa: [Yeah.]

361 Tom: ["that's] not the right thing to be doing here. You're sending
 362 her and us the wrong message. We are committed. (.) We just need help to get past
 363 this hump and we're gonna carry on." And that is what happened, erm you know
 364 we've carried on and things are much much more settled with [()]

365 Lisa: [What] help did they
366 put in place?
367 Tom: So, to have a service within the local authority called (name of service)
368 and I can't remember all of the letters, but it includes rehabilitation and as in
369 rehabilitation home [and]
370 Lisa: [Yeah]
371 Tom: [and erm] sort of like emergency support and placement
372 breakdown (.) placement stability. ((Intake of breath)) So, it was kind of like a crisis
373 team within fostering that come into, (.) you know swoop in and try and fix things
374 ((Intake of breath)). Erm and so, they did that, which was useful. Erm there was
375 some opportunity for her to have some therapeutic one-to-one time with a social
376 worker, talking about her life story and talking about, you know (.) her (.) home with
377 us. Erm so, you know that was part of it, but partly it was just time. Just the longer
378 Lisa: [Yeah]
379 Tom: [the] time
380 went on, the more she learned, we really were gonna stick it out. Erm it's like, over
381 the years, both K and R have said to me, (.) erm (.) "Can you tell my social worker I
382 want to move house" and I'm like, "Sure of course, I'll text him right now, but just to
383 be clear, you are stuck with us." ((Laughing)). Like it's (.) at times it's whether you like
384 it or not, this is your family. We are it, where the grass isn't always greener, we love
385 you, we are committed to the long haul and just because you said to your social
386 worker, you want to move house, it doesn't mean they're going to whip you out."
387 Lisa: [Mm]
388 Tom: [and] I
389 remember that in that moment of crisis with R, erm, one of the team managers told
390 me off because I'd said to R, like "You live with us unconditionally right". And the
391 manager had said to me, "But she's going to, she's going to think now she can
392 behave how she likes and you're not gonna send her away. So, she's gonna behave
393 really badly." I said, "No, she's gonna know she's secure. And she's stable."
394 Lisa: [Yeah]
395 Tom: [And] (.) so she's
396 gonna, (.) you know she's gonna go from that place of secure base (.) . Erm and so I
397 found that really interesting because even managers in the fostering service were
398 encouraging us (.) to sort of (.) almost threaten a child with (.) having to move
399 house, if they carry on behaving (.) badly (.) No ((Smiling)). That wasn't, that wasn't
400 where we were at ((Intake of breath)). It didn't you know fit with what we were
401 about as foster carers I suppose.
402 Lisa [Yeah]
403 **26:38 minutes**
404 Tom: [Erm] and then the final child, we erm I say final, we'll,
405 we'll, she won't be final, [but the]

406 Lisa: [Yes, for now]

407 Tom: The most recent child that we ever took on ((Laughing)) was

408 a baby aged five months and erm and basically the fostering service had (.) they

409 knew there were several children coming into care in the following week, several

410 babies coming into care in the following week and I'd always been very clear not

411 interested in babies. Not my thing. I'd rather go kind of like (.) primary school age

412 plus but I'm also somebody that responds to a need.

413 Lisa: [Yeah]

414 Tom: [and] the need was babies. My

415 wife had erm a part-time job at church at the time and it would have been very

416 difficult to do that with a baby. But (.) you know (.) we were foster carers first and

417 she had always wanted to foster a baby, so we said, "Yeah go on then, we'll consider

418 a baby." And then I was in [place name] erm being interviewed for a position as a

419 vice chair of a (.) permanence panel. No, as a chair of a permanence panel and while

420 I'm waiting for this interview, (.) I get this phone call saying, "We've got this baby,

421 she's five months old erm she's been in hospital for most of her life. She has Down's

422 syndrome." And I said, "I'll phone my wife but yeah", ((nodding)). So, I phoned my

423 wife, we have what was literally a one-minute conversation, "five months old.

424 Down's syndrome and her name is J" [[Discussion of name removed]]. So, erm

425 anyway we said yes, and within, within two and a half hours, I was at hospital, you

426 know (.) an hour and a half away from [place name] erm (.) erm collecting this baby

427 who, when I arrived was covered in tubes and I was kind of like I arrived and said to

428 the hospital, (.) "I'm here to collect this child, I'm the foster carer" and they pointed

429 me into a room, and I go into room. And there's just this baby and me and it's kind of

430 like "What do I do now like, hello." (((Laughing)))].

431 Lisa: [Wow.]

432 Tom: Very weird (.) ((Intake of breath)) experience

433 because she had so many tubes attached, I didn't know what I could touch ((Intake

434 of breath)) and all that kind of thing. Anyway, we take this baby home and erm

435 within two months, we erm discover that she's in chronic cardiac failure and is slowly

436 deteriorating and essentially, on a trajectory towards death and erm and, you know,

437 erm I spent (.) I mean if you add up the amount of time, I've spent in hospital with

438 her in total, it'll be something like six to nine months [and]

439 Lisa: [Ok]

440 Tom: [over the years] but in her early

441 time with us, it was at least 50% of the time for the first six months that I was in

442 hospital with her which, of course, impacted on my work you know because I was

443 not able to do social work erm (.) whilst that was all going on. So erm yeah, her heart

444 was a massive problem, and her breathing was a massive problem, but the heart was

445 the biggest problem. So, at nine months old, she had surgery at [Hospital] and they

446 erm fixed a number of holes, in her heart. And of course, during all of that time in

447 hospital, particularly [Hospital], I was staying there like locally to the hospital. They
 448 let me stay in a house nearby. Erm with the birth father.

449 Lisa: [Okay.]

450 **30:15 minutes**

451 Tom: [So] was spending, I think we
 452 did something like three and a half weeks solid at [Hospital]. And during that time, it
 453 was 14 hours a day that he and I would spend together at the bedside. Then, we'd
 454 walk across [place name] streets, back to the home, we were staying in, via
 455 somewhere to get food, so we eat together and then (.) briefly sleep, and then
 456 repeat and we did that. Anyway, one night they phoned us up at 4am and said, "It's
 457 time to say goodbye." So, he and I rushed into (.) the hospital and erm [.] we sort of
 458 met a nurse in a lift. And erm she said, "Oh you're the dads, aren't you?" [[Laughing]]
 459 "Well okay, yeah we'll go with that." Now is not the moment to sort of explain this
 460 scenario. [[Laughing]]

461 Lisa: [Yeah]

462 Tom: [So erm] she says, "Oh, she made it." And I said, "How close was it?" She
 463 says, "It don't get closer." She'd had a respiratory arrest erm (.) because her lungs (.)
 464 the the erm bronchus to her lungs had both collapse at the same time, she could not
 465 breathe. They'd had a big emergency call out and a team of 15 had managed to
 466 stabilize her.

467 Lisa: [[()]]

468 Tom: [Eventually] and about an hour and a half later they let us in to see her and
 469 she was all tubed up and it looked awful. But long story short, that was the turning
 470 point and things have got better and better and better ever since with her [[Intake of
 471 breath]]. So, when she got to a couple of years old, the local authority at that point
 472 were looking for her permanence option and they were talking of adoption.
 473 ((Turning away)) Erm we never planned to be adopters and

474 Lisa: [Yeah]

475 Tom: [and] erm we didn't really want to be adopters, partly
 476 because erm (.) in terms of like ideology, I'm more (.) keen on the Australian style of
 477 system where erm (.) they don't really do what the Daily Mail would call 'forced
 478 adoption' in Australia ((Smiling)), you know erm it's a different system of
 479 permanence that's preferred there. And I don't much like the fact that in adoption,
 480 you sever, the relationship with the birth family entirely.

481 Lisa: [Mm]

482 Tom: [Erm] in any event, you
 483 know, that's what the local authority we're looking for, (.) for J, for all the right
 484 reasons. J needed permanence and, erm you know the birth family weren't able to
 485 offer the care that she needed, and they were quite accepting of that. So erm (.) they
 486 started looking at adoption. They asked us, if we'd be interested in adopting her and
 487 we sort of said, "No, you know that's not (.) we're not interested in this business of

488 severing the relationship", and then, as as weeks, and months went by, we sort of
 489 realised but actually, we don't have to do that, like there's such thing as open
 490 adoption. So, we went back to the local authority and said, "Actually (.) on the
 491 condition that you allow us to do it openly (.) we will put ourselves forward for
 492 adoption." And of course, they bit our hands off and the birth family were very
 493 excited about the whole thing.

494 Lisa: [Well you'd developed a relationship] with the dad
 495 anyway.

496 Tom: [Exactly, exactly] Not just the dad, like I knew the mum
 497 very well .

498 Lisa: [Yeah.]

499 Tom: [So] fast forward to today. She's five years old, erm (.) and I think (.) it's been
 500 two or three years since the adoption went through erm two years, two years since
 501 the adoption went through and erm (.) ((looking away)) sorry in October, it'll be
 502 three years since the, the anniversary of the adoption [and]

503 Lisa: [Okay]

504 Tom: [and erm] we see her birth
 505 parents, they are separated so we see them separately, but we see her birth parents,
 506 probably erm four to six times a year each. She has erm (.) eight siblings within the
 507 birth family and only two of those do we not see erm because they now erm live
 508 with erm (.) they are half siblings, so they live with a parent who you know isn't
 509 maintaining that relationship with us. So (.) she is being raised to understand that
 510 she has two mums and two dads and very controversial, we didn't change her
 511 surname.

512 Lisa: [((())]

513 Tom: [And] the reason for that was because erm the birth parents, (.) the birth
 514 mother even though she doesn't have the surname, was very keen that the surname
 515 was kept. And we just didn't care because surnames don't mean anything to us.

516 Lisa: [Yeah]

517 Tom: [Because]
 518 actually we have two permanent children (.) two children permanently placed with
 519 us with a different surname.

520 Lisa: [Yeah]

521 Tom: [and] what we decided was, if we were to (.) change
 522 her surname (.), the message it would send them is that the surname makes you
 523 more of the family than they are. And legally, she is more in the family than they are.
 524 But we don't need to reinforce that with a (.) name change that would send more of
 525 a message to them than it would to her, because let's be clear, you know, J has
 526 Down's syndrome. This business of the (.) choice of what surname, she uses. Number
 527 one if in the future she wants to use our surname, of course we won't stop her. But
 528 actually, I think keeping the birth surname erm (.) ((Looking up)) tells her her own

529 story better because it demonstrates the history and she's still gonna be in
530 relationship with her birth father. So that made sense and also, I'm not being funny
531 but it's much easier to spell than our surname ((Smiling)). And we just thought we'd
532 do her a favour and not give her an extra task to learn how to spell our surname so
533 that she could erm spell her own name earlier ((Intake of breath)) I suppose ((Intake
534 of breath)). And so that's five children, we currently have with us two birth children,
535 two permanently fostered, and one now adopted and that and what we like to call
536 round one.

537 **35.34 minutes**

538 Lisa: [Yeah]

539 Tom: [and] when some of the individuals in this family, turn 18 erm we'll have
540 round two erm and that's kind of like the plan, (.) but I think erm in terms of ongoing
541 motivations erm (.) my job, I obviously work with foster children and foster carers
542 and I understand the level of need nationally for placements and (.) erm the
543 shortage and all of that and also am acutely aware of how often children move
544 around. So that's that's led to me and my wife sort of (.) accidentally specialising in
545 what we would call the long-term care of hard to place.

546 Lisa: [Yeah]

547 Tom: [So], we, we're quite, we
548 have been (.) relatively intentional that we will (.) try and offer children who (.) have
549 had a poor experience of foster care, stability. (.) But interestingly like for me, (.)
550 when I think about erm (.) my motivations for wanting to foster in the first place,
551 that was really coming from a place of wanting to rescue. [Right]

552 Lisa: [Yeah]

553 Tom: [And] actually, it's very,
554 very hard to think that about a child who's been with you for 10 years, and like if I, if
555 I think about why I'm motivated to carry on offering permanence to K and R (.) I
556 don't have an answer for that. I don't think I am that motivated like in any sort of
557 different way to the same way, in which I'm motivated to carry on looking after my
558 birth children.

559 Lisa: [Yeah]

560 Tom: [With] my birth children, no one asks you that, like they might say,
561 "Why did you want to have children?" But they don't ever say, "Why do you still
562 want to have children?" (.) and sometimes you might not still what the children
563 based on whether you've had a bad day [[[Laughing]]]

564 Lisa: [Yeah] ((Laughing))

565 Tom: [But] the fact is (.) it doesn't occur to you
566 that you could stop.

567 Lisa: [No]

568 Tom: [And] and you almost don't need an ongoing motivation. You
569 know you need motivation for getting up and doing a good job as a parent, but you

570 don't need motivation for keeping them because they are, they are in your family
 571 and that's just what it is. And so (.) for me, there's always been a bit of a conflict
 572 because (.) I'm motivated to do the rescuing bit (.) So, I'm excited about the prospect
 573 of round two erm (.) but that doesn't change the fact that I'm committed to round
 574 one.

575 Lisa: [Yeah]

576 Tom: [And] I'm the one that says to my wife "Do you think we could do one more?"
 577 and she'll go "No. ((we can't do)) one more." ((Laughing))

578 Lisa: ((Laughing))
 579 (And) so she's always sort of, kept us
 580 grounded. And she's very much erm, her motivations. She is only committed to the
 581 ones we have got. She's not committed to the task of fostering. She's not committed
 582 to going again, she's up for it, as a couple that's what we intend to do (.), and it's
 583 become a lifestyle and something that (.) is very positive. But for her, the motivation
 584 to go, again, won't come until, really come until she sees the profile of a child who
 585 needs looking after. And then she'll become maternal and (.) and desperate to, you
 586 know (.) offer that child what they need and the moment they arrive in our house we
 587 both know that's it now, unless there's a reason not why it's in their best interest to
 588 go somewhere else, then we're committed. So I think in that sense, mine and my
 589 wife's motivations are very different because (.) erm I'm always , I'm always
 590 ((Looking up)) looking at how we can expand what we do as a family and it's like, if
 591 you imagine when J came to live with us erm (.) at that point, there was a lot of talk
 592 in the local authority about children who foster? And I struggled with this because
 593 okay, yeah, my birth children foster. I understand that. ((Nodding))

594 Lisa: [Yeah]

595 Tom: [But] what I struggled with (.)
 596 was that R and K had been with us for so long at that point, they were so embedded
 597 in our family and from their perspective, what they were offering J was exactly the
 598 same as what the birth children were.

599 Lisa: [Yeah]

600 Tom: [So], I have this kind of conflict because actually
 601 I think that foster children can foster (.) other children that join the family. And so,
 602 for me, it's almost difficult to view children (.) that have been with us so long as erm
 603 (.) ((Looking away)) I mean, I understand fostering very much. I understand they are
 604 foster children, but I don't, if I think about like my feelings, towards the five children
 605 in our house, there's no difference in those feelings. I can't. I know some people (.)
 606 think that it's different with birth children. It is not different for me. Legally it is
 607 different, but emotionally, it's not different. Erm that's particularly true when, of
 608 course, you've taken on a foster child that has become adopted. Erm (.) like my love
 609 for J (.) is not distinguishably different (.) from the birth children erm but also, the
 610 day that the adoption went through, was an anti-climactic day cause nothing

611 happened, nothing changed. We put a post on Facebook announcing it, but we put
612 her to bed like usual, and she had a breakfast like usual. [You know] ((Laughing))
613 Lisa: [Yeah]
614 **40:31 minutes**
615 Tom: [Yeah] (.) and so erm (.)
616 ((Breath out)) I think, I think that's kind of like where we're at as a family. I'm
617 definitely the driver still to keep going with fostering erm I'm still the one that goes
618 to all the meetings, I'm still the one that does all the transport for family time. I'm
619 still the one that sort of champions the relationships with all of the birth families and
620 my wife is still the one (.) who offers the majority of the day-to-day care in the house
621 erm and erm (.) that partnership works well for us as a family (.) but yeah, (.) I think
622 consistently over the years, I have been considered by the fostering service to be (.)
623 somehow less critical and like for example, if we were having supervision with our
624 social worker, if I couldn't make a date we would carry on and hold the visit. If my
625 wife couldn't make the date, we would not carry on and hold the visit.
626 Lisa: [Yeah]
627 that's different.
628 Tom: [Yeah], but
629 actually we're very equal. We do different things. She does more of the day-to-day
630 care and I do more of the (.) erm like if there's a crisis, if a child has had a burst of
631 emotion because of something in their birth family, I'm the one they will come to in
632 that scenario. (.) so(.) in that sense, we are equally involved. I'm not just a supporter
633 of my wife. [You know]
634 Lisa: [No]
635 Tom: We are equally involved in engaged in fostering, but erm (.) yeah, my wife is
636 definitely viewed as being (.) still the main carer. Out of the pair of us. So, I think that
637 is my story.
638 Lisa: That is really interesting. Thank you. Anything else you wanted to say or is that
639 everything?
640 Tom: I can't think of anything else. I think (.) I've been involved professionally in trainings
641 around men, who foster.
642 Lisa: [Yeah]
643 Tom: [and so] this business of making sure that erm men (.) are
644 heard in fostering (.) households is something that's definitely important to me on a
645 personal level ((Nodding)). Erm and as a fostering assessor (.) I'm always really clear
646 in an assessment that it should be an equal presentation of both members erm of
647 the couple and erm (.) like sometimes I come across assessments, where people
648 have got the impression that it will be okay (.) for the female applicant to do more of
649 the visits than the male applicant. And I sort of say "No, I'm gonna need to see each
650 of you individually for one of the visits. So, I have visit with one of you and one visit
651 with just the other of you. But otherwise, I do expect that you're both there

652 throughout. If either of you can't make a visit, we might carry on and do the
653 assessment work anyway, but that's not geared towards you know one gender over
654 another". Erm I'd like to think that in my assessments that I produce, I'm quite
655 deliberate, and intentional about presenting, both sides of that and because I work
656 in connected persons fostering at the moment, I get a lot of (.) people who have
657 been thrown into it and "Oh my partner's supporting me to look after my
658 grandchild." "No. that don't work for me, you're both starting up to foster care"
659 ((Laughing)). So (.) yeah, even if where there's a dynamic within an applicant's couple
660 relationship (.) where they think that one of them is gonna primarily do this and the
661 other is just going to support. I'm like, "No, that's not the reality of what you're
662 signing up for. The reality of what you're signing up for is that you are both becoming
663 approved foster carers is for this child, you are both erm required to meet a
664 standard, and you are both required to commit to caring permanently together, for
665 this child." And yeah, things go wrong in relationships, we all know that. But as a
666 starting point for an assessment, that's where I always put things.

667 Lisa: Thank you very much, I'll stop recording.

668 **44.31 minutes**

8.8.2. Tom's listening guide readings

KEY					
I	We	[Word]	Personal Reflections		
You	They	[Word]	Praxis Reflections		
She/He		[Word]	Voice		
Lisa:	I think we're recording now.				
Tom:	It shows me we are, so that sounds good.				
Lisa:	That's perfect. Ok, erm so thank you for joining me today and I suppose really, I'll open it up to you. I'm really interested just to hear about your experiences of fostering.				
Tom:	Erm so (.) befo[re] (.) <u>when I was a child, I had two experiences of fostering in my birth family.</u> The first being that my mum had a friend with mental health problems, who was in and out of erm being held under section.			Personal experience – confidence?	
Lisa:	[Uhum]				
Tom:	[And] when her child...And <u>when she was under section, we had her child.</u>			Practitioner voice	
Lisa:	[Yeap]				
Tom:	[I kind] of remember it relatively fleetingly, but it was on and off. <u>I think</u> , the longest single period was three months, and <u>I would</u> have been about 10ish when that happened. Erm so (.) <u>That was what we would now call a connected person's fostering arrangement</u> , although then, we're talking about the late 90s,			Practitioner voice	
Lisa:	[Yeap]				
Tom:	[then] it would have just been, " <u>Here's the child, get on with it.</u> " [((Laughing))].			Joking voice	
Lisa:	[Yeah]				
Tom:	And <u>like I remember</u> my mum, <u>she had to</u> fight really hard just to get some shoes refunded that <u>she'd bought</u> , because he didn't have school shoes.			Funding – professional vs voluntary role	
Lisa:	[Goodness. OK.]				
Tom:	[So], it's very <u>different from what we call connected persons now</u> . But nonetheless, my experience was of a child, <u>I didn't know</u> , appearing in the house for a few months on and off. And becoming part of the family. And then, later on in life, when <u>I was</u> about 16, a friend of the same age, his parents were			Practitioner voice	

<p>missionaries, who had been living in the UK and then they moved back to America. So, we took him in from the age of about 16 to 18. Erm (.) under what I guess would be called private fostering.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay.]</p> <p>Tom: [but] again... I think then it was just, "family friend.</p> <p>Lisa: [(they can live with you)]</p> <p>Tom: [Do what you like]" you know. And so, I'd had some experience of growing up around children that I was not related to. Erm and then around that same time, actually when I was 17 and my now wife was 16, we met through church. We both had a kind of Christian upbringing... erm...(.) and you know we'd both been involved in church, all of our lives and there's a lot of...there's a theme throughout the Bible around erm...orphans and adoption. And so, both of us kinda, had it built into us that this was a thing that goes with faith... I suppose...(.) erm and so very early into our relationship before we were adults, we were talking about the fact that at some point in the future, we thought we wanted to foster or adopt. Erm, she wanted five children that was her plan in her head. (((Laughing)))</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay. ((Laughing))]</p> <p>Tom: (((Laughing))) That's a lot of children. Anyway, so we kind of had it in our minds before we were engaged you know that we would end up having birth children and other children, whatever that meant erm and then we got married erm young (.), I was 21, she was 19 and we just kinda carried that with us. So, there was no firm plan, but it was an idea that we intended to erm (.) you know have birth children but also have children in some other way I suppose. And then when I was 19, I had joined the police.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay.]</p> <p>Tom: Straight from school essentially. And obviously, in the police, you see all sorts of things like erm, neglect and abuse and parents with problems, like, alcohol and drug use. And I would use police</p>	<p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Committed relationship</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Value – faith</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Plan to foster early on</p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Resolution</p> <p>Job</p>
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<p>protection powers to remove children relatively frequently. So, <u>I was sort of exposed to the world where children were at risk of harm (.)...at a very young age.</u> You know I was 19 doing that as I say, so, <u>I think that had a huge impact (.) on erm like my heart for children, I suppose.</u> Anyway, when my wife and I got married, we managed to buy erm a decent house to begin with, which we're still in today mainly because we just had help off parents. So, erm, we're talking about in 2008, as I say, I was 21, she was 19 and erm we managed to get a four bedroom home (.) and with just two of you in it in a large house, it kind of felt like we ought to get on with having a family at some point but we deliberately waited a little bit before having children erm and then a couple of things happened for me at work which meant we...that kind of, triggered us to actually apply to become foster carers. And the first thing was, that one of my colleagues had just started fostering himself, and he taken on two brothers. And at the time, it was all going swimmingly and, you know that was inspiring for us erm in terms of what's stopping us. Why not get on with? You know what we waiting for? And the second thing was that <u>I went to an incident where there was a family where the mother had been incarcerated very recently.</u> The father was looking after five children and erm not doing it very well.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5:30 minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [And] there was faeces. Faeces smeared on every wall. There was erm, I mean the worst thing was that there was broken glass on the kitchen floor and because the broken glass hadn't been cleared up erm the children all had cuts on their feet.</p> <p>Lisa: [OK]</p> <p>Tom: [But,] not only that you could literally see on their feet, that the skin had healed over shards of glass. (1) <u>So, it was like the real extreme end of neglect that these children [(will have experienced.)]</u></p>	<p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>External witnessing of abuse and neglect</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Security</p> <p>Motivation – friend</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Spark</p>
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<p>Tom: <i>Which at the time was a decision I didn't really understand and part of me still doesn't</i> but in any case, you know that was what we were told. We were told "Come back erm you know maybe when you've had whatever children you want to have and, you know let's say your youngest is six months old." So, we took that literally and it's exactly what we did, erm and in quite quick succession after that, we got pregnant, erm we had two children within the space of 21 months, And when the youngest was six months old, we went straight back to them. And you know we spoke to a different person at the end of the enquiry line, and they said, "All right yeah maybe when your youngest is 18 months." [((Laughing))]</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay. Yeah ((Laughing))]</p> <p>Tom: <i>"No, you told us six months. We've done what you told us. We could phone up an independent fostering agency and they'd snap us up immediately, we don't want to do that. We want to come to you.</i> So, can you at least come out and meet us?"</p> <p>Lisa: Is, can I just ask, Is there a reason why you chose to work for the local authority rather than an IFA?</p> <p>Tom: At the time, I don't think we knew better. Erm when I say better, I don't think it is better by the way. But at the time we didn't know differently [and]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: but also, we did know, there were other fostering services that (.) would take us so I'm not sure I knew what the difference between them all was, but I certainly knew <i>that [local authority] sounded like the most local and somehow it felt like what you're supposed to do.</i> I'm not really I can't remember well enough to be sure.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [But] erm anyway <i>they agreed to come out and do an initial visit and that became an assessment.</i> And erm you know (.) the erm assessment was very positive, <i>but it was very much focused on my wife,</i></p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>Often say 18 months</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Subjective interpretation</p> <p>Fight</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Not for profit</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Public service</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Assessment</p>
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<p><i>more than me, there were assessment visits that were booked for when I was out at work and the assessment itself was very much weighted to my wife. She was erm... You know the language was main carer. She was the main carer throughout the assessment. It wasn't carer one carer two. It was main carer erm so yeah, it was very, it was sort of implied that they expected my wife to be the one (.) who did most the stuff and to be fair that was going to be true, like she was going to be the main carer, because that's how it was from a birth children. But at the same time, like I became the one that was much more heavily involved in all of the meetings and all of the transport for family time and things like that. So, from a fostering services perspective, it was me who they saw all the time, you know. We were both there for supervisions, but (.) well when they were scheduled when I wasn't at work, but it was me, that was doing all of the children in care reviews and the PEP meetings and all those sorts of things. And I probably should have mentioned by the way that in between erm the first time we approached the local authority and the second time we approached them. I deliberately we'd been quite intentional career wise in sort of shifting my focus to be more relevant. So, I'd become a a specialist in family safeguarding erm not child protection but when I say family safeguarding, I mean like domestic abuse, honour-based violence erm I'd done a secondment to a local authority children services team, so I'd done, it was called the Troubled Families Initiative.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Oh yes, I remember that, yeah, yeah.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11:05 minutes</p> <p>Tom: [()], So I'd become a key worker for families that needed early help you know, whilst being a police officer (.) erm (.) I'd done a stint in the public protection unit. So that's kind of like working with (.) erm prolific offenders who are erm released let's say they're on probation and they need</p>	<p>Focus on wife <u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>Caring assumption based on gender. <u>Practitioner voice</u> Skills not utilised/ role under investigated</p> <p>Care giving <u>Challenge voice</u> 'Professional parent'</p> <p>Supervision – Not recognising need for this <u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u> Job role – intentional choices <u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p>
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<p>support to erm (.) you know stay out of trouble, you know. So, I was kind of much more involved in the preventative, early help, family side of policing erm you know and that (.) clearly impacted on my motivations even more because I was even more heavily involved in removing children in emergency situations like in between those two times so erm yeah (.) that was (.) impacting on my motivations, I suppose. Erm and then anyway very quickly after we were approved, which would have been October 2013, erm two weeks later we got a phone call saying, "Can you take this seven-year-old?" Who I'll call K.</p>	<p>Impact</p> <p>Child moves in</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [And] basically, the story was that K had entered care at the age of erm three. He'd gone immediately to an emergency placement where he'd have remained ever since which had been four years. Erm and then he had erm his... a foster mother and a foster father, Christian family, involved in church, erm but the foster mother had quite suddenly been diagnosed with breast cancer and within a space of months was dead.</p>	<p>Bereavement/Grief</p>
<p>Lisa: [Okay, gosh]</p> <p>Tom: [And so,] we were taking him, you know, the suggestion was that we would take him directly from that family. ((Clears throat)) And our immediate response was "No he needs a permanent family. This is our first child; you know first attempt at fostering we don't know how this is going to go. We can't offer him permanence (.) erm you should find a family that can offer him permanence." And they sort of you know laughed back at us as if that's something they can do. ((Laughing))</p>	<p>Aspirational – matching <u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: And said "No, no, no like we need a bed today. Like can you be that bed today? And can you bridge this gap? And we will look for a permanent family for him." So, we were like, "Yeah, we can do that. Of course, we can do that." ((Laughing)). So, so you</p>	<p><u>Bridging placement</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p>

<p>know we had a little introduction with him, erm and he, he has a significant learning disability. But when you first meet him, this isn't obvious at all. So, we sat down and we're just having erm a bit of a play with him. Thinking what they talk about, you know, learning needs. I can't see any of that. I said, "K how old are you chum?" And he sort of counted wrongly on his fingers and then announced that he was three years old as a seven-year-old.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay.]</p> <p>Tom: [And] we're like okay that's the disability I see it now. ((Intake of breath)) So, anyway he became a member of our erm (.) family ((Intake of breath)) and the rest is history. He's still with us today. He he's gonna turn 18 erm next year (.) and erm so we've had him for coming up to 10 years now (.) ((Intake of breath)) but erm the three months after he arrived in our family, erm we discovered something very unexpectedly because we, I remember, I mentioned the police officer that had started fostering.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah... you did]</p> <p>Tom: [And] so, as a thank you to him and his wife for kind of like inspiring us to get on with doing it, we took them out for a meal and erm (.) during that meal, we showed a photo of the child (.) and his wife like teared up. And she explained the story, which is that erm the reason they'd become foster carers, was because she'd been working in a erm a nursery or some sort of childcare setting when erm social workers had come and said, "Don't release that child. We're going to (.) be taking him away at the end of the day." And it turns out it was the same child.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15.02 minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Wow, okay.]</p> <p>Tom: [and so] they had been inspired to foster by K essentially and then, K had gone into this family for a few years where he'd been very well looked after but sadly, the female carer died. And during that time, we were going through our process of sort</p>	<p>SEND</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u> Member of family</p> <p>Full circle</p>
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<p>of, you know having children and being ready to apply. And then, of course, the moment that the the foster mother dies, he he comes to us erm and so, <i>it felt very much like a circle and sort of reinforced for us, the sense that this wasn't just something we wanted to do. This was a calling, you know, from a religious sense.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Aha]</p> <p>Tom: [erm ((Intake of breath))] so erm yeah, that was our first child ((smiling)) and you know we just sort of kept going from there really. Erm (.) in 2014, the April of 2014, I left the police (.) in order to become a social worker.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay.]</p> <p>Tom: [and] I had (.) erm I'd already been erm like sitting on fostering panels as a police officer since just before we started fostering. Erm so, I was sort of involved with multiple fostering agencies on a fostering panel level and hearing lots of different stories and I just kind of felt more drawn to that than I did to policing anymore. Also, there was talk of me becoming ill health retired...because have erm fibromyalgia.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mmh]</p> <p>Tom: which was impacting on police work in a way that it wouldn't really impact on social work.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [So], I went through an ill health retirement process, but at the last moment they decided I was ill enough but not permanently enough. So, they weren't gonna, weren't you know going to retire me off, but by then, I'd applied to I'd apply to study social work. So, I decided to carry on and do that. so, I left the police to qualify as a social worker which I did over four years, part-time whilst fostering. ((Intake of breath)) erm (.) and I should also mention that two years after we were first approved, we decided to transfer from the local authority within which we live to a neighbouring local authority for fostering erm and the reason we gave at the time was that because (.) because of the county, I live in being the</p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Confirmation</p> <p>Role – change in career</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u> Resolution</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose Voice</u> Social worker</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Transfer</p>
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<p>most obvious place for me to work as [a social worker.]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yes. Yeah. Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: <i>We wanted to avoid conflict of interest.</i> That was the reason <i>we gave.</i> The true reason was that <i>we didn't know</i> how without sounding racist to (.) point out to the fostering service, that <i>our social worker didn't speak English well enough (.) to communicate with us,</i> effectively and that led to all sorts of like, <i>you know we had an annual review written about us and (.) I read it with my panel member perspective thinking this sounds awful. It was just because we hadn't been understood at all by our social worker. So, she'd written things that just weren't right about us and written them in a way in which (.) you know perhaps she didn't mean it to sound erm negative, but it really did. and erm yeah, there was just this erm (.) you know blatant language barrier, but we didn't, we didn't know how to communicate that without sounding like we were the ones with the problem.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [So], it was sort of like a cop-out really and <i>we you know</i> it was a really useless reason to transfer but <i>we did</i> and <i>you know we've remained with the other local authority ever since and been very very happy</i> ((Intake of breath)) erm (.) and of course, once <i>we arrived</i> in that new local authority, <i>we took, we transferred with the child that we already had in placement</i> from the first local authority but naturally, the second local authority wanted to place a child with us, and <i>we were very much up for that ((nodding))</i> erm so child number two, <i>we had</i> for erm six months and <i>he was a five-year-old M</i> erm and <i>he erm eventually went</i> back to live with erm a a grandparent.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [Erm] <i>so erm you know we joke in our family that "he was the one that got away" because he's the only child that's ever arrived and then left.</i></p>	<p><i>Practitioner voice</i></p> <p><i>Challenge voice</i></p> <p><i>Practitioner voice</i> <i>Challenge voice</i> Perception of others – no control of what people write <i>Challenge voice</i></p> <p><i>Purpose voice</i></p> <p><i>Practitioner voice</i></p> <p><i>Purpose voice</i> Child moves in – reunification</p> <p><i>Joking voice</i> View of family – permanence</p>
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<p><i>Everybody else arrived and then got stuck with us.</i> ((Smiling))</p> <p>Lisa: How did it feel erm doing the reintegration back to family?</p> <p>Tom: The thing is the complicating factor was that she was <i>believed to be the paternal grandmother at the beginning of the process. But then it was established that the father wasn't the father (.) through DNA.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [But] she had continued, she'd always had that role and the father, the reported father had always had the role of father. So, the family decided that despite the DNA proving otherwise they would continue to operate (.) as though he was the father and she was the maternal grandmother. And the thing is that her circumstances (.) <i>It was a very borderline assessment (.) of her (.) It was not guaranteed that this was gonna go well.</i> It was, it was clearly something of an experiment. <i>That was not comfortable [and]</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: she lived in extreme poverty and the (.) erm (.) ((turning away)) the sort of like, we knew that his <i>erm (.) opportunities would be much more limited with her than they had been with us. And yet at the same time we did recognise it was family.</i> [And]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20.14 minutes</p> <p>Tom: We were able to sell it to him incredibly positively. You know cried a lot you know when we were <i>building up to it but</i> (.) erm another factor was that in the case of this particular child, his the the (.) he presented <i>as having an extreme issue with attachment.</i> He was not using emotions to communicate at all. He was a very, very flat child, who never cried and never laughed. And you know <i>it was therefore quite challenging to bond with him. (.)</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Hmm]</p>	<p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>Concern – access to opportunities and experiences limited. Social mobility <u>Challenge voice</u> Family</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u> Emotional labour</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Attachment</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u> Bonding</p>
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Tom: [so], <i>as much as we loved him, erm totally and utterly</i> like it did occur to me that this is a woman who has since birth had a very good bond with him.	<u>Purpose voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah.]	
Tom: [and] <i>therefore, something about the whole scenario felt right</i>	Resolution
Lisa: [OK]	
Tom: [You know] So erm (.) So <i>he went</i> back to live with her, and <i>we wanted to maintain contact and she wanted to forget that he'd ever been in foster care.</i> And <i>we've essentially not had any communication since the day he was you know erm transferred to her care erm despite, you know kind of our efforts erm so that's sad.</i> Erm but <i>we have</i> a, <i>you know</i> we gave him erm a photo album of his time with us. And <i>we kept</i> a copy. So, our children,	Maintaining links not always wanted
Lisa: [Yes.]	<u>Challenge voice</u>
Tom: [who] <i>will remember vaguely growing up with him.</i> Erm <i>they they have</i> something to <i>you know</i> remember that time by <i>i suppose.</i> ((Intake of breath)) (.) And then erm after that, <i>we took on erm our third erm child</i> ((smiling)) and <i>she is</i> R, and <i>she was i think</i> nine ((looking away)). No, <i>she must</i> have been 10. <i>i think</i> the maths would be better if <i>she was</i> 10. Erm anyway <i>she came</i> to us erm <i>having only been in care for 18 months but had this constant change of placement.</i> <i>She'd had like seven main placements plus respite placements in that 18 months.</i> So erm <i>i went</i> to collect her, it was about an hour and a half drive from where <i>she was.</i> And as <i>i was</i> driving back, <i>she said,</i> erm " <i>i love being in foster care.</i> " <i>i said,</i> "Why is that?" <i>She says,</i> " <i>get to move house all the time.</i> "	Impact on birth children
Lisa: [Oh gosh, right ok]	Child moves in
Tom: [And] <i>i just</i> said, "Not any more love, not anymore." And erm (.) <i>she didn't accept</i> that, <i>you know</i> lite[rally] three months later <i>she was</i> literally packing her bags saying, "Can you let my social worker <i>i'm ready</i> to go." <i>We'd had</i> a good day. <i>She was</i> just like, "It's time now. This is, <i>i do</i> my stint	<u>Practitioner voice</u> Multiple moves
	Experience influenced view
	'Honeymoon period'
	Resolution
	Uncertainty whether to trust

and then I go , and I have something new.” Erm and so, <i>it took her many, many years to (.) accept that this was her permanent home.</i>	<u>Purpose voice</u>
Lisa: [Mmm]	
Tom: [and] erm she actually happened to arrive on K's, four-year anniversary of arriving.	
Lisa: [OK]	
Tom: [So], <i>every year, when we go out for a meal on that date, that saves us a meal out every year because they're on the same date ((smiling)), but he's coming up to 10 years and she's coming up to six and so erm yeah (.), I mean, she was an incredibly challenging young person. And <i>there were absolutely times where we talked about giving up</i> erm I (.) like <i>going back to that whole kind of faith thing.</i></i>	<u>Joking voice</u> Celebration Challenging <u>Challenge voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah.]	<u>Purpose voice</u>
Tom: <i>[For me] marriage is a 100% lifelong commitment. Like (.) separating is not a (.)</i>	Commitment <u>Purpose voice</u>
Lisa: [option]	
Tom: <i>[consideration] for me in a marriage and I fe(e)l that's the level of commitment I fee when I commit to permanence of a child. It's like, (.) you know, you don't (.) you don't stop. Now don't get me wrong because professionally I know there are circumstances where it's right for people to stop (.)</i> <i>(((nodding)))</i>	<u>Purpose voice</u> Personal vs professional values - conflicting <u>Practitioner voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah.]	
Tom: <i>right for the child (.) for people to stop ((nodding)). I get it placements can break down. But (.) for me like the difficulty was I was having to communicate with the fostering service, that things were going badly wrong, and we needed help, (.) but they were sort of like placement planning in parallel to supporting us and I had to say to them, “Stop it? Like no...”</i>	<u>Practitioner voice</u> <u>Challenge voice</u> System Lack of control and agency
Lisa: [Yeah.]	
Tom: <i>[“that's] not the right thing to be doing here. You're sending her and us the wrong message. We are committed. (.) We just need help to get past this hump and we're gonna carry on.” And that is what</i>	<u>Challenge voice</u> Committed <u>Purpose voice</u>

<p><i>happened, erm you know we've carried on and things are much much more settled with [()]</i></p> <p>Lisa: [What] help did they put in place?</p> <p>Tom: So, to have a service within the local authority called (name of service) and I can't remember all of the letters, but it includes rehabilitation and as in rehabilitation home [and]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [and erm] sort of like emergency support and placement breakdown (.) placement stability. ((Intake of breath)) So, it was kind of like a crisis team within fostering that come into, (.) you know swoop in and try and fix things ((Intake of breath)). Erm and so, they did that, which was useful. Erm <i>there was some opportunity for her to have some therapeutic one-to-one time with a social worker, talking about her life story and talking about, you know (.) her (.) home with us. Erm so, you know that was part of it, but partly it was just time. Just the longer</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [the] time went on, the more she learned, we really were gonna stick it out. Erm it's like, over the years, both K and R have said to me, (.) erm (.) "Can you tell my social worker I want to move house" and I'm like, "Sure of course, I'll text him right now, but just to be clear, you are stuck with us." ((Laughing)). Like it's (.) at times it's whether you like it or not, this is your family. We are it, where the grass isn't always greener, we love you, we are committed to the long haul and just because you said to your social worker, you want to move house, it doesn't mean they're going to whip you out."</p> <p>Lisa: [Mm]</p> <p>Tom: [and] I remember that in that moment of crisis with R erm one of the team managers told me off because I'd said to R, like "You live with us unconditionally right". And the manager had said to me, "But she's going to, she's going to think now she can behave how she likes and you're not gonna</p>	<p>Placement stability support received.</p> <p>Fix it!!!</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Time</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Role of child social worker</p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p>Consistent message</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Unconditional love and positive regard</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Difference in perspective</p>
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<p>send her away. So, she's gonna behave really badly." said, "No, she's gonna know she's secure. And she's stable."</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [And] (.) so she's gonna, (.) you know she's gonna go from that place of secure base (.) . Erm and so I found that really interesting because even managers in the fostering service were encouraging us (.) to sort of (.) almost threaten a child with (.) having to move house, if they carry on behaving (.) badly (.) No ((Smiling)). That wasn't, that wasn't where we were at ((Intake of breath)). It didn't you know fit with what we were about as foster carers I suppose.</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u> Confidence in knowledge base and personal values as foster carers</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa [Yeah]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">26:38 minutes</p>	
<p>Tom: [Erm] and then the final child, we erm I say final, we'll, we'll, she won't be final, [but the]</p>	<p><u>Joking voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yes, for now]</p>	
<p>Tom: The most recent child that we ever took on ((Laughing)) was a baby aged five months and erm and basically the fostering service had (.) they knew there were several children coming into care in the following week, several babies coming into care in the following week and I'd always been very clear not interested in babies. Not my thing. I'd rather go kind of like (.) primary school age plus but I'm also somebody that responds to a need.</p>	<p>New child – Baby</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u> Not preferred age range - Need of service</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p>	
<p>Tom: [and] the need was babies. My wife had erm a part-time job at church at the time and it would have been very difficult to do that with a baby. But (.) you know (.) we were foster carers first and she had always wanted to foster a baby, so we said, "Yeah go on then, we'll consider a baby." And then I was in [place name] erm being interviewed for a position as a vice chair of a (.) permanence panel. No, as a chair of a permanence panel and while I'm waiting for this interview, (.) I get this phone call saying, "We've got this baby, she's five months old erm she's been in hospital for most of her life. She</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Hospital</p>

<p>has Down's syndrome." And I said, "I'll phone my wife but yeah", ((nodding)). So, I phoned my wife, we have what was literally a one-minute conversation, "five months old. Down's syndrome and her name is J"[[Discussion of name removed]]. So, erm anyway we said yes, and within, within two and a half hours, I was at hospital, you know (.) an hour and a half away from [place name] erm (.) erm collecting this baby who, when I arrived was covered in tubes and I was kind of like I arrived and said to the hospital, (.) "I'm here to collect this child, I'm the foster carer" and they pointed me into a room, and I go into room. <u>And there's just this baby and me and it's kind of like "What do I do now like, hello." [((Laughing))].</u></p> <p>Lisa: [Wow.]</p> <p>Tom: Very weird (.) ((Intake of breath)) experience because she had so many tubes attached, I didn't know what I could touch ((Intake of breath)) and all that kind of thing. Anyway, we take this baby home and erm within two months, we erm discover that she's in chronic cardiac failure and is slowly deteriorating and essentially, on a trajectory towards death and erm and, you know, erm I spent (.) I mean if you add up the amount of time, I've spent in hospital with her in total, it'll be something like six to nine months [and]</p> <p>Lisa: [Ok]</p> <p>Tom: [over the years] <u>but in her early time with us, it was at least 50% of the time for the first six months that I was in hospital with her which, of course, impacted on my work</u> you know because I was not able to do social work erm (.) whilst that was all going on. So erm yeah, her heart was a massive problem, and her breathing was a massive problem, but the heart was the biggest problem. So, at nine months old, she had surgery at [Hospital] and they erm fixed a number of holes, in her heart. And of course, during all of that time in hospital, particularly [Hospital], I was staying there</p>	<p>Response – immediate</p> <p>Overwhelming</p> <p>Joking voice</p> <p>Challenge voice</p> <p>Heart condition</p> <p>Challenge voice</p> <p>Hospital stays – impacting work</p>
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<p>like locally to the hospital. They let me stay in a house nearby. Erm with the birth father.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay.]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">30:15 minutes</p> <p>Tom: [So] <i>was spending, I think we did something like three and a half weeks solid at [Hospital]. And during that time, it was 14 hours a day that he and I would spend together at the bedside.</i> Then, <i>we'd walk</i> across [place name] streets, back to the home, <i>we were</i> staying in, via somewhere to get food, so <i>we'd eat together and then (.) briefly sleep, and then repeat</i> and <i>we did</i> that. Anyway, one night <i>they phoned</i> us up at 4am and said, "It's time to say goodbye." So, <i>he and I rushed</i> into (.) the hospital and erm [.] <i>we sort of met</i> a nurse in a lift. And erm <i>she said, "Oh you're the dads, aren't you?"</i> <i>[[Laughing]] "Well okay, yeah we'll go with that."</i> <i>Now is not the moment to sort of explain this scenario.</i> <i>[[Laughing]]</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [So erm] <i>she says, "Oh, she made it."</i> And <i>I said, "How close was it?"</i> <i>She says, "It don't get closer."</i> <i>She'd had a</i> respiratory arrest erm (.) because her lungs (.) the the erm bronchus to her lungs had both collapse at the same time, <i>she couldn't breathe.</i> <i>They'd had a</i> big emergency call out and a team of 15 had managed to stabilize her.</p> <p>Lisa: [[()]]</p> <p>Tom: [Eventually] and about an hour and a half later <i>they let</i> us in to see her and <i>she was</i> all tubed up and it looked awful. But long story short, that was the turning point and things have got better and better and better ever since with her <i>[[Intake of breath]]</i>. So, <i>when she got to a couple of years old, the local authority at that point were looking for her permanence option and they were talking of adoption.</i> <i>((Turning away)) Erm we never planned to be adopters</i> and</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [and] erm <i>we didn't really want to be adopters, partly because erm (.) in terms of like ideology, I'm</i></p>	<p>Importance of birth family</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Support for each other.</p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Adoption <u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u> Ideology – connection to birth family</p>
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<p>more (.) keen on the Australian style of system where erm (.) they don't really do what the Daily Mail would call 'forced adoption' in Australia ((Smiling)), you know erm it's a different system of permanence that's preferred there. And I don't much like the fact that in adoption, you sever, the relationship with the birth family entirely.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mm]</p> <p>Tom: [Erm] in any event, you know, that's what the local authority were looking for, (.) for J, for all the right reasons. I needed permanence and, erm you know the birth family weren't able to offer the care that she needed, and they were quite accepting of that. So erm (.) they started looking at adoption. They asked us, if we'd be interested in adopting her and we sort of said, "No, you know that's not (.) we're not interested in this business of severing the relationship", and then, as weeks, and months went by, we sort of realised but actually, we don't have to do that, like there's such thing as open adoption. So, we went back to the local authority and said, "Actually (.) on the condition that you allow us to do it openly (.) we will put ourselves forward for adoption." And of course, they bit our hands off and the birth family were very excited about the whole thing.</p> <p>Lisa: [Well you'd developed a relationship] with the dad anyway.</p> <p>Tom: [Exactly, exactly] Not just the dad, like I knew the mum very well .</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Tom: [So] fast forward to today. She's five years old, erm (.) and I think (.) it's been two or three years since the adoption went through erm two years, two years since the adoption went through and erm (.) ((looking away)) sorry in October, it'll be three years since the, the anniversary of the adoption [and]</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Tom: [and erm] we see her birth parents, they are separated so we see them separately, but we see</p>	<p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Open adoption</p> <p>Maintain contact</p>
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<p><i>her birth parents, probably erm four to six times a year each.</i> She has erm (.) eight siblings within the birth family and only two of those do we not see erm because they now erm live with erm (.) they are half siblings, so they live with a parent who you know isn't maintaining that relationship with us. So (.) she is being raised to understand that she has two mums and two dads and very controversial, we didn't change her surname.</p> <p>Lisa: [((())]</p> <p>Tom: [And] the reason for that was because erm the birth parents, (.) the birth mother even though she doesn't have the surname, was very keen that the surname was kept. And we just didn't care because surnames don't mean anything to us.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [Because] actually we have two permanent children (.) two children permanently placed with us with a different surname.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [and] what we decided was, if we were to (.) change her surname (.), the message it would send them is that the surname makes you more of the family than they are. And legally, she is more in the family than they are. But we don't need to reinforce that with a (.) name change that would send more of a message to them than it would to her, because let's be clear, you know, J has Down's syndrome. This business of the (.) choice of what surname, she uses. Number one if in the future she wants to use our surname, of course we won't stop her. But actually, I think keeping the birth surname erm (.) ((Looking up)) tells her her own story better because it demonstrates the history and she's still gonna be in relationship with her birth father. So that made sense and also, I'm not being funny but it's much easier to spell than our surname ((Smiling)). And we just thought we'd do her a favour and not give her an extra task to learn how to spell our surname so that she could erm spell her own name earlier ((Intake of breath)) I suppose</p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u> Family name</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u> Difference in legitimacy between birth, adopted, and fostered children. <u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u> Life story</p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p>
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<p>((Intake of breath)). And so that's five children, we currently have with us two birth children, two permanently fostered, and one now adopted and <u>that's what we like to call round one.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;">35.34 minutes</p>	
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [and] <u>when some of the individuals in this family, turn 18 erm we'll have round two erm and that's kind of like the plan, (.) but I think erm in terms of ongoing motivations erm (.) my job, I obviously work with foster children and foster carers and I understand the level of need nationally for placements and (.) erm the shortage and all of that and also am acutely aware of how often children move around. So that's <u>that's led to me and my wife sort of (.) accidentally specialising in what we would call the long-term care of hard to place.</u></u></p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>Plan to continue fostering</p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Professional gaze</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Specialism</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [So], we, we're quite, we have been (.) relatively intentional that we will (.) try and <u>offer children who (.) have had a poor experience of foster care, stability.</u> (.) But interestingly like for me, (.) when I think about erm (.) <u>my motivations for wanting to foster in the first place, that was really coming from a place of wanting to rescue.</u> [Right]</p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>Rescue</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [And] <u>actually, it's very, very hard to think that about a child who's been with you for 10 years, and like if I, if I think about why I'm motivated to carry on offering permanence to K and R (.) I don't have an answer for that. I don't think I am that motivated like in any sort of different way to the same way, in which I'm motivated to carry on looking after my birth children.</u></p>	<p>Questioning ongoing motivation</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p>No differences</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [With] my birth children, no one asks you that, like they might say, "Why did you want to have children?" But they don't ever say, "Why do you still want to have children?" (.) and sometimes you might not still what the children based on whether you've had a bad day [((Laughing))]</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p>

Lisa: [Yeah] ((Laughing))	
Tom: [But] <i>the fact is (.) it doesn't occur to you that you could stop.</i>	<u>Challenge voice</u>
Lisa: [No]	
Tom: [And] and <i>you almost don't need an ongoing motivation. You know you need motivation for getting up and doing a good job as a parent, but you don't need motivation for keeping them because they are, they are in your family</i> and that's just what it is. And so (.) for me, <i>there's always been a bit of a conflict</i> because (.) <i>I'm motivated to do the rescuing bit</i> (.) So, <i>I'm excited</i> about the prospect of round two erm (.) <i>but that doesn't change the fact that I'm committed to round one.</i>	<u>Purpose voice</u> Family <u>Challenge voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah]	<u>Purpose voice</u>
Tom: [And] I'm the one that says to my wife <i>"Do you think we could do one more?"</i> and <i>she'll go "No. ((we can't do)) one more."</i> ((Laughing))	<u>Practitioner voice</u> <u>Joking voice</u>
Lisa: ((Laughing))	
Tom: (And) so <i>she's always</i> sort of, kept us grounded. And <i>she's very</i> much erm, her motivations. <i>She is only committed to the ones we have got. She's not committed to the task of fostering. She's not committed to going again, she's up for it, as a couple that's what we intend to do (.), and it's become a lifestyle and something that (.) is very positive.</i> But for her, the motivation to go, again, won't come until, really come until <i>she sees</i> the profile of a child who needs looking after. And then <i>she'll become</i> maternal and (.) and desperate to, <i>you know</i> (.) offer that child what <i>they need</i> and <i>the moment they arrive in our house we both know that's it now, unless there's a reason not why it's in their best interest to go somewhere else, then we're committed.</i> So <i>I think</i> in that sense, mine and my wife's motivations are very different because (.) erm <i>I'm always, I'm always</i> ((Looking up)) <i>looking at how we can expand what we do as a family</i> and it's like, if <i>you imagine</i> when I came to live with us erm (.) <i>at that point, there was a lot of talk in the local authority about children who</i>	<u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Challenge voice</u> Value - Care <u>Practitioner voice</u> 'Psychological pregnancy' – claiming behaviours <u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Practitioner voice</u>

<p><i>foster? And I struggled with this because okay, yeah, my birth children foster. I understand that.</i> ((Nodding))</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [But] <i>what I struggled with (.) was that R and K had been with us for so long at that point, they were so embedded in our family and from their perspective, what they were offering J was exactly the same as what the birth children were.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Tom: [So], <i>I have this kind of conflict because actually I think that foster children can foster (.) other children that join the family. And so, for me, it's almost difficult to view children (.) that have been with us so long as erm (.)</i> ((Looking away)) <i>I mean, I understand fostering very much. I understand they are foster children, but I don't, if I think about like my feelings, towards the five children in our house, there's no difference in those feelings. I can't. I know some people (.) think that it's different with birth children. It is not different for me. Legally it is different, but emotionally, it's not different.</i> Erm that's particularly true when, of course, you've taken on a foster child that has become adopted. Erm (.) like <i>my love for J (.) is not distinguishably different (.) from the birth children</i> erm but also, <i>the day that the adoption went through, was an anti-climactic day because nothing happened, nothing changed. We put a post on Facebook announcing it, but we put her to bed like usual, and she had a breakfast like usual. [You know]</i> ((Laughing))</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u> Role of birth children in fostering role</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u> Role of foster children in fostering role</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u> Conflict <u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Practitioner voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Practitioner voice</u> <u>Purpose voice</u> Emotionality – family What constitutes family?</p> <p><u>Purpose voice</u></p> <p><u>Joking voice</u></p> <p>Nothing changed after adoption</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">40:31 minutes</p> <p>Tom: [Yeah] (.) and so erm (.) ((Breath out)) <i>I think, I think that's kind of like where we're at as a family. I'm definitely the driver still to keep going with fostering</i> erm <i>I'm still the one that goes to all the meetings, I'm still the one that does all the transport for family time. I'm still the one that sort</i></p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Purpose – driver</u> Specific roles – partnership <u>Practitioner voice</u></p>

<p><i>of champions the relationships with all of the birth families</i> and my wife is still the one (.) who offers the majority of the day-to-day care in the house erm and erm (.) that partnership works well for us as a family (.) but yeah, (.) I think consistently over the years, I have been considered by the fostering service to be (.) somehow less critical and like for example, if we were having supervision with our social worker, if I couldn't make a date we would carry on and hold the visit. If my wife couldn't make the date, we would not carry on and hold the visit.</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u> <u>Importance?</u> <u>Practitioner voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah], that's different. Tom: [Yeah], <i>but actually we're very equal. We do different things. She does more of the day-to-day care and I do more of the (.) erm like if there's a crisis, if a child has had a burst of emotion because of something in their birth family, I'm the one they will come to in that scenario.</i> (.) so(.) in that sense, we are equally involved. I'm not just a supporter of my wife. [You know]</p>	<p><u>Challenge voice</u> <u>Practitioner voice</u></p> <p>Emotional containment</p> <p>EQUAL <u>Challenge voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [No] Tom: We are equally involved in engaged in fostering, but erm (.) yeah, <i>my wife is definitely viewed as being (.) still the main carer.</i> Out of the pair of us. So, I think that is my story.</p>	<p><u>Purpose voice</u> <u>Challenge voice</u> Wife seen as main carer</p>
<p>Lisa: That is really interesting. Thank you. Anything else you wanted to say or is that everything? Tom: I can't think of anything else. I think (.) I've been involved professionally in trainings around men, who foster.</p>	<p><u>Practitioner voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah] Tom: [and so] <i>this business of making sure that erm men (.) are heard in fostering (.) households is something that's definitely important to me on a personal level</i> ((Nodding)). Erm and as a fostering assessor (.) I'm always really clear in an assessment that it should be an equal presentation of both members erm of the couple and erm (.) like sometimes I come across assessments, where people have got the impression that it will be okay (.) for the female applicant to do more of the visits</p>	<p>Professional view <u>Challenge voice</u></p> <p>Undertakes assessments <u>Practitioner voice</u> Equal</p> <p><u>Challenge voice</u></p>

than the male applicant. And I sort of say “No, I’m gonna need to see each of you individually for one of the visits. So, I have visit with one of you and one visit with just the other of you. But otherwise, I do expect that you’re both there throughout. If either of you can’t make a visit, we might carry on and do the assessment work anyway, but that’s not geared towards you know one gender over another”. Erm I’d like to think that in my assessments that I produce, I’m quite deliberate, and intentional about presenting, both sides of that and because I work in connected persons fostering at the moment, I get a lot of (.) people who have been thrown into it and “Oh my partner’s supporting me to look after my grandchild.” “No. that don’t work for me, you’re both starting up to foster care” ((Laughing)). So (.) yeah, even if where there’s a dynamic within an applicant’s couple relationship (.) where they think that one of them is gonna primarily do this and the other is just going to support. I’m like, “No, that’s not the reality of what you’re signing up for. The reality of what you’re signing up for is that you are both becoming approved foster carers is for this child, you are both erm required to meet a standard, and you are both required to commit to caring permanently together, for this child.” And yeah, things go wrong in relationships, we all know that. But as a starting point for an assessment, that’s where I always put things.

Lisa: Thank you very much, I'll stop recording.

44.31 minutes

Practitioner voice

Intentionality

Practitioner voice

Joking voice

Practitioner voice

Practitioner voice

8.8.3. Tom's voice poem

I	You	She/He	We	They
I was				
I had two				
		She was		
I kind				
I think				
I would				
I remember				
		She had to		
		She'd bought		
I didn't know				
I was				
				They moved
			We took	
I guess				
I think				
	You know			
I'd had some				
I was not				
I was				
			We both	
	You know			
			We'd both	
I suppose				
			We were	
			We were	
			We thought	
			We wanted	

	She wanted	We [kind of] had it We were We would We got
I was		
	She was	We just We intended
	You know	
I suppose		
I was		
I had joined		
	You see	
I would		
I was		
	You know	
I was		
I say		
I think		
I suppose		
I got		We managed
	You in	We're still We just
I say		
I was		
	She was	We managed

We ought

We
[deliberately]
waited
We

He taken

You know

You know

We waiting

I went

I mean

I want

I used

I shared

I'd be

I'd be

We were

He lunged

He grabbed

I used

You know

I was

I had access

He tries

I flattened

I drag

I'm not sure

I'm not sure

I could

I left

I needed

I think

I don't know
what we're
waiting for

I didn't
understand

You know

You know

You've had

You want

You know

You told

We should

We
approached
We want

They said

We shared

We planned

They said

We were

We were

We took

We did

We got

We had two

We went

We spoke

They said

We've done

We could

They'd snap

We don't want

		We want	
	You at least		
I don't think			
		We knew	
I say			
I don't think			
		We didn't know We did know	
I'm not sure			
I knew			
I certainly knew I'm not really			
I can't remember			They agreed
I was			
	She was		
	She was		
			They expected
	She was		
I became			
	You know		
		We were	
			They were
I wasn't at			
I probably			
		We approached We approached	
I delib[erately]			
		We'd been quite	

I'd become

I say

I mean

I'd done

I'd done

I'd become

I'd done

They're on

They need

You know

I was

You know

I was

I suppose

We were

We got

I'll call

He'd gone

He'd have

remained

He had

We were

We would

He needs

You know

We don't know

We can't offer

You should

They [sort of

you know]

laughed

They can

			We need
			We will
		We were	
		We can	
		We can	
	You know		
		We had	
		He has	
	You first		
		We sat	
		We're just	
	You know		
I can't see			
I said			
		He [sort of]	
		counted	
		He was	
			We're like okay
I see			
		He became	
		He's still	
		he's gonna	
			We've had him
		He arrived	
			We discovered
			We
I remember			
I mentioned			
			We took
			We showed
		She explained	

			They'd become
		She'd been	
			They had
		He'd been	
			We were
	You know		
		He	
		He comes	
			We wanted
	You know		
	You know		
			We just
I left			
I had			
I'd already			
			We started
I was			
I just			
I did			
I have			
I went			
			They decided
I was			
			They weren't gonna
	You know		
I'd applied			
I'd apply			
I decided			
I left			
I did			

I should

We were
We decided
We live
We gave

I live

We wanted
We gave
We didn't
know

You know

We had

I read

We hadn't
been
understood

She'd written

You know

She didn't
mean

You know

We didn't
We didn't
know
We were
We

You know

We did

You know

We've
remained
We arrived
We took
We transferred

			We already had We were We had
		He was	
		He [erm eventually] went	
	You know		
			We joke
		He was	
		He's the	
		She was	
		She had	
		She's always	
			They would
		He was	
		She was	
		She lived	
			We knew
			They had
			We did
			We were
	You know		
I cried			We were
		He presented	
		He was not using He was	
	You know		
			We loved
		He went	

			We wanted
		She wanted	
		He'd ever	
			We've essentially
		He was	
	You know		
	You know		
			We have
	You know		
			We kept
			They
			They have
	You know		
I suppose			
			We took
		She is	
		She was	
I think			
		She must	
I think			
		She was	
		She came	
		She'd had	
I went			
		She was	
I was			
		She said	
		I love	
I said			
		She says	

		I get	
I just		She didn't accept	
	You know	She was	
		I'm ready	
			We'd had
		She was	
		I do	
		I go	
		I have something	
		She [actually] happened	
			We go
			They're on
		He's coming	
		She's coming	
I mean			
		She was	
			We talked
I fe(el)			
I feel			
I commit			
	You know		
	You don't		
	You don't stop		
I know			
I get it			
I was			
			We needed

			They were
I had to			
	You're sending		
		We are	
		We just	
	You know		
		We've carried	
I can't remember			
	You know		
			They did
	You know		
	You know		
		She learned	
			We [really] were
		I want	
I'm like			
I'll text			
		We are	
		We love	
		We are	
	You		
	You said		
	You want		
			They're going
	You out		
I remember			
I'd said			
	You live		
		She's going	
		She's going	

		She can	
		She likes	
		She's gonna	
I said			
		She's gonna	
		She's secure	
		She's stable	
		She's gonna	
	You know		
		She's gonna	
I found			
			They carry
		We were	
	You know		
		We were	
I suppose			
		We	
I say			
		We'll	
		We'll	
		She wont	
		We ever	
			They knew
I'd always			
I'd rather			
I'm also			
	You know		
		We were	
		She had	
		always	
		We said	

			We'll consider
I was			
I'm waiting			
I get			
			We've got
		She's five	
		She's been in	
		She has	
I said			
I'll phone			
I phoned			
			We have
			We said
I was			
	You know		
I arrived			
I was			
I arrived			
I'm here			
I'm the			
I go			
I do			
		She had	
I didn't know			
I could			
			We take
			We [erm]
			discover
		She's in	
	You know		
I spent			

I mean

You add

I've spent

I was

You know

I was

She had
surgery

They [erm]
fixed

I was

They let

I think

We did

He and

I would

We'd walk

We were

We'd eat

We did

They phoned

He and

I rushed

We [sort of]
met

She said

You're the

You

We'll go

She says

She made

I said

		She says	
		She had a	
		She couldn't breathe	
			They'd had a
			They let
		She was	
		She got	
			We never
			We didn't really
I'm more			
			They don't really
	You know		
I don't much			
	You sever		
	You know		
			They needed
	You know		
		She needed	
			They were
			They started
			They asked
			We'd be
			We [sort of] said
	You know		
			We're not interested
			We [sort of] realised
			We don't have
			We went
	You allow		

		We will	
			They bit
I knew			
	She's five		
I think		We see	
			They are
		We see	
		We see	
	She has		
		We not see	
			They live
You know			
	She is		
	She has two		
		We didn't change	
	She doesn't have		
		We just	
		We have	
		We decided	
		We were	
You more			
			They are
	She is		
			They are
		We don't need	
You know			
	She uses		
	She wants		
		We won't stop	

I think

She's still

I'm not being

We just

We'd do

She could

I suppose

We currently

have

We like

We'll have

I think

I [obviously]

work

I understand

We would

We

We're quite

We have been

We will

I think

I

I think

I'm motivated

I don't have

I don't think

You that

They don't ever

You still

You might

You've had

You that

You almost
don't need
You know

You need

You don't need

They are

They are

I'm motivated

I'm excited

I'm committed

We could

She'll go

She's always

She's very

We have

She's not
committed
She's not
committed
She's up

We intend

She sees

She'll become

You know

They need

We both

We're
committed

I think

I'm always

I'm always

We can

We do

You imagine

I struggled

I understand

I struggled

They were

They were

I have

I think

I mean

I understand

I understand

They are

I don't

I think

I can't

I know

You've taken

We put

We put

She had

You know

I think

I think

We're at

I'm definitely

I'm still

I'm still

I'm still

I think

I have

I couldn't
make

We were

We would

We would

We're [very]
equal
We do

She does

I do

I'm the

They will

We are

I'm not [just a]
supporter

We are

I think

I'm the

I can't think

I think

I've been
involved
I'm always

I come

I sort

I'm gonna

You
individually

I have

You

You

I do

You're both

You can't

We might

You know

I'd like

I produce

I'm quite

I work

I get

You're both

They think

I'm like

You're signing

You're signing

You are

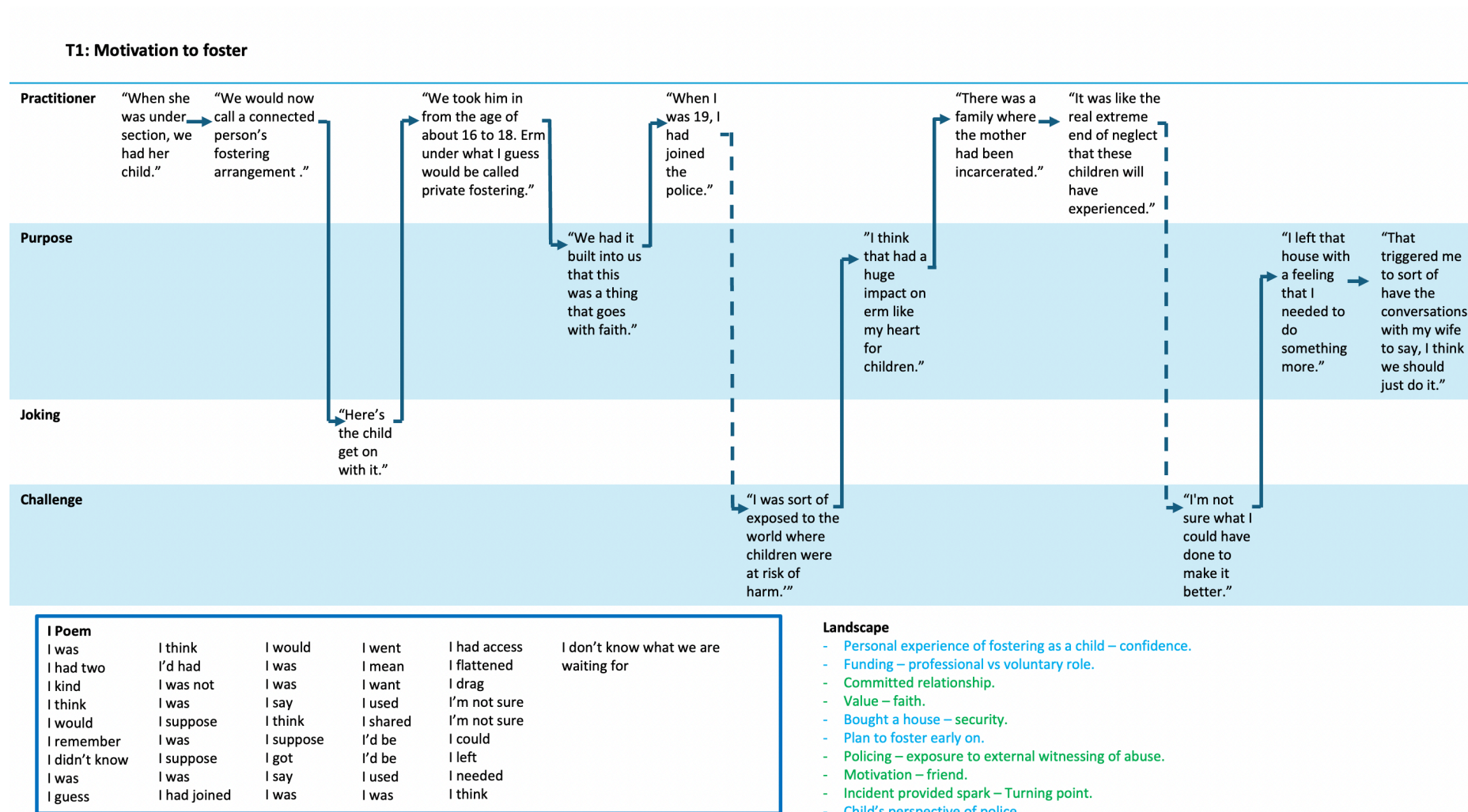
You are

You are

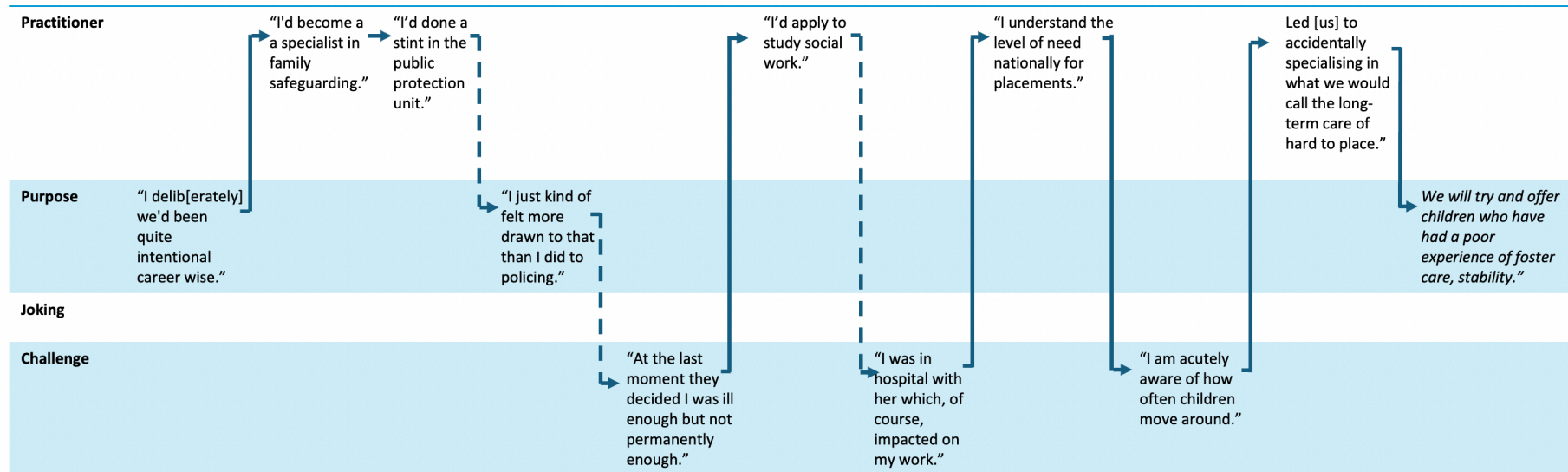
We all

I always

8.8.4. Maps of Tom's contrapuntal voice



T2: Move towards a dual role



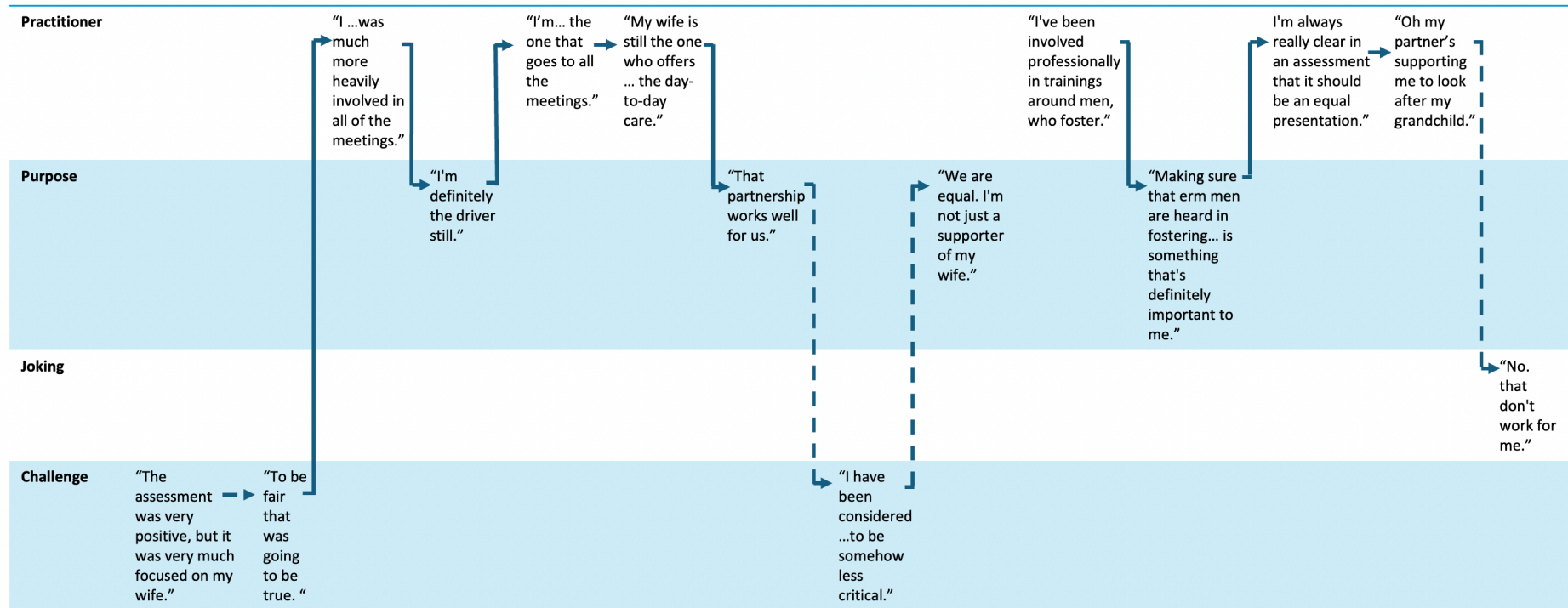
I Poem

I delib[erately]	I'd already	I've spent
I'd become	I was	I was
I say	I just	I was
I mean	I did	I think
I'd done	I have	I obviously
I'd done	I went	I understand
I'd become	I was	
I'd done	I'd applied	
I was	I'd apply	
I was	I decided	
I suppose	I left	
I left	I spent	
I had	I mean	

Landscape

- Intentional choices.
- Impact of policing.
- Changed jobs to retrain as a Social Worker.
- Ill health impacted role – Resolution.
- Hospital stays – impacted ability to work.
- Plans to continue fostering – Round two.
- Professional gaze – need nationally for placements.
- Specialised role.

T3: How Tom feels he is seen in fostering and how he sees other men who foster



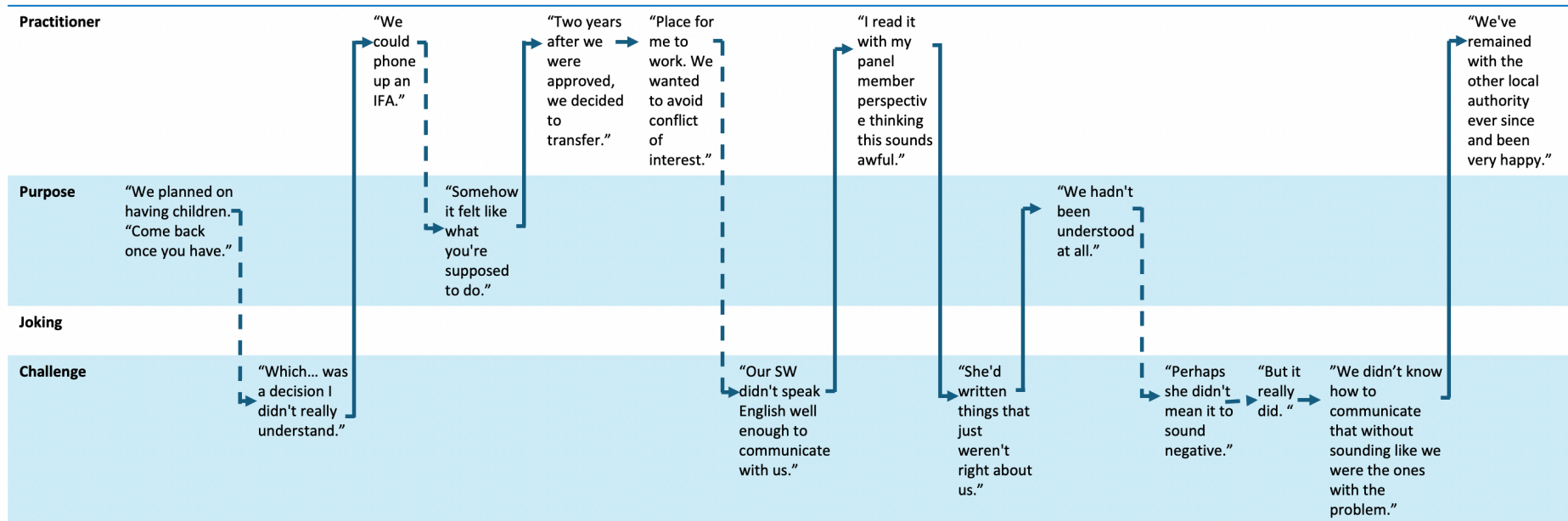
I Poem

I was	I'm definitely	I have	I've been involved	I have	I work
I became	I'm still	I couldn't make	I'm always	I do	I get
I wasn't at	I'm still	I'm the	I come	I'd like	I'm like
I think	I'm still	I'm not just	I sort	I produce	I always
I think	I think	I think	I'm gonna	I'm quite	

Landscape

- Caring assumption based on gender.
- Skills not utilized/ role under investigated.
- Care giving.
- Professional parent.
- Supervision – Not recognising need.
- Driver.
- Specific roles – partnership.
- Wife seen as main carer.
- Equal.
- Importance questioned.
- Emotional containment.
- Professional view – undertakes assessments.
- Intentionality to casework.

T4: Messages received from the fostering service



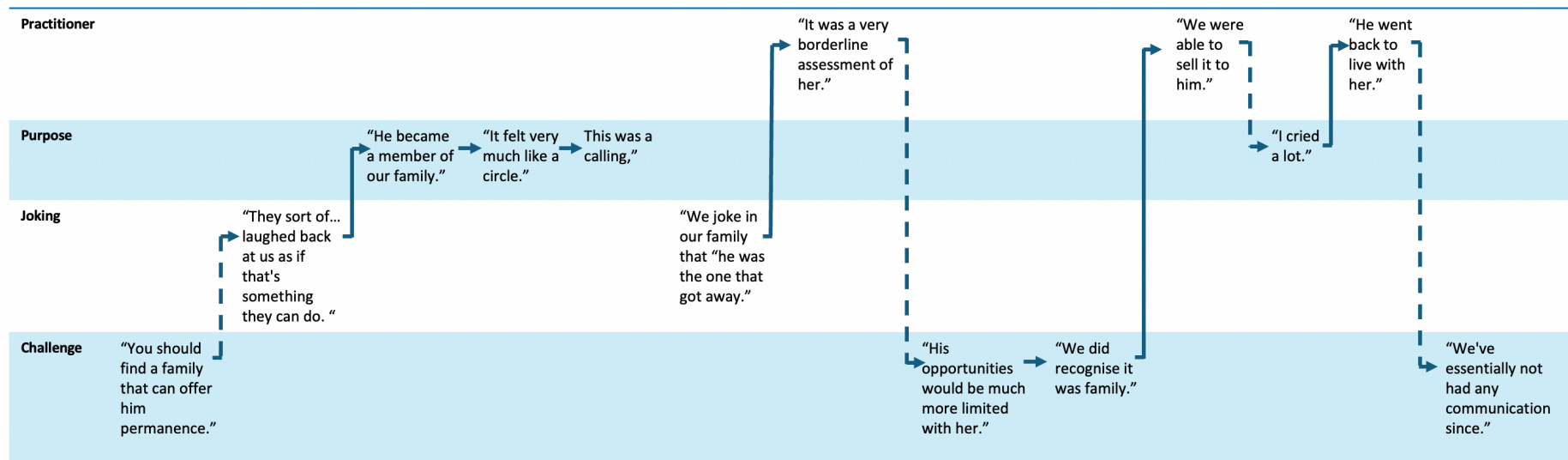
I Poem

I didn't understand I should
 I don't think I live
 I say I read
 I don't think
 I'm not sure
 I knew
 I certainly knew
 I'm not really
 I can't remember

Landscape

- Initial interest.
- Usually 18 months.
- Subjective interpretation.
- Fight.
- Public service – not for profit.
- Transfer.
- Perception of others – no control over what people write.

T5: Round One (Part One)



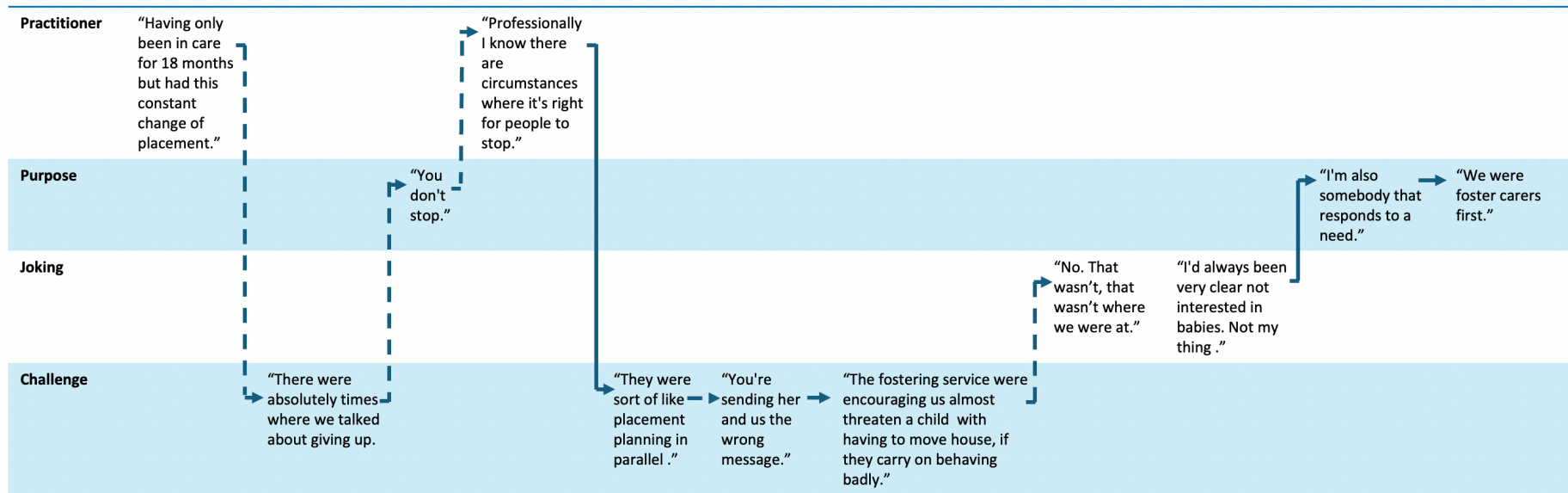
I Poem

I can't see
I said
I see
I remember
I mentioned
I cried
I suppose

Landscape

- Bereavement/Grief.
- Aspirational – matching.
- Bridging placement.
- SEND.
- Member of the family.
- Full circle.
- Confirmation.
- Reunification.
- Concern – access to opportunities and experiences limited.
- Social mobility.
- Emotional labour.
- Attachment.
- Bonding.
- Resolution.
- Maintaining links not always wanted.
- Impact on birth children.

T6: Round One (Part Two)



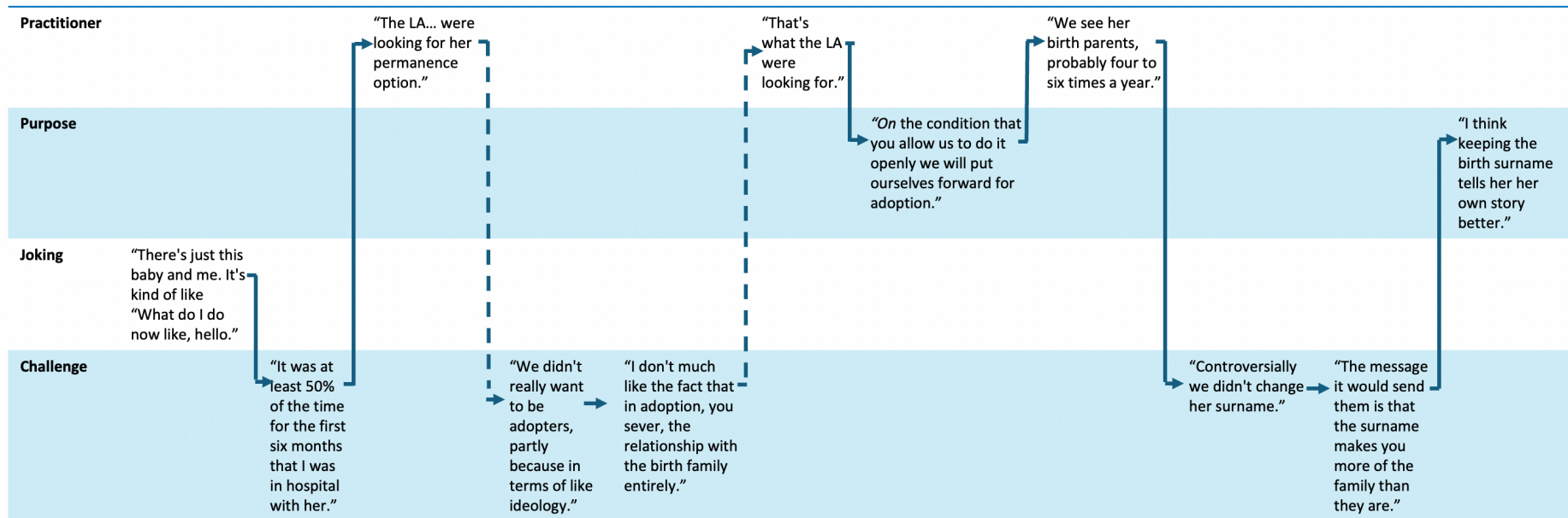
I Poem

I think	I go	I can't remember	I say
I think	I have something	I want	I'd always
I went	I mean	I'm like	I'd rather
I was	I feel	I'll text	I'm also
I love	I feel	I remember	
I said	I commit	I said	
I get	I know	I said	
I just	I get	I found	
I'm ready	I was	I suppose	
I do	I had to	I say	

Landscape

- Multiple moves.
- Influenced views.
- Honeymoon period.
- Uncertainty whether to trust.
- Celebration.
- Challenging.
- Commitment.
- Personal vs professional values – conflicting.
- System.
- Lack of control and agency.
- Placement stability support received.
- Fix it!!!
- Role of child social worker.
- Consistent message.
- Unconditional love and positive regard.
- Difference in perspective.
- Confidence in knowledge base and personal values as foster carers.
- Not preferred age range – Need of service.

T7: Round One (Part Three)



I Poem

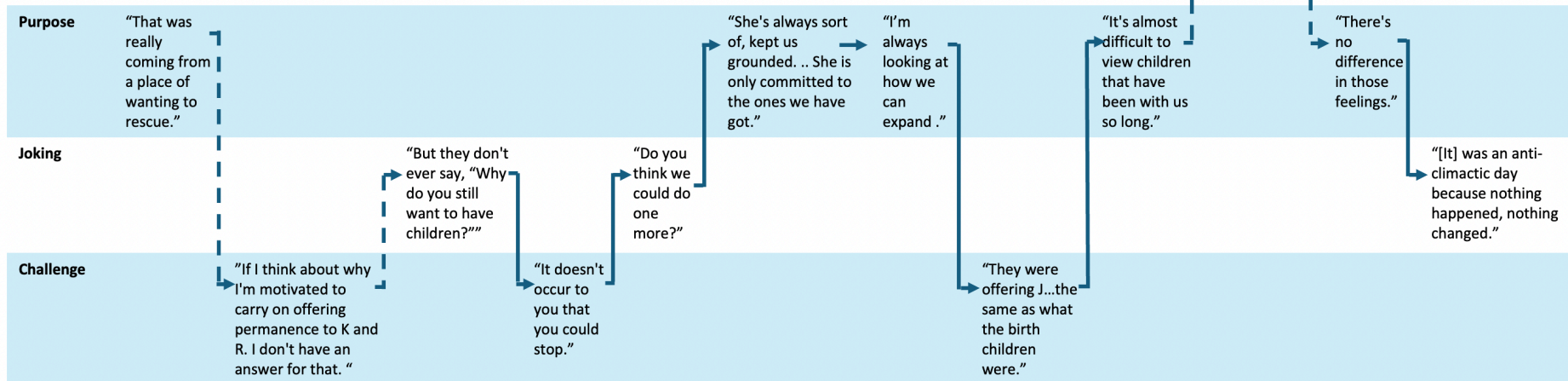
I was	I'm the	I was	I'm not being
I'm waiting	I go	I think	I suppose
I get	I do	I would	
I said	I didn't know	I rushed	
I'll phone	I could	I said	
I was	I spent	I'm more	
I arrived	I mean	I don't	
I arrived	I've spent	I knew	
I was	I was	I think	
I'm here	I was	I think	

Landscape

- Hospital.
- Response – immediate.
- Overwhelming.
- Hospital stays – impacting work.
- Importance of birth family.
- Support for each other.
- Open adoption.
- Ideology – connection to birth family.
- Maintain contact.
- Difference in legitimacy between birth, adopted, and fostered children.
- Life story.

T8: Motivations to fostering

Practitioner



I Poem

I think	I think	I understand
I thin	I'm always	I don't
I'm motivated	I'm always	I think
I don't have	I struggle	I can't
I don't think	I understand	I know
I am	I struggle	
I'm motivated	I have	
I'm motivated	I think	
I'm excited	I mean	
I'm committed	I understand	

Landscape

- Rescue.
- Questioning ongoing motivation.
- No differences in feelings towards children.
- Family – Emotionality/what constitutes family?
- Value – care.
- 'Psychological pregnancy' – claiming behaviours.
- Role of birth children in fostering.
- Role of foster children in fostering.
- Conflict.
- Nothing changed after adoption.

T9: Overview of landscapes

Fostering services

- Funding – professional vs voluntary role (T1)
- Public service – not for profit. (T4)
- Fight. (T4)
- Initial interest (T4)
- Usually 18 months. (T4)
- Subjective interpretation. (T4)
- Transfer. (T4)
- Perception of others – no control over what people write (T4)
- Role of child social worker. (T5)
- Difference in perspective. (T5)
- Confidence in knowledge base and personal values as foster carers. (T5)
- Placement stability support received. (T5)
- Fix it!!! (T5)

Family

- Committed relationship. (T1)
- Commitment to family (T5)
- Member of the family. (T5)
- Bought a house – security. (T1)
- Plan to foster early on. (T1)
- No differences in feelings towards children. (T6)
- Family – Emotionality/what constitutes family? (T6)
- Difference in legitimacy between birth, adopted, and fostered children challenged. (T5)
- Value – care. (T6)
- Impact on birth children. (T5)
- Role of birth children in fostering. (T6)
- Role of foster children in fostering. (T6)
- Conflict. (T6)
- Nothing changed after adoption. (T6)
- Importance of birth family. (T5)
- Support for each other. (T5)
- Open adoption. (T5)
- Ideology – connection to birth family. (T5)
- Maintain contact. (T5)

Motivations to foster

- Personal experience of fostering as a child – confidence. (T1)
- Value – faith. (T1)
- Confirmation. (T5)
- Full circle. (T5)
- Policing – exposure to external witnessing of abuse. (T1/T2)
- Child's perspective of police. (T1)
- Motivation – friend. (T1)
- Incident provided spark – Turning point. (T1)
- Rescue. (T5)
- Questioning ongoing motivation. (T5)
- 'Psychological pregnancy' – claiming behaviours. (T6)
- Plans to continue fostering – Round two. (T2)
- Professional gaze – need nationally for placements. (T2)
- Specialised role. (T2)
- Intentional choices. (T2)
- Not preferred age range – Need of service. (T5)
- Response – immediate. (T5)

Children's experiences

- Bereavement/Grief. (T5)
- SEND. (T5)
- Multiple moves. (T5)
- Influenced views. (T5)
- Honeymoon period'. (T5)
- Uncertainty whether to trust. (T5)
- Aspirational – matching. (T5)
- Bridging placement. (T5)
- Attachment. (T5)
- Emotional containment. (T3)
- Consistent message. (T5)
- Unconditional love and positive regard. (T5)
- Resolution. (T5)
- Celebration. (T5)
- Challenging. (T5)
- Personal vs professional values – conflicting. (T5)
- System. (T5)
- Lack of control and agency. (T5)
- Hospital. (T5)
- Overwhelming. (T5)
- Life story. (T5)

Different roles but equal

- Caring assumption based on gender. (T3)
- Skills not utilized/ role under investigated. (T3)
- Care giving. (T3)
- Professional parent. (T3)
- Supervision – Not recognising need. (T3)
- Driver. (T3)
- Specific roles – partnership. (T3)
- Wife seen as main carer. (T3)
- Equal. (T3)
- Importance questioned. (T3)
- Professional view – undertakes assessments. (T3)
- Intentionality to casework. (T3)

Changing roles

- Hospital stays – impacted ability to work. (T2/T5)
- Changed jobs to retrain as a Social Worker. (T2)
- Ill health impacted role – Resolution. (T2)

Reunification

- Reunification. (T5)
- Concern – access to opportunities and experiences limited. (T5)
- Maintaining links not always wanted. (T5)
- Social mobility. (T5)
- Emotional labour. (T5)

8.9. Appendix Nine: Lee

8.9.1. Lee's transcript

- 1 Lisa: Okay, I think recording.
- 2 Lee: [There] you go, recording and transcribing all at the same time.
- 3 ((Smiling))
- 4 Lisa: ((Smiling)) Perfect. Isn't it? Erm thank you very much for joining me today
- 5 [name]. Erm so (.) what I'd like to do really is just open it up to you (.) just to tell me
- 6 about your experience of fostering.
- 7 Lee: ((Intake of breath)) Yeah okay (.) so erm (.) we've been fostering for 12 years. (.) Erm
- 8 so we (.) had had our (.) two children erm, prior to starting fostering. They were
- 9 really quite young ((Intake of breath)) erm and actually the the motivation, to start
- 10 fostering really, was erm that (.) my wife, didn't (.) she worked previously as a as a
- 11 manager in a children's nursery.
- 12 Lisa: [Yeah]
- 13 Lee: [Erm and] when our first child was born obviously went
- 14 back to work and erm and found it really disturbing that, you know we were paying
- 15 quite a lot of money for our daughter to literally be in the same building (.) in a
- 16 different room to her mum ((smiling)) and we were paying for that privilege which all
- 17 seemed a bit crazy erm and it meant that, you know I think [name] went down to
- 18 three days but financially, she did three really long days er and that was really
- 19 rubbish on erm our daughter. So, we decided not to do that again. So after, after her
- 20 maternity leave had finished (.) for our second child, erm our son, erm she must have
- 21 always had fostering in her mind, I suppose.
- 22 Lisa: [Okay]
- 23 Lee: [Erm and] I, I it's difficult for me to speak
- 24 to that. I know that she's got, erm (.) there's quite a few sort of adopted nieces and
- 25 nephews, and, you know cousins and stuff in her family. So, she was obviously very
- 26 well aware of that whole sort of side of things. But it was, when she came to me and
- 27 sort of said look you know (.) because we'd been talking about her not wanting to go
- 28 back to work in the regular way and then she said, "Look do you want to come along
- 29 to this? It's an open evening for our local authority's erm (.) you know, sort of
- 30 fostering event." So, we went along to that, and I guess that was really my first
- 31 exposure to actually, what fostering was rather than the very high-level stuff that all
- 32 of us has, [you know]
- 33 Lisa: [Yeah]
- 34 Lee: [people] erm we know fostering goes on, but we don't really know much
- 35 about it. So that was my first sort of introduction to it (.) and I guess I remember
- 36 sitting there and it, the whole kind fostering thing very much sort of aligns with (.) I
- 37 guess where my values are as a person in terms of you know erm (.) doing stuff
- 38 positively to make a difference as opposed to just passively sitting by and expecting

39 the world to be a better place without you actually doing anything (.) about it. (.) Erm
40 you know our our sort of our society and our politicians yes, they are the ones that
41 erm (.) are in (.) in positions where they can make a difference, but actually it does
42 take all of us to do our bit erm which is kind of where we go wrong really. Erm so
43 yeah, it fitted with what I wanted to do. It fitted with our sort of family makeup. Erm,
44 you know I loved the idea you know that for our two birth children at that point, it
45 meant that [Name] would be able to earn some money, but she could also go along
46 to every school play and all the rest of it because I was working for a major
47 supermarket at the time and working crazy hours and all the rest of it. So, I really
48 wasn't in the house very much (.) at that point. Erm so yeah, that was that. So, then
49 we ended up applying and we went through the the the sort of dreaded approval
50 process.

51 Lisa: [[[Laughing]] Yeah]

52 Lee: [Erm] (.) That was really, really difficult erm very intrusive, you know more (.)
53 more kind of sharing of (.) thoughts and feelings, than (.) you know as an adult, I'd
54 probably done with anybody ever. Really.

55 Lisa: [Yeah]

56 Lee: [Because] even as a couple I don't think you kind
57 of share the stuff in the way in which the the the approval process does because it
58 asks it so directly. Whereas you know when you're in sort of relationships and stuff, it
59 becomes a more organic sharing of getting to know each other. So that that was (.)
60 quite difficult, you know to get through but that was okay, we passed that and went
61 to panel. Erm and then (.) then our fostering journey really began I suppose you
62 know. So, we were (.) baby carers erm because we didn't have a spare room erm but
63 at that point, it didn't matter. You were allowed just to, you could be approved.

64 Lisa: [Yeah]

65 Lee: [If you]

66 could fit a cot in your bedroom, erm (.) and then over the years we've, we've, so we
67 did loads of babies and moved them on to adoption [and and and]

68 **5.20 minutes**

69 Lisa: [Okay]

70 Lee: a couple went back erm (.) one
71 went back to relatives and another to Mum, (.) erm his Mum, which was lovely. Erm
72 (.) and we we still keep in contact with erm all of them to a greater or lesser extent,
73 now, er which is (.) which is fantastic erm and it's lovely. You know, we're coming up
74 to Christmas soon and we'll get cards with pictures and updates on how they're all
75 doing. ((Intake of breath)) And I think you get a great deal of sense of erm
76 achievement (.) out of seeing that, you know cause obviously as a foster carer, you
77 know all the backstory about these (Intake of breath))(.) these little ones and you
78 know erm what, why they weren't able to stay (.) with their mum or their dad, erm
79 and you understand all their medical (.) conditions, erm and you know how those

80 medical conditions came about. So, you've got that real insight and then, you know
 81 you did your bit (.) in sort of steadying their ship, holding them and then, you know
 82 (.) with most of the little ones, as I say then moving them on to their sort of forever
 83 families.

84 Lisa: How did it make you feel when you moved children on?

85 Lee: Oh, its horrendous.

86 Lisa: [Yes]

87 Lee: Erm (.) Yeah it is (.) it's very tough (.) and I I I think generally, it gets
 88 quite underestimated, you know it's (.) the impact, the impacts massive. Erm (.) and
 89 er it was interesting a few years ago er, (.) because our, (.) what we didn't realise we
 90 kind of dealt with it and moved on, but we didn't realise the impact on our birth
 91 children, until erm my daughter got caught up in [significant event].

92 Lisa: [Oh goodness]

93 Lee: [So], because of that, she had erm
 94 counselling and therapy because of the [significant event]. But actually, she ended up
 95 talking more about the the loss that she had from these babies constantly coming
 96 into the house and leaving the house and how that had affected her, you know
 97 emotionally and all the rest of it. So actually, erm seven years ago, we had (.) two
 98 boys come to stay with us, and they were only meant to come to stay for (.) a
 99 weekend, erm (.) to give their (.) aunt and uncle who they were staying with at the
 100 time, a bit of a break (.) erm and they're still here.

101 Lisa: [Ok, right]

102 Lee: [Erm] and and will be here erm certainly
 103 the younger one erm, at least till he's 21 or 23 or whatever (.) it ends up looking like.

104 Lisa: [Yeah]

105 Lee: [His]
 106 his older brother, erm (.) probably will be able to move out to independence, so he'll
 107 be able to leave when he (.) when he wishes really. So, when he's old enough and
 108 wishes to go. Erm so that that's helped a lot because (.) for as challenging as they,
 109 they both are with all of their issues, it has led some stability to the house. Erm and
 110 then the other thing was we, we continued while we had the boys, to still have
 111 babies. Erm but then four years ago we (.) we got eh a little one and erm (.) she (.)
 112 her adoption. I think it was three separate occasions, erm broke down and the
 113 adopters walked away.

114 Lisa: [Okay]
 115 [Erm] so we, we adopted her. Erm so she is now ours erm and
 116 that has brought our family to kind of (.) for now, at least while the boys are with us
 117 (.) you know (.) to a, to a, to a stop.

118 Lisa: [Yeah]

119 Lee: [Erm and] what's been good to see is that all of us have
 120 been able to kind of relax into it, because there isn't this kind of coming and going of

121 (.) people who (.) because I always said you have to attach, you know like, with the (.)
122 the babies. You have to fully attach, and you have to love them because otherwise
123 you're not doing it right. You know, you won't be able (.) to (.) even begin the journey
124 of fixing the mental trauma (.) that they have been through if you, if you don't really
125 give them that (.), as as you know, a secure base as you can for the time that they are
126 (.) that they are with you.

127 Lisa: [Yeah]

128 Lee: [Er, so] that's, that's where, that's where we
129 are. I suppose [you know].

130 Lisa: [Yeah] ((Intake of breath)) Erm (.) yeah, there's a lot of things you
131 have said there () (((Laughing))).

132 Lee: (((Laughing))) 12 years in five minutes.

133 Lisa: [Yeah], it is ((Laughing)). So erm,
134 what have been the ups for you then? In terms (.) the ups or [downs]?

135 **10:15 minutes**

136 Lee: [The] ups are (.) when
137 you see (.), it's like with any child, when you see them doing something new, when
138 you see them achieving, learning, growing, developing, (.) erm (.) that's always
139 tremendous erm (.) whether that's whilst they're with you or like I said, when you
140 sort of get updates and you can see how (.) they're developing, that's always a real
141 positive. And then, of course, you know, kids have got the most amazing (.)
142 personalities, even the ones that are, can equally be horrendous erm (.) are funny
143 and you know, make you smile and do things and all the rest of it. So those little
144 moments that, you know, you have to sort of be erm (.) almost on the watch out for
145 those, you know and be mindful and present in the moment of what's going on.
146 Because if you're not careful, you miss them (.) and that all you actually end up
147 remembering is (.) when they have er a meltdown er about (.) whatever. Because
148 those are easy to remember because they're forced into your face.

149 Lisa: [Yeah.]

150 Lee: [Erm] but what you've
151 got to remember is all the other little bits that, you know (.) erm weren't as big
152 because the bits of positivity and joy and happiness aren't, they you know, they, it's
153 not, we don't live in an Instagram world do we? Do you know what I mean? They are
154 smaller and they don't tend to be captured. So, you've got to be mindful and watch
155 those, so those, (.) those are the positives. I suppose. Those are the ups (.) definitely.
156 Erm and the downs are generally (.) when, when you, when you move a child on,
157 those are the biggest downs, (.) [definitely].

158 Lisa: [Yeah]

159 Lee: [because] even with the boys now and they have
160 some really tough challenging behaviours and all the rest of it, but that's just (.),
161 those are difficult in the moment, but that is only ever in the moment, you just kind

162 of deal with whatever (.) has happened, what's been said, what's been (.) broken, or
 163 thrown, or whatever.

164 Lisa: [Mmm]

165 Lee: [But] (.) the key is not to, not to dwell on it, don't let it, that
 166 become all encompassing. So those, those are really (.) they're not particularly (.) a
 167 problem.

168 Lisa: [No]

169 Lee: [Erm] you know and I suppose the other lows are like when you are sort of (.)
 170 I suppose battling the system a little bit, where you're sort of trying your best to
 171 advocate, for what (.) a particular child might need (.) erm (.) and most professionals
 172 around that child seem to sort of be an agreement, but then (.) you know
 173 fundamentally you know, mainly sort of cash led reasons why that particular (.)
 174 intervention or piece of work or move (.) can't happen perhaps as (.) in the way in
 175 which everybody would like, but that (.) that again is unfortunately just the world we
 176 live in and you know, you have to accept that, you can't just kind of try to rail against
 177 it and (.) because there are only (.) so many places, there are only so many hours that
 178 er professionals have to have to be available to spend with (.) with the people that
 179 are in our care, you know, it's a stretched (.) it's a stretched system that we all
 180 operate in erm and I think you have to (.) be able to (.) understand that and accept it
 181 (.) so that you don't kind of get overly angry with it all, but also then kind of
 182 differentiate when things do need to happen and you do need to sort of get quite (.)
 183 erm feisty about what you're trying to get [achieved ((Smiling))].

184 Lisa: [Yeah] okay, you said initially that (.) you
 185 were working quite long [hours]

186 Lee [Yeah]

187 Lisa: [and so] over the last sort of 14 years have you noticed a
 188 difference in your involvement in fostering?

189 Lee: [Yeah] so ((Out breath)) seven years ago, nearly
 190 eight years ago I got, er I left (.) the supermarket that was a HR manager for. They
 191 made us all redundant (.) or lots of us, thousands of us got made redundant erm and
 192 I decided at that point, not (.) to go and get a similar (.) job. Erm so, I started up (.)
 193 the first of my businesses at that point erm and a massive part of that was to be able
 194 to correct my work life balance erm (.) because at that point the, you know, the boys
 195 hadn't been with us very long or had they been with us? I can't remember. But we'd
 196 obviously been fostering quite a while, so I was aware of the demands of that, our
 197 own children were growing up. So, I wanted to have something where I wasn't
 198 working across seven days a week, you know, 10, 12 hours (.) on a working day.

199 **15:31 minutes**

200 Lisa: [Yeah]

201 Lee: [Erm] and
 202 so I started my own business and that, that although it has its own challenges

203 because you're not just earning 50 grand a year without (.) thinking, you know, which
 204 is pretty much what employment is. You just go and as long as you just turn up, they
 205 pay you don't they. You know, that's fundamentally what it is. You don't even have to
 206 be any good. You just have to turn up. Erm (.) whereas running your own business
 207 isn't like that at all, erm (.) you know (.) but yeah. So, that, (.) I did that and that's
 208 allowed me to become much more involved in (.) in fostering over the years. So, you
 209 know, I go to lots and lots of the professional meetings erm (.) and all that side of
 210 stuff. I'm here (.) all of the time, really, you know, erm (.) to to sort of be around to to
 211 do the good stuff and help with the sort of harder stuff of all of the, all of the
 212 children that we've got, whatever, their sort of background is, (.) all five of them have
 213 got, (.) because that's the thing isn't it when you've got foster kids and birth kids, and
 214 we've got an adopted child, that they're just all the [children].

215 Lisa: [Yeah]

216 Lee: [and] so, they've all
 217 got their own needs and demands and stuff. And then obviously it means that, you
 218 know (.) me and [Name] are able to carve out time for ourselves as well, and you
 219 know, even if that's (.) just going out for lunch or brunch one day a week, you know,
 220 without anybody because (.) whereas, if I was working in a (.) in a sort of traditional
 221 salaried, salaried job, that wouldn't happen. Because on the days, when all the kids
 222 are at school, well I'd be at [work].

223 Lisa: [Yeah. Yeah]

224 Lee: [Erm, so] that's really helped I think to keep (.) the
 225 fostering going because it's allowed us to maintain our (.) resilience and (.) sanity
 226 about the whole thing, really. [[[Laughing]]]

227 Lisa: [[[Laughing]]]

228 Lee: [So yeah]

229 Lisa: [Do] you find that you are supportive for each other
 230 then?

231 Lee: Yeah, definitely (.) definitely. Neither (.) I don't think (.) I don't (.) I don't know how
 232 single carers do it. I haven't got a clue how they do it. And I suppose (.) you (.) figure
 233 that out when you're in that position. But certainly, looking at it from (.) (our), my
 234 perspective I don't really understand how they even get the basics of getting young
 235 people they look after around and you know, then go to umpteen meetings and (.)
 236 also, then have their own life (.) and actually put themselves first at some point. Erm
 237 (.) yeah, I am just kind of in awe of that really, you know, [but]

238 Lisa: [Yeah, absolutely] So, erm
 239 what next then, obviously you've got five at the minute.

240 Lee: [So], what next is is pretty much
 241 carrying on as we are, I suppose, I mean, the, the boys are nine and ten. [So]

242 Lisa: [A while
 243 yet. Yeah. Still young.]

244 Lee: [Yeah], I mean the older one (.) he, he might (.) they both still see their
 245 (.) birth mum really regularly and are potentially starting to to (.) begin family time
 246 with their birth dad. So, you know, we we can foresee that he might at some point
 247 want to go back (.) to live with his mum because you know there becomes a point
 248 where court orders don't matter and what, if they want to go at 14 or 15, if he wants
 249 to go and live there, he's going to go and live there and doesn't matter what anybody
 250 else says (.) erm (.) but we'll see. So yeah they just kind of carry on and life just
 251 carries on and we just, (.) We don't try to (.) We erm (.) There was a point where we
 252 were really struggling with the elder one and we had some intervention from the (.)
 253 erm (.) somebody from the erm mental, mental health team who's looked after, sort
 254 of placement stability and er she came and did some work with [Name] and I and we
 255 sort of (described), "Well you know when thinking about (.) L you know and were
 256 going to have him at least for" and at that point it would have been another 11 years
 257 or something and she was just like, "Well there's your problem straight away is it." I
 258 was like, "What do you mean?" It was like, "Well just worry about getting through
 259 today. You know don't think too much about (.) the future that (.) because it
 260 becomes too much, it's too overwhelming." If, you think of all of the challenges (.)
 261 whether you're a foster carer or not, if you kind of went, "Oh right yeah, we've got
 262 this and it's going to be like this for the next 10 years, 20 years." It's too much. You
 263 know, you've got to hold it a bit more lightly than that and just sort of think about (.)
 264 well today, this week, that's it.

20:32 Minutes

266 Lisa: [Yeah]
 267 Lee: [So] that's all we (.) that's all we think about because
 268 things can change so (.) so quickly, you know (.) erm you don't know (.) what's
 269 around the corner, any number of (.) things can come happen (.) but then they might
 270 not and you just carry (.) and then you just carry on the way you are, so it doesn't
 271 matter.
 272 Lisa: [Mm, absolutely] You talked about erm (.) earlier about when you get the
 273 letters at Christmas and things or cards at Christmas from (.) family members of the
 274 children that have been adopted.
 275 Lee: [Yeah]
 276 Lisa: [Er] can you tell me more about I suppose how that
 277 feels when you get those letters and cards?
 278 Lee: [Erm] (.) It's nice. It feels like when (.) you
 279 get a Christmas card off, erm (.) sort of an extended member of your family, I
 280 suppose. You know, if you had a member of the family that you had nieces and
 281 nephews that were scattered around the country and you don't really see them very
 282 much, but you know that they're still part of the family. And then, you know at
 283 Christmas and birthdays, you get a little photograph of them or, when they move up
 284 to a different school, you get a picture of them in their uniform, whatever and erm

285 so you just go, wow, it's lovely to hear about whichever one it is and read about what
286 they're doing and all the rest of it and I guess (.) because they're all doing brilliant,
287 because they're all with lovely lovely families and I suppose (.) Yeah, there's (.) there's
288 a real sense of pride, I suppose in the fact that like I said before we've played a part
289 in that (.) that journey, they came to us, you know (.) because some of, they were so
290 young, they won't really remember it at all, but when they look back and read and
291 you know, (.) know that they were adopted that, we are (.) part of their (.) life at a
292 very, very early stage, you know erm [So yeah].

293 Lisa: [How] old were most of the babies, ()
294 like from birth?

295 Lee: [Yeah], most were from the hospital.

296 Lisa: [Were they, yeah.]

297 [Yeah. Yeah.] Proper baby babies is what we
298 tended to (.) look after erm (.) so they tended to (.) move on from us, you know (.) at
299 around somewhere between one and two depending on (.) how everything had
300 gone. So yeah, it's good just and there's pictures every child we ever had. There's a
301 picture of them on the wall in the dining room because they're just always (.) always
302 there. So yeah, it's good. It's nice.

303 Lisa: [Yeah], that sounds lovely. Anything else you want to think
304 about?

305 Lee: I don't think. That's pretty much I mean, obviously, when we were chatting before
306 this, and the male roles and female roles and all that kind of stuff, and it is (.)
307 interesting how [Name] is always (.) erm assumed to be the main kind of carer, erm
308 and then I guess, even when you look through at almost everybody I deal with (.)
309 tends to be female. It's, it and I always really do notice that, but I suppose it's much
310 the same as when I was a personal manager, that was exactly the same. You know,
311 there was only two, two guys. Erm oh no I think there might have been three out of
312 our sort of regional group of 40. You know, so its erm so it's another kind of role
313 where it is (.) it happens to be very female (.) dominated. Erm (.) now whether that
314 matters or not, I don't know. I don't think it probably does erm (.) you know but (.) I
315 suspect it probably does, you know I mean, when I think the two lads that we've got
316 (.) and you know male role models and all that kind of thing (.) and in terms of,
317 particularly for young lads, keeping them on the (.) right track, they need positive
318 role models but in the same (.) but then so do the young girls who are coming up
319 through. They need to see male role models that (.) behave appropriately and don't,
320 (.) because they may well have had some very negative perceptions of what male
321 role models (.) can be and how they behave, and understanding what is acceptable
322 behaviour (.) from a male, you know in terms of behaviours, language, just what they
323 expect other people to do, and you know all of that kind of stuff. Erm so, yeah, I do
324 still find that sort of unusual. You know, erm I remember I got recruited to sit on a
325 very large, local authority erm (.) fostering panel and the main reason was because

326 they just didn't have any enough, they didn't have any males who's on it and they
 327 needed (.). We rightly talk about diversity and all the rest of it, but it's most
 328 fundamental level of gender split, actually, you know it can quite easily not be right
 329 before you even start getting around to ethnicity and all the rest of it.

330 Lisa: [Mm]

331 **26:52 Minutes**

332 Lee: [There's] lots of
 333 bits when you look around fostering that it'll struggle to be acceptable if it was in a
 334 commercial environment (.) as a company, it would be criticised for not having (.)
 335 diversity in almost every (.) every way really.

336 Lisa: [Yeah]

337 Lee: [Because] do we as foster carers and the social
 338 service network around it. Do we genuinely represent the communities that we serve
 339 and we probably don't (.) erm to be fair. Erm you know and that just, (.) in the work
 340 that I do with erm [Organisation] where I support, you know, erm foster carers that
 341 are going through allegation process and stuff, you see it quite a lot where you go,
 342 you as a foster carer and, maybe your ethnic background, religious background is
 343 different from most of the people that you're working with and they just don't get
 344 you, you know, it's not that they're doing anything wrong but they just don't
 345 understand really the, the fundamentals of (.) how you would lead your life. Yeah, it's
 346 an interesting er thing to sort of, have a bit of a look at and shine a light on.

347 Lisa: Yeah, hopefully, I'd like it to be of interest. Erm how do you find it being male then in
 348 fostering?

349 Lee: Erm, I think, I suppose I have, you have to be (.) yeah, I suppose you've got to be
 350 comfortable going and sitting (.) in a meeting or in a situation where you are the only
 351 (.) male. Erm (.) you know which I (.) like I say, I've been in situations that for a long,
 352 long time but it isn't usual. You know in most walks of life, there will be a mix.

353 Lisa: [Yeah]

354 Lee: [Erm but] more
 355 often than not there won't be. Even, I mean like later this week I've got a meeting up
 356 at the school about one of the boys and that will all be, you know from (.) every
 357 professional there will be female and then me and you have to be kind of able to go
 358 and (.) and be and not let that really affect how you act or what you say or whatever
 359 erm and I suppose, it doesn't make a difference, but equally you're aware of it.

360 Lisa: [Yeah]

361 Lee: [You know], just
 362 the same as not that many years ago, if a [.] female manager walked into a
 363 management meeting she probably would have been the only female in many
 364 companies, 30, 40 years ago erm and there is a level of (.) erm there can be, I mean,
 365 certainly back then in terms of sort of sexism and all the rest of it though. There was

366 an intimidation about going into those situations. Now, there certainly isn't that but
367 you're certainly aware of being the only guy.

368 Lisa: [Yeah]

369 Lee: [Yeah], and I suppose it's just the fact
370 you are aware it's a thing.

371 Lisa: Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it. Yeah, anything else you can think of.

372 Lee: No, I don't think so. I think that's everything.

373 Lisa: Yeah, I do really appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

374 Lee: No worries.

375 **30:44 Minutes**

8.9.2. Lee's listening guide readings

KEY			
I	We	[Word]	Personal Reflections
You	They	[Word]	Praxis Reflections
She/He		[Word]	Voice

<p>Lisa: Okay, I think recording.</p> <p>Lee: [There] you go, recording and transcribing all at the same time. ((Smiling))</p> <p>Lisa: ((Smiling)) Perfect. Isn't it? Erm thank you very much for joining me today [name]. Erm so (.) what I'd like to do really is just open it up to you (.) just to tell me about your experience of fostering.</p> <p>Lee: ((Intake of breath)) Yeah okay (.) so erm (.) we've been fostering for 12 years. (.) Erm so we (.) had had our (.) two children erm, prior to starting fostering. They were really quite young ((Intake of breath)) erm and actually <i>the the motivation, to start fostering really</i>, was erm that (.) my wife, didn't (.) she worked previously as a as a manager in a children's nursery.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm and] when our first child was born obviously went back to work and erm and <i>found it really disturbing that, you know we were paying quite a lot of money for our daughter to literally be in the same building (.) in a different room to her mum ((smiling)) and we were paying for that privilege</i> which all seemed a bit crazy erm and it meant that, you know I think [name] went down to three days but financially, she did three really long days er and <i>that was really rubbish on erm our daughter</i>. So, we decided not to do that again. So after, after her maternity leave had finished (.) for our second child, erm our son, erm she must have always had fostering in her mind, I suppose.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm and] I, I it's difficult for me to speak to that. I know that she's got, erm (.) there's quite a few sort of adopted nieces and nephews, and, you know cousins and stuff in her family. So, she was obviously very well aware of that whole sort of side of things. But it was, when she came to me and sort</p>	<p>Established, experienced foster carers.</p> <p>Birth children motivation. <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Economic reward of two incomes but cost to family life. <u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Fostering considered as a possibility.</p> <p>Knowledge of adoption</p> <p>Confidence in system? Guided.</p>
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<p>of said look you know (.) because we'd been talking about her not wanting to go back to work in the regular way and then she said, "Look do you want to come along to this? It's an open evening for our local authority's erm (.) you know, sort of fostering event." So, we went along to that, and I guess that was really my first exposure to actually, what fostering was rather than the very high-level stuff that all of us has, [you know]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [people] erm we know fostering goes on, but we don't really know much about it. So that was my first sort of introduction to it (.) and I guess I remember sitting there and it, the whole kind fostering thing very much sort of <i>aligns with (.) I guess where my values are as a person in terms of you know erm (.) doing stuff positively to make a difference</i> as opposed to just passively sitting by and expecting the world to be a better place without you actually doing anything (.) about it. (.) Erm you know our our sort of our society and our politicians yes, they are the ones that erm (.) are in (.) in positions where they can make a difference, but actually it does take all of us to do our bit erm which is kind of where we go wrong really. Erm so yeah, it fitted with what I wanted to do. <i>It fitted with our sort of family makeup.</i> Erm, you know I loved the idea you know that for our two birth children at that point, it meant that [Name] would be able to earn some money, but she could also go along to every school play and all the rest of it because I was <i>working for a major supermarket at the time and working crazy hours and all the rest of it.</i> So, I really wasn't in the house very much (.) at that point. Erm so yeah, that was that. So, then we ended up applying and we went through the the the sort of <i>dreaded approval process.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [[[Laughing]]] Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] (.) <i>That was really, really difficult erm very intrusive, you know more (.) more kind of sharing of</i></p>	<p>Clarifying</p> <p>Actual role vs perceived role. "Oh, it marvellous what you do...but I couldn't do it."</p> <p>Information gathering. We had little experience of fostering also.</p> <p><u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p>Alignment with personal values - congruent</p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> Change in lifestyle – importance of being present.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> Role – provider. Committed.</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>My response - Laughter as a response in recognition. <u>Hidden voice</u></p>
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<p>(.) thoughts and feelings, than (.) you know as an adult, I'd probably done with anybody ever. Really.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Because] even as a couple I don't think you kind of share the stuff in the way in which the the the approval process does because it asks it so directly. Whereas you know when you're in sort of relationships and stuff, it becomes a more organic sharing of getting to know each other. So that that was (.) quite difficult, you know to get through but that was okay, we passed that and went to panel. Erm and then (.) then our fostering journey really began I suppose you know. So, we were (.) baby carers erm because we didn't have a spare room erm but at that point, it didn't matter. You were allowed just to, you could be approved.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [If you] could fit a cot in your bedroom, erm (.) and then over the years we've, we've, so we did loads of babies and moved them on to adoption [and and and]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5.20 minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Lee: a couple went back erm (.) one went back to relatives and another to Mum, (.) erm his Mum, which was lovely. Erm (.) and we we still keep in contact with erm all of them to a greater or lesser extent, now, er which is (.) which is fantastic erm and it's lovely. You know, we're coming up to Christmas soon and we'll get cards with pictures and updates on how they're all doing. ((Intake of breath)) And I think you get a great deal of sense of erm achievement (.) out of seeing that, you know cause obviously as a foster carer, you know all the backstory about these (Intake of breath))(.) these little ones and you know erm what, why they weren't able to stay (.) with their mum or their dad, erm and you understand all their medical (.) conditions, erm and you know how those medical conditions came about. So, you've got that real insight and then, you know you did your bit (.) in</p>	<p>Process followed – Form F completed. Private/Public</p> <p><u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> Relationship – care and commitment. <u>Hidden voice</u> <u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p>Fostering started</p> <p>Children under 2 can stay in the same room as foster carer if LA permits.</p> <p>“Moved” - normalise process / possibly take some of emotion away. Way of feeling less pain?</p> <p><u>Reunification</u> <u>Idealised voice</u> Adoptive parents sense of gratitude. Wanting to hold on to experiences. Maintaining links isn't always wanted. <u>Idealised voice</u></p> <p>Value - achievement</p> <p><u>Moralistic voice</u></p>
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<p><i>sort of <u>steadying their ship, holding them</u> and then, <u>you know</u> (.) with most of the little ones, as <u>I say</u> then moving them on to their sort of forever families.</i></p> <p>Lisa: How did it make you feel when you moved children on?</p> <p>Lee: <u>Oh, its horrendous.</u></p> <p>Lisa: Yes.</p> <p>Lee: Erm (.) Yeah it is (.) it's very tough (.) and <u>I think generally, it <u>gets quite underestimated</u>, <u>you know it's (.) the impact, the impacts massive</u>.</u> Erm (.) and er it was interesting a few years ago er, (.) because our, (.) what <u>we didn't realise we kind of dealt</u> with it and moved on, but <u>we didn't realise</u> the <u>impact on our birth children</u>, until erm my daughter got caught up in [significant event].</p> <p>Lisa: [Oh goodness]</p> <p>Lee: [So], because of that, <u>she had</u> erm counselling and therapy because of the [significant event]. But actually, <u>she ended</u> up <u>talking more about the the loss that <u>she had</u> from these babies constantly coming into the house and leaving the house and how that had affected her, <u>you know</u> emotionally and all the rest of it.</u> So actually, erm seven years ago, <u>we had (.) two boys come to stay with us,</u> and <u>they were</u> only meant to come to stay for (.) a weekend, erm (.) to give their (.) aunt and uncle who they were staying with at the time, a bit of a break (.) erm and <u>they're still here.</u></p> <p>Lisa: [Ok, right]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] and and will be here erm certainly the younger one erm, <u>at least till <u>he's 21</u> or 23 or whatever (.) it ends up looking like.</u></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [His] his older brother, erm (.) probably <u>will be able to move out to independence</u>, so <u>he'll be able</u> to leave when <u>he (.)</u> when <u>he wishes</u> really. So, when <u>he's old</u> enough and wishes to go. Erm so that that's helped a lot because (.) for as <u>challenging as <u>they, they both</u> are with all of their issues, it has <u>led some stability to the house</u>.</u> Erm and then the other</p>	<p>Focus on child.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> "Yes" - No further comments needed. Shared understanding <u>Matter of fact voice</u> Can become normalised and then the impact minimised. <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Systemic/family systems</p> <p>Role/family identity/feelings of belonging and stability.</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> Frequently heard statement.</p> <p>Staying put scheme. Commitment to permanence.</p> <p>"Independence" - Neutral term Transition to adulthood - Pathway plan starts at 16. <u>Hidden voice</u> Maintaining function of family. Equilibrium - minimises risks of change</p>
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<p>thing was we, we continued while we had the boys, to still have babies. Erm but then four years ago we (.) we got eh a little one and erm (.) she (.) her adoption. think it was three separate occasions, erm broke down and the adopters walked away.</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] so we, we adopted her. Erm so she is now ours erm and that has brought our family to kind of (.) for now, at least while the boys are with us (.) you know (.) to a, to a, to a stop.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm and] what's been good to see is that <i>all of us have been able to kind of relax into it, because there isn't this kind of coming and going of (.) people who (.) because I always said you have to attach, you know like, with the (.) the babies. You have to fully attach, and you have to love them because otherwise you're not doing it right. You know, you won't be able (.) to (.) even begin the journey of fixing the mental trauma (.) that they have been through if you, if you don't really give them that (.), as as you know, a secure base as you can for the time that they are (.) that they are with you.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Er, so] that's, that's where, that's where we are. I suppose [you know].</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah] ((Intake of breath)) Erm (.) yeah, there's a lot of things you have said there (.) (((Laughing))).</p> <p>Lee: (((Laughing))) 12 years in five minutes.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah], it is ((Laughing)). So erm, what have been the ups for you then? In terms (.) the ups or [downs]?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10:15 minutes</p> <p>Lee: [The] ups are (.) when you see (.), it's like with any child, when you see them doing something new, when you see them achieving, learning, growing, developing, (.) erm (.) that's always tremendous erm (.) whether that's whilst they're with you or like I said, when you sort of get updates and you can see how (.) they're developing, that's always a</p>	<p>but continued to foster babies – identity as “baby carers”.</p> <p>Emotional labour – preparing child for adoption.</p> <p>“She is now ours.” Love saying this about our daughter.</p> <p>Commitment.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Ebb and flow greater in foster families? I had a sense that I wasn't fostering anymore – fostering role part of identity.</p> <p><u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p>Attachment Theory - Babies are dependent on trusted adults meeting needs. Pain associated with having to say goodbye.</p> <p>Stages of development. Early milestones during first 2 years.</p>
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<p>real positive. And then, of course, <i>you know, kids have got the most amazing (.) personalities, even the ones that are, can equally be horrendous erm (.) are funny</i> and <i>you know</i>, make you smile and do things and all the rest of it. So those <i>little moments</i> that, <i>you know, you have to sort of be erm (.) almost on the watch out for those, you know and be mindful and present in the moment of what's going on</i>. Because <i>if you're not careful, you miss them (.) and that all you actually end up remembering is (.) when they have er a meltdown er about (.) whatever</i>. Because <i>those are easy to remember because they're forced into your face</i>.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah.]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] but what <i>you've got</i> to remember is all the other little bits that, <i>you know (.)</i> erm weren't as big because the bits of positivity and joy and happiness aren't, <i>they you know, they</i>, it's not, <i>we don't live in an Instagram world do we?</i> Do <i>you know</i> what I mean? <i>They are</i> smaller and <i>they don't tend</i> to be captured. So, <i>you've got</i> to be mindful and watch those, so those, (.) those are the positives. <i>I suppose</i>. Those are the ups (.) definitely. Erm and the downs are generally (.) when, <i>when you, when you move a child on, those are the biggest downs, (.)</i> [definitely].</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [because] even with the boys now and <i>they have some really tough challenging behaviours</i> and all the rest of it, <i>but that's just (.), those are difficult in the moment</i>, but that is <i>only ever in the moment</i>, <i>you just kind of deal</i> with whatever (.) has happened, what's been said, what's been (.) broken, or thrown, or whatever.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mmm]</p> <p>Lee: [But] (.) <i>the key is not to, not to dwell on it, don't let it, that become all encompassing</i>. So those, those are really (.) <i>they're not particularly (.)</i> a problem.</p> <p>Lisa: [No]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] <i>you know</i> and <i>I suppose</i> the other lows are like when <i>you are</i> sort of (.) <i>I suppose</i> <i>battling the</i></p>	<p><u>Idealised voice</u></p> <p>Being present and in the moment.</p> <p><u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p>Strategy to support wellbeing.</p> <p><u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Moralistic voice</u> Rejection of idealised notion of “perfection”.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> “You” – attempts to depersonalise difficult feelings?</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> Acknowledgment in difference between managing behaviours and loss.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p><u>Advice Giving voice</u></p> <p>System – Social Care? School? Heath?</p>
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<p>system a little bit, where you're sort of trying your best to advocate, for what (.) a particular child might need (.) erm (.) and <u>most professionals around that child seem to sort of be an agreement</u>, but then (.) you know fundamentally you know, mainly sort of <u>cash led reasons why that particular (.) intervention or piece of work or move (.) can't happen</u> perhaps as (.) in the way in which everybody would like, but that (.) that again is <u>unfortunately just the world we live in and you know, you have to accept that, you can't just kind of try to rail against it</u> and (.) because there are only (.) so many places, <u>there are only so many hours that er professionals have to have to be available to spend with (.) with the people that are in our care</u>, you know, it's a stretched (.) <u>it's a stretched system that we all operate in</u> erm and <u>I think you have to (.) be able to (.) understand that and accept it (.) so that you don't kind of get overly angry with it all</u>, but also then kind of differentiate when things do need to happen and you do need to sort of get quite (.) erm feisty about what you're trying to get [achieved ((Smiling))].</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah] okay, you said initially that (.) you were working quite long [hours]</p> <p>Lee: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lisa: [and so] over the last sort of 14 years have you noticed a difference in your involvement in fostering?</p> <p>Lee: [Yeah] so ((Out breath)) seven years ago, nearly eight years ago <u>I got, er I left (.) the supermarket that was a HR manager for. They made us all redundant</u> (.) or lots of us, thousands of us got made redundant erm and <u>decided</u> at that point, not (.) to go and get a similar (.) job. Erm so, <u>I started up (.) the first of my businesses</u> at that point erm and a <u>massive part of that was to be able to correct my work life balance</u> erm (.) because at that point the, you know, the boys hadn't been with us very long or had <u>they been</u> with us? <u>I can't</u> remember. But <u>we'd obviously been fostering</u> quite</p>	<p><u>Idealised voice</u> Is the foster carer also 'seen' as a professional by others? Does Lee 'see' himself this way?</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p>Financial implications <u>Moralistic voice</u> <u>Advice giving voice</u> "You have to accept that" – Resolution. <u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Moralistic voice</u> Systemic pressures. <u>Advice giving</u></p> <p>Contradiction – Action is sometimes required.</p> <p>Loss of role - provider.</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> Change in career – resolution. Self-employed. <u>Matter of fact voice</u> Work/life balance – integrated into family. <u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p>Family/fostering Personal – 'missed out?'</p>
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<p>a while, so I was aware of the <u>demands</u> of that, our own children were growing up. So, I wanted to have something where I wasn't working across seven days a week, you know, 10, 12 hours (.) on a working day.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15:31 minutes</p>	<p><u>Hidden voice</u> <u>Idealised voice</u></p> <p>Role - provider</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] and so I started my own business and that, that although it <u>has its own challenges</u> because <u>you're not just earning 50 grand a year without (.) thinking, you know, which is pretty much what employment is. You just go and as long as you just turn up, they pay you don't they.</u> You know, that's fundamentally what it is. You don't even have to be any good. You just have to turn up. Erm (.) <u>whereas running your own business isn't like that at all, erm (.) you know (.) but yeah. So, that, (.) I did that and that's allowed me to become much more involved in (.) in fostering</u> over the years. So, you know, I go to lots and lots of the professional meetings erm (.) and all that side of stuff. I'm here (.) all of the time, really, you know, erm (.) to <u>to sort of be around to to do the good stuff and help with the sort of harder stuff of all of the, all of the children</u> that we've got, whatever, their sort of background is, (.) all five of them have got, (.) because that's the thing isn't it when you've got foster kids and birth kids, and we've got an adopted child, that they're just all the [children].</p>	<p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p>Shift. <u>Hidden voice</u> Involvement. <u>Matter of fact voice</u> <u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> <u>Hidden voice</u> Belonging.</p> <p>Individual needs.</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [and] so, they've all got their own needs and demands and stuff. And then obviously it means that, you know (.) <u>me and [Name] are able to carve out time for ourselves as well, and you know, even if that's (.) just going out for lunch or brunch one day a week, you know, without anybody because (.) whereas, if I was working in a (.) in a sort of traditional salaried, salaried job, that wouldn't happen.</u> Because on the days, when all the kids are at school, well I'd be at [work].</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah. Yeah]</p>	<p>Value time together.</p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> Benefit.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> Strategy to support wellbeing. Emotional Labour – toil of caring for children.</p>

Lee: [Erm, so] that's really helped I think to keep (.) the fostering going because it's <u>allowed us to maintain our (.) resilience and (.) sanity</u> about the whole thing, really. [((Laughing))]	Hidden voice
Lisa: [((Laughing))]	
Lee: [So yeah]	
Lisa: [Do] you find that you are supportive for each other then?	
Lee: Yeah, definitely (.) definitely. Neither (.) don't think (.) I don't (.) I don't know how single carers do it. I haven't got a clue how they do it. And I suppose (.) you (.) figure that out when you're in that position. But certainly, looking at it from (.) (our), my perspective I don't really understand how they even get the basics of getting young people they look after around and you know , then go to umpteen meetings and (.) also, then have their own life (.) and actually put themselves first at some point. Erm (.) yeah, I am just kind of in awe of that really, you know , [but]	Repetition - struggling to comprehend this.
Lisa: [Yeah, absolutely] So, erm what next then, obviously you've got five at the minute.	Wellbeing
Lee: [So], what next is is pretty much carrying on as we are, I suppose, I mean , the, the boys are nine and ten. [So]	Focus on now.
Lisa: [A while yet. Yeah. Still young.]	
Lee: [Yeah], I mean the older one (.) he , he might (.) they both still see their (.) birth mum really regularly and are potentially starting to to (.) begin family time with their birth dad. So, you know , we we can foresee that he might at some point want to go back (.) to live with his mum because you know there becomes a point where court orders don't matter and what, if they want to go at 14 or 15, if he wants to go and live there, he's going to go and live there and doesn't matter what anybody else says (.) erm (.) but we'll see . So yeah they just kind of carry on and life just carries on and we just , (.) We don't try to (.) We erm (.) There was a point where we were really struggling with the elder one and we had some intervention from the	<p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> Push and pull of loyalties. <u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> <u>Idealised voice</u> Everyday life. <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p>

<p>(.) erm (.) somebody from the erm mental, mental health team who's looked after, sort of placement stability and er she came and did some work with [Name] and I and we sort of (described), "Well you know when thinking about (.) L you know and were going to have him at least for" and at that point it would have been another 11 years or something and she was just like, "Well there's your problem straight away is it" I was like, "What do you mean?" It was like, "Well just worry about getting through today. You know don't think too much about (.) the future that (.) because it becomes too much, it's too overwhelming." If, you think of all of the challenges (.) whether you're a foster carer or not, if you kind of went, "Oh right yeah, we've got this and it's going to be like this for the next 10 years, 20 years." <i>It's too much. You know, you've got to hold it a bit more lightly than that and just sort of think about (.) well today, this week, that's it.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">20:32 Minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [So] that's all we (.) that's all we think about because things can change so (.) <i>so quickly</i>, you know (.) erm you don't know (.) what's around the corner, any number of (.) things can come happen (.) but then they might not and you just carry (.) and then you just carry on the way you are, so it doesn't matter.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mm, absolutely] You talked about erm (.) earlier about when you get the letters at Christmas and things or cards at Christmas from (.) family members of the children that have been adopted.</p> <p>Lee: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lisa: [Er] can you tell me more about I suppose how that feels when you get those letters and cards?</p> <p>Lee: [Erm] (.) It's nice. It feels like when (.) you get a Christmas card off, erm (.) sort of an extended member of your family, suppose. You know, if you had a member of the family that you had nieces and nephews that were scattered around the country and you don't really see them very much,</p>	<p>Support from others within system.</p> <p>Overwhelming – meaningful.</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> <u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u></p> <p>Placement stability?</p> <p>Children held in mind.</p>
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<p>but you know that <i>they're still part of the family</i>. And then, you know at Christmas and birthdays, you get a little photograph of them or, when they move up to a different school, you get a picture of them in their uniform, whatever and erm so you just go, wow, it's lovely to hear about whichever one it is and read about what <i>they're doing</i> and all the rest of it and I guess (.) because <i>they're all doing brilliant, because they're all with lovely lovely families</i> and I suppose (.) Yeah, there's (.) <i>there's a real sense of pride, I suppose</i> in the fact that like I said before <i>we've played a part in that</i> (.) that journey, <i>they came</i> to us, you know (.) because <i>some of, they were so young, they won't really remember it at all</i>, but when <i>they look back</i> and read and you know, (.) know that <i>they were adopted that, we are</i> (.) part of their (.) life at a very, very early stage, you know erm [So yeah].</p> <p>Lisa: [How] old were most of the babies, () like from birth?</p> <p>Lee: [Yeah], most were from the hospital.</p> <p>Lisa: [Were they, yeah.]</p> <p>Lee: [Yeah. Yeah.] Proper baby babies is what <i>we tended</i> to (.) look after erm (.) so <i>they tended to (.) move on from us, you know (.) at around somewhere between one and two depending on (.) how everything had gone</i>. So yeah, it's good just and there's pictures of <i>every child we ever had</i>. There's a picture of <i>them on the wall in the dining room because they're just always (.) always there</i>. So yeah, it's good. It's nice.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah], that sounds lovely. Anything else you want to think about?</p> <p>Lee: <i>I don't think</i>. That's pretty much <i>I mean</i>, obviously, when <i>we were</i> chatting before this, and the male roles and female roles and all that kind of stuff, and it is (.) interesting how <i>[Name] is always (.) erm assumed to be the main kind of carer</i>, erm and then <i>I guess</i>, even when you look through at almost <i>everybody, I deal with (.) tends to be female</i>. It's, it and I <i>always</i> really do notice that, but <i>I suppose</i> it's</p>	<p><i>Idealised voice</i></p> <p>Value – pride. <i>Hidden voice</i> <i>Moralistic voice</i></p> <p><i>Matter of fact voice</i></p> <p>Part of life story.</p> <p>Term.</p> <p><i>Matter of fact voice</i></p> <p>Held in mind.</p> <p><i>Hidden voice</i></p> <p>Women are usually assigned primary carer status. <i>Matter of fact voice</i> Gender</p> <p><i>Matter of fact voice</i></p>
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<p>much the same as when I was a personal manager, that was exactly the same. You know, there was only two, two guys. Erm oh no I think there might have been three out of our sort of regional group of 40. You know, so its erm so it's another kind of role where it is (.) it happens to be very female (.) dominated. Erm (.) <i>now whether that matters or not, I don't know. I don't think</i> it probably does erm (.) you know but (.) <i>I suspect it probably does</i>, you know I mean, when I think the two lads that we've got (.) and you know male role models and all that kind of thing (.) and in terms of, particularly for young lads, keeping them on the (.) right track, <i>they need positive role models but in the same (.) but then so do the young girls who are coming up through. They need</i> to see male role models that (.) behave appropriately and don't, (.) because they may well have had some very negative perceptions of what male role models (.) can be and how they behave, and understanding what is acceptable behaviour (.) from a male, you know in terms of behaviours, language, just what they expect other people to do, and you know all of that kind of stuff. Erm so, yeah, <i>I do still find that sort of unusual</i>. You know, erm <i>I remember I got</i> recruited to sit on a very large, local authority erm (.) fostering panel and the main reason was because <i>they just didn't have any enough, they didn't have any males</i> who's on it and they needed (.) <i>We rightly talk about diversity</i> and all the rest of it, but it's most fundamental level of gender split, actually, you know it can quite easily not be right before you even start getting around to ethnicity and all the rest of it.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mm]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">26:52 Minutes</p> <p>Lee: [There's] lots of bits when you look around fostering that it'll struggle to be acceptable if it was in a commercial environment (.) as a company, it would be criticised for not having (.) diversity in almost every (.) every way really.</p>	<p>Questioning...</p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u> Positive male role models. <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p><u>Idealised voice</u> Changing narrative of men.</p> <p>Visibility. <u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Majority of foster carers couples – men's roles not valued/seen? Matter of fact voice <u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p>Wider concern – representation.</p> <p>Reflection of service.</p>
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<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Because] do we as foster carers and the social service network around it. <i>Do we genuinely represent the communities that we serve and we probably don't</i> (.) erm to be fair. Erm you know and that just, (.) in the work that I do with erm [Organisation] where I support, you know, erm foster carers that are going through allegation process and stuff, you see it quite a lot where you go, you as a foster carer and, maybe your ethnic background, religious background is different from most of the people that you're working with and they just don't get you, you know, it's not that they're doing anything wrong but they just don't understand really the, the fundamentals of (.) how you would lead your life. Yeah, it's an interesting er thing to sort of, have a bit of a look at and shine a light on.</p> <p>Lisa: Yeah, hopefully, I'd like it to be of interest. Erm how do you find it being male then in fostering?</p> <p>Lee: Erm, I think, I suppose I have, you have to be (.) yeah, I suppose you've got to be comfortable going and sitting (.) in a meeting or in a situation where you are the only (.) male. Erm (.) you know which I (.) like I say, I've been in situations that for a long, long time but it isn't usual. You know in most walks of life, there will be a mix.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [Erm but] more often than not there won't be. Even, I mean like later this week I've got a meeting up at the school about one of the boys and that will all be, you know from (.) every professional there will be female and then me and you have to be kind of able to go and (.) and be and not let that really affect how you act or what you say or whatever erm and I suppose, it doesn't make a difference, but equally you're aware of it.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Lee: [You know], just the same as not that many years ago, if a [.] female manager walked into a management meeting she probably would have</p>	<p><u>Moralistic voice</u></p> <p>How could this be easier? What more can I do when working with families to ensure men's views are heard and recognised.</p> <p><u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p>'Caring professions' – dominated by females.</p> <p><u>Matter of fact voice</u> Change in workforce. <u>Advice giving voice</u></p> <p><u>Hidden voice</u></p> <p>Awareness.</p>
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been the only female in many companies, 30, 40 years ago erm and there is a level of (.) erm there can be, I mean, certainly back then in terms of sort of sexism and all the rest of it though. There was an intimidation about going into those situations. Now, there certainly isn't that but you're certainly aware of being the only guy.

Lisa: [Yeah]

Lee: [Yeah], and I suppose it's just the fact you are aware it's a thing.

Lisa: Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it. Yeah, anything else you can think of.

Lee: No, I don't think so. I think that's everything.

Lisa: Yeah, I do really appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

Lee: No worries.

8.9.3. Lee's voice poem

I	You	She/He	We	They
			We've been fostering We (.) had had our	
				They were
	You know	She worked		
			We were We were	
	You know			
I think		She did		
			We decided	
		She must		
I suppose				
I				
I				
I know				
		She's got		
	You know			
		She was She came		
	You know			
			We'd been talking	
		She said		
	You know			
			We went	
I guess				
	You know			
			We know We don't	
I guess				
I remember				
I guess				
	You know			
				They are They can
			We go	
I wanted				
	You know			
I loved				
		She could		

I was
I [really] wasn't
in

You know
You know

I'd [probably]
done
I don't think

You know
You're in
You know

I suppose
You know

You were
You could
You could

You know

I think

You know
You know

You know
You know
You know

I say
I
I think

You know

We ended
We went

We passed

We were
We didn't have

We've
We've
We did
We
We [still] keep

We're coming
We'll get

They're all

They weren't
able

We didn't
realise
We [kind of]
dealt

			We didn't realise	
		She had She ended She had		
	You know		We had	They were They're still here
		He's 21 He'll be able He wishes He's old		
				They They both
			We We continued We had We got	
I think		She		
			We We adopted	
		She is		
I always	You know			
	You have to You know You have to You have to You know			
	You don't really			They have They are They are
I suppose	You know You see You see			
				They're with
I said	You sort of get You can			
				They're developing
	You know			

	<p>You know You know You have You know You're not careful You miss You actually end</p>		
	<p>You've got You know</p>		<p>They have They're forced</p>
	<p>You know</p>		<p>They</p>
			<p>They</p>
		<p>We don't live We</p>	
	<p>You know</p>		<p>They are They don't tend</p>
<p>I suppose</p>	<p>You've got</p>		
	<p>You You move</p>		
	<p>You just kind of deal</p>		<p>They have</p>
			<p>They're not particularly</p>
<p>I suppose</p>	<p>You know</p>		
<p>I suppose</p>	<p>You are</p>		
	<p>You're sort of trying You know You know</p>		
		<p>We live</p>	
	<p>You know You have to You can't just You know</p>		
<p>I think</p>		<p>We all</p>	

	<p>You have to</p> <p>You don't</p> <p>You do</p> <p>You're trying</p>	
<p>I got</p> <p>I left</p>		<p>They made</p>
<p>I decided</p> <p>I started</p>	<p>They been</p>	
<p>I can't</p> <p>remember</p>		<p>They been</p>
		<p>We'd</p> <p>[obviously]</p> <p>been fostering</p>
<p>I was</p> <p>I wanted</p> <p>I wasn't</p> <p>working</p> <p>I started</p>	<p>You're not</p> <p>You know</p> <p>You just go</p> <p>You just</p>	
	<p>You</p> <p>You know</p> <p>You don't</p> <p>You just</p> <p>You know</p>	<p>They pay</p>
<p>I did</p>	<p>You know</p>	
<p>I go</p> <p>I'm here</p>	<p>You know</p>	
	<p>You've got</p>	<p>We've got</p>
		<p>We've got</p>
		<p>They're just</p> <p>They've all</p>
<p>I was</p> <p>I'd be at</p> <p>I think</p>	<p>You know</p> <p>You know</p> <p>You know</p>	

I don't think
I don't
I don't know
I haven't

I suppose
I don't really
understand

I am

I suppose
I mean
I mean

I was

You know

You know

You know

You know

You know

You know

You mean
You know
You think
You kind of
went

You know
You've got to

He
He might

He might

He wants
He's going

She came

She was

We are

We can

We'll see

We just
We don't try
We were
We had some

We sort

We've got

They do

They even
They look

They both

They want

They just

		We	
		We think	
	You know		
	You don't know		
	You just carry		
	You just carry		
	on		
I suppose	You get		
	You know		
	You had		
	You don't really		
	You know		They're still
	You know		
	You get		
	You get		
I guess			They're doing
			They're all
			They're all
I suppose			
I suppose			
I said			
		We've played	
			They came
	You know		
			They were
			They won't
			really
			They look
	You know		
			They were
		We are	
	You know		
		We tended	
			They tended
	You know		
		We ever	
			Them on
			They're just
I don't think			
I mean			
		We were	
I guess			
I deal			
I always			

I suppose
I was

You know

I think

You know

I don't know
I don't think

You know

I suspect

You know

I mean
I think

We've got

You know

Them on
They need
They need
They may
They expect

You know

I do
I remember
I go

They just didn't
have
They didn't
have
The needed

You know
You look

We rightly

We as
We genuinely
represent
We serve
We probably
don't

You know

I do
I support

You know
You see
You go
You as a
You're working

You

They just

	You know		They're doing They just don't
	You would		
I think			
I suppose			
I have			
	You have to		
I suppose			
	You've got		
	You are		
	You know		
I say			
	You know		
I mean			
I've got			
	You know		
	You have to		
I suppose			
	You're aware		
		She probably would	
I mean			
	You're certainly aware		
I suppose			
I don't think			
I think			

8.9.4. Maps of Lee's contrapuntal voices

L1: Decision to foster

Moralistic

Idealised

Hidden

"Motivation, to start fostering really."

→ "Found it really disturbing."

Matter of fact

"We were paying quite a lot of money for our daughter to literally be in the same building in a different room to her mum ((smiling)) and we were paying for that privilege."

→ "That was really rubbish on erm our daughter."

→ "Whole kind fostering thing very much sort of aligns with I guess where my values are as a person in terms of you know erm doing stuff positively to make a difference."

→ "It fitted with our sort of family makeup."

→ "I was working for a major supermarket at the time and working crazy hours."

Advice giving

I Poem

I think
I suppose
I
I know
I guess
I guess
I remember
I guess
I wanted
I loved
I was
I [really] wasn't in

Landscape

- Experience of caring for children.
- Economic / financial.
- Family time.
- Extended wider family.
- Confidence in system.
- Guided initially by partner's interest.
- Role – provider.

L2: Approval Process

Moralistic

Idealised

Hidden

Matter of fact

Advice giving

"I don't think you kind of share the stuff in the way in which the the the approval process does because it asks it so directly."

"When you're in sort of relationships and stuff, it becomes a more organic sharing of getting to know each other."

"We went through the the the sort of dreaded approval process."

"That was really, really difficult erm very intrusive."

"So that that was quite difficult to get through that."

"We ended up applying."

"But that was okay."

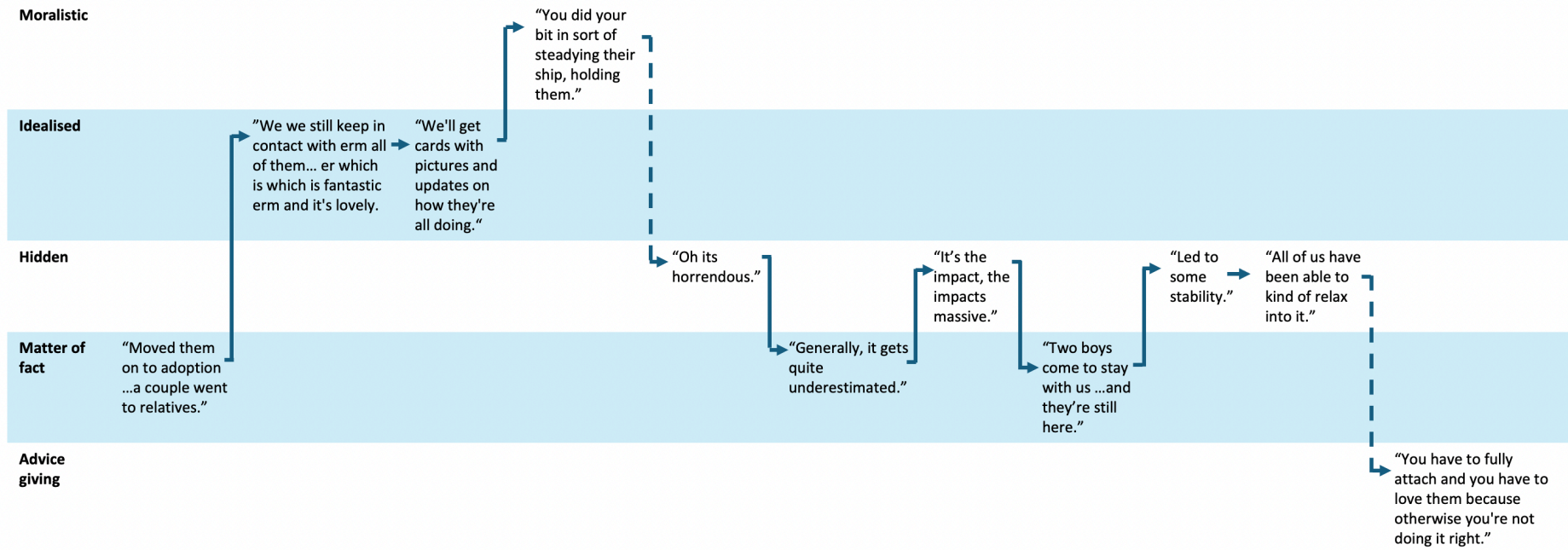
I Poem

I'd [probably] done
I don't think

Landscape

- Process followed – Form F completed.
- Relationship – care and commitment.
- My response was to laugh at the comment "dreadful approval process" due to own experience.

L3: Moving on



I Poem
I think
I say
I
I think
I think
I always
I suppose

Landscape

- Terms such as "Moved" and "Independence" - normalise process / possibly take some of emotion away. Way of feeling less pain?
- *Staying put scheme* - Commitment to permanence.
- *Transition to adulthood* - Pathway plan starts at 16.
- *My initial response* - Maintaining links isn't always wanted. Adoptive parents' sense of gratitude. Wanting to hold on to connection.
- Value – achievement.
- *Emotional labour* - Focused on child's needs/ preparing infant for adoption. Is this anticipated?
- *Systemic/family systems* - Role/family identity/feelings of belonging and stability. Maintaining function of family. Equilibrium – limited change.
- Is the ebb and flow greater in foster families?
- Attachment Theory - Babies are dependent on trusted adults meeting needs.

L4: Parenting with presence

Moralistic

Idealised

"Kids have got the most amazing personalities, even the ones that are, can equally be horrendous and are funny."

Hidden

Matter of fact

Advice giving

"You have to sort of be almost on the watch out for those, you know and be mindful and present in the moment of what's going on."

"If you're not careful, you miss them."

"All you actually end up remembering is when they have a meltdown."

"Those are easy to remember because they're forced into your face."

"We don't live in an Instagram world."

"They have some really tough challenging behaviours."

"Those are difficult in the moment."

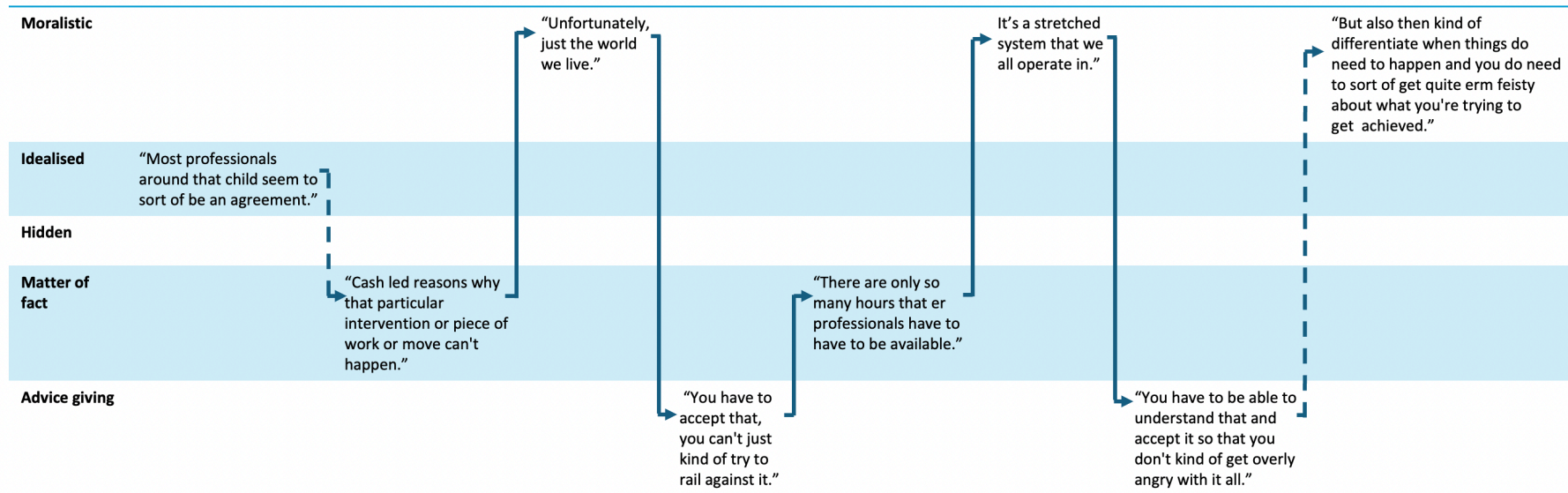
"The key is not to, not to dwell on it, that become all encompassing."

I Poem
I suppose

Landscape

- Strategy to support wellbeing - Being present and in the moment.
- Rejection of idealised notion of "perfection".
- "You" – attempt to depersonalise difficult feelings?
- Acknowledgment in difference between managing behaviours and loss.

L5: Access to services

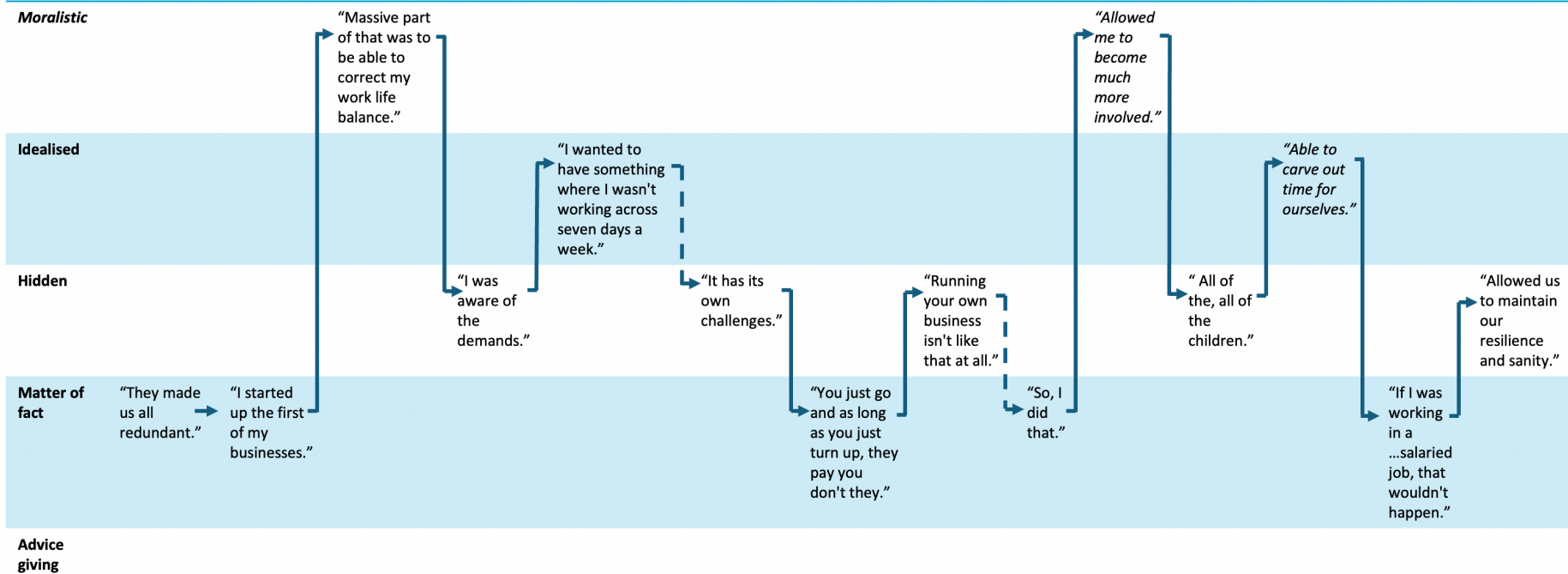


I Poem
I suppose
I suppose
I think

Landscape

- Systems – foster carers work with partners from Social Care, School, and Health.
- Is the foster carer also 'seen' as a professional by others? Does Lee 'see' himself this way?
- Financial implications/systemic pressures
- Resolution - "You have to accept that"
- Contradiction – Action is sometimes required.

L6: Changing role



I Poem

I got
I left
I decided
I started
I was
I wanted
I wasn't working
I started
I did
I go
I'm here

Landscape

- Loss of role - provider.
- Change in career – resolution.
- Work/life balance – integrated into family.
- Involvement in fostering.
- Belonging.
- Meeting individual needs.
- Value time together.
- Strategy to support wellbeing.
- Emotional Labour – toil of caring for children.

L7: Placement stability

Moralistic

Idealised

"We can foresee that he might at some point want to go back."

"They just kind of carry on and life just carries."

Hidden

"We'll see."

"There was a point where we were really struggling."

"It's too much."

"Things can change so quickly,."

Matter of fact

"They both still see their birth mum."

"There becomes a point where court orders don't matter."

"If he wants to go and live there, he's going to go."

Advice giving

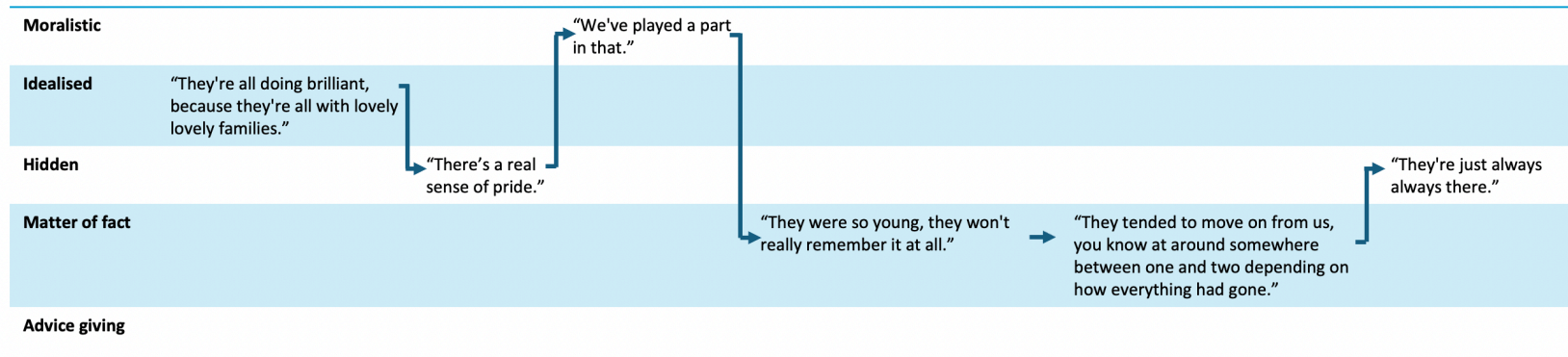
"You've got to hold it a bit more lightly than that and just sort of think about well today, this week, that's it."

I Poem
I mean
I was

Landscape

- Placement stability - Focus on present.
- Feelings can be overwhelming.
- Push and pull of loyalties.
- Everyday life.
- Support from others within system seen as valuable.

L8: Maintaining links



I Poem
I suppose
I guess
I suppose
I suppose
I said

Landscape
- Children held in mind.
- Value – pride.
- Part of life story.

L9: Gender

Moralistic

Idealised

Hidden

Matter of fact

Advice giving

"[Name] ...assumed to be the main carer."

"Everybody I deal with tends to be female."

"Whether that matters or not, I don't I don't think it probably does."

"I suspect it probably does."

"Young lads ...they need positive role models...but then so do the young girls."

"I do still find that sort of unusual."

"They didn't have any males."

"We rightly talk about diversity."

"Do we genuinely represent the communities that we serve?"

"You've got to be comfortable going and sitting in a meeting or in a situation where you are the only male."

"You have to be kind of able to go and and be and not let that really affect how you act or what you say."

"You're aware of it."

I Poem

I guess	I think	I suppose
I deal	I do	I say
I always	I remember	I mean
I suppose	I got	I've got
I was	I do	I suppose
I think	I support	I mean
I don't know	I think	I suppose
I don't think	I suppose	I have
I suspect		
I mean		

Landscape

- 'Caring professions' – dominated by females. Women are usually assigned primary carer status.
- Changing narrative of men. Positive male role models.
- Visibility - Majority of foster carers are couples – men's roles not valued/seen? - How could this be easier? What more can I do when working with families to ensure men's views are heard and recognised?
- Wider concern – representation.
- Reflection of service.

L10: Overview of landscapes

Motivation to foster

- Economic / financial. (L1)
- Family time. (L1)
- Experience of caring for children. (L1)
- Wider family have fostered and adopted - Confidence in system. (L1)
- Process followed – Form F completed. (L2)
- My response was to laugh at the comment “dreadful approval process” due to own experience. (L2)

Changing role

- Loss of role – provider. (L6)
- Change in career – resolution. (L6)
- Work/life balance – integrated into family. (L6)
- Involvement in fostering. (L6)
- Meeting individual needs. (L6)
- Value time together. (L6)

Gender

- ‘Caring professions’ – dominated by females. Women are usually assigned primary carer status. (L9)
- Changing narrative of men. Positive male role models. (L9)
- Visibility - Majority of foster carers are couples – men’s roles not valued/seen? - How could this be easier? What more can I do when working with families to ensure men’s views are heard and recognised? (L9)
- Guided initially by partner’s interest. (L1)
- Role – provider. (L1/L6/L9)
- Wider concern – representation. (L9)
- Reflection of service. (L9)
- Change in career – resolution. (L6)
- Work/life balance – integrated into family. (L6)
- Involvement in fostering. (L6)
- Relationship – care and commitment. (L2)

Caring for babies/children

- Value – pride. (L3/L8)
- Value – achievement. (L3)
- Emotional Labour – toil of caring for children/ focussed on child’s needs/ preparing child for adoption. (L3/L6)
- My initial response - Maintaining links isn’t always wanted. Adoptive parents’ sense of gratitude. Wanting to hold on to connection. (L3)
- Systemic/family systems - Role/family identity/feelings of belonging and stability. Maintaining function of family. Equilibrium - minimises risks of change but continued to foster babies. (L3)
- Is the ebb and flow greater in foster families? (L3)
- Attachment Theory - Babies are dependent on trusted adults meeting needs. (L3)
- Belonging. (L6)
- Meeting individual needs. (L6)
- Children held in mind. (L8)
- Part of life story. (L8)

Transition into adulthood

- Terms such as “Moved” and “Independence” - normalise process / possibly take some of emotion away. Way of feeling less pain? (L3)
- Staying put scheme - Commitment to permanence. (L3)
- Transition to adulthood - Pathway plan starts at 16. (L3)
- Push and pull of loyalties. (L7)

Working in partnership - public

- Systems – foster carers work with partners from Social Care, School, and Health. (L5)
- Is the foster carer also ‘seen’ as a professional by others? Does Lee ‘see’ himself this way? (L5)
- Financial implications/systemic pressures. (L5)
- Resolution - “You have to accept that”. (L5)
- Contradiction – Action is sometimes required. (L5)

Strategies

- Strategy to support wellbeing - Being present and in the moment. (L4/L6)
- Rejection of idealised notion of “perfection”. (L4)
- “You” – attempt to depersonalise difficult feelings? (L4)
- Acknowledgment in difference between managing behaviours and loss. (L4)
- Support from others within system seen as valuable. (L7)
- Placement stability - Focus on present. (L7)
- Feelings can be overwhelming. (L7)
- Everyday life. (L7)

8.10. Appendix Ten: Mr X

8.10.1. Mr X's transcript

- 1 Lisa: I think we're recording yeah.
- 2 Mr X: Yes fine.
- 3 Lisa: Ok, well thank you so much for joining me today, erm this really is just about you
4 being able to tell me about your experiences. So, I'd just been really interested to
5 hear erm and you can start (.) begin wherever you like.
- 6 Mr X: Ok, I'm gonna just go through a quick chronological thing, which might then bring up
7 some questions, erm but we (.) in about a week and a half time we will have been
8 fostering for 20 years.
- 9 Lisa: [Ok]
- 10 Mr X: [Erm] and it's been a real roller coaster. The first two children
11 we had were just a temporary placement because that's how they wanted us to do
12 things. And we got twin boys and er that was a steep learning curve, in many
13 respects because (.) they came saying that they both had learning difficulties and it
14 turned out that only one did. The other one was just [mimicking].
- 15 Lisa: [Yeah]
- 16 Mr X: [what] the one with learning
17 difficulties was doing because he thought that's what was normal. But it became very
18 obvious. I should point out that before I did this, I was a teacher and I worked with
19 children with learning difficulties, so I quickly came to realise as did my wife who was
20 also from a similar background. That one of the boys was not (.) not that way at all.
21 In fact, he was quite bright and erm should not have been in the special school he
22 was in [Intake of breath]. We only had them for about six months. It was (.) made
23 complicated by the fact, there was a parental involvement, that wasn't always erm
24 particularly healthy (.) and it was clearly at the root of lots of the issues and
25 problems erm it wasn't just that the boys were hard work [Intake of breath]. But they
26 were really, er we did as good a job as we could with them and both the social
27 worker and the mum said, we'd done a good job and couldn't believe that she'd got
28 them to, we'd got them to dress themselves and (.) they went from wearing nappies
29 at four years old into wearing just ordinary underwear, both of them, got them toilet
30 trained in a very short space of time, got them to sit still. They could actually go into
31 a classroom and sit, and listen, and behave and all kinds of things. So, it was really
32 satisfying. Er we'd always gone into fostering because we wanted to keep a sibling
33 group together because we've been aware as teachers, that we'd come across
34 children, who had been separated, (.) through no fault of their own, who'd got a
35 brother over here, and a sister over there, that they didn't hardly ever saw. We felt
36 that wasn't fair or right and so we looked for a group of three or four and (.) nothing

seemed to be forthcoming. We were with an independent fostering agency to start with and they just didn't seem to be very proactive. So, I got fed up with waiting and started phoning up social services and got told off for it. And I said, "Well then you do your job, and don't have me doing it for you.", and they didn't like that at all. And I said, "Well, whose toes am I treading on? If I'm (upsetting) someone's ego, then I'm fine with that. I don't have a problem with it but if I'm breaking the law then that's different. "Urgh well it's not illegal". I said then "Why are you trying to stop me doing it? Anyway, eventually, (.) because of my efforts, we found a sibling group of five and erm the IFA manager said, "I'm really not happy that you've done this." I said, "Let's talk to your boss then" because I know they wouldn't be unhappy about the money that was coming in. He was just unhappy I'd trodden on his toes because he hadn't got on with doing his job. So eventually he got moved on, but I've never been able to suffer fools gladly, I'm afraid and maybe that's a failing. I've never been rude to people or anything other than forthright, but I do think when you've got a social worker, that's not doing the job, it just needs to be nudged in that direction and I'm not frightened of doing that. I firmly believe in advocating (.) and as a foster carer apart from all the nuts and bolts of looking after children, I would have said that my greatest strength, and my wife's and it was identified during our initial erm (.) work you to do to become a foster career that we would make good advocates and we always have done and particularly from an educational point of view with our backgrounds. We've never let things get in the way of doing what needs to be done and that's really what came to the fore in getting this sibling group of five to come with us. But the amount of negativity you come across from (.) people who really ought to know better. "Ah well you've found them but whether we'll actually get them to come to you or not it's another matter altogether." I said, "But where else are they going? They've been stuck in a children's home for 18 months. Nobody wants them. Nobody can take them. They're on the verge of being split up and adopted." I said, "Which is (.) we got into this to stop exactly that." Not the adoption but the splitting up.

Lisa: [Yeah]

5:02 Minutes

Mr X: [and erm] So (.) right from the off, we've had to fight and battle just to get our job done which always struck me as being (.) a waste of energy that should never be the case, but it was actually a good experience because it's been that way all along. It's always been the case where we've had to take on the institution of just get simple things done, and that doesn't matter whether it's the medical institution, the educational institution, the children services, social work institution, they all seem to have (.) rules in place and protocols in place that in some cases are just simply counterproductive. I understand safeguarding and you have to do things in a certain way but (.) my view has always been, you know, is this serving the needs of the child (.) and if it's not, then why we're doing it?

78 Lisa: [Yeah]
 79 Mr X: [Erm] and I've not got
 80 a lot of time for people who are jobsworths. So having trodden on a few toes, we
 81 finally managed to get the sibling group of five to arrive and (.) suddenly people
 82 started taking us a bit more seriously and realise we weren't (.) just (.) a couple of (.)
 83 numpties, that we actually had got some gumption about us. And we did a relatively
 84 good job. Those children still call us Mum and Dad and they still come home for
 85 Christmas and another times. We have family gatherings four or five times a year.
 86 We've been on holiday with them. We've taken them on holiday and (.) we've just
 87 got this extending family too, (.) to the extent that we have to hire, the village hall
 88 every time we want to get together, as there isn't enough room at home.

89 Lisa: [()] Yeah.
 90 Mr X: [Yeah], and there were
 91 problems with one of the children that didn't end up staying with a very long. But
 92 those problems had gone back, (.) long before they'd come to stay with us, so (.) So
 93 that, that was the first and taking on five, having five arrive on your doorstep is a
 94 daunting task. My wife fortunately is one of these people that's incredibly well
 95 organised (.) and erm pre-empted an awful lot of issues and problems we might have
 96 had (.) just by (adding) to the fact she's just one of these people whose house runs
 97 like clockwork (.) and within the love and fun of being in a family, there is a structure
 98 there.

99 Lisa: [Yeah]
 100 Mr X: [There's] a functionality to it, without it being a regimented. It's a wonderful
 101 balancing act. ((Intake of breath)) Erm (.) and that took up the next sort of er (.)
 102 seven or eight years of our fostering experience. ((Intake of breath)) That said, by the
 103 time we'd finished and the last two or three of them were (.) still with us, we'd had
 104 enough. They'd come damaged. We'd love them as our own which is perhaps (.) a bit
 105 of a mistake. I think sometimes you have to just be a bit professionally aloof, and we
 106 weren't able to be. (.) And I don't apologise for that. We had more than one social
 107 worker try to tell us that, that you know that wasn't the way to do it. And I said, "I
 108 just don't know any other way to be a parent." (.) Erm it came to something of a head
 109 when one of the girls (.) in the group, who was having behavioural problems and who
 110 we'd identified as learning difficulties issues, which the social worker wouldn't take
 111 seriously (.) and the school didn't really want to listen to. ((Intake of breath)) erm
 112 started seeing a boy and was spending a lot of time at his house and I said, "That's all
 113 fine and good but you've now been there seven or eight times. The next time you
 114 meet up, I want you to come here. I want to meet him."

115 Lisa: [Yeah]
 116 Mr X: [Which] I didn't
 117 think was unreasonable and at the time she agreed until it came time for her to go
 118 again and I wouldn't let her leave the house. I literally stood in the doorway and said,

119 "No, you phone him up and tell him to come here." I said, "In fact, I will go with you
 120 to pick him up to bring him."

121 Lisa: [Yeah]

122 Mr X: [I said], "I'm meeting him and that's the end of it." And this
 123 was following up from what I'd said before, and what we'd agreed before, and what
 124 the social worker had agreed. Anyway, in standing my ground, she assaulted me (.)
 125 and I tried to fend her off as best I could. Unfortunately, my wife was out at the time
 126 so there was no witness to it. (.) Fortunately, her sister saw the whole thing (.) and at
 127 one point, she actually managed to get the door open and I (.) tried to stop it and she
 128 trapped my hand in the door and (.) I had to push her away to get my hand out, at
 129 which point she fell over (.) and er then she got up and just started assaulted me
 130 again er and I just let it all play out until she'd stopped. Anyway, we reported it as you
 131 should, with these things. And the next thing I know is the social worker has
 132 informed the police that this girl has been assaulted, because in an interview with
 133 her, I think he'd managed to persuade her to believe that me (.) pushing her away
 134 from me (.) was assault. And the police got involved and that was the worst
 135 experience (.) of my life, really. I'd had one accusation made against me as a teacher,
 136 which came to nothing because of the teaching assistant in the classroom and it was
 137 the child's parents that were (.) pushing it, but there was no evidence to suggest.
 138 And what was most annoying was (.) the social worker who having listened to what
 139 the girl had said and to what the girl's sister who had witnessed it, still decided to go
 140 ahead with the police investigation (.) when there wasn't a mark on her. There was
 141 nothing untoward had gone on. And you know if anyone's going to cause problems
 142 from, it would have been her sister who could have easily lied through her teeth and
 143 said, "Yeah", but she wouldn't be persuaded (.) and that was what was distressing. It
 144 wasn't what the girl did. I think she was put up to doing it. But then, I went through
 145 three months where (.) our own social worker wouldn't be drawn on any comments
 146 when I was asking for advice, as they don't. Er and it was just the loneliest time in the
 147 world. Had that (.) gone through to a prosecution (.) erm all of the children would
 148 have been taken away. We would have lost our income from fostering, I would have
 149 lost my income from teaching. I would have been lucky to get a job at a checkout (.)
 150 in a supermarket somewhere. I mean, fortunately (.) erm my wife thought a bit
 151 better, better on her feet than I did and the day after she said, "You need to phone
 152 the police, tell them you've been accused of this, but you've also been assaulted" (.)
 153 and er the bruises were coming out by then, all up and down one leg, the hand
 154 damage, another couple of bruises on my shoulder where she'd punch me. And so (.)
 155 I got a police photographer about two days afterwards documenting about a dozen
 156 or so injuries and bruises and er at the end of it erm (.) the police officer that
 157 interviewed me said, "We aren't taking any further action. It's very obvious what's
 158 happened here. I don't know why my time has been wasted." But someone's, when a
 159 looked after child is [involved]

160 Lisa: [Yeah]

161 11:55 Minutes

162 Mr X: [they've] got to respond. They can't make a
 163 judgment call. They've got to follow the process. And he said, "But there is enough
 164 evidence for you to prosecute her for assault." (.) And said, "I'm not interested."

165 Lisa: [Yeah]

166 Mr X: [I] didn't
 167 get into this to cause problems for a damaged young person. But at the end of all
 168 that, the social worker was furious, which was another annoying thing. Erm and
 169 eventually one of the other children, insisted on a separate social worker because he
 170 said, "He's trying to persuade me to cause problems at home, he's trying to get me
 171 to leave, and I don't want to. We're happy here." Even the girl that was, you know
 172 the subject of the allegations didn't want to leave.

173 Lisa: [No]

174 Mr X: [Erm] and they didn't take her
 175 away, they didn't take anybody away, whilst the investigation went on. So, it was a
 176 real storm in a teacup ((Intake of breath)) but we decided collectively that, that was
 177 it. Once these children had gone, we would do no more. We'd had enough. (.) And
 178 then a very canny social worker said erm (.) to us, "Have you maybe thought about a
 179 different type of fostering?"

180 Lisa: [Okay]

181 Mr X: [We] said "No. We're finished, we're exhausted, we've no. (.)
 182 our stress levels are where they shouldn't be. We're in our late 50s. I am not dying of
 183 a heart attack (.) in two weeks' time because of it." But she said, "We're starting to
 184 get more and more refugees come through and they tend to be far more respectful.
 185 They usually haven't come from broken homes. They are usually, well-adjusted young
 186 people that have had to leave the country through no fault of their own, because a
 187 threat of violence or whatever." And we said, "Well, we're not persuaded." And she
 188 said, "Well I've got one that's not happy where he is. His carers are going away on
 189 holiday and we just need a placement for him for a week." And so, we took (.) a
 190 young man erm (.) he was [Nationality], and he was just lovely (.) and (.) the saddest
 191 thing of it all was, we had him for a week, we didn't want to let him go back, he
 192 didn't want to go back. We were about to go on holiday with our foster children and
 193 we had a spare place and the saddest thing I've ever done (.) was to drop him off in
 194 tears (.) back at his carers and knowing that we were going on holiday and we could
 195 have taken him with us.

196 Lisa: [Yeah]

197 Mr X: [I've] regretted that (.) I really have. Erm even now I get
 198 emotional about that and there's a reason for that. That's because erm (.) he came to
 199 live with us eventually, was with us two years and then he moved on to
 200 independence. Kept in touch, he turned up a family weddings and family gatherings

201 and occasions. Back in March, we were invited to his wedding (.) and we went to see
202 him married. Erm a few months afterwards, he told us his wife was pregnant. And
203 then erm four weeks ago, we got a very distressing phone call from his wife, saying
204 he'd passed away.

14:54 minutes

205
206 Lisa: [Oh I'm so sorry]

207 Mr X: [()] He had epilepsy. Erm and last weekend, his wife and his cousin
208 were here and we're making plans together about what we can do (.) to help and
209 support. But as I said to his wife, I said, "You've got to understand the impact that he
210 had on us. As a consequence of him, we have now fostered over 20 refugees." And
211 we currently have four in place and we've had as many as five. And we've got two
212 boys who have been with us two years who are leaving this week and two more
213 coming in their place. Erm and that's been the story of our fostering.

214 Lisa: [(.) Yeah] Wow,
215 very powerful. [Very powerful]

216 Mr X: [So I'm getting] emotional sat here just talking about [it]. ((wiping
217 eyes))

[Yeah]

218 [and] because
219 it's (.) was my 65th birthday which was in May. We had the family gathering as usual
220 and we had about 10 refugee boys there (.) current and past, and we had erm all of
221 my birth children and grandchildren, erm nearly all of my foster children and the
222 grandchildren that have come with them and erm we invited two friends from
223 church, erm who we are close with and (.) and they didn't really know about our
224 extended family. And erm one of them came up to me said, "This is just amazing.
225 This is just amazing." They were just completely blown away and I don't, I can
226 understand why. And I said, "You know something, I got no idea what heavens like, I
227 really don't. Erm I've gone to church all my life and I've heard what people say." I
228 said, "but if this (.) is heaven. That I'm fine with it. I don't need anything else."

229
230 Lisa: [Yeah]

231 Mr X: [So], that's
232 me in a nutshell.

233 Lisa: [Wow] it's amazing ((Looking away)) ((Intake of breath)) (.) Wow (.) Ok yeah. I
234 suppose just going back to the beginning of your story then. Where did the
235 motivation come from [()]?

236 Mr X: [I] I was sat in a staffroom looking, looking through a er staff
237 leaflet. I did a bit of supply teaching for a while.

238 Lisa: [Mm]

239 Mr X: [And] I was always on the lookout for
240 (.) permanent jobs. Er (.) by supply teaching, I was working with the authority with
241 difficult children, so I was moving around a lot, but I fancied settling down in a school

242 and starting developing a career properly. And I was looking through, the leaflet's got
 243 all the jobs in and on the very back page it said, "Ever consider fostering?" and er just
 244 that morning, I'd been teaching er (.) working with a boy, who'd got behaviour
 245 problems. He was fostered (.) and er he was telling me about his family. Stepsister
 246 here, stepbrother there, full brother over there (.) not in, under the same roof, kind
 247 of thing and I think that's a real shame. It's a pity that foster careers can't take more
 248 than one, because at the time I got no idea what foster carers could and couldn't
 249 [do].

250 Lisa: [Okay]

251 Mr X: [And] then I saw this thing on the back [.]and in my break I just sort of Google
 252 searched the thing, and then I remembered I got erm a friend in [Location] who was
 253 part of our church friendship and he, they fostered so I thought I'll give him a ring.
 254 Anyway, I did do, and er (.) he said to me, (.) "You and your wife don't talk much do
 255 you?". I said, "What you mean?" And he said, "Well, she was on the phone last week
 256 to my wife about the very same subject".

257 Lisa: [((Laughing))]
 258 [and] she'd seen the same thing in the
 259 same leaflet in her staffroom (.) and er similarly she was, she had in her class erm a
 260 boy. He was erm fostered, a looked after child and was thinking along exactly the
 261 same lines. So, me mate was quite right, we don't talk to each other properly
 262 ((Laughing)). But then er I said, "Hey, you never guess what?" and she said, "Yeah,
 263 she told me", because he'd talked to his wife and (.) she'd messaged her, but they
 264 didn't work for a local authority, they worked for Independent fostering Agency so
 265 that's how we got into it through an IFA.

266 Lisa: [Yeah]

267 Mr X: [So] that was that.

268 Lisa: [Yeah], Did you move over to a local
 269 authority then?

270 Mr X: [Yes], we did. Erm the IFA eventually changed hands a couple of times. They got
 271 tighter and tighter ((Laughing)). And (I'm not) don't get me wrong, I'd not got into
 272 fostering for the money. We did it [for]

273 Lisa: [No, you (wouldn't do)]

274 Mr X: [good reasons] and stayed because of the good
 275 reasons. (.) But you know when you can't claim relatively straightforward expenses (.)
 276 and I understand they were getting (scores) but it then became a, it went from a non-
 277 for-profit organisation to erm I think we got sold to erm (.) a what do they call them?
 278 ((Rubbing eyes)). A hedge fund company (.) who were looking to invest for return.

279 Lisa: [Okay]

280 Mr X: [and] at that point my wife and I just kind of went, "It's no wonder it's going
 281 down the pan really. It's (.) it's just not (.) working for us." (.) I mean, for example, we
 282 got five children, and we got one of our own at home, so we had an 8-seater vehicle.

283 We started out leasing it through the original foster () and they and they leased it for
284 us, and then after five years they leased it again, and then when it came up for (.) the
285 other time, we'd still got four there, erm so we expected that they wouldn't do it but
286 we quite liked the idea of having a bigger vehicle because by that point we'd got
287 grandchildren and stuff.

288 Lisa: [Yeah]

289 **20:23 minutes**

290 Mr X: [And so] we tried to negotiate with them, and they just
291 wouldn't have it at all. I said, "Well okay, what about leasing a smaller vehicle? I
292 know that we've still got four. We can't fit us all into a car. We're happy to pay the
293 extra," But they wouldn't budge at all. And then they got more and more (.) you
294 know (.) we used to take them, my wife's got a sister in [Country] so every year we
295 went to [Country] on holiday. Every year went to [Location] holiday and we got no
296 support or help with that at all. Nothing for holidays. Nothing for clothing. Nothing
297 for school uniform. Nothing for this, nothing for that. And we used to get bits and
298 pieces and one by one, they got stripped away.

299 Lisa: [Right]

300 Mr X: [And] to give you some idea (.) we left them in January
301 and we put our notice in December (.) and they stopped the £500 Christmas bonus
302 because we were thinking of leaving them.

303 Lisa: [[[Gasp]] Gosh]

304 [We] still had the kids with them under their () in
305 December.

306 Lisa: [Yeah]

307 Mr X: [But] because we were leaving, we'd handed our notice into quit. They stopped the
308 £500 (Christmas). I mean, (.) apart from the (.) you know nonsensical thing of doing.
309 What a thing to do to a family (.) in the lead up to Christmas to deprive them of the
310 £500 they think they're going to get. Presumably, you've got children, you've got
311 foster kids?

312 Lisa: Yeah, absolutely [(I have)]

313 Mr X: [So], you must have some notion that that's not a time of year when
314 you can manage to lose 500 quid unexpectedly.

315 Lisa: Not all.

316 Mr X: So, it just was the final nail in the coffin, really? I think (). So yeah. So that's the, that's
317 the motivation to getting into it and the reasons for doing it and the reasons for
318 moving over to (.) that and the fact we've got two boys from the authority that we're
319 with and their social worker was just terrific.

320 Lisa: [Oh yeah, okay.]

321 Mr X: [Got] on very well with him. One of
322 those, I'm, I, I am sorry but most social workers are a waste of space. The ones that
323 are not are absolutely brilliant and I don't know whether that's because of the

324 contrast, but it just seems to be that they're either on top of their job or their jobs on
325 top of them and there's no middle ground. I don't think in social worker there's
326 anywhere to hide.

327 Lisa: No.

328 Mr X: I think if you're not good, not organised, not on top of things, you are useless. You
329 need to be doing something that doesn't impact people's lives quite so much, but
330 the good ones, and I can count them on one hand in 20 years of of (.) erm (.) of being
331 a foster carer are erm just tremendous. Just the salt the earth. But that was the
332 reason why we moved to where we moved to, (.) because of this one, particular
333 individual.

334 Lisa: [Yeah.]

335 Mr X: [He's] since moved on recently.

336 Lisa: [Oh has he]

337 Mr X: [but] fortunately, been replaced by some that were, a
338 couple of others that were really good, but (.) he (.) he would tell me and my wife.
339 He'd say, "I can have half a dozen kids that are yours because you caused me so little
340 work and do so much in my job for me."

341 Lisa: Yeah. Is it (.) Do you find that you've both taken the fostering role on together?

342 Mr X: Oh no, we're not equally (). My wife does the bulk of it. I up until this year (.) was
343 working (.) Erm I took retirement when she got Covid and it obvious she'd got long
344 Covid and couldn't do things. And I quit because my job is getting more stressful, and
345 (.) just so that we could help out with the fostering and the running around. She's
346 recovered from the long Covid and now she's going great guns again, she doesn't
347 need me at all. I tend to get involved when there's decisions to be made. I get
348 involved with the logistics of things, running people around, taxiing. I was out last
349 night taking a boy to football practice. On Tuesday, when the boys leave, they usually
350 go to, to the local city, where we are based, I nearly said it, erm (.) and so I tend to
351 help them with the moves and things like that. If there's a bit of extra shopping to be
352 done, appointments to dentist, doctors. I do my fair share of running around.

353 Lisa: [Yeah]

354 Mr X: [She's] the
355 one that runs, goes into the meetings, she's got two PEPs on now (.) and so she tends
356 to do the meeting. She has meetings with social workers. We're obviously both there
357 for our independent review, which was last week, no this week. Erm but other than
358 that, she does all that admin side of stuff, meeting with people. Erm I obviously get
359 involved in decisions but I'm the dog's body really. Quite happy of it.

360 **24:55 Minutes**

361 Lisa: [Yeah]

362 Mr X: [She] does a good
363 job, she does a good job. And and I wish I could tell everybody, erm I wish everybody
364 was privy to the reviews that she has (.) because she gets glowing reports from

365 everybody, (.) the independent reviewing officer, the social worker; ours, the
 366 children's, even, even health professionals write in, when they're invited to because
 367 they are so impressed with her. We've had lawyers write in because there's always a
 368 lot of legal work with refugees. And erm (.) just every one of them using words, like
 369 'excellent', 'dedication', 'commitment', 'above and beyond' those kinds of phrases.
 370 Erm, I think she should be recognised in the flipping honours role, let alone some of
 371 these numpties that end up being called whatever.

372 Lisa: [Mm]

373 Mr X: [Because] 20 years of dedicated service
 374 like that, having done such a good job, (.) I don't think it gets a recognition, that kind
 375 of role, that it deserves. If I'd ever thought it'd be taken seriously, I'd put her forward
 376 for an OBE or something. I certainly see other people that get them, and I think well
 377 okay, really? [But no]

378 Lisa: [Yeah]

379 Mr X: [I'm] very, very, very thrilled with what she does and thrilled just to
 380 be a part of it.

381 Lisa: Yeah, you sound really proud of her.

382 Mr X: [Oh] absolutely, she's quite remarkable (.) and I
 383 don't know, if it's a bloke thing, but sometimes (.) the boys will do something wrong,
 384 you know, what a stupid thing to and she's going "put it into perspective" and we're
 385 getting paid for this, she just got a very (.) calming way of dealing with erm (.) I can't
 386 put my finger on. The favourite one is ((Laughing)).

387 Lisa: [Yeah]

388 Mr X: [You] would have thought, wouldn't you that
 389 the degree of intelligence, it takes a turn on a light switch is the same degree of
 390 intelligence required to turn it off but it's not (((Laughing))).
 391 [Laughing]
 392 [That's] kind of my (.) ((frustrated
 393 gesture)) I don't get irate about it, but it does (.) it does erm get on my nerves a little
 394 bit, sometimes when they're doing stuff like that. Walking out of rooms leaving lights
 395 on is just my pet (.) peeve. (.) but you know, that's the worst of it. () Teenage boys.

396 Lisa: [Yeah]

397 Mr X: [It could] it could
 398 be a lot worse than that and I know it has been cause we've looked after them [but
 399 erm (.)]

400 Lisa: [Yeah], You've talked quite a lot about the sort of erm permanence I suppose you
 401 offer beyond fostering and into adulthood. Was that a conscious choice when you
 402 went into fostering that you'd always be part of their life as a family?

403 Mr X: Yeah. I er (.) (Long breath out) We looked after on respite, before we got the sibling
 404 group, four children erm two brothers and two sisters but not (.) they weren't (.) all

405 siblings, if you see what I mean the two boys siblings are two girls. And they came to
 406 live with us for two weeks.

407 Lisa: [Yeah]

408 Mr X: [We] did all sorts with them. We erm (.) filled the two weeks
 409 with as much fun as we could (.) and the oldest boy comes to family gatherings,
 410 Mum and Dad, ((Laughing)) two weeks and calls us Mum and Dad. And erm (.) he (.)
 411 will tell anybody, it was the best two weeks of his life and erm whilst (.) I'm glad
 412 about that, I'm also exceptionally sad about it, because that should not be any child's
 413 experience of growing up. Should just not be. We're grandparents to his son. But that
 414 should not be any child's experience (.) and even the carers that he stayed with for a
 415 decade have nothing to do with him [and]

416 Lisa: [Right]

417 Mr X: [and] that I find I can't fathom, I just
 418 don't (.) I can't (.) get my head around that at all. I have occasionally bumped into
 419 those people and erm (.) it requires 100% of my effort to be pleasant (.) and polite
 420 because I just don't get that.

421 Lisa: [It's sad isn't it.]

422 Mr X: [You don't, you don't] If you looked after a dog for 10 years,
 423 you'd be heartbroken when it left. If you saw it in the street, you'd be making a fuss
 424 of it. I do not understand why they aren't grandparents to that boy. I do not
 425 understand why they don't his celebrate birthday and all the rest of it. We do.

426 Lisa: [Mm]

427 Mr X: [What]

428 How do you do that? You tell me that Lisa because I've got no idea. I honestly (.)
 429 beyond (.) it's outside of my (.) I can't, I can't even find words which is not like me
 430 [[[Laughing]]]

431 Lisa: [[[Laughing]]]

432 Mr X: [to] express how I feel about that.

433 Lisa: {Yeah}

434 Mr X: [Any]way, he's a great lad. He was round here the day
 435 and I'm helping him set up a business, when he got into trouble with a partner and
 436 got kicked out, was homeless, we helped him find a flat erm (.) we helped him with
 437 some money to get himself back on his feet. And that's just what you do for kids.

438 Lisa: [Mm]

439 Mr X: [That's]

440 what you do for your children.

441 Lisa: [Absolutely]

442 **29:52 Minutes**

443 Mr X: [They] need a family (.) everybody needs a family, and I
 444 don't care if you've got a family that dysfunctional it's better than nothing (.) just
 445 better than nothing at all. ((Intake of breath)) There's a wonderful thing, I, I studied

446 music at college and I'm a bit of a musician and a singer and erm the science of music
 447 (.) and something that struck me as being utterly profound is in order for sound to be
 448 sound, you have to have two things. You have to have pressure waves, that create (.)
 449 something but you also have an ear that hears it. And the conundrum is the tree falls
 450 in a forest and there's no mammalian or reptilian ears to hear it falls in silence.

451 Lisa: [Mm]

452 Mr X: [That's] so sad, it's just profoundly awful. Such a cataclysmic thing happens
 453 without any reaction or response. And I think that's what it must be like when you've
 454 got no family. You've got nothing to, (.) to, (.) to listen, to respond, to react, to put an
 455 arm around your shoulder when it's bad, to to be thrilled for you when it's happy. It
 456 must be that kind of a (.) again, I don't have that. I've got four brothers and a sister,
 457 my wife's got three sisters, you know we've got family coming out our ears.

458 Lisa [Yeah]

459 Mr X: Sometimes it's a pain in the rear end, but I'd rather a pain in the rear end and
 460 nothing. So that's why we do what we do, I think.

461 Lisa: [Yeah], that makes (.)

462 Mr X: [Does to me]

463 Lisa: [Very profound] Yeah, it does
 464 made sense. Anything else you'd like to think about with me [Name] or is that your
 465 story?

466 Mr X: That's my story (.) from top to bottom really. It's erm, you know, I've taught kids to
 467 chop wood with axes. I've taught kids to make, and build, and repair things. I've
 468 taught kids how to put plugs on things. I've taught kids all sorts of stuff (.) and erm
 469 you know, I've had children come back to me when they married or you know
 470 cohabiting with someone who's clueless (.) and thanked me profoundly (.) and of all
 471 the things you think kids would be grateful for, you wouldn't have thought that
 472 would be it [((Laughing))].

473 Lisa: [The practical? Yeah.] ((Smiling)).

474 Mr X: [You'd] think yeah, the heart-to-heart talk with the arm around the
 475 shoulder, the compassion, the love. No. "Thanks for teaching me how to put a plug
 476 on a (.) bit of wire." ((Laughing))

477 Lisa: How did your children (.) Were your children older when you fostered?

478 Mr X: Three of them were, one was a bit younger. One of them was part of the fostering
 479 process until he left home and got married.

480 Lisa: [Yeah]

481 Mr X: [A] couple of the foster kids didn't leave
 482 home. One didn't leave till he was 22. He went to university from here. Got his
 483 degree from here. Met a girl (.), moved in, got married eventually. (.) he was the
 484 youngest one. We had our own musical group at one point.

485 Lisa: [Did you?]

486 Mr X: [With] the foster kids and my
487 son. I was the roadie, the manager. They had a band and I think one of their mates,
488 played drums, but the others were all instrumentalists, singers. ((Intake of breath))
489 Every single one of them learnt to play an instrument of some kind or another (.) and
490 a couple of them kept it on. (.) So, we have a couple of flautists in the family and a
491 cello player and a bass player and the guitarists, banjo. Whatever () is really.

492 Lisa: [Wow]
493 Mr X: [That's] the
494 only option is not to try.

495 Lisa: [Yeah] absolutely. Yeah, it [really]
496 Mr X: [No], your option wasn't to (.) You
497 had to try. That was not an option.

498 Lisa: [Yeah. Yeah]
499 Mr X: [If] you didn't like it, then that was fine. But they had
500 to give it a go and it was amazing how many stuck it for six weeks and then "No no,
501 I'll carry on. I'll carry on".

502 Lisa: [That's really good.]
503 Mr X: "No. You don't have to if you don't want", "No no. I'll take it away, it's okay" Yeah.
504 ((Laughing))

505 Lisa: ((Laughing)) It sounds like (.) so you've discussed a time which was really difficult,
506 and you described as lonely but then equally you are describing times which are
507 really joyous and fun.

508 Mr X: Oh, we've had hilarious times and this stuff I can tell you probably couldn't record
509 but you can delete it can't you? I'll tell you a really funny incident. We had a boy from
510 [Country], we've a couple of [Country] lads. The first one we got [details removed].
511 That boy's now got his own business, he's a dad and a baby and comes to visit us
512 regularly. Facetimes us all the time. The happiest guy you'll ever meet. But one
513 Christmas (erm) he got me a Christmas card and he was developing a sense of
514 humour. And I think that's (.) when you know you have landed when someone can
515 start making jokes, and the first thing he did, which made me think, Ah yeah he's
516 settled in was, I gave him an A4 book, lined paper, 100 sheets, 200 sides and said,
517 "Just put a line down the middle, divide it into four, English word, [first language]
518 word, just fill that out over time." Three weeks in, "I need another book Dad, I run
519 out." "Yeah, right. Whatever. Show me the book." 200 pages (.) Seriously, 30 lines on
520 a thing. All filled with the [first language] words and English words. Just as he came
521 across them and he obviously flipped back through them. Just amazing. So, we used
522 to do a thing where we didn't understand what he would come and talk to me, I'd
523 explain what the word was but then his job is to put into a sentence. This went on for
524 weeks. Erm he's picking up just the nuances of the English language, which is as
525 confusing as anything you'll ever come across. And then one day he came to me, "I
526 don't understand this word Dad" and he tried to pronounce, and he couldn't, and I

527 said, "Let me look at it" and it was the word inept, I said, "Oh it means you're useless
 528 at something. You can't do it." I said, "So you put that into a sentence." And he goes,
 529 "All right. Erm (.) My dad is inept at teaching English." I said "Yes, Nooo"
 530 [[[Laughing]]]
 531 Lisa: [[[Laughing]]]
 532 Mr X: [and] then, I thought, he set me up.
 533 Lisa: [Yeah]
 534 Mr X: [And] at that point, I thought, Ah there's hope
 535 for you. But the funnier thing was one Christmas when he got me a Christmas card (.)
 536 and we were all sat in the living room, sharing, swapping presents and cards and
 537 stuff. And I open this card and I couldn't, I just burst out laughing. [description of card
 538 removed]. Which is just plain rude, except he doesn't understand [description
 539 removed] So, I starts to laugh. I'm passing the card around and everybody starts to
 540 laugh because they all know him, immediately he's not rude at all as a boy.
 541 Lisa: [No, no]
 542 Mr X: [He's] just innocently got the wrong end of the stick. He's tried to be funny and
 543 completely missed the joke, but nobody can explain this to him because we're all
 544 laughing. And he's going, "What I do, I don't know what I do" and the more he's
 545 protesting his innocence (.) we're just falling about, eventually we managed to come
 546 compose ourselves, and my youngest son said, "Come here, come with me." So,
 547 takes him into the room we're in now, shuts the door between here and the living
 548 room. You can't really hear people speak, but after a few minutes, tears running
 549 down our face, all we can hear from this room is "But I don't know that." and we all
 550 just start laughing again and we're just in fits of tears and we've brought it up several
 551 times (.) And er he says, "I come with Christmas present this year Dad." I said,
 552 "Please, don't bring a card, do not bring a card." It's just a standing joke now (.)
 553 presents are okay, but no card. So (.) but (.) so that's the other side to it all, it's the
 554 laugh and the funniness. And at my 65th party, I stood up and said, "Thank you for
 555 coming. (.) Er thank you all for you know, staying involved and keeping in touch and
 556 all the wonderful things you've done for me today." I'm a dad joke person so they
 557 were reading (.) the task was if they gave me a card or present, they had to read a
 558 joke out (.) so, that was hilarious. But the thing I said at the end was I said, "I tell you
 559 what, I'm most proud of" and it all goes quiet. "The thing I'm most proud of is that
 560 there's lots of people that have lived with me, lived in my house with me and we've
 561 loved having you but there isn't a single one of you that's got the foggiest idea of
 562 what it means to belong to a normal family." [[[Laughing]]]
 563 Lisa: [[[Laughing]]]
 564 Mr X: [And] that's what I'm proudest of. They know what human interactions like, and they
 565 know that they can express themselves and they know that they can (.) come to me
 566 and gob off if they need to and vent about whatever (.) and have a laugh.

567 Lisa: [Yeah], you
568 should be proud of that.

569 Mr X: [I am] absolutely thrilled. I am. We've got (.) just that humour
570 is there. It underpins just about everything we've been through.

571 Lisa: Yeah. Thank you.

572 Mr X: You're welcome.

573 Lisa: Is that everything you'd like to say?

574 Mr X: No. What questions have you got?

575 Lisa: I don't think I've got any more questions, it's just interesting what you're saying [and]
576 Mr X: [I
577 don't] think there's not enough support. Full stop. And I'm not, I'm not jumping on
578 the male gender bandwagon here. I think there's (.) I think you've got a social worker
579 and that's all fine and good, but there should be some kind of (.) helpline (.) some
580 kind of advice line that you can take, that you can phone up. You know if children are
581 in a bad way, they've got the child help line. Why is there not one for foster carers?
582 Or is there and if there is why don't we know about it. I've been doing it 20 years, I'm
583 not aware of a thing. There's things like fostering network and there's people there
584 you can talk to but (.) sometimes it's not that you need legal advice, (.) it that you
585 just need someone to go, (.) "You're not nuts."

586 Lisa: [Mm]

587 **39:53 Minutes**

588 Mr X: [You know] "Try talking to this person or
589 going here, or doing this" (.) just somebody who can look at it (.) you know out of
590 context from everything else that's going on that can just (.) I don't know (.) almost
591 like a counselling service for foster carers, (.) that's not the social worker, that's not
592 somebody who's got a (.) legal alter whatever going on in the background, you know,
593 that's not worried about (.) protocols and stuff, but they can give you good advice
594 but can also be more friendly than that ((Intake of breath)) That's what I think foster
595 carers need on occasion.

596 Lisa: Yeah, it can sometimes feel lonely can't it.

597 Mr X: Yeah, and it really ought not to.

598 Lisa: [Mmm]

599 Mr X: [That] and giving them a proper job with pay and
600 conditions. You know this business of self-employed and find your own accountant is
601 utter dribble.

602 Lisa: Would you have changed it? Would you have done everything again?

603 Mr X: ((Intake of breath)) Erm I'd never have started being honest erm on reflection. Now
604 I've done it. I'm glad I've done it and I'm utterly thrilled with (.) lots of the
605 repercussions of it. But knowing what I now, no, I'd find an easier, quieter life (.) I'd
606 get a job down a mine or something (((Laughing)))

607 Lisa: [Yeah]((Laughing))

608 Mr X: It's less hazardous. I'm being slightly facetious, but I
609 think.
610 Lisa: [Yeah]
611 Mr X: [I think] I think, I don't, I think that applies to lots of things, if you knew what you
612 were getting yourself into before you got into it, you probably wouldn't do it (.)
613 Marriage ((Laughing)) (.) Parenthood ((Laughing)). You have this rosy idea of the
614 world when you're in your teens don't you that is never gonna just turn out to be
615 accurate.
616 Lisa: [Mm]
617 Mr X: [No], I think I would do it differently. (.) I would do it differently. I would
618 change some things definitely (.) I think our dream of keeping a sibling group
619 together was, was a bit pie in the sky. I think I would temper (.) my ambition (.) to do
620 something a bit more manageable.
621 Lisa: [Yeah]
622 Mr X: [Erm] what we're doing now is what I would like
623 to have done all along. [I think].
624 Lisa: [Is it?] Right, ok.
625 Mr X: [Yeah], It's because (.) I think my wife and I as a team are well
626 suited to it erm I think we were slightly out of our depth when we took on five kids
627 and still had one of our own at home and still had three other kids that were going
628 through uni and finding the feet.
629 Lisa: [Yeah]
630 Mr X: [Erm] the most lunatic thing we did was whilst we had
631 those six children at home, as take on a baby (.) for er for eight months. Three days
632 old.
633 Lisa: [Really?]
634 Mr X: [Yeah], Some good came of it. It really did (.) erm none of the girls that we looked
635 after (.) got pregnant outside of a steady relationship. (.) It shocked them.
636 Lisa: [Did it]
637 Mr X: [Yeah] There's (.) the
638 parents of the baby were drug addicts.
639 Lisa: [Right]
640 Mr X: [and] it absolutely shocked them to the core (.)
641 that you could do that to a (.) little one. So that was the good that came from it. But
642 yeah.
643 Lisa: Eight months with a baby as well. Yeah.
644 Mr X: We got her at three days and took her off her mum from the hospital and we looked
645 after until she got adopted (.) with her sister.
646 Lisa: How do you (.) manage the (.) the goodbyes. Or is it for you, it's not a goodbye, [its]
647 Mr X: [it's
648 not a goodbye]

649 Lisa [we'll see you soon]
 650 Mr X: [just see you later]
 651 Lisa: [Yeah]
 652 Mr X: The hardest one was the baby. That was a goodbye.
 653 Lisa: Yeah.
 654 Mr X: That I would never do again and haven't. But mainly for the fact we're in our 50s at
 655 that point and it physically killed us. (.) We we said goodbye on the Friday and the
 656 following Friday went off in a two-week cruise ((Laughing)) Which is a total waste of a
 657 cruise because all we needed to do was to book a hotel room for two weeks and just
 658 sleep. ((Laughing)) No, it was good.
 659 Lisa: [That's]
 660 Mr X: [Yeah] Fortunately, my daughter had no children
 661 at the time and her husband moved in (.) and took over.
 662 Lisa: Yeah.
 663 Mr X: She proved to be as capable as a mother, which is not too surprising really. Yeah.
 664 Lisa: Thank you. Anything else you wanted to?
 665 Mr X: [I] don't know what you're after because
 666 there's so much stuff that's happening in 20 years.
 667 Lisa: Yeah, I'm not really after anything.
 668 Mr X: Erm. It's been fascinating looking after Muslim boys (.) taking them to Friday prayers,
 669 helping them celebrate Eid, erm helping them when they're going through fasting
 670 and talking to them about religion, theirs and ours, similarities and differences.
 671 Lisa: [Yeah]
 672 **45:00 Minutes**
 673 Mr X: [and erm]
 674 it's been (.) lovely to support them in trying to er follow their beliefs and to
 675 encourage them. One boy, complained about erm a picture of Jesus being on the
 676 wall. So, I walked into his room and there's the black flag of the whatever on the wall
 677 and I said, "Well, I could complain about that but I'm being respectful to you and
 678 your beliefs. I said, "There's a Qur'an over there. There's a prayer mat roll up in the
 679 corner." (.) I said, "In the bathroom there's (.) a jug for washing (.) for prayers. I said,
 680 "In the kitchen there's a frying pan that never has pork in it." I said, "Unless we learn
 681 to live amongst each other. The world's gonna have problems, isn't it?" The social
 682 worker agreed. And in fact, the interpreter told him off which they're not supposed
 683 to do ((Laughing)).
 684 Lisa: No
 685 Mr X: He said, "These people have bent over backwards to accommodate your belief" he
 686 said, "You do the same." I think sometimes they get their head filled full of rubbish,
 687 some of them and they don't, can't quite make the adjustment so easily when they
 688 come across. The life in this country, they don't expect girls to be dressed skimpily
 689 and they don't expect (.) erm women to be expressing their views and opinions and

690 erm one or two haven't taken kindly to women social workers (.) or interpreters.
691 They've been gently told, you know, what is what.
692 Lisa: [Yeah]
693 Mr X: [The] funniest thing I've come
694 across is when they arrive into this country entitled, thinking that they've got a right.
695 (.) Erm an interesting conversation, one of the boys who's leaving. It's been explained
696 to him that he'd be given a place, but he's expected to pay for it. You have to work.
697 "Well, I am working." I said, "Yes, but you'll be able to work and pay" but he said,
698 "But that's my money." There was the concept of having to pay for something out of
699 his money was a bit foreign. And he said, "Why they're not continue giving me
700 money." I said, "Well they give you money now because you're a child. When you're
701 18, you're an adult." I said, "Do you want to be treated like a child when you're an
702 adult?" "Err No." I said, "Well there you go then." "So, you want to grow up and be a
703 man. Then you've got to behave like a man." (.) I said, "Nobody gives me money I
704 don't earn." I said, "I wouldn't want them to. I feel that was wrong. I want my money
705 to be my money. I've earned it. I take pride in that." So, it's just about (.) getting
706 inside their head and messing with it, I suppose is one way of putting it, but just
707 helping them readjust to new expectations. I even said to one boy with his social
708 worker there. I said erm "When you lived in [Country], how much money did the
709 government give you there." "Nothing" "So that's what you'll get here when you
710 become an adult. Nothing." I said, "In fact, you are expected to pay tax and put some
711 money back in."
712 Lisa: [Mmm, Yeah.]
713 Mr X: [That's] That's something you can take a huff at if you want to, but I
714 just try to treat it as a learning opportunity (.) not to get upset and offended by the
715 fact he expects this country which is not his country to pay for him forever, but just
716 to help them adjust. And they do make some wonderful adjustments to some of
717 these boys (.)
718 Lisa: [Yeah]
719 Mr X: [Every] single one of the ones that we're still in touch with is working, is
720 settling down, is getting on with being British and enjoying their life even though
721 they've come from a long way.
722 Lisa: [Yeah]
723 Mr X: [The] [Country] boy drives me nuts because he won't
724 take any benefits. (.) Point blank refuses. I said, "You've got a baby. You've got a
725 wife." (.) who yet can't work because she was also erm hasn't yet got leave to remain
726 though that should be coming anytime soon, because the (.) baby gives her the legal
727 right to be.
728 Lisa: [Yeah]
729 Mr X: [Erm] I said, "You just need to claim money" "I don't want it." "It's not for
730 you." ((Laughing)) We have these like kind of utterly bizarre little conversations, "It's

731 for my grandchild. I want my grandchild to have that (.) "I not happy." I said, "Me,
732 neither." ((Laughing)) So yeah.

733 Lisa: Yeah

734 Mr X: Yeah

735 Lisa: Well, thank you.

736

49.34 Minutes

737 Mr X: I'll tell you one last thing.

738 Lisa: Yeah.

739 Mr X: And erm the group of five that came gave us lots of problems when they were
740 teenagers erm (.) they went through all that they went through and they were
741 comfortable enough with us, to be able to act out, and kick off, and mouth off, and
742 do stupid things, because they know that they were loved and cared for. At the time,
743 you don't see that for what it is. But all of them, to a man, at different times, on their
744 own (.) have come back to us and apologise for their behaviour. (.) "I can't believe I
745 behaved like that." I said, "Well I can, first of all, you were teenagers and secondly
746 didn't exactly have the best start in life."

747 Lisa: Yeah. How did it feel when they sort of apologised, in retrospect?

748 Mr X: It felt, we felt vindicated in some respects erm (.). There were times when I could
749 have just kicked them into touch. I really could have. My wife never would (.) and I
750 always felt that she's got the better instinct for that kind of thing. Blokes are blokes.
751 They tend to want to deal with things head on and sorted it out. And sometimes you
752 can't, you've just got to leave it be, move on, keep going. But I felt vindicated in many
753 respects, but the other thing that it allowed (.) us to do, which we could have done
754 before, but didn't feel inclined to because of some element of ill feeling about some
755 of it erm (.) it allowed us to say, "Yeah but we got it wrong too. We made mistakes."
756 You don't take on five of somebody else's kids and expect to get it right, unless
757 you've totally naive. I said, "Yeah but we didn't get it right" you know, and we were
758 experienced parents at that point. Erm, we made mistakes. You know, we did lots of
759 things that we look back and think, oh you idiot. That's, that's an experience of every
760 parent. We made mistakes with our own kids as well, erm and so it allowed us to to
761 to, in a way of saying thank you, it allowed us to also say (.) we are all human.

762 Lisa: Yeah.

763 Mr X: What else can you do? You muddle through, you don't intend to muck it up, but you
764 do and, you know, just try and get on with it. So that was, that what was, what was
765 lovely not the apology, but the opportunity to also say, "Yeah, sorry too." (.) It was
766 actually quite moving on a couple of those occasions.

767 Lisa: [Yeah, sounds like complete repair does it.]

768 Mr X: [So yeah. Yeah, it was.] And of course, they then
769 become adults and so they've got children of their own, so they then start to see
770 things as I'm sure you're aware, from a completely different perspective. You know
771 and they've got responsibilities that you had and they're now coming back to

772 Grandma and Grandpa for advice (.) "How do you do this", "What should I do here?"
773 You know. It's because there's no manual.
774 Lisa: [No]
775 Mr X: [No] What a silly thing to do, have all
776 this society going on and there's no manual ((Laughing))
777 Lisa: It would be so much easier. ((Laughing))
778 Mr X: It would.
779 Lisa: Take the challenge or take something away from it though, wouldn't it?
780 Mr X: It certainly would, yeah. But simple things like, you know, this is how you change
781 your nappy. ((Laughing)) I know you can learn that from your parents to some extent
782 but just a Haynes manual for the human body of a baby and then slightly more than
783 an encyclopaedia for the human mind of a teenager ((Laughing)).
784 Lisa: (((Laughing)) It Yeah]
785 Mr X: [Would be helpful.] Yeah. Right.
786 Lisa: Well, thank you. I really appreciate your time.
787 Mr X: You're welcome.

8.10.2. Mr X's listening guide readings

KEY			
I	We	[Word]	Personal Reflections
You	They	[Word]	Praxis Reflections
She/He		[Word]	Voice

<p>Lisa: I think we're recording yeah.</p> <p>Mr X: Yes fine.</p> <p>Lisa: Ok, well thank you so much for joining me today, erm this really is just about you being able to tell me about your experiences. So, I'd just been really interested to hear erm and you can start (.) begin wherever you like.</p> <p>Mr X: Ok, I'm gonna just go through a quick chronological thing, which might then bring up some questions, erm but we (.) in about a week and a half time we will have been fostering for 20 years.</p> <p>Lisa: [Ok]</p> <p>Mr X: [Erm] and <i>it's been a real roller coaster</i>. The first two children we had were just a temporary placement because <i>that's how they wanted us to do things</i>. And we got twin boys and er <i>that was a steep learning curve, in many respects</i> because (.) they came saying that they both had learning difficulties and it turned out that only one did. The other one was just [mimicking].</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [what] the one with learning difficulties was doing because he thought that's what was normal. But it became very obvious. I should point out that before I did this, I was a teacher and I worked with children with learning difficulties, so I quickly came to realise as did my wife who was also from a similar background. That one of the boys was not (.) not that way at all. In fact, he was quite bright and erm should not have been in the special school he was in [Intake of breath]. We only had them for about six months. It was (.) <i>made complicated by the fact, there was a parental involvement, that wasn't always erm particularly healthy</i> (.) and it was clearly at the root of lots of the issues and problems erm it</p>	<p>Long serving foster carers</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Ebb and flow Service demand? <u>Critical voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>SEND Who keeps track?</p> <p>Knowledge of SEND <u>Information voice</u></p> <p>Agreement</p> <p>Short term placement – two siblings <u>Critical voice</u> Wider system</p>
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wasn't just that the boys were hard work [Intake of breath]. But they were really, er *we did as good a job as we could with them and both the social worker and the mum said, we'd done a good job and couldn't believe that she'd got them to, we'd got them to dress themselves* and (.) *they went* from wearing nappies at four years old into wearing just ordinary underwear, both of them, got them *toilet trained* in a very short space of time, got them to sit still. *They could* actually go into a classroom and sit, and listen, and behave and all kinds of things. So, *it was really satisfying*. Er *we'd always* gone into fostering because *we wanted to keep a sibling group together because we've been aware as teachers, that we'd come across children, who had been separated, (.) through no fault of their own*, who'd got a brother over here, and a sister over there, that *they didn't hardly* ever saw. *We felt that wasn't fair or right* and so *we looked for a group of three or four* and (.) nothing seemed to be forthcoming. *We were* with an independent fostering agency to start with, and *they just didn't seem to be very proactive*. So, *I got fed up with waiting and started phoning up social services*, and got told off for it. And *I said*, "Well then *you do your job, and don't have me doing it for you*.", and *they didn't like* that at all. And *I said*, "Well, whose toes am I treading on? If *I'm (upsetting) someone's ego*, then *I'm fine* with that. *I don't have* a problem with it but if *I'm breaking the law* then that's different." "Urgh well it's not illegal". *I said* then "Why are *you* trying to stop me doing it? Anyway, eventually, (.) *because of my efforts*, *we found* a sibling group of five and erm the IFA manager said, "*I'm really not* happy that *you've* done this." *I said*, "*Let's talk to your boss then*" because *I know they wouldn't be* unhappy about the money that was coming in. *He was just unhappy I'd trodden* on his toes because *he hadn't got on with doing his job*. So eventually *he got* moved on, but *I've never been able to suffer fools gladly, I'm afraid and maybe that's a failing. I've never been rude to*

Pride voice

Validation

Independence skills

Role satisfying

Determined voice

Reflecting voice

Motivation – seen siblings split.

Value – justice

Determined voice

Critical voice

Determined voice

Involvement seen as crossing the line

Critical voice

Critical voice

Pride voice

Sibling group of five

Critical voice

Dealing with others – systemic

Reflective voice

<p>people or anything other than forthright, but I do think when you've got a social worker, that's not doing the job, it just needs to be nudged in that direction and I'm not frightened of doing that. I firmly believe in advocating (.) and as a foster carer apart from all the nuts and bolts of looking after children, I would have said that my greatest strength, and my wife's and it was identified during our initial erm (.) work you to do to become a foster career that we would make good advocates and we always have done and particularly from an educational point of view with our backgrounds. We've never let things get in the way of doing what needs to be done and that's really what came to the fore in getting this sibling group of five to come with us. But the amount of negativity you come across from (.) people who really ought to know better. "Ah well you've found them but whether we'll actually get them to come to you or not it's another matter altogether." I said, "But where else are they going? They've been stuck in a children's home for 18 months. Nobody wants them. Nobody can take them. They're on the verge of being split up and adopted." I said, "Which is (.) we got into this to stop exactly that." Not the adoption but the splitting up.</p>	<p>Perception of SW job role – Expectation <u>Determined voice</u> Strong advocates</p> <p><u>Reflective voice</u></p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> Battle</p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5:02 Minutes</p> <p>Mr X: [and erm] So (.) right from the off, we've had to fight and battle just to get our job done which always struck me as being (.) a waste of energy that should never be the case, but it was actually a good experience because it's been that way all along. It's always been the case where we've had to take on the institution of (.) just get simple things done, and that doesn't matter whether it's the medical institution, the educational institution, the children services, social work institution, they all seem to have (.) rules in place and protocols in place that in some cases are just simply counterproductive. I understand safeguarding and you have to do things in a certain way but (.) my view has always been,</p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u> Systems working against each other <u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Professional sphere – bureaucracy</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p>

<p>you know, <i>is this serving the needs of the child (.) and if it's not, then why are we doing it?</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [Erm] and <i>I've not got a lot of time for people who are jobsworths. So having trodden on a few toes, we finally managed to get the sibling group of five to arrive and (.) suddenly people started taking us a bit more seriously and realise we weren't (.) just (.) a couple of (.) numpties</i>, that we actually had got some gumption about us. And <i>we did a relatively good job. Those children still call us Mum and Dad and they still come home for Christmas and another times. We have family gatherings four or five times a year. We've been on holiday with them. We've taken them on holiday and (.) we've just got this extending family</i> too, (.) to the extent that we have to hire, the village hall every time we want to get together, as there isn't enough room at home.</p> <p>Lisa: [(.)] Yeah.</p> <p>Mr X: [Yeah], and there were problems with one of the children that didn't end up staying with a very long. But those problems had gone back, (.) long before they'd come to stay with us, so (.) So that, that was the first and taking on five, <i>having five arrive on your doorstep is a daunting task. My wife fortunately is one of these people that's incredibly well organised</i> (.) and erm pre-empted an awful lot of issues and problems we might have had (.) just by (adding) to the fact <i>she's just one</i> of these people whose house runs like clockwork (.) and within the love and fun of being in a family, there is a structure there.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [There's] a functionality to it, without it being a regimented. <i>It's a wonderful balancing act.</i> ((Intake of breath)) Erm (.) and that took up the next sort of er (.) seven or eight years of our fostering experience. ((Intake of breath)) That said, <i>by the time we'd finished and the last two or three of them were (.) still with us, we'd had enough. They'd come damaged. We'd love them as our own which is perhaps (.) a bit of a mistake. I think sometimes you</i></p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Questioning commitment of others <u>Critical voice</u> <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Changing perception <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u> Continued care into adulthood</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Logistics of large family <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Structure – predictability</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Compassion fatigue? <u>Affection voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> Love – family</p>
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<p>have to just be a bit professionally aloof, and we weren't able to be. (.) And I don't apologise for that. We had more than one social worker try to tell us that, that you know that wasn't the way to do it. And I said, "I just don't know any other way to be a parent." (.) Erm it came to something of a head when one of the girls (.) in the group, who was having behavioural problems and who we'd identified as learning difficulties issues, which the social worker wouldn't take seriously (.) and the school didn't really want to listen to. ((Intake of breath)) erm started seeing a boy and was spending a lot of time at his house and I said, "That's all fine and good but you've now been there seven or eight times. The next time you meet up, I want you to come here. I want to meet him."</p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> <u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Difficulty</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [Which] I didn't think was unreasonable and at the time she agreed until it came time for her to go again and I wouldn't let her leave the house. I literally stood in the doorway and said, "No, you phone him up and tell him to come here." I said, "In fact, I will go with you to pick him up to bring him."</p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u> <u>Determined voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [I said], "I'm meeting him and that's the end of it." And this was following up from what I'd said before, and what we'd agreed before, and what the social worker had agreed. Anyway, in standing my ground, she assaulted me (.) and I tried to fend her off as best I could. Unfortunately, my wife was out at the time so there was no witness to it. (.) Fortunately, her sister saw the whole thing (.) and at one point, she actually managed to get the door open and I (.) tried to stop it and she trapped my hand in the door and (.) I had to push her away to get my hand out, at which point she fell over (.) and er then she got up and just started assaulted me again er and I just let it all play out until she'd stopped. Anyway, we reported it as you should, with these things. And the next thing I know is the social worker has informed the police that this girl has been assaulted, because</p>	<p><u>Determined voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> Assault</p> <p><u>Safeguarding</u></p>

<p>in an interview with her, <i>I think he'd managed to persuade her to believe that me (.) pushing her away from me (.) was assault. And the police got involved and that was the worst experience (.) of my life, really. I'd had one accusation made against me as a teacher, which came to nothing because of the teaching assistant in the classroom and it was the child's parents that were (.) pushing it, but there was no evidence to suggest. And what was most annoying was (.) the social worker who having listened to what the girl had said and to what the girl's sister who had witnessed it, still decided to go ahead with the police investigation (.) when there wasn't a mark on her.</i> There was nothing untoward had gone on. And <i>you know</i> if anyone's going to cause problems from, it would have been her sister who could have easily lied through her teeth and said, "Yeah", but <i>she wouldn't be</i> persuaded (.) and <i>that was what was distressing. It wasn't what the girl did. I think she was put up to doing it. But then, I went through three months where (.) our own social worker wouldn't be drawn on any comments when I was asking for advice, as they don't.</i> Er and it was just the <i>loneliest time in the world. Had that (.) gone through to a prosecution (.) erm all of the children would have been taken away. We would have lost our income from fostering. I would have lost my income from teaching. I would have been lucky to get a job at a checkout (.) in a supermarket</i> somewhere. <i>I mean, fortunately (.) erm my wife thought a bit better, better on her feet than I did and the day after she said, "You need to phone the police, tell them you've been accused of this, but you've also been assaulted" (.)</i> and er the bruises were coming out by then, all up and down one leg, the hand damage, another couple of bruises on my shoulder where <i>she'd punch</i> me. And so (.) <i>I got</i> a police photographer about two days afterwards documenting about a dozen or so injuries and bruises and er at the end of it erm (.) the police officer that interviewed me said, "<i>We aren't taking</i></p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> Traumatising</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> Long process</p> <p><u>Reflective voice</u> Lack of support/advocacy <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Consequences</p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p>
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<p>any further action. It's very obvious what's happened here. don't know why my time has been wasted." But someone's, when a looked after child is [involved]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">11:55 Minutes</p> <p>Mr X: [they've] got to respond. They can't make a judgment call. They've got to follow the process. And he said, "But there is enough evidence for you to prosecute her for assault." (.) And said, "I'm not interested."</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [I] didn't get into this to cause problems for a damaged young person. But at the end of all that, the <i>social worker was furious, which was another annoying thing</i>. <i>Erm and eventually one of the other children, insisted on a separate social worker because he said</i>, "He's trying to persuade me to cause problems at home, he's trying to get me to leave, and I don't want to. We're happy here." Even the girl that was, <i>you know</i> the subject of the allegations didn't want to leave.</p> <p>Lisa: [No]</p> <p>Mr X: [Erm] and they didn't take her away, they didn't take anybody away, whilst the investigation went on. So, it was a real storm in a teacup ((Intake of breath)) but we decided collectively that, that was it. Once these children had gone, we would do no more. We'd had enough. (.) And then a very canny social worker said erm (.) to us, "Have you maybe thought about a different type of fostering?"</p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Mr X: [We] said "No. We're finished, we're exhausted, we've no. (.) <i>our stress levels are where they shouldn't be. We're in our late 50s. I am not dying of a heart attack (.) in two weeks' time because of it.</i>" But she said, "We're starting to get more and more refugees come through and they tend to be far more respectful. They usually haven't come from broken homes. They are usually, well-adjusted young people that have had to leave the country through no fault</p>	<p><u>Determined voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> Relationship with social worker</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p> <p>Unaccompanied children</p>
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<p>of their own, because a threat of violence or whatever.” And we said, “Well, we’re not persuaded.” And she said, “Well I’ve got one that’s not happy where he is. His carers are going away on holiday and we just need a placement for him for a week.” And so, we took (.) a young man erm (.) he was [Nationality], and he was just lovely (.) and (.) the saddest thing of it all was, we had him for a week, we didn’t want to let him go back, he didn’t want to go back. We were about to go on holiday with our foster children and we had a spare place and the saddest thing I’ve ever done (.) was to drop him off in tears (.) back at his carers and knowing that we were going on holiday, and we could have taken him with us.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [I’ve] regretted that (.) I really have. Erm even now I get emotional about that and there’s a reason for that. That’s because erm (.) he came to live with us eventually, was with us two years and then he moved on to independence. Kept in touch, he turned up a family weddings and family gatherings and occasions. Back in March, we were invited to his wedding (.) and we went to see him married. Erm a few months afterwards, he told us his wife was pregnant. And then erm four weeks ago, we got a very distressing phone call from his wife, saying he’d passed away.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">14:54 minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Oh I’m so sorry]</p> <p>Mr X: [()] He had epilepsy. Erm and last weekend, his wife and his cousin were here and we’re making plans together about what we can do (.) to help and support. But as I said to his wife, I said, “You’ve got to understand the impact that he had on us. As a consequence of him, we have now fostered over 20 refugees.” And we currently have four in place and we’ve had as many as five. And we’ve got two boys who have been with us two years who are leaving this week and two more coming in their place. Erm and that’s been the story of our fostering.</p>	<p>New YP – one week respite</p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Connection</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u> Motivation to continue fostering</p>
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<p>Lisa: [(.) Yeah] Wow, very powerful. [Very powerful]</p> <p>Mr X: [So <i>I'm getting</i>] <i>emotional sat here just talking about [it].</i> ((wiping eyes))</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [and] because it's (.) was my 65th birthday which was in May. <i>We had the family gathering as usual and we had about 10 refugee boys there (.) current and past, and we had erm all of my birth children and grandchildren, erm nearly all of my foster children and the grandchildren</i> that have come with them and erm <i>we invited</i> two friends from church, erm who <i>we are</i> close with and (.) and <i>they didn't</i> really know about our extended family. And erm one of them came up to me said, "This is just amazing. This is just amazing." <i>They were just completely blown away and I don't, I can understand why.</i> And <i>I said,</i> "You know something, <i>I don't no idea what heavens like, really don't. Erm I've gone to church all my life and I've heard what people say."</i> <i>said, "but if this (.) is heaven. That I'm fine with it. I don't need anything else."</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [So], that's me in a nutshell.</p> <p>Lisa: [Wow] it's amazing ((Looking away)) ((Intake of breath)) (.) Wow (.) Ok yeah. I suppose just going back to the beginning of your story then. Where did the motivation come from [()]?</p> <p>Mr X: [I] <i>I was</i> sat in a staffroom looking, looking through a er staff leaflet. <i>I did</i> a bit of supply teaching for a while.</p> <p>Lisa: [Mm]</p> <p>Mr X: [And] <i>I was</i> <i>always on the lookout for (.) permanent jobs.</i> Er (.) by supply teaching, <i>I was</i> working with the authority with difficult children, so <i>I was</i> moving around a lot, but <i>I fancied settling down in a school and starting developing a career properly.</i> And <i>I was</i> looking through, the leaflet's got all the jobs in and on the very back page it said, "Ever consider fostering" and er just that morning, <i>I'd been teaching er (.) working with a boy, who'd got behaviour problems. He was fostered (.) and er he</i></p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u> Content/satisfaction Life's work</p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Motivation – leaflet <u>Information voice</u></p>
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<p><i>was telling me about his family.</i> Stepsister here, stepbrother there, full brother over there (.) not in, under the same roof, kind of thing and <i>I think</i> that's a real shame. It's a pity that foster careers can't take more than one, because <i>at the time I got no idea what foster carers could and couldn't [do].</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Okay]</p> <p>Mr X: [And] then <i>I saw</i> this thing on the back [.]and in my break I <i>just</i> sort of Google searched the thing, and then <i>I remembered I got erm a friend in [Location] who was part of our church friendship and he, they fostered so I thought I'll give him a ring.</i> Anyway, <i>I did</i> do, and er (.) <i>he said</i> to me, (.) <i>"You and your wife don't talk much do you?"</i>. <i>I said</i>, <i>"What you mean?"</i> And <i>he said</i>, <i>"Well, she was on the phone last week to my wife about the very same subject"</i>.</p> <p>Lisa: [[[Laughing]]]</p> <p>Mr X: [and] <i>she'd seen</i> the same thing in the same leaflet in her staffroom (.) and er similarly <i>she was, she had</i> in her class erm a boy. <i>He was</i> erm fostered, a looked after child and was thinking along exactly the same lines. <i>So, me mate was quite right, we don't talk to each other properly</i> ((Laughing)). But then er <i>I said</i>, <i>"Hey, you never guess what?"</i> and <i>she said</i>, <i>"Yeah, she told me"</i>, because <i>he'd talked</i> to his wife and (.) <i>she'd messaged</i> her, but <i>they didn't work</i> for a local authority, <i>they worked for Independent fostering Agency</i> so that's how <i>we got</i> into it through an IFA.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [So] that was that.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah], Did you move over to a local authority then?</p> <p>Mr X: [Yes], <i>we did</i>. Erm <i>the IFA eventually changed hands a couple of times. They got tighter and tighter</i> ((Laughing)). And (<i>I'm not</i>) don't get me wrong, <i>I'd not got into fostering for the money.</i> <i>We did</i> it [for]</p> <p>Lisa: [No, you (wouldn't do)]</p> <p>Mr X: [good reasons] and stayed because of the good reasons. (.) But <i>you know when you can't claim relatively straightforward expenses</i> (.) and <i>I understand they were</i> getting (scores) but it then</p>	<p>Motivation – working with a child who was fostered</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Limited understanding of role</p> <p><u>Information voice</u> Friend</p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p>Wife also considering fostering</p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Care/financial gains</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p>
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<p>became a, it went from a non-for-profit organisation to erm I think we got sold to erm (.) a what do they call them? ((Rubbing eyes)). A hedge fund company (.) who were looking to invest for return.</p>	
<p>Lisa: [Okay]</p>	
<p>Mr X: [and] <i>at that point my wife and I just kind of went, "It's no wonder it's going down the pan really. It's (.) it's just not (.) working for us." (.) I mean, for example, we got five children, and we got one of our own at home, so we had an eight-seater vehicle. We started out leasing it through the original foster (.) and they and they leased it for us, and then after five years they leased it again, and then when it came up for (.) the other time, we'd still got four there, erm so we expected that they wouldn't do it but we quite liked the idea of having a bigger vehicle because by that point we'd got grandchildren and stuff.</i></p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u> Retention</p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p>	
<p>20:23 minutes</p>	
<p>Mr X: [And so] we tried to negotiate with them, and they just wouldn't have it at all. I said, "Well okay, what about leasing a smaller vehicle? I know that we've still got four. We can't fit us all into a car. We're happy to pay the extra," But they wouldn't budge at all. And then they got more and more (.) you know (.) we used to take them, my wife's got a sister in [Country] so every year we went to [Country] on holiday. Every year went to [Location] holiday and we got no support or help with that at all. <i>Nothing for holidays. Nothing for clothing. Nothing for school uniform. Nothing for this, nothing for that. And we used to get bits and pieces and one by one, they got stripped away.</i></p>	<p><u>Determined voice</u> <u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> Financial changes</p>
<p>Lisa: [Right]</p>	
<p>Mr X: [And] to give you some idea (.) we left them in January, and we put our notice in December (.) and they stopped the £500 Christmas bonus because we were thinking of leaving them.</p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [[[Gasp]]] Gosh</p>	

<p>Mr X: [He's] since moved on recently.</p> <p>Lisa: [Oh has he]</p> <p>Mr X: [but] fortunately, been replaced by some that were, a couple of others that were really good, but (.) he (.) <u>he would tell me and my wife. He'd say, "I can have half a dozen kids that are yours because you caused me so little work and do so much in my job for me."</u></p> <p>Lisa: Yeah. Is it (.) Do you find that you've both taken the fostering role on together?</p> <p>Mr X: Oh no, we're not equally (.) My wife does the bulk of it. I up until this year (.) was working (.) Erm I took retirement when she got Covid and it obvious she'd got long Covid and couldn't do things. And I quit because my job is getting more stressful, and (.) just so that we could help out with the fostering and the running around. <u>She's recovered from the long Covid and now she's going great guns again, she doesn't need me at all. I tend to get involved when there's decisions to be made. I get involved with the logistics of things, running people around, taxiing. I was out last night taking a boy to football practice.</u> On Tuesday, when the boys leave, they usually go to, to the local city, where we are based, I nearly said it, erm (.) and so I tend to help them with the moves and things like that. If there's a bit of extra shopping to be done, appointments to dentist, doctors. <u>I do my fair share of running around.</u></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: <u>[She's] the one that runs, goes into the meetings, she's got two PEPs on now (.) and so she tends to do the meeting. She has meetings with social workers. We're obviously both there for our independent review, which was last week, no this week. Erm but other than that, she does all that admin side of stuff, meeting with people. Erm I obviously get involved in decisions but I'm the dog's body really. Quite happy of it.</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;">24:55 Minutes</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p>	<p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Traditional family setup Early retirement – wife's ill health <u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u> Involvement – decisions, transport</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Wife – attends meetings</p>
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<p>Mr X: [She] does a good job, she does a good job. And and I wish I could tell everybody, erm I wish everybody was privy to the reviews that she has (.) because she gets glowing reports from everybody, (.) the independent reviewing officer, the social worker; ours, the children's, even, even health professionals write in, when they're invited to because they are so impressed with her. We've had lawyers write in because there's always a lot of legal work with refugees. And erm (.) just every one of them using words, like 'excellent', 'dedication', 'commitment', 'above and beyond' those kinds of phrases. Erm, I think she should be recognised in the flipping honours role, let alone some of these numpties that end up being called whatever.</p>	<p>Pride in wife <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Mm]</p> <p>Mr X: [Because] 20 years of dedicated service like that, having done such a good job, (.) I don't think it gets a recognition, that kind of role, that it deserves. If I'd ever thought it'd be taken seriously, I'd put her forward for an OBE or something. I certainly see other people that get them, and I think well okay, really? [But no]</p>	<p>Lack of recognition</p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [I'm] very, very, very thrilled with what she does and thrilled just to be a part of it.</p>	<p><u>Pride voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: Yeah, you sound really proud of her.</p> <p>Mr X: [Oh] absolutely, she's quite remarkable (.) and I don't know, if it's a bloke thing, but sometimes (.) the boys will do something wrong, you know, what a stupid thing to and she's going "put it into perspective" and "we're getting paid for this", she just got a very (.) calming way of dealing with erm (.) I can't put my finger on. The favourite one is ((Laughing)).</p>	<p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Window of tolerance different – Balance between the two <u>Reflecting voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [You] would have thought, wouldn't you that the degree of intelligence, it takes a turn on a light switch is the same degree of intelligence required to turn it off but it's not (((Laughing))).</p>	<p><u>Humour voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Laughing]</p>	

<p>Mr X: [That's] kind of my (.) ((frustrated gesture)) I don't get irate about it, but it does (.) it does erm get on my nerves a little bit, sometimes when they're doing stuff like that. Walking out of rooms leaving lights on is just my pet (.) peeve. (.) but you know, that's the worst of it. (.) Teenage boys.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [It could] it could be a lot worse than that and I know it has been cause we've looked after them [but erm (.)]</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah], You've talked quite a lot about the sort of erm permanence I suppose you offer beyond fostering and into adulthood. Was that a conscious choice when you went into fostering that you'd always be part of their life as a family?</p> <p>Mr X: Yeah. I er (.) (Long breath out) We looked after on respite, before we got the sibling group, four children erm two brothers and two sisters but not (.) they weren't (.) all siblings, if you see what I mean the two boys siblings are two girls. And they came to live with us for two weeks.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [We] did all sorts with them. We erm (.) filled the two weeks with as much fun as we could (.) and the oldest boy comes to family gatherings, Mum and Dad, ((Laughing)) two weeks and calls us Mum and Dad. And erm (.) he (.) will tell anybody, it was the best two weeks of his life and erm whilst (.) I'm glad about that, I'm also exceptionally sad about it, because that should not be any child's experience of growing up. Should just not be. We're grandparents to his son. But that should not be any child's experience (.) and even the carers that he stayed with for a decade have nothing to do with him [and]</p> <p>Lisa: [Right]</p> <p>Mr X: [and] that I find I can't fathom, I just don't (.) I can't (.) get my head around that at all. I have occasionally bumped into those people and erm (.) it requires 100% of my effort to be pleasant (.) and polite because I just don't get that.</p> <p>Lisa: [It's sad isn't it.]</p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p>Respite</p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Remained in contact</p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Children's experience of growing up in care</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p>Value- Loyalty</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Determined voice</u></p>
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Mr X: <u>[You don't, you don't] If you looked after a dog for 10 years, you'd be heartbroken when it left. If you saw it in the street, you'd be making a fuss of it. I do not understand why they aren't grandparents to that boy. I do not understand why they don't his celebrate birthday and all the rest of it. We do.</u>	<u>Reflecting voice</u>
Lisa: [Mm]	
Mr X: [What] <u>How do you do that? You tell me that Lisa because I've got no idea. I honestly (.) beyond (.) it's outside of my (.) I can't, I can't even find words which is not like me [((Laughing))]</u>	<u>Reflecting voice</u> <u>Humour voice</u>
Lisa: [((Laughing))]	
Mr X: [to] express how I feel about that.	
Lisa: {Yeah}	
Mr X: <u>[Any]way, he's a great lad. He was round here the day and I'm helping him set up a business, when he got into trouble with a partner and got kicked out, was homeless, we helped him find a flat erm (.) we helped him with some money to get himself back on his feet. And that's just what you do for kids.</u>	<u>Pride voice</u> <u>Continued support</u> <u>Affection voice</u>
Lisa: [Mm]	
Mr X: <u>[That's] what you do for your children.</u>	<u>Affection voice</u>
Lisa: [Absolutely]	Family
29:52 Minutes	
Mr X: <u>[They] need a family (.) everybody needs a family, and I don't care if you've got a family that dysfunctional it's better than nothing (.) just better than nothing at all. ((Intake of breath)) There's a wonderful thing, I, I studied music at college and I'm a bit of a musician and a singer and erm the science of music (.) and something that struck me as being utterly profound is in order for sound to be sound, you have to have two things. You have to have pressure waves, that create (.) something but you also have an ear that hears it. And the conundrum is the tree falls in a forest and there's no mammalian or reptilian ears to hear it falls in silence.</u>	<u>Reflecting voice</u> Importance of family <u>Reflecting voice</u>
Lisa: [Mm]	
Mr X: <u>[That's] so sad, it's just profoundly awful. Such a cataclysmic thing happens without any reaction or response. And I think that's what it must be like</u>	<u>Reflecting voice</u>

<p>when you've got no family. You've got nothing to, (.) to, (.) to listen, to respond, to react, to put an arm around your shoulder when it's bad, to to be thrilled for you when it's happy. It must be that kind of a (.) again, I don't have that. I've got four brothers and a sister, my wife's got three sisters, you know we've got family coming out our ears.</p> <p>Lisa [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: Sometimes it's a pain in the rear end, but I'd rather a pain in the rear end and nothing. So that's why we do what we do, I think.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah], that makes (.)</p> <p>Mr X: [Does to me]</p> <p>Lisa: [Very profound] Yeah, it does made sense. Anything else you'd like to think about with me [Name] or is that your story?</p> <p>Mr X: That's my story (.) from top to bottom really. It's erm, you know, I've taught kids to chop wood with axes. I've taught kids to make, and build, and repair things. I've taught kids how to put plugs on things. I've taught kids all sorts of stuff (.) and erm you know, I've had children come back to me when they married or you know cohabiting with someone who's clueless (.) and thanked me profoundly (.) and of all the things you think kids would be grateful for, you wouldn't have thought that would be it [((Laughing))].</p> <p>Lisa: [The practical? Yeah.] ((Smiling)).</p> <p>Mr X: [You'd] think yeah, the heart-to-heart talk with the arm around the shoulder, the compassion, the love. No. "Thanks for teaching me how to put a plug on a (.) bit of wire." ((Laughing))</p> <p>Lisa: How did your children (.) Were your children older when you fostered?</p> <p>Mr X: Three of them were, one was a bit younger. One of them was part of the fostering process until he left home and got married.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [A] couple of the foster kids didn't leave home. One didn't leave till he was 22. He went to university from here. Got his degree from here. Met a girl (.),</p>	<p><u>Humour voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> Ongoing motivation</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Passing skills on</p> <p><u>Pride voice</u> <u>Critical voice</u> <u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u> <u>Humour voice</u></p> <p>Birth children</p> <p><u>Information voice</u> Staying put</p>
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<p><i>moved in, got married eventually. () he was the youngest one. We had our own musical group at one point.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Did you?]</p> <p>Mr X: [With] the foster kids and my son. <i>I was the roadie, the manager. They had a band and I think one of their mates, played drums, but the others were all instrumentalists, singers. ((Intake of breath)) Every single one of them learnt to play an instrument of some kind or another (.) and a couple of them kept it on. (.) So, we have a couple of flautists in the family and a cello player and a bass player and the guitarists, banjo. Whatever () is really.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Wow]</p> <p>Mr X: [That's] the only option is not to try.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah] absolutely. Yeah, it [really]</p> <p>Mr X: [No] your option wasn't to (.) You had to try. That was not an option.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah. Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [If] you didn't like it, then that was fine. But <i>they had to give it a go and it was amazing how many stuck it for six weeks</i> and then "No no, I'll carry on. I'll carry on"</p> <p>Lisa: [That's really good.]</p> <p>Mr X: <i>"No. You don't have to if you don't want", "No no. I'll take it away, it's okay"</i> Yeah. ((Laughing))</p> <p>Lisa: ((Laughing)) It sounds like (.) so you've discussed a time which was really difficult, and you described as lonely but then equally you are describing times which are really joyous and fun.</p> <p>Mr X: Oh, <i>we've had hilarious times</i> and this stuff I can tell you probably couldn't record but you can delete it can't you? I'll tell you a really funny incident. We had a boy from [Country], we've a couple of [Country] lads. The first one we got [details removed]. That boy's now got his own business, he's a dad and a baby and comes to visit us regularly. FaceTime's us all the time. The happiest guy you'll ever meet. But one Christmas (erm) he got me a Christmas card and he was developing a sense of humour. And I think that's (.) when you know you have landed when</p>	<p><u>Affection voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p>Music – passing on passions</p> <p><u>Reflective voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Information voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p>Funny times</p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p>
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<p> <i>someone can start making jokes, and the first thing he did, which made me think, Ah yeah he's settled in was, I gave him an A4 book, lined paper, 100 sheets, 200 sides and said, "Just put a line down the middle, divide it into four, English word, [first language] word, just fill that out over time." Three weeks in, "I need another book Dad I run out." "Yeah, right. Whatever. Show me the book." 200 pages (.)</i> <i>Seriously, 30 lines on a thing. All filled with the [first language] words and English words. Just as he came across them and he obviously flipped back through them. Just amazing. So, we used to do a thing where we didn't understand what he would come and talk to me, I'd explain what the word was but then his job is to put into a sentence.</i> This went on for weeks. </p> <p> Erm he's picking up just the nuances of the English language, which is as confusing as anything you'll ever come across. And then one day he came to me, "I don't understand this word Dad" and he tried to pronounce, and he couldn't, and I said, "Let me look at it" and it was the word inept, I said, "Oh it means you're useless at something. You can't do it." I said, "So you put that into a sentence." And he goes, "All right. Erm (.) My dad is inept at teaching English." I said "Yes, Nooo" (((Laughing))) </p> <p> Lisa: (((Laughing))) </p> <p> Mr X: [and] then, I thought, he set me up. </p> <p> Lisa: [Yeah] </p> <p> Mr X: [And] at that point, I thought, Ah there's hope for you. <i>But the funnier thing was one Christmas when he got me a Christmas card (.) and we were all sat in the living room, sharing, swapping presents and cards and stuff. And I open this card and I couldn't, I just burst out laughing.</i> [description of card removed]. Which is just plain rude, except he doesn't understand [description removed] So, I starts to laugh. I'm passing the card around and everybody starts to laugh because they all know him, immediately he's not rude at all as a boy. </p> <p> Lisa: [No, no] </p>	<p> <i>Humour voice</i> <i>Pride voice</i> </p> <p> <i>Reflecting voice</i> </p> <p> <i>Humour voice</i> </p> <p> <i>Information voice</i> </p> <p> <i>Humour voice</i> </p>
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<p>Mr X: [He's] just innocently got the wrong end of the stick. He's tried to be funny and completely missed the joke, but nobody can explain this to him because we're all laughing. And he's going, "What I do, I don't know what I do" and the more he's protesting his innocence () we're just falling about, eventually we managed to come compose ourselves, and my youngest son said, "Come here, come with me." So, takes him into the room we're in now, shuts the door between here and the living room. You can't really hear people speak, but after a few minutes, tears running down our face, all we can hear from this room is "But I don't know that." and we all just start laughing again and we're just in fits of tears and we've brought it up several times (.) And er he says, "I come with Christmas present this year Dad." I said, "Please, don't bring a card, do not bring a card." <i>It's just a standing joke now (.) presents are okay, but no card. So (.) but (.) so that's the other side to it all, it's the laugh and the funniness.</i> And at my 65th party, I stood up and said, "Thank you for coming. (.) Er <i>thank you all for you know, staying involved and keeping in touch and all the wonderful things you've done for me today.</i>" I'm a dad joke person so they were reading (.) <i>the task was if they gave me a card or present, they had to read a joke out (.) so, that was hilarious.</i> But the thing I said at the end was I said, "I tell you what, I'm most proud of" and it all goes quiet. "The thing I'm most proud of is that there's lots of people that have lived with me, lived in my house with me and we've loved having you but there isn't a single one of you that's got the foggiest idea of what it means to belong to a normal family." (((Laughing)))</p>	<p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: (((Laughing)))</p>	
<p>Mr X: [And] <i>that's what I'm proudest of. They know what human interactions like, and they know that they can express themselves and they know that they can (.) come to me and gob off if they need to and vent about whatever (.) and have a laugh.</i></p>	<p><u>Affection voice</u></p> <p><u>Value - pride</u></p> <p><u>Reflection voice</u></p>
<p>Lisa: [Yeah], you should be proud of that.</p>	

Mr X: [That] and giving them a proper job with pay and conditions. <i>You know this business of self-employed and find your own accountant is utter dribble.</i>	<u>Critical voice</u>
Lisa: Would you have changed it? Would you have done everything again?	
Mr X: ((Intake of breath)) Erm <i>I'd never have started being honest erm on reflection. Now I've done it. I'm glad I've done it and I'm utterly thrilled</i> with (.) lots of the repercussions of it. But knowing what <i>I now, know, I'd find</i> an easier, quieter life (.) <i>I'd get</i> a job down a mine or something [((Laughing))]	<u>Reflecting voice</u> – wouldn't have started <u>Pride voice</u> <u>Critical voice</u> <u>Humour voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah]((Laughing))	
Mr X: <i>It's less hazardous. I'm being</i> slightly facetious, but <i>I think.</i>	<u>Humour voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah]	
Mr X: <i>[I think] I think, I don't, I think that</i> applies to lots of things, if you knew what you were getting yourself into before you got into it, you probably wouldn't do it (.) Marriage ((Laughing)) (.) Parenthood ((Laughing)). <i>You have this rosy idea of the world when you're in your teens don't you that is never gonna just turn out to be accurate.</i>	<u>Reflecting voice</u> <u>Humour voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u> Rose tinted perspective of life
Lisa: [Mm]	
Mr X: [No], <i>I think I would</i> do it differently. (.) <i>I would</i> do it differently. <i>I would</i> change some things definitely (.) <i>I think</i> our dream of keeping a sibling group together was, was a bit pie in the sky. <i>I think I would</i> temper (.) my ambition (.) to do something a bit more manageable.	<u>Reflecting voice</u> <u>Pride voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah]	
Mr X: [Erm] what <i>we're doing</i> now is what <i>I would</i> like to have done all along. <i>[I think].</i>	
Lisa: [Is it?] Right, ok.	
Mr X: [Yeah], <i>It's because (.) I think</i> my wife and <i>I</i> as a team are well suited to it erm <i>I think</i> <i>we were</i> slightly out of our depth when <i>we took</i> on five kids and still had one of our own at home and still had three other kids that were going through uni and finding the feet.	<u>Pride voice</u> <u>Reflecting voice</u>
Lisa: [Yeah]	

<p><i>not too surprising really.</i> Yeah.</p> <p>Lisa: Thank you. Anything else you wanted to?</p> <p>Mr X: [I] don't know what you're after because there's so much stuff that's happening in 20 years.</p> <p>Lisa: Yeah, I'm not really after anything.</p> <p>Mr X: Erm. <i>It's been fascinating looking after Muslim boys (.) taking them to Friday prayers, helping them celebrate Eid, erm helping them when they're going through fasting and talking to them about religion, theirs and ours, similarities and differences.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p style="text-align: right;">45:00 Minutes</p> <p>Mr X: [and erm] it's been (.) lovely to support them in trying to er follow their beliefs and to encourage them. One boy, complained about erm a picture of Jesus being on the wall. <i>So, I walked into his room and there's the black flag of the whatever on the wall and I said, "Well, I could complain about that but I'm being respectful to you and your beliefs. I said, "There's a Qur'an over there. There's a prayer mat roll up in the corner." (.) I said, "In the bathroom there's (.) a jug for washing (.) for prayers. I said, "In the kitchen there's a frying pan that never has pork in it." I said, "Unless we learn to live amongst each other. The world's gonna have problems, isn't it?"</i> The social worker agreed. And in fact, the interpreter told him off which they're not supposed to do ((Laughing)).</p> <p>Lisa: No</p> <p>Mr X: He said, "These people have been over backwards to accommodate your belief" he said, "You do the same." I think sometimes they get their head filled full of rubbish, some of them and they don't, can't quite make the adjustment so easily when they come across. The life in this country, they don't expect girls to be dressed skimpily and they don't expect (.) erm women to be expressing their views and opinions and erm one or two haven't taken kindly to women social workers (.) or interpreters. They've been gently told, you know, what is what.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p>	<p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Support</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Tolerance</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u> Adjustment Managing expectation <u>Reflecting voice</u></p>
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<p>being British and enjoying their life even though they've come from a long way.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: <i>[The] [Country] boy drives me nuts because he won't take any benefits. (.) Point blank refuses. I said, "You've got a baby. You've got a wife." (.) who yet can't work because she was also erm hasn't yet got leave to remain though that should be coming anytime soon, because the (.) baby gives her the legal right to be.</i></p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: <i>[Erm] I said, "You just need to claim money" "I don't want it." "It's not for you." ((Laughing)) We have these like kind of utterly bizarre little conversations, "It's for my grandchild. I want my grandchild to have that (.)" "I not happy." I said, "Me, neither." ((Laughing)) So yeah.</i></p> <p>Lisa: Yeah</p> <p>Mr X: Yeah</p> <p>Lisa: Well, thank you.</p>	<p><u>Critical voice</u></p>
<p style="text-align: right;">49.34 Minutes</p> <p>Mr X: I'll tell you one last thing.</p> <p>Lisa: Yeah.</p> <p>Mr X: <i>And erm the group of five that came gave us lots of problems when they were teenagers erm (.) they went through all that they went through and they were comfortable enough with us, to be able to act out, and kick off, and mouth off, and do stupid things, because they know that they were loved and cared for. At the time, you don't see that for what it is. But all of them, to a man, at different times, on their own (.) have come back to us and apologise for their behaviour. (.) "I can't believe I behaved like that." I said, "Well I can, first of all, you were teenagers and secondly didn't exactly have the best start in life."</i></p> <p>Lisa: Yeah. How did it feel when they sort of apologised, In retrospect?</p> <p>Mr X: <i>It felt, we felt vindicated in some respects erm (.) There were times when I could have just kicked them into touch. I really could have. My wife never would</i></p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Resolve</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p>

<p>(.) and I always felt that she's got the better instinct for that kind of thing. Blokes are blokes. They tend to want to deal with things head on and sorted it out. And sometimes you can't, you've just got to leave it be, move on, keep going. But I felt vindicated in many respects, but the other thing that it allowed (.) us to do, which we could have done before, but didn't feel inclined to because of some element of ill feeling about some of it erm (.) it allowed us to say, "Yeah but we got it wrong too. We made mistakes." You don't take on five of somebody else's kids and expect to get it right, unless you're totally naive. I said, "Yeah but we didn't get it right" you know, and we were experienced parents at that point. Erm, we made mistakes. You know, we did lots of things that we look back and think, oh you idiot. That's, that's an experience of every parent. We made mistakes with our own kids as well, erm and so it allowed us to to to, in a way of saying thank you, it allowed us to also say (.) we are all human.</p> <p>Lisa: Yeah.</p> <p>Mr X: What else can you do? You muddle through, you don't intend to muck it up, but you do and, you know, just try and get on with it. So that was, that what was, what was lovely not the apology, but the opportunity to also say, "Yeah, sorry too." (.) It was actually quite moving on a couple of those occasions.</p> <p>Lisa: [Yeah, sounds like complete repair does it.]</p> <p>Mr X: [So yeah. Yeah, it was.] And of course, they then become adults and so they've got children of their own, so they then start to see things as I'm sure you're aware, from a completely different perspective. You know and they've got responsibilities that you had and they're now coming back to Grandma and Grandpa for advice (.) "How do you do this", "What should I do here?" You know. It's because there's no manual.</p> <p>Lisa: [No]</p> <p>Mr X: [No] What a silly thing to do, have all this society going on and there's no manual ((Laughing))</p>	<p>Gender assumption – move on</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p>Full repair</p> <p><u>Critical voice</u></p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Affection voice</u> Shift in relationship</p> <p><u>Reflecting voice</u> Now adults - change in perspective</p> <p><u>Pride voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p>
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<p>Lisa: It would be so much easier. ((Laughing))</p> <p>Mr X: It would.</p> <p>Lisa: Take the challenge or take something away from it though, wouldn't it?</p> <p>Mr X: It certainly would, yeah. But simple things like, you know, this is how you change your nappy. <i>((Laughing)) I know you can learn that from your parents to some extent but just a Haynes manual for the human body of a baby and then slightly more than an encyclopaedia for the human mind of a teenager ((Laughing)).</i></p> <p>Lisa: (((Laughing)) It Yeah]</p> <p>Mr X: [Would be helpful.] Yeah. Right.</p> <p>Lisa: Well, thank you. I really appreciate your time.</p> <p>Mr X: You're welcome.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">53:15 Minutes</p>	<p><u>Reflecting voice</u></p> <p><u>Humour voice</u></p>
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8.10.3. Mr X's voice poem

I	You	She/He	We	They
I'm gonna			We	
			We will	
			We had	
				They wanted
			We got	
				They came
				They both
		He thought		
I should				
I did				
I was				
I worked				
I quickly				
		He was		
		He was		
			We only	
		She'd got		
			We'd got	
				They went
				They could
			We'd always	
			We wanted	
			We've been	
			We'd come	
				They didn't hardly
			We felt	

We looked

We were

They just

I got

I said

You do

For you

They didn't like

I said

I'm upsetting

I'm fine

I don't have

I'm breaking

I said

You trying

We found

I'm really not

You've done

I said

I know

They wouldn't
be

He was

I'd trodden

He hadn't got

He got

I've never

I'm afraid

I've never

I do

You've got

I'm not
frightened
I firmly believe
I would

We would
We always
We've never

You come
across
You've found

We'll actually
get

You

I said

They going
They've been
They're on

I said

We got
We've had
We've had

They all

I understand

You have to
You know

We doing

I've not got

We finally
We weren't just
We actually had
We did
We have

			We've been on	
			We've taken	
			We've just got	
			We have	
			We want	
				They'd come
			We might	
		She's just one		
			We'd finished	
			We'd had	
				They'd come
			We'd love	
I think				
	You have to			
We weren't able I don't apologise				
			We had	
	You know			
I'd said				
I just don't know				
			We'd identified	
I said				
	You've now been			
I want				
I want				
I didn't think				
		She agreed		
I wouldn't let				
I literally				

I said

You phone

I will

You to

I'm meeting

I'd said

We'd agreed

She assaulted

I tried

I could

She actually

I (.) tried

She trapped

I had

She fell

She got

I just let

She'd stopped

We reported

I know

I think

He's managed

I'd had

You know

She wouldn't be

I think

I went

I was

They don't

We would

I would

I would

I mean

I did

She said

She'd punch

I got

We aren't
taking

I don't know

They can't
make

He said

I'm not

I didn't get

He said

He's trying

He's trying

I don't want

We're happy

You know

They didn't take

They didn't take

We decided

We would

We'd had
enough

We said

We're finished

We're
exhausted

We've no

They shouldn't
be

		We're in	
I am not			
	She said		
			We're starting
			They tend
			They usually
			haven't
			They are
		We said	
		We're not	
	She said		
I've got			
	He is		
			We just
		We took	
	He was		
	He was		
		We had	
		We didn't want	
	He didn't want		
		We were	
I've ever			
		We were	
		We could	
I've regretted			
I really			
I get			
	He came		
	He moved		
	He turned		
		We were	

			We went
		He told	
			We got
		He'd passed	
		He had	
			We're making
			We can
I said			
I said			
	You've got to		
		He had	
			We have
			We currently
			We've had
			We've got
I'm getting			
			We had the
			We had about
			We had
			We invited
			We are
			They didn't really They were
I don't			
I can			
I said			
I got			
I really			
I've gone			
I've heard			

I said

I don't need

I was

I was

I was

I fancied

I was

I'd been

He was

He was

I think

I got

I saw

I just

I remembered

I got

He

They fostered

I thought

I'll give

I did

He said

You mean

I said

He said

She was

She'd seen

She was

She had

He was

		We don't talk	
I said			
	She said		
	She told		
	He'd talked		
	She'd messaged		
			They didn't work
			They worked
		We got	
		We did	
			They got
I'm not			
I'd not got			
		We did	
	You know		
	You can't claim		
I understand			
			They were
I think			
		We got	
			They call
I just			
I mean			
		We got	
		We got	
		We had	
		We started	
			They
			They leased
			They leased

I said
I know

We'd still
We expected
They wouldn't
do
We quite liked
We'd got
We tried
They just

We've still
We can't fit
We're happy
They wouldn't
budge
They got

We used
We went
We got
We used
They got

We left
We put
They stopped

We were
We still
We were
We'd handed
They stopped

I mean

You know

They think

	You've got	
	You've got	
	You must	
	You can	
I think		
		We've got
		We're with
I'm		
I am		
I don't know		
		They're either
I don't think		
I think		
	You're not good	
	You are	
	You need	
I can		
		We moved
		We moved
		He's since
		He
		He would
		He'd say
		I can
	You caused	
		We're not equally
I up		
I took		
	She got	
	She'd got	

I quit

We could

She recovered

She's going

She doesn't
need

I tend

I get

I was

They usually

We are

I nearly

I tend

I do

She's the

She's got

She tends

She has

We're obviously

She does

I'm the

She does

She does

I wish

I could

I wish

She has

She gets

They're invited

They are

We've had

I think

She should

I don't think

I'd ever

I'd put

I certainly

I think

I'm very thrilled

She does

She's quite

I don't know

You know

She's going

We're getting

She's just got

I can't put

You that

I don't get

They're doing

You know

I know

We've looked

We got

They weren't

I mean

They came

We did

We filled

We could

He will

I'm glad

I'm also

We're
grandparents

He stayed

I find

I can't

I just don't

I can't

I have

I just don't

You don't

You don't

You looked

I do not
understand

They aren't
grandparents

I do not
understand

They don't

We do

You do that

You tell

I've got no

I honestly

I can't

I can't even

I feel

He's a

He was

I'm helping

He got

		We helped
		We helped
	You do	
	You do	
		They need
I don't care		
	You've got	
I studied		
I'm a		
	You have to	
	You have to	
	You also	
I think		
	You've got	
	You've got	
	You when	
I don't have		
I've got		
	You know	
		We've got
I'd rather		
		We do
		We do
I think		
	You know	
I've taught		
I've taught		
I've taught		
I've taught		
	You know	

I've had

They married

You know

You'd think

He left

He was

He went

We had

I was

They had

I think

We have

You had to

They had

I'll carry

I'll carry

You don't have

You don't want

I'll take

We've had

I can

You can

Can't you

I'll tell

We had

We've a

We got

He's a

He got

He was

I think

He did

He's settled

I gave

I need

I run

He came

He obviously

We used

We didn't
understand

He would

I'd explain

He's picking

You'll ever

He came

I don't
understand

He tried

He couldn't

I said

I said

You're useless

You can't do

I said

You put

He goes

I said

I thought

He set

I thought

He got

		We were
I open		
I couldn't		
I just burst		
I've got		
	You've been	
	He doesn't	
	understand	
	He just thinks	
	He's compared	
I starts		
I'm passing		
	He's not rude	
	He's just	
	He's tried	
		We're all
	He's going	
	I do	
	I don't know	
	I do	
	He's protesting	
		We're just
		We managed
	You can't really	
		We can
	I don't know	
		We all
		We're just
		We've brought
	He says	
	I come	

I said

I stood

You all

You know

You've done

I'm a

They were

They gave

They had

I said

I said

I tell

I'm most

I'm most

We've loved

You

You that's

I'm proudest

They know

They know

They can

They know

They can

They need

I am

I am

We've got

We've been

I do

I'm not

I'm not

I think

You've got

You can

You can

You know

We know

I've been

I'm not

You can

You just

You're not nuts

You know

You know

I don't know

You know

You know

They can

I think

I'd never have

I've done

I'm glad

I've done

I'm utterly
thrilled

I now know

I'd find

I'd get

I'm being

I think

I think

I think

I don't

I think

You knew

You were

You got

You probably
wouldn't

You have

You're in

Don't you

I think

I would

I would

I think

I think

I would

We're doing

I would

I think

I think

I think

We were

We took

I would

I think

I think

I

I think

We were

We took

		We did	
		We looked	
	You could		
		We got	
		We looked	
I would			
		We're in	
		We	
		We said	
		We needed	
	She proved		
I walked			
I said			
I could			
I'm being			
I said			
I said			
I said			
I said			
		We learn	
			They're not
	He said		
	He said		
	You do		
I think			
			They get
			They don't
			They come
			They don't
			expect
			They don't
			expect

	You know	They've been
I've come		
		They've got
	He'd be	
	He's expected	
	You have to	
	I am	
I said		
	You'll be able	
	He said	
	He said	
		They're not continuing
I said		They give
	You're a	
	You're 18	
	You're an	
I said		
	You want	
	You're an	
I said		
	You go	
	You want	
	You've got	
I said		
I don't earn		
I said		
I wouldn't want		
I feel		

I want

I've earned

I take

I suppose

I even

I said

You there

You'll get

You become

I said

You can

I just try

He expects

They do

We're still

They've come

He won't take

I said

You've got

You've got

She was

I said

You just

For you

I don't want

We have

I want

I not happy

I'll tell

They were

They went
They went
They were
They know
They were

You don't see

I can't believe

I behaved

I said

I can

You were

We felt

I could

I really

I always

She's got

You can't

They tend

You've just got

I felt

We could

We got

We made

You don't take

You're totally
naive

I said

We didn't get

You know

We were

We made

You know

We did

We got

We made

We are

You do

You don't
intend

You do

You know

They then

They've got

They then

I'm sure

You're aware

You know

They've got

You had

They're now

You do

I do

You know

You know

You change

I know

You can

8.10.4. Maps of Mr X's contrapuntal voices

X1: Motivation to foster and decision to move to Local Authority

Pride

Reflecting

"We'd come across children, who had been separated, through no fault of their own"

"At the time I got no idea what foster carers could and couldn't do"

Information

"A friend... fostered so I thought I'll give him a ring"

"They worked for an IFA"

"I'd not got into fostering for the money."

Critical

"The IFA eventually changed hands... They got tighter and tighter"

"But when you can't claim relatively straight forward expenses"

"They just wouldn't have it at all"

"One by one they got stripped away"

Determined

"We wanted to keep a sibling group together"

"We tried to negotiate with them"

Humour

"You and your wife don't talk much do you?"

Affection

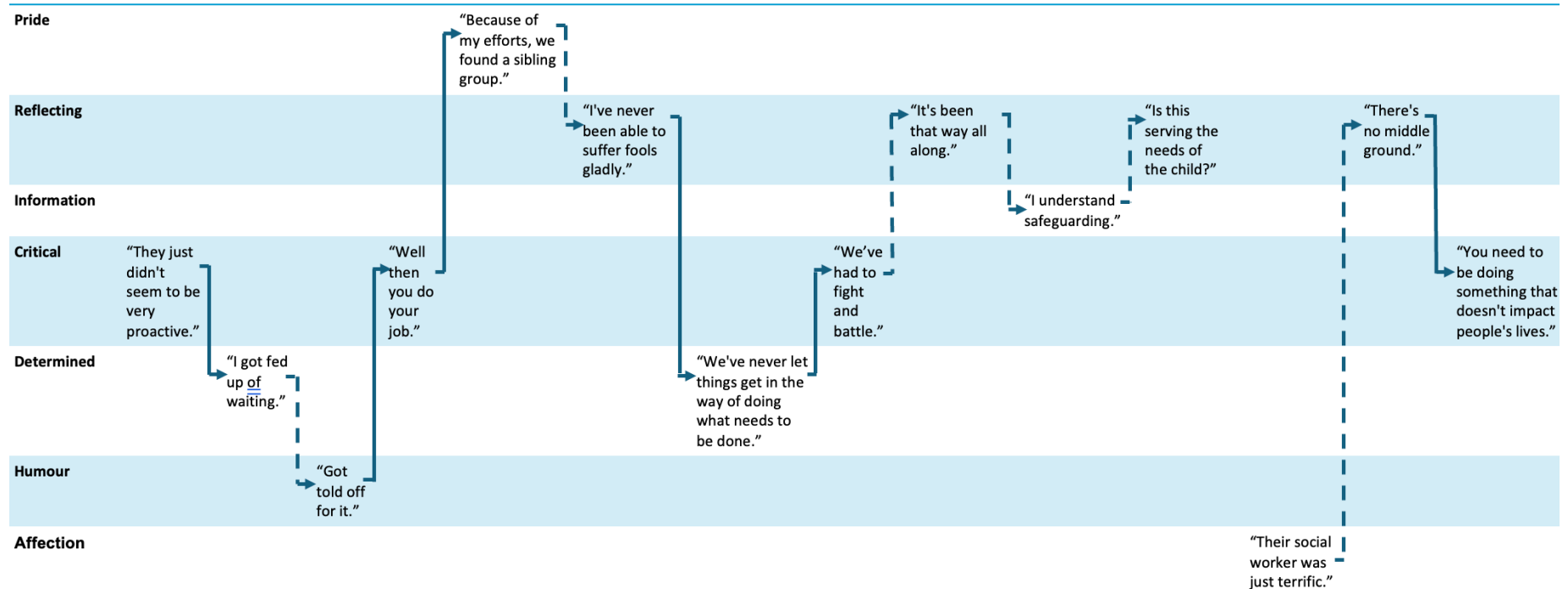
I Poem

I was	I saw	I said	I said
I was	I just	I said	I know
I was	I remembered	I'm not	I mean
I fancied	I got	I'd not got	I think
I was	I thought	I understand	
I'd been	I'll give	I think	
I think	I did	I just	
I got	I said	I mean	

Landscape

- Motivation – seen siblings split, working with a child who was fostered.
- The spark – Leaflet and friend.
- Value – justice.
- Limited understanding of role.
- Lucy also expressed an interest independently.
- Care/financial gains.
- Retention – Non-profit vs hedge fund.

X2: Team around the family



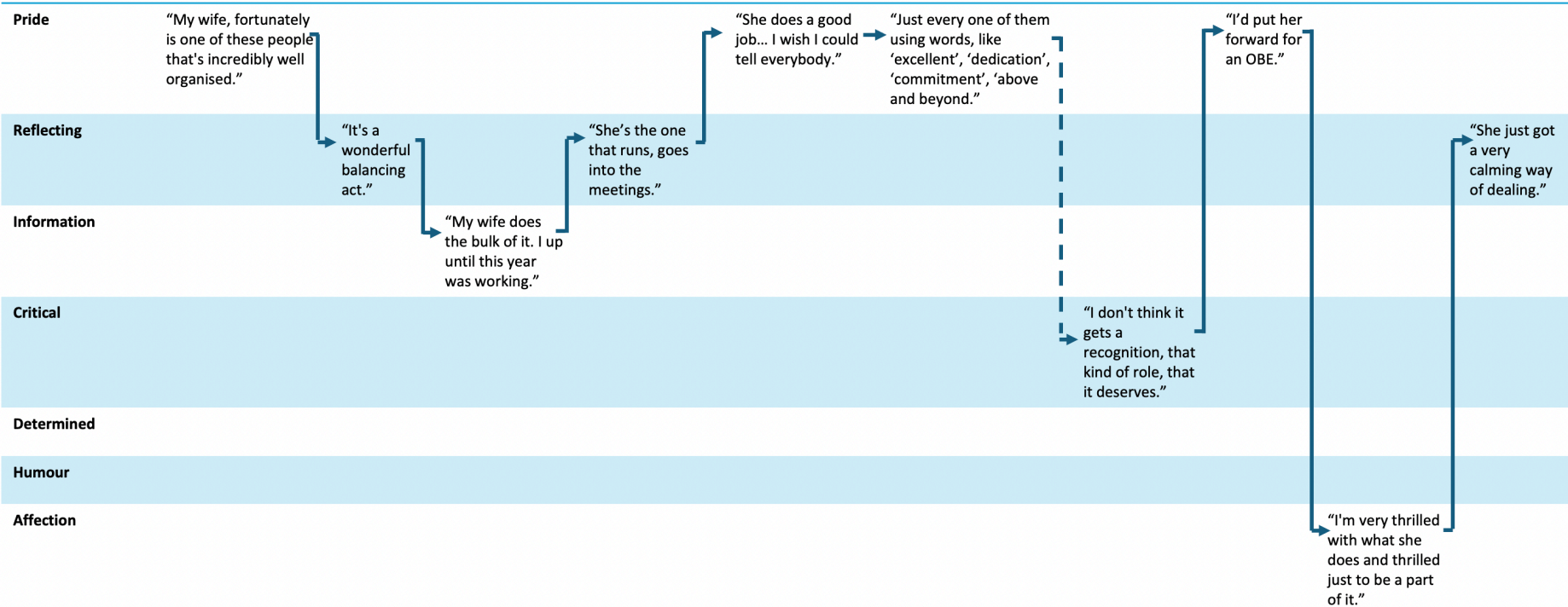
I Poem

I got	I <u>said</u>	I firmly believe	I
I <u>said</u>	I know	I would	I
I said,	I'd trodden	I <u>said</u>	I don't know
I'm upsetting	I've never	I <u>said</u>	I don't think
I'm fine	I'm afraid	I understand	I think
I don't have	I've never	I've not got	I think
I'm breaking	I do	I think	I can
I <u>said</u>	I'm not frightened	I'm	

Landscape

- Value – justice.
- Involvement seen as crossing the line.
- Sibling group of five.
- Dealing with others – systemic.
- Perception of SW job role – Expectation.
- Strong advocates.
- Battle.
- Systems working against each other.
- Professional sphere – bureaucracy.
- Questioning commitment of others.
- Changing perception.
- Demands of SW.

X3: Admiration for Lucy



I Poem

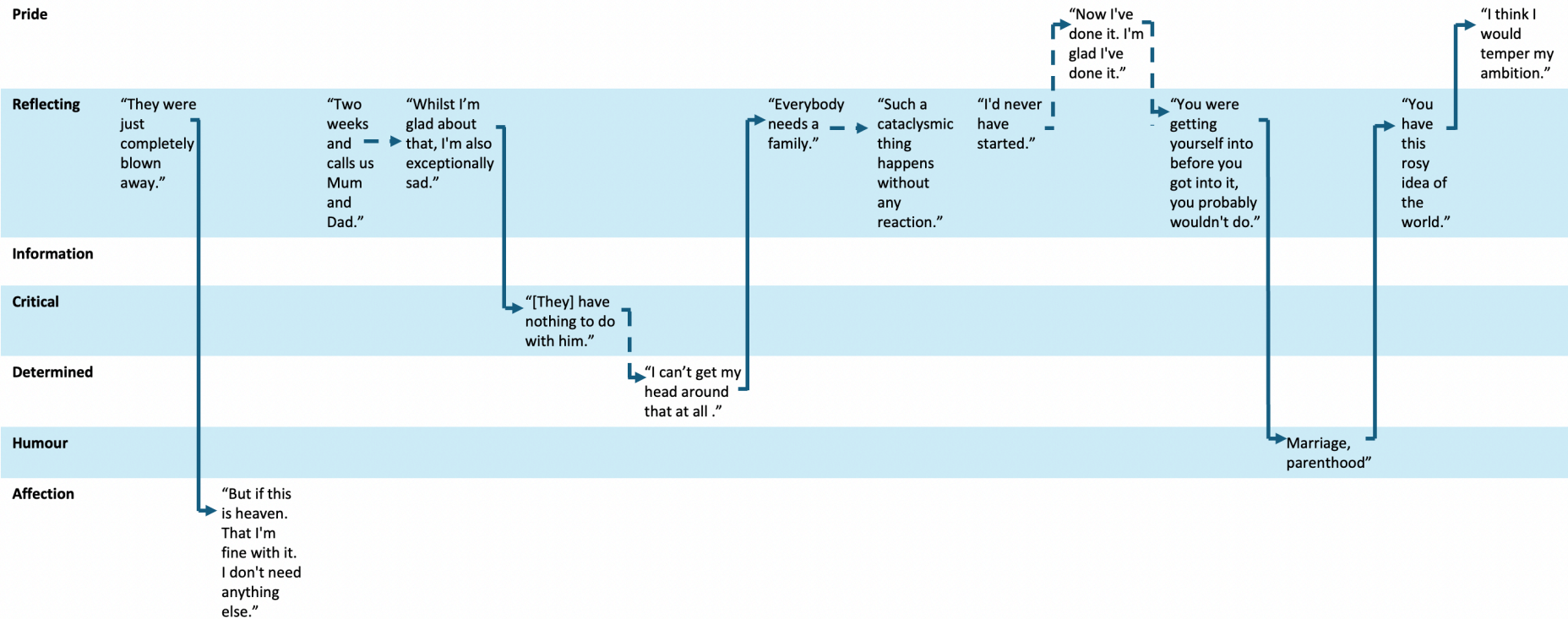
I up	I do	I don't think
I took	I obviously get	I'd ever
I quit	I'm the	I'd put
I tend	I wish	I certainly
I get	I could	I think
I was	I wish	I'm very
I nearly	I think	
I tend		

Landscape

- Logistics of large family.
- Structure – predictability.
- Traditional family setup – specific roles.
- Early retirement – wife's ill health, stress at work.
- Involvement – decisions, transport.
- Lack of recognition.
- Difference in tolerance.

X4: Philosophical reflections

Pride



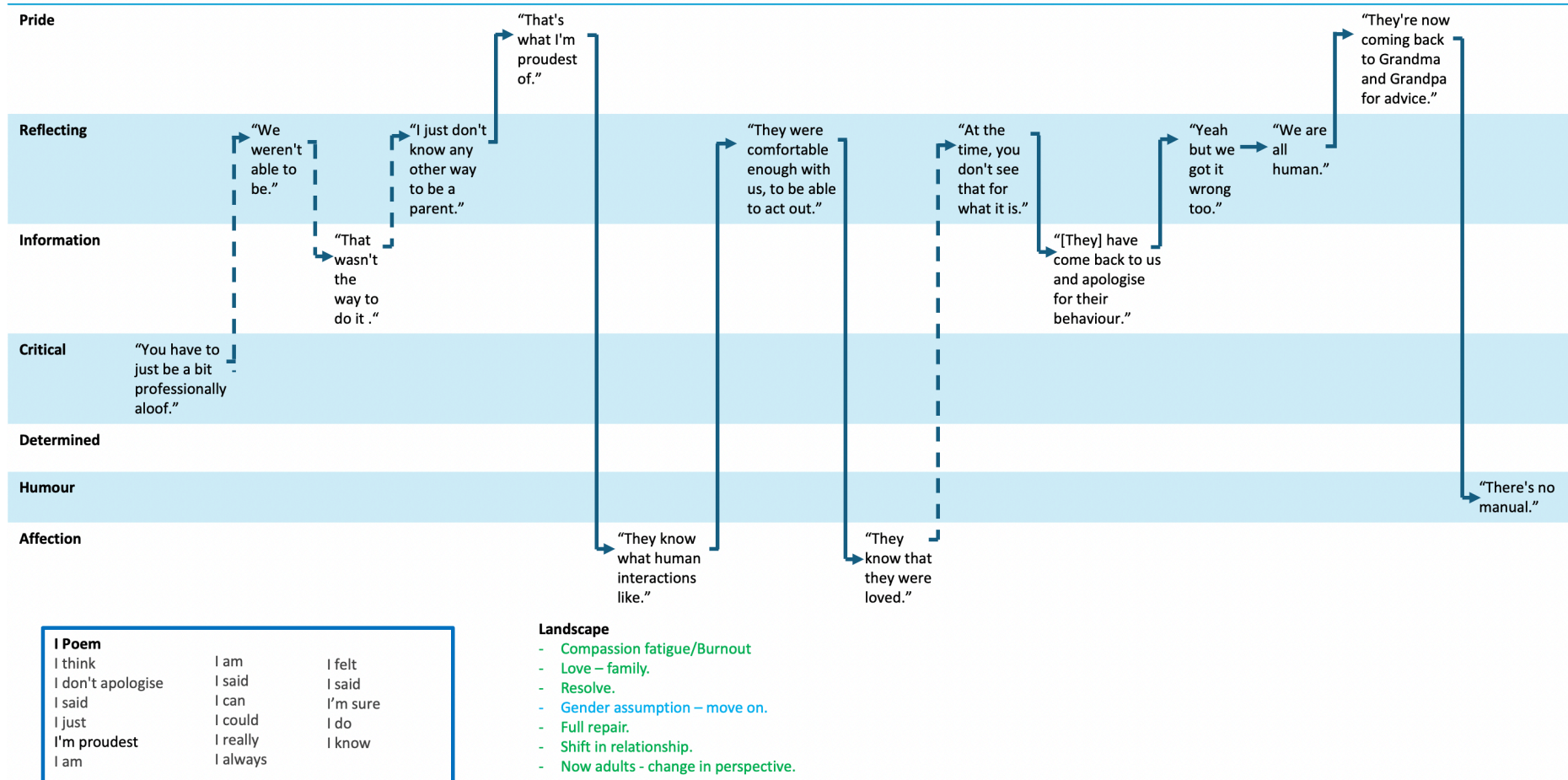
I Poem

I don't	I said	I don't	I can't	I think	I'm glad	I think	I would
I can	I don't need	I can't	I can't	I don't have	I've done	I think	I would
I said	I'm glad	I have	I feel	I've got	I'm utterly	I think	I think
I got	I'm also	I just don't	I'm helping	I'd rather	I now	I don't	I think
I really	I find	I do not	I don't care	I think	I'd find	I think	I would
I've gone	I can't	I've got	I studied	I'd never have	I'd get	I think	I would
I've heard	I just	I honestly	I'm a	I've done	I'm being	I would	I think

Landscape

- Content/satisfaction.
- Life's work.
- Respite.
- Remained in contact.
- Children's experience of growing up in care.
- Value – loyalty.
- Continued support.
- Importance of family.
- Rose tinted perspective of life.

X5: Full circle



X6: The impact of allegation

Pride

Reflecting

"It came to something of a head."

"In standing my ground, she assaulted me."

"That was the worst experience of my life."

"It was just the loneliest time in the world."

"I would have been lucky to get a job at a checkout."

"They didn't take anybody away."

"It was a real storm in a teacup."

"We'd had enough."

Information

"Started seeing a boy and was spending a lot of time at his."

"The police got involved."

"Our own social worker wouldn't be drawn on any comments."

Critical

Determined

"I'm meeting him and that's the end of it."

"We decided collectively that, that was it."

Humour

Affection

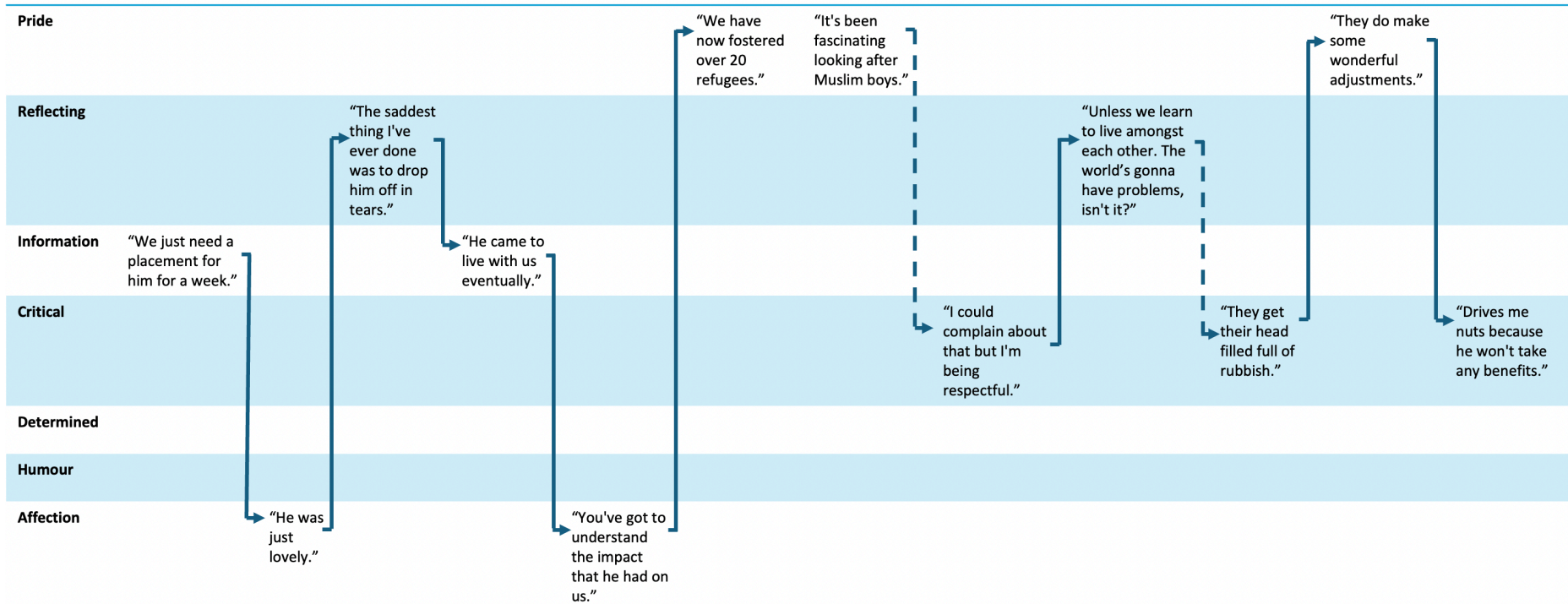
I Poem

I said	I'm meeting	I think	I got
I want	I'd said	I'd had	I don't know
I want	I tried	I think	I'm not
I didn't think	I could	I went	I didn't get
I wouldn't let	I tried	I was	
I literally	I had	I would	
I said,	I just let	I mean	
I will	I know	I did	

Landscape

- Difficulty.
- Assault.
- Safeguarding.
- Traumatizing.
- Long process.
- Lack of support/advocacy.
- Consequences.
- Relationship with social worker.

X7: Looking after unaccompanied children



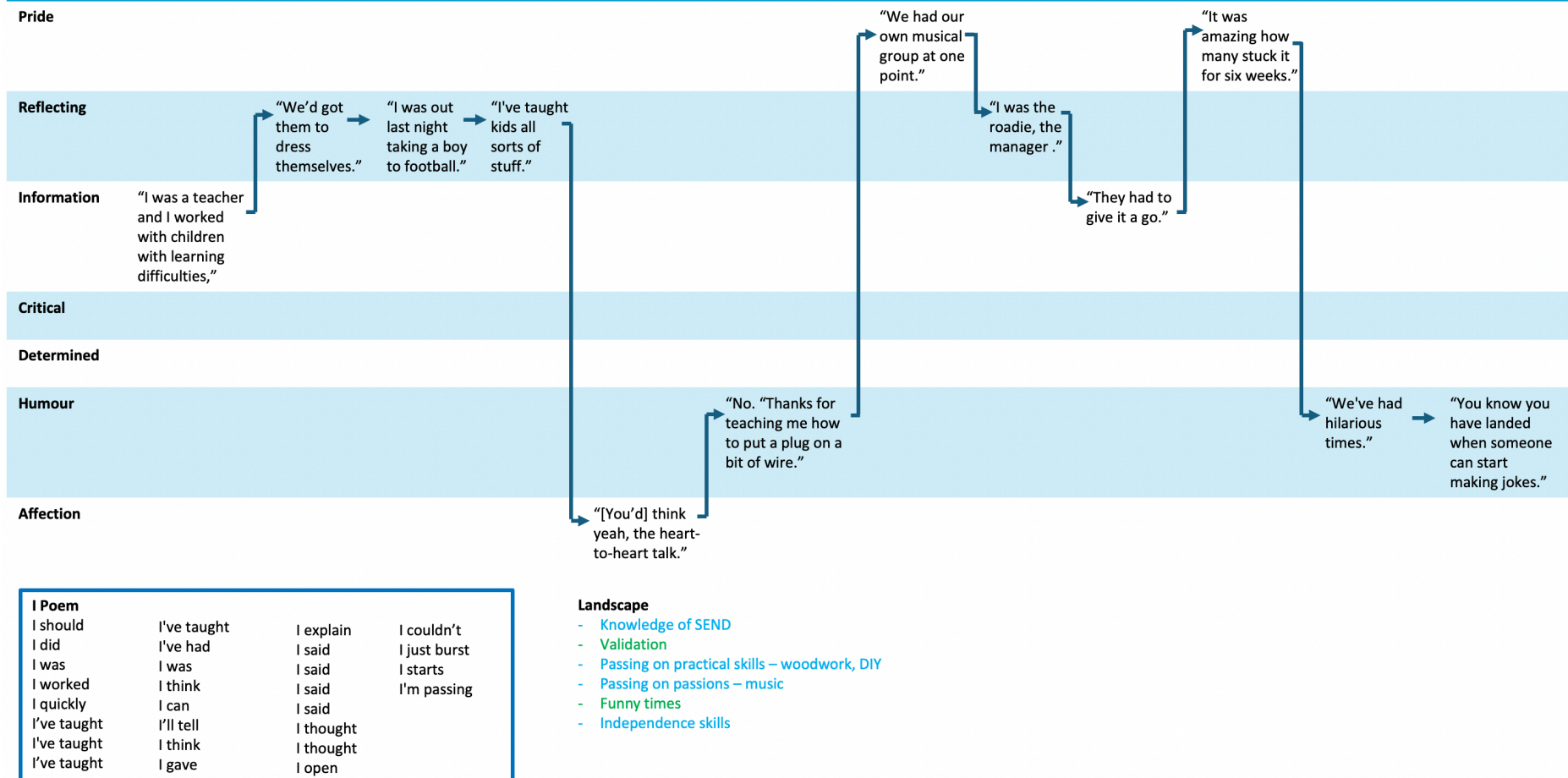
I Poem

I've got	I said	I'm being	I think	I said	I feel	I even
I've ever	I'm getting	I said	I've come	I said	I want	I said
[I've] regretted	I walked	I said	I said	I don't earn	I've earned	I said
I really have.	I said	I said	I said	I said	I take	I just try
I get	I could	I said	I said	I wouldn't want	I suppose	I want

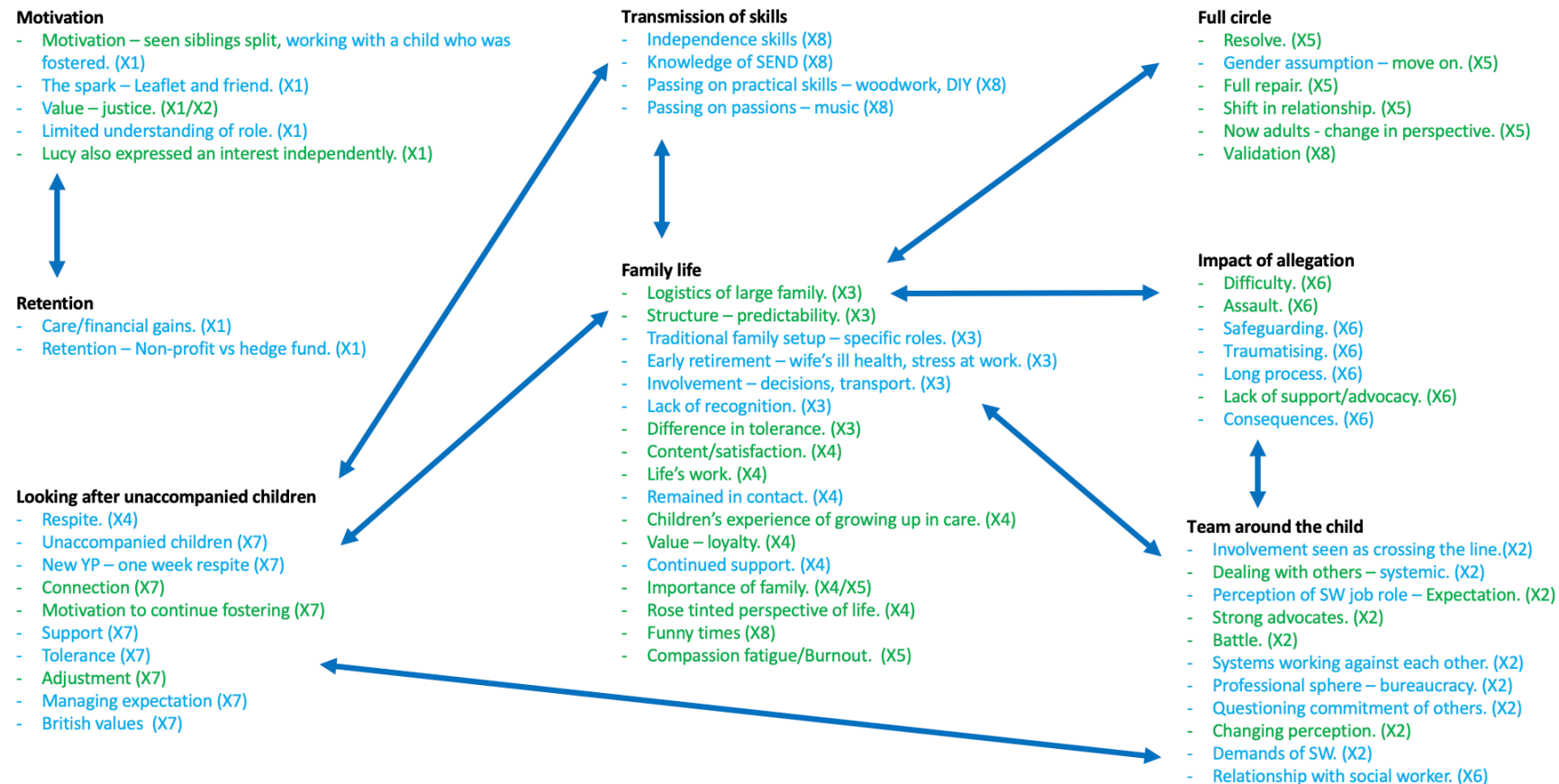
Landscape

- Unaccompanied children
- New YP – one week respite
- Connection
- Motivation to continue fostering
- Support
- Tolerance
- Adjustment
- Managing expectation
- British values

X8: Family life



X9 – Overview of landscapes



8.11. Appendix Eleven: Untold stories which could be revisited

Tom

- Image of fostering (T, 175 – 192)
- Supporting a child with special educational needs (T, 192 – 200)
- Reunification to birth family (T, 271- 319)
- Differences in adoption between UK and Australian ideology (T, 475 – 480)
- Perceived difference in commitment (T, 580 – 593)

Lee

- Moving into independence (L, 106 – 108)
- Fighting the system (L, 169 – 183)
- Views around single carers (L, 231 – 237)
- Court orders (L, 246 – 250)

Mr X

- Supporting children with learning difficulties (X, 13 – 32)
- Reflections on fostering career (X, 603 – 623)
- Impact of looking after a baby (X, 630 – 645)

