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Foster Care Parents Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Behavioral Health Leaders

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Alicia Jackson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Foster Care Parents Recruitment and Retention Strategies for Behavioral Health Leaders

by

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MA, New York University, 1994

BA, Caldwell University, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Psychology in Behavioral Health Leadership

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

Therapeutic foster homes have been identified as invaluable to the stability and success of many children placed in the foster care system. A challenge faced by the organizations that establish, support, and monitor these homes is recruiting new parents and the struggle to retain current foster parents. This study explored how understanding which recruitment strategies influence an individual's decision to foster could improve the abilities of a small foster care agency in recruiting and retaining foster parents, thereby improving foster parent recruitment and retention rates. In this qualitative study, the Baldrige Excellence Framework was used to distinguish and evaluate the key operational practices that impacted the organization's recruitment and retention outcomes. Data for this study were obtained through semistructured interviews with the leaders of a small therapeutic foster care organization on the East Coast. Additional data were obtained through secondary sources such as the organization's records, governmental sites, and data from academic literature reviews. The triangulation method was used to analyze data findings and identify themes collected from all sources. Data findings suggest that implementing new strategies to improve foster parents' satisfaction will address the organization's presenting problem. Recommendations from the study findings include conducting foster parent satisfaction surveys and establishing a program pairing new foster parents with seasoned ones. Knowledge gleaned from this doctoral study can impact positive social change by assisting agencies in implementing strategic foster parent recruitment activities while simultaneously structuring and executing foster parent training and other processes to improve recruitment efforts and retention rates.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my God, my Lord and Savior. Thank you for Always climbing into the trenches with me. I also dedicate this study to my sisters, son, husband, god-daughter, mom, brother, co-workers and Sister/Friends, “My Squad.” Thank you all for your constant prayers, with and for me. I thank you all for your support, encouragement, patience, and belief in me. Thank you for pushing me to dig deeper and persevere, especially when I wanted to give up. Thank you for joining me in my vision of earning a doctoral degree and pushing me to stay on course when the journey got tough. Thank you for always reminding me that quitting was never an option.

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Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

Introduction

The situation or issue that prompted this doctoral study is the lack of viable foster families to support the number of children in care who need a safe, loving, and nurturing home. The AFCARS Report #29, disseminated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], (2022), stated that there are almost 400,000 children in foster care in the United States annually. Conversely in a blog, Fosterva (n.d.) reported that nationally, there are only an estimated 200,000 licensed foster homes to support the needs of the almost 400,000 children in foster care. The behavioral health organization depicted in this doctoral study accepted the mission of establishing homes to fill the gap in needed foster homes, only to find themselves struggling to accomplish their mission. For anonymity purposes, the organization depicted in this case study is referred to as Organization X throughout this paper.

This study could assist Organization X by examining its internal foster parent recruitment, training, and support processes. In this study, I intended to identify factors that prevent Organization X from accomplishing its mission of promoting foster care children's health and well-being. Therapeutic foster care (TFC) agencies, such as Organization X, aim to establish families that offer comprehensive and individualized services to foster children in a supportive and safe environment (see Bernedo et al., 2016). Once these factors have been identified, Organization X can use that knowledge to develop new practices that may increase the availability of foster homes and favorable outcomes for children in foster care.

Practice Problem

The leaders of Organization X expressed their current struggles with recruiting viable foster families to meet the increasing number of referrals they receive daily. Their concerns were acknowledged by Davi et al. (2021), who documented that foster care organizations are experiencing high turnover and low foster parent retention rates. The leaders of Organization X further shared these main concerns: developing and executing recruitment strategies to open new foster homes, specifically foster homes that are willing to accept children over 12. Organization X's leaders further shared that retaining foster families is another major challenge, stating that several of their foster parents requested to close their homes after being foster parents for just 1 year. This is not a major challenge only experienced by Organization X as (Ahn et al. (2017) reported that many foster parents decide to terminate fostering after only one year. Therefore, in this study, I addressed the specific organizational problem of understanding the marketing strategies a small organization should implement to inform strategic recruitment activities and increase foster parent retention rates.

The research questions (RQs) that guided this doctoral study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the recruitment strategies that influence individuals to become foster parents?

RQ2: How can leaders of new and or small TFC agencies strategically use knowledge of that information to improve recruitment efforts?

RQ3: How can leaders of new or small TFC agencies use that knowledge to develop practical strategies they can execute that will improve foster parent retention rates?

Gap in Current Research

In my research, I found a surplus of literature focusing on comprehensive marketing and retention strategies executed by foster care organizations with large employee pools, access to many resources, data collected and analyzed regularly, and the financial means to conduct extensive marketing and recruiting. For example, the literature offered strategies such as performing *deliberate recruitment*, which requires enough staff to focus on recruitment in a targeted way, thereby increasing foster parent reimbursement rates (Hanlon et al., 2021). Additionally, the coalition Children Need Amazing Parents (CHAMPS; 2019) suggested that foster care agencies implement recruitment plans driven by continuously collecting data through quarterly satisfaction surveys and annual interviews with foster parents. These approaches are not easily performed by organizations such as Organization X, which operates with only four employees on a small operating budget. Hence, there is a gap in the literature addressing recruitment and foster parent retention strategies that small or new organizations with limited funds and personnel can implement.

Purpose

Therapeutic foster parents have been identified as invaluable to the stability and success of many children enveloped in the foster care system. The recruitment and retention of foster parents has been a significant problem plaguing agencies providing

those services and child welfare systems (Cleary et al., 2018). CHAMP (2019) documented that 2019 marked the fifth consecutive year in which the number of children in foster care increased. Although the number of children in care is increasing, CHAMP reported that 30% to 50% of foster families quit fostering within the first year.

When a foster family elects to close their home, this decision impacts foster care organizations in many ways. For example, a foster care organization can be impacted financially, as the personnel, time, and resources an organization devotes to ensuring that foster parents are well-equipped for the job can deplete an organization already struggling in those areas. The expenditure of time, money, and human resources hours on recruiting and training new foster parents due to frequent turnover among foster parents has been described by Hanlon et al. (2021) as an urgent issue on a state level and nationally. This issue is especially challenging for Organization X as it is new, small, and operating with limited finances and employees.

Therefore, in this qualitative doctoral study, I explored how recruitment strategies can effectively improve the foster parent census of smaller TFC agencies. Using effective strategies that influence an individual's decision to foster can improve small foster care agencies' success rates in recruiting foster parents who can provide a safe, supportive living environment in a licensed foster home. The knowledge gleaned from this doctoral study could aid new and small TFC agencies in establishing and conducting targeted and strategic foster parent recruitment and retention practices.

The sources of information used to address this study's purpose were open interviews with the leaders of Organization X and internal secondary data collected from

the organization's files, including marketing/recruitment records, orientation schedules, financial records, foster parent files, and funding source contracts. Additional data sources were retrieved from external secondary data sources such as research conducted by national organizations, scholarly articles, and governmental agencies. Furthermore, as guided by Walden University's Office of Research and Doctoral Services (2014) the secondary data used to address this study's presenting problem consisted of information collected from research journals and public, nonsecured websites.

Significance

A potential value of this study to Organization X, as explained by Mihalo et al. (2016), is that data gleaned may inform reasonable and achievable internal programmatic changes and improvements that can lead to the organization's future sustainability. The results of this study may identify, synthesize, and analyze recruitment strategies to increase foster parent census numbers and internal practices that support foster parent retention.

Through this study, I aim to contribute to the leader's decision-making and process implementation by providing quality data that can inform daily operations in marketing, recruitment, support, and training. Additionally, another contribution of this project to the organization is the development of leader self-sufficiency in identifying and resolving problems. Through taking this journey with me, Organization X's leadership team may potentially learn skills they can rely on to resolve problems and challenges when they arise (see McNamara, 2006).

Lastly, through conducting this study and recommending strategies that inform effective foster parent recruitment and retention, TFC agency leaders can gain insight into establishing foster homes with families who are intrinsically invested in providing safe living environments for children in foster care. The social change benefit of this case study is that knowledge gleaned can inform processes and inspire programmatic changes in small-sized foster care organizations, resulting in the successful recruitment of foster parents and the retention of safe, supportive home environments for children in foster care.

Summary

TFC homes are invaluable for children with behavioral, emotional, and medical needs who find themselves in the foster care system and needing a safe, stable, nurturing home environment. Research has revealed that in the state where Organization X is located, there are 4,800 children in foster care with an average stay of 21 months (United Methodist Family Services, 2021). Many of those children have significant behavioral, emotional, and medical needs due to their lived experiences and require a foster family to support their elevated needs. By identifying strategies that can inspire more individuals to become therapeutic foster parents and stimulate retention in current foster parents, TFC agencies can recruit and retain viable therapeutically trained foster families who can provide safe and supportive environments for foster children (Ahn et al., 2017).

Section 1b: Organizational Profile

Introduction

The leaders of Organization X expressed the challenge of developing and executing recruitment strategies that could open new foster homes, specifically foster homes that are willing to accept children over 12. The leaders of Organization X further expressed difficulty retaining foster families, stating that several of their foster parents closed their homes after only fostering for a short period. The specific organizational problem addressed through this study was understanding what recruitment strategies motivate or influence individuals to become foster parents and how small foster care organizations can use that knowledge to inform strategic recruitment activities and increase foster parent retention rates. To address the presenting problem, in Section 1b of this study, I examine Organization X's profile, key factors, background, and context.

Organization Profile

Organization X is a small TFC agency established during the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2021 and has been licensed and operating for 2 years. Organization X is identified as a TFC licensed child-placing agency focusing on placing children in foster care, ages newborn to 17 ½, with behavioral, emotional, intellectual, and medical needs, as well as substance usage and legal issues. They aim to place children into safe, nurturing, highly trained, and qualified short- and long-term foster homes. Organization X is located in a mid-sized county on the East Coast of the United States and is governed by its state licensing entity. Organization X's office is central to numerous main streets and easily accessible as it is near several highly traveled highways. The leaders of

Organization X shared that they put a lot of thought into their office location as they wanted a location central to the three largest surrounding social service agencies.

Organizational Profile and Key Factors

Organization X is a very small, for-profit, TFC agency located within a metropolitan city on the East Coast of The United States. Organization X has an operational structure consisting of a chief operating officer (COO), an executive director, a casework supervisor, and one caseworker. Operating with only four employees quantifies Organization X as a small business, according to Warren and Szostek (2017), who defined any business with fewer than 500 employees as a privately owned small business. Because it is a small organization, the employees and leaders of Organization X must absorb other roles and inherit additional responsibilities to ensure that all performance expectations of a TFC agency are met

For example, within Organization X, the executive director also assumes the responsibilities of a foster parent recruiter/trainer and shares the child placing specialist duties. The COO also performs the duties of an administrative assistant and business development coordinator. The casework supervisor also performs child placing specialist duties and risk management responsibilities. Additionally, it is the expectation that, when needed, the casework supervisor will also manage a client caseload until the census numbers support hiring another caseworker. Having to perform additional job functions illustrates that the the leaders of Organization X are overloaded and have limited availability to support foster parent needs, issues or concerns. The lack of an organization's ability to address foster parent needs or provide immediate supports,

according to CHAMP (2019) and Cleary et al. (2018), has a direct correlation to foster parent satisfaction, which impacts one of this study's presenting problems, foster parent retention.

In Organization X's TFC system, maximum caseloads for all positions are regulated by licensing standards. For example, caseworkers' caseloads cannot exceed 12, and supervisors are not allowed to supervise more than five caseworkers at one time. However, foster parent recruiters are allowed to monitor/support 25 foster parents. Organization X operates with a census of nine children in their program and a foster home pool of eight families.

Position Requirements

In the child welfare system, employee positions are regulated by stringent educational and field experience requirements as mandated by governing bodies such as the State Department of Social Services, Medicaid, and the location of Organization X. In Organization X, caseworkers must have acquired a bachelor's degree in a social sciences area from an accredited college or university and have at least 1 year of experience in the programs and services the child-placing agency offers. An employee who does not have at least 1 year of experience must be employed as a caseworker trainee. However, the licensing standards for foster parent recruiters or trainers are not as defined or stringently regulated. The state's licensing regulations provide standards for who can become a foster parent and what training they should receive. Conversely, the licensing board does not offer guidance about educational or professional standards regarding who can recruit and train foster parents.

Mission, Vision, Values

The mission of Organization X is to promote the health and well-being of children in foster care by establishing safe and supportive foster family environments where children can receive quality, comprehensive, and individualized services that are community-centered and outcome-driven. Today's healthcare organizations are forged by intentionally aligning their mission, vision, values, and beliefs, as these core elements define the organizations' identity, purpose, and intentions while guiding the organization's behaviors as a whole (Johnson & Rossow, 2019). Organization X's values stem from a belief that all children deserve and will thrive if they grow up in a family that cares for them, keeps them safe, and encourages them to reach their full potential. Organization X's value system substantiates its vision, which is to make a positive life-altering impact on children in foster care, foster parents, and communities. The organization's current services include placing and monitoring children in therapeutic foster homes and supervising visitations between children and biological families; however, there is still an issue of parent retention strategies that Organization X, with its limited funds and personnel, can implement.

Services Offered

Organization X offers TFC and case management services to children in foster care, ages newborn to 17 1/2, who require specially trained foster parents due to the child's identified emotional, behavioral, intellectual, developmental, or medical needs. These services include case management and overseeing that all required services are first assessed, identified, and provided. Case management also ensures that all the

children's needs are appropriately and consistently met. The organization also provides supervised visitation services by monitoring supervised visits between the children in their program and their biological family members. Organization X establishes and monitors therapeutic foster homes to support the therapeutic needs of children in foster care. Simultaneously, Organization X has the responsibility of monitoring, directing, and ensuring the implementation of services that address the individual needs of the children placed in their foster homes. There is definitely a need for these services, as literature such as UHDHHS (2022) stated that there are almost 400,000 children in foster care in the United States annually.

Core Competencies

Organization X's core competencies are shaped by its philosophy and practices around the experiences of foster parents and children in foster care. Organization X's core competencies are as follows:

- partnerships and collaborations,
- innovation establishing new foster parenting practices by developing a holistic, community approach to fostering,
- implementation of customer-focused improvements,
- communication, and
- commitment to changing outcomes of children in foster care through enhancing educational development.

Informed by a deep understanding of what foster parents experience and how they make the largest impact in a child's life, Organization X is on a mission to provide care

and guidance to foster parents as they navigate integrating a child into their home and being a vital part of that child's healing and growth. This is a monumental task that the leaders of Organization X assumed as literature has revealed that many foster families terminate providing foster care services after only 1 year (Ahn et al., 2017; Davi et al., 2021).

Organizational Direction

The leaders of Organization X are committed to recruiting and retaining high-quality families to serve as foster parents for children in foster care. This commitment has been articulated by the organization's leaders when discussing the organization's direction, which focuses on hiring an employee whose sole responsibilities would be recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents. This commitment has been further demonstrated by the leaders of Organization X through its restructuring and "rebranding" initiative, which consists of broadening their social media footprint.

Organizational Background and Context

Organization X is a new and small TFC agency that has existed for 2 years. During their second year of operation, they experienced a decline in establishing new foster homes. In 2021, Organization X opened seven foster homes; however, in 2022, Organization X only opened four new homes, a 43% decrease from 2021. Simultaneously, in 2022, Organization X experienced the voluntary termination of several foster families from providing foster care services. One family closed their home due to illness. Another family decided to close their home when they did not receive a placement after being open for 6 months. The third family reportedly transferred to

another agency, hoping that the agency would give them better access to a baby. These home closures negatively impacted Organization X's leaders' goal of retaining 90% of their foster homes. The loss of three foster homes placed their retaining percentage at 73%.

The leaders of Organization X informed me of their expectations of participating in this doctoral study, in which the aim was to explore current operational methods and trends that impact retention rates of foster families. In this study, I intended to glean new ideas and strategies that could inform new operational practices, increasing Organization X's foster parent census and retention rates.

Organization Background

Organization X is a small, for-profit TFC organization with four employees in a large metropolitan city that already encompasses many larger TFC organizations. Foster care is not a new business, and with many additional organizations providing the service, Organization X has placed itself in a highly competitive business environment. Organization X's multifaceted competitors include nonprofit, for-profit organizations, and limited liability companies. Some of their competitors have religious affiliations because many churches have established foster care programs. It must be noted that most of Organization X's competitors have been in business longer than they have, with many existing for more than 20 years.

An additional distinction between Organization X and many of its competitors is that Organization X's focus is on one service line—foster care. In contrast, many of its competitors provide additional services, such as community-based services (mental

health skill building and intensive in-home services) or run alternative schools or congregate care facilities such as group homes. Providing other services can be an asset for a foster care agency as it affords the foster parents easier linkages and access to the mental health supports and services that traumatized children require. According to Larsen et al. (2020), coordinating mental health services for the children placed in their homes positively impacts the foster parent experience.

Operating Standards

The primary entity that regulates the operations of Organization X is its State Board of Social Services, which has established and published guidelines entitled *The Standards for Licensed Child-Placing Agencies*. These standards clearly define the operative practices of licensed child-placing agencies (LCPA), addressing areas such as developing policies and procedures, program evaluation and quality assurance, placement limitations, foster parent training and development requirements, foster home environment guidelines, and home study requirements. This is not an exhaustive list of standards, however, as the standards cover many additional topics not discussed in this narrative.

The regulatory requirements for Organization X are conveyed through the administrative codes that embody the standards governing foster care placement regulations, expectations, and practices within the state where Organization X resides. Attaining and maintaining compliance with these standards are prerequisites for issuing and maintaining a license to operate for all LCPAs in this state. Failure of the LCPA to maintain substantial compliance with the standards or applicable requirements of the

administrative codes will result in the LCPA losing its license to operate. The LCPA can receive a 1- to 3-year operating license based on unannounced audits conducted by state licensing specialists.

2022 Audit Outcome

Organization X experienced their most recent state audit in January 2023, an audit of their 2022 performance. The leaders of Organization X reported they passed the audit, receiving only one violation related to documentation. As a result, the organization is currently operating with a 1-year license.

Required Regulations

One regulatory requirement invaluable for any TFC organization is how the LCPA establishes and monitors the homes where foster children are placed. Specifically, before an LCPA places a child in a foster home, they are responsible for ensuring that the foster homes meet specific standards, verified through the LCPA opening that home under their license. Furthermore, the LCPA must routinely monitor and inspect that foster home to ensure that it consistently meets the state's administrative code regulatory standards.

There are many applicable occupational and health and safety regulations that Organization X must adhere to operate as an LCPA. As explained by the executive director, some of the more well-known regulations include the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), confidentiality requirements, Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines, and Medicaid regulations if they want to be reimbursed for case management services. In addition, Organization X must ensure that

all foster parents obtain and maintain first aid and CPR certifications for adults, children, and babies, obtain and maintain a certification in Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, and receive annual emergency preparedness training covering situations such as fire safety and all types of inclement weather emergencies.

Some industry standards imposed within Organization X's operating practices include the mandate that all foster parents pass a background check, pass a Central Crime Records Exchange check, and have a driver's license in good standing, meaning less than 5 points. In addition, foster parents must have a comprehensive physical before opening their home and then annually. A licensed physician must perform a comprehensive physical examination and include tuberculosis screenings.

Industry standards further mandate that all foster parents participate in an evidenced-based foster parent curriculum designed to provide foster parents with skills needed to manage and support the behaviors of children in TFC. Organization X uses a preservice training curriculum, which focuses on the antecedent, behavior, consequence model of addressing behaviors. This is an 8-week course that is attended by foster parents both in person and online.

Financial Regulations

The service rates are a financial regulation applicable to Organization X's operating practices. Each year, Organization X has to submit to each local social services department a sheet specifying rates for all services when negotiating contracts. The leaders of Organization X reported they would first explore the rates of its five competitors within a 30-mile radius performing similar services and then determine their

rates based on competitors' rates. The state also regulates the stipend that Organization X pays its foster parents. This can be very impactful for LCPAs, limiting their autonomy to increase their foster parent census by offering a more substantial stipend than their competitors.

Organizational Assets

An organization's assets can be described as a resource that the organization possesses or has access to that provides positive economic value (Lima et al., 2021). Organization X has only existed for 2 years and is considered a relatively small organization. Therefore, presently, their assets are not that extensive. When asked about assets, the leaders of Organization X reported that their assets consist of tangible assets such as their company vehicle, office furniture, and computers, which they own outright. Other assets that Organization X have are large insurance policies for the COO and executive director, which can be described as financial assets. Organization X is owned and operated by a husband-and-wife team who decided to purchase insurance policies to protect the company should something happen to one of them. These insurance policies are valued as assets because they are a resource the surviving leader can use to keep the organization financially afloat. Additional assets possessed by Organization X include stocks, petty cash for daily operating expenses such as postage, and money in bank accounts that will only be accessed in case of an emergency.

Organizational Performance Processes

Organizations X has implemented performance improvement systems to assist the organization in identifying areas where it may be underperforming by not meeting

compliance standards or requirements. One process that Organization X uses is a quality improvement and utilization team, which consists of the executive director, COO, and casework supervisor. This team oversees Organization X's quality improvement plan, which is reviewed during quarterly meetings. Organization X's quality improvement process is modeled after total quality management, which identifies customer-focused improvements and makes continuous small changes over time to optimize processes. The identified changes result from suggestions provided by staff and foster parents and problem-solving strategies, which are analyzed to assess processes' performance and make changes as needed. During quality improvement meetings, the plan is reviewed to analyze its effectiveness in identifying needed areas, and the action plan is developed to make anticipated improvements. The quality improvement plan is revised as needed; however, it is revised at least annually. Organization X's performance improvement systems data are collected and dispensed through quarterly and annual reports to the executive leadership team, employees, and funding sources.

Summary

Organization X is committed to establishing foster homes and offering foster parents resources to help the parents face the challenges of foster parenting. The leaders of Organization X have established a quality TFC agency with sound assets, a strong knowledge of the field, and established partnerships to aid in their sustainability. Organization X has one primary need: foster parents who are willing to support their mission and buy-in to Organization X's vision. Section 1 was devoted to identifying the presenting problem and Organization X's need for this doctoral study. In the next section,

I synthesize and analyze documentation germane to the practice problem of this case study through the literature and other secondary data sources, as well as the information shared regarding the leadership strategies and discussion on Organization X's workforce.

Section 2: Background and Approach—Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Introduction

Organization X is a small TFC agency on the East Coast that has existed for 2 years. The organization's leaders expressed challenges with recruiting viable foster families to meet the increasing number of referrals they received daily. Specifically, their challenge is developing and executing recruitment strategies that result in opening new foster homes. Organization X's leaders further shared that retaining foster families is another major challenge, stating that several foster parents closed their homes after only fostering for 1 year. Therefore, the specific organizational problem addressed through this study is understanding what recruitment strategies motivate or influence individuals to become foster parents and how small foster care organizations can use that knowledge to inform strategic recruitment activities and increase foster parent retention rates.

In this section, I will introduce and discuss the supporting literature and evidence that addressed the focal point of this case study, the practice problem of new and smaller TFC agencies' recruitment and retainment of foster families, as identified by Organization X. Additionally, in Section 2, using supporting literature, I will conduct a deeper exploration of Organization X, examining areas such as leadership strategy, workforce, and client population served. This exploration was conducted to provide readers with a more comprehensive understanding and assessment of Organization X, a small TFC agency on the East Coast.

Supporting Literature

To conduct a literature search about my presenting problem, I started by identifying keywords and phrases I believed would procure useful literature. The keywords and phrases that I used include but were not inclusive of the following: *therapeutic foster care, children, statistics, caregivers, motivation and incentives to foster, foster parent burnout, foster parent retention rates, foster parent recruitment strategies and interventions, foster parent satisfaction, foster parent commitment, child welfare system, and small organizations*. To obtain as much literature and resources as possible, I implemented my search using databases such as EBSCO, SAGE Journals, ProQuest One Academic, and Scholar Works. I also used governmental and national organization databases such as the USDHHS, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, The AFCARS Report #29, and FosterVA.

Existing Literature

The existing literature and resources have provided me with insight into the challenges identified by other foster care agencies and the foster care system, specifically in the areas of foster parent recruitment and retention with small agencies. For example, Hanlon et al. (2021) contended that diligent foster parent retention efforts are impacted by the foster care systems' lack of clear goals to retain foster parents. Hanlon et al. further noted that only 10 states reported having clear goals focused on foster parent retention. Ahn et al. (2017) also noted that foster care agencies experience challenges with improving outcomes in recruitment and retention due to a lack of understanding of why foster parents discontinue foster care. In other words, to implement strategies to

address recruitment and retention issues, leaders of foster care agencies must first understand why the phenomenon is occurring. Furthermore, the existing literature and resources verified that the child welfare system including for-profit and nonprofit foster care agencies are all experiencing a struggle with inspiring individuals and families to become foster parents and keep them encouraged to continue in that role (see CHAMP, 2019).

Literature Contrasts

Where the existing literature and resources differed became the focal point of this literature review. For example, the existing literature and resources differed on the most effective strategies and interventions foster care agencies can employ to inspire individuals and families to foster. Furthermore, the existing literature provided insights into recruitment and retention strategies that could be more amenable to midsized and larger foster care agencies but not so easily operationalized by smaller agencies.

The existing literature supported the relevance of my practice problem, understanding what recruitment strategies motivate or influence individuals to become foster parents and using that knowledge to increase foster parent recruitment and retention rates in smaller foster care agencies, by providing me with varying perspectives to consider and data to collect and glean from as I conducted my case study. Furthermore, the existing literature depicted challenges in foster parent recruitment and retention experienced by other agencies from varying regions. This is useful knowledge when analyzing data and projecting outcomes for Organization X, a small agency.

RQs

The collection and analysis of supporting literature and resources offered evidence that addressed the RQs directing this case study. The RQs guiding this case study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the recruitment strategies that influence individuals to become foster parents?

RQ2: How can leaders of new and or small TFC agencies strategically use knowledge of that information to improve recruitment efforts?

RQ3: How can new or small TFC agency leaders use that knowledge to improve foster parent retention rates?

I explored those mitigating factors with the aim to learn how new and small TFC agencies can use knowledge of that information to improve recruitment efforts and foster parent retention rates. In this case study, I intended to synthesize and analyze collected data that could aid new and small TFC agencies in establishing and conducting targeted and strategic foster parent recruitment and retention practices.

Sources of Evidence

During the exploration process of learning about Organization X, useful information was uncovered that supported an understanding of the inner workings of Organization X. The major sources of evidence was obtained through interviews with the executive director and COO of Organization X. Additional sources of evidence included the organization's website, program description, foster parent files and recruitment event sign-in sheets. This information was instrumental in guiding the research conducted when

seeking literature to address the RQs. One such source of evidence learned about Organization X is what inspired the establishment of the organization as well as its mission and vision. Another source of evidence collected pertained to how the organization's leaders interacted with and valued its current foster parents. Understanding what inspired the creation of Organization X facilitated my assessment of how committed the leaders are to identifying and making necessary changes in recruitment and improving foster parent retention rates.

Simultaneously, sources of evidence included data that informed the leaders of Organization X on how impactful and instrumental foster parents are to their organization. Additional sources of evidence that supported addressing the presenting problem included Organization X's policies and procedures manual, strategic and quality improvement plans, financial report, regulatory guidelines, and the agency's organizational chart. Subsequent sources included face-to-face meetings with Organization X's leaders, social media platforms, and information gleaned from their community engagement interactions, reputation, and collaborations/partnerships.

Uses of Information

All relevant information collected regarding Organization X supported an ability to focus on and discern the research literature that could be valuable and instrumental in addressing this study's presenting problem: supporting new and small TFC agencies in establishing and conducting targeted and strategic foster parent recruitment and retention practices. Using information from Excel spreadsheets as evidence was instrumental in gleaning the number of foster parent inquiries Organization X received monthly through

social media platforms, emails, and telephone calls. Several sources of evidence that may have been invaluable in addressing the RQ were not readily available. These sources included foster parent satisfaction surveys and data from marketing events, such as the number of people engaged during marketing events, the months when marketing events are most successful, and locations where Organization X attracts the most people.

Organization X did not previously recognize the usefulness of this information and, therefore, did not consistently record these data so they could be collected and analyzed.

Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Organization X has a leadership structure consisting of a COO and an executive director. The leaders of Organization X conduct combined decision making on matters such as recruitment, marketing, contracts, and finances. However, the executive director is responsible for all daily operations. One key finding about my organization's leaders is that they were married, had been foster parents, and had adopted children. Additionally, one of the organization's leaders worked as a foster care caseworker for many years. The founders of Organization X have also led several faith-based initiatives, which they used as preparative measures in their decision to establish a foster care agency. These initiatives focused on foster care advocacy, educating prospective foster parents, and providing Christmas toys for children in care. Those experiences and initiatives helped shape their desires to be more involved in the foster care community, leading to the launch of Organization X. This information contributes to understanding the organization's leaders' leadership strategies and abilities.

Current Leadership

The leadership of Organization X recently decided not to operate with the guidance and support of a board of directors. A board promotes accountability, can guide the organization away from potential risks, and helps mitigate potential challenges (Brennan, 2022). However, at Organization X, there were some negatives to having a board in place, such as the loss of control experienced by organization leaders. The leaders of Organization X expressed their challenges with having a board that could undermine their authority, attempt to alter goals that aligned with the initial mission/vision of why the organization was established, and possess separate goals that did not align with future goals and visions possessed by Organization X's leaders. The leadership of Organization X conveyed that having a board has been more of a deterrent than a benefit and, therefore, executed a strategic move to dismantle its board. During an interview, the COO of Organization X conveyed that they recognized the potential value of having a board and expressed that a future goal could be determining how to make it beneficial for them.

Decision-Making Practices

All organizational decisions are made by the leadership team, which consists of the COO and executive director. Their current leadership strategy regarding operational and business decisions is to discuss each issue, conduct research on the best approach to take, consider all costs, and, most importantly, examine how decisions align with the organization's mission and vision and how these decisions will impact or align with goals and outcomes. The leaders of Organization X further shared that before any strategy is

implemented, they discuss it with their legal team to ensure they are conducting legal practices. Additionally, the leaders of Organization X refer to their licensing specialist, designated to monitor Organization X by the state it is located in, when they want verification that a strategy being implemented does not violate licensing standards. The leaders of Organization X expressed that if a strategy does not align with licensing standards, it is quickly revised.

Leadership Strategies Involving Stakeholders

Organization X's leadership strategies involving employees, foster parents, stakeholders, and other external contact interactions consist of clear and consistent communication practices, transparency in their actions, conducting interactions and making decisions using high ethical practices, being intentional about interweaving cultural awareness practices and diversity within the organization, and improving organizational performance through demonstrating value for its employees and foster parents. Although the leaders of Organization X have conveyed using effective decision making practices that include consistent communication within the organization, one area to be explored is the possibility of a breakdown in communication between leadership and foster parents, which has resulted in the problem of retaining foster parents.

Clients/Population Served

Clients

McNamara (2006) conveyed that an organization's clients, other customers, and stakeholders can be defined as anyone who inspires or directs the functions of the organization, anyone with whom the organization regularly interacts to perform its

operational functions, anyone who has a vested interest in the services the organization provides, or anyone who directly or indirectly benefits from or is impacted by the services the organization provides. Organization X is a small and relatively new TFC organization located in a city that is populated with large TFC agencies that have been in business for a long time. As a TFC organization, the primary clients are children in foster care, infants and children up to 17 ½ years old, and their biological families. Organization X's clients include all social services departments within their state that trust them and are willing to place a child in one of their established foster homes. Additional clients or stakeholders for Organization X include employees, foster parents, therapists, teachers, pediatricians, funding sources, governing bodies, the judicial system, and the community.

Atypical Clients

As a TFC agency, Organization X has unique circumstances regarding who is considered a client, given the different entities it interacts with. A foster parent can be considered a client because Organization X assists them with obtaining resources and services to succeed as foster parents. Foster parents can also be considered collaborative partners because they work with Organization X to address and support foster care children's needs.

Client Engagement Approaches

As leaders of a small TFC agency, Organization X's leaders expressed that to engage and build relationships with potential clients, foster parents, or social services workers, they knew they had to offer something the larger, more seasoned, and well-known organizations were not offering. The leaders of Organization X decided they

would engage with potential referral sources and build relationships by offering something different in communication and interactions.

Face-to-Face Interactions

The leaders of Organization X shared that one approach they implemented and found helpful in engaging and building relationships with clients/customers was conducting many of their interactions through personalized face-to-face contacts. Organization X opened its doors in January 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The leaders of Organization X explained that from the onset, they offered a physical presence in their office, which included having a live person answer their phones during business hours. The leaders of Organization X shared they were seeking to build a working alliance with clients/referral sources who wanted physical, personalized interactions by offering face-to-face interactions (something other agencies would not offer) and transparent communication methods, such as verbal dialogue during in-person interactions.

Telephone Communication

Another approach Organization X practices is returning missed calls within 24 hours unless the call occurs on a Friday. Then, the call would be returned by noon the following Monday. The leaders of Organization X noted this practice is in place to demonstrate to their clients and all stakeholders that they are valued and respected. Whatever the issue/concern, the call was relevant to the organization's leaders. It is the organizations' goal to document each call to ensure all calls are returned within 24 hours.

The leaders of organization X further explained that by returning calls so promptly, they hoped to demonstrate cooperative efforts with all clients/referral sources.

Simplifying Client-Related Processes

The leaders of Organization X expressed that they wanted to be innovative, organized, and efficient in their practices. Therefore, they elected to utilize a web-based case management electronic record system to collect and store all necessary client information, including sensitive information from individuals collected while becoming certified as a foster parent. The leaders of Organization X decided to use a web-based case management system because they wanted a process that would be easy for foster parents and staff to access at any time. All information submitted by foster parents is password-protected and maintained on a secure system. From the onset, potential foster parents are encouraged to utilize the electronic system after completing their initial application.

Upon completion, all paperwork and needed documents are uploaded into the system by the potential foster parents. Once it is uploaded, the leaders of Organization X receive an email informing them that paperwork/documents have been submitted. This web-based system makes it possible for Organization X to streamline processes for potential foster parents, allowing potential foster parents to navigate through the home opening process at their leisure. It also eliminates the barrier of potential foster parents waiting for a scheduled meeting to deliver paperwork. Furthermore, it prevents paperwork from being lost or misplaced by an employee.

Additional Benefits

The leaders of Organization X noted being pleased with their decision to utilize a web-based system as they have enjoyed additional benefits from its usage. One such benefit is that it allows the potential foster parent to become familiar with using the web-based system since most of the training offered by the organization is conducted or accessed through the web-based system and other virtual platforms. The leaders of Organization X shared they have elected to provide training virtually to offer ease and accessibility to families that may experience obstacles with getting to in-person training. The leaders of Organization X conveyed that implementing virtual training was a strategic decision to eliminate attending training as a barrier to becoming foster parents.

This decision, as discussed by Organization X's executive director, resulted from their personal experience when participating in a foster parent group. Many group members said online training would have made the foster parent onboarding process much easier (Executive Director, personal communication, December 30, 2022). Absorbing this knowledge, the leaders of Organization X decided to use it as they sought to establish their agency. Implementing and using processes that make becoming a foster parent more user-friendly is one way that Organization X demonstrates how it listens to potential clients and other customers to obtain actionable information.

Email Communications

The leaders of Organization X further shared another approach to client interactions that they consider to be invaluable, which is the use of email. As expressed during a personal communication with Organization X's executive director, "A benefit of

collecting information through email is that you have a written record of the information shared as well as the date and time.” She further noted that interactions through email can be exchanged immediately, and any misinterpreted communications can be quickly resolved. Furthermore, information collected through email can be easily stored and quickly shared with other organization members.

Organizational Benefits

Organization X can utilize its web-based system to provide supplementary information such as tracking when individuals utilize it, how often, and for what purpose. By possessing this tracked information, Organization X can ascertain the engagement of its clients and other stakeholders. This web-based system also allows Organization X to collect data about numerous relevant areas such as inquiries, recruitment activities participants, home openings, closings, and census numbers per month. Organization X can utilize this information to assess its performance in marketing strategies, recruitment, and home openings per month and year and then compare that to past year’s performances. This knowledge is instrumental to Organization X, a small TFC organization, as its leaders seek to understand where they need to make changes to improve foster parent recruitment and retention rates.

The leaders of Organization X reported that another benefit of its web-based system is that, in the future, they will be able to use it to collect and store data from marketing events, such as the months when marketing events were more successful and the location where Organization X attracted the most people. The leaders of Organization X further noted that its web-based system will be instrumental when the organization

accomplishes its objective of consistently conducting foster parent satisfaction surveys. Organization X did not initially recognize the usefulness of this information or how its web-based system could assist with collecting and reporting the information and, therefore, did not previously capture any data on client satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Workforce and Operations

An organization's structure demonstrates the flow of power, authority, and decision making. This structure introduces the leaders and the entire organization's workforce. Leaders of an organization are responsible for effectively overseeing its operative processes and ensuring it understands public responsibilities and the expectations of its customers, community partners, and funding sources (Johnson & Rossow, 2019). An organization accomplishes this by providing stellar leadership, strategic direction, quality customer care, and ensuring that the organization is operating with financial stability (Johnson & Rossow, 2019).

Organizational Structure

Organization X is a small, family-owned, fairly new agency with a modest workforce structure. Its organizational chart comprises a COO, executive director, casework supervisor, and caseworker. The state where Organization X is located has specific guidelines regarding the workforce for the organization. For example, all caseworkers must have acquired a bachelor's degree in a social sciences area from an accredited college or university and have at least one year of experience in the programs and services the child-placing agency offers. A caseworker who does not have at least one year of experience must be employed as a caseworker trainee. The casework

supervisor must possess a master's degree in social sciences and at minimum three years of supervisory experience.

Organization X ensures the competency of its employees by offering annual, required training in subjects related to foster care regulations, health & safety, and trauma-informed therapeutic interventions. Furthermore, all employees must receive and maintain certifications in first aid and Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), and nonviolent crisis intervention, a de-escalation approach used to respond during a crisis. According to state licensing guidelines, caseworkers cannot carry more than 12 clients on their caseload; no foster parent recruiter or any employee in that capacity can have more than 25 foster parents on their caseload. Presently, the executive director is serving as the role of foster parent recruiter simultaneously with the responsibilities of being the executive director. The casework supervisor also serves in a dual role as a child placing specialist responsible for placing children in the foster homes the organization establishes.

Program Specific Operation

Organization X operates 24 hours a day as it serves as an entity to place children in foster care, sometimes as an emergency placement, in therapeutic foster homes. These homes are licensed by Organization X and then monitored, according to state licensing regulations and other governing body standards, by employees of Organization X specially trained to supervise/monitor these homes. The foster homes remain operated based on monthly in-person inspections and routine monitoring by Organization X employees. Foster homes that do not comply with licensing and governing body

standards and internal policies and procedures have 30 days to comply or be subject to closure. Organization X's operating practices and protocols are governed by internal policies that are reviewed annually and revised as needed. The children in these foster homes receive services provided by caseworkers and monitored by the casework supervisors. Foster parents must ensure that children placed in their homes are accessible to their caseworker and social services worker at any time for face-to-face interaction.

Additionally, Organization X's employees are expected to respond to all referral calls within 30 minutes and crises calls within 20 minutes, daily. As a result of its 24-hour-a-day responsibility, one of Organization X's operating practices is always to have an employee working and accessible to potential clients or stakeholders. This 24-hour crisis response or placement availability also includes working during the weekend. The oversight and subsequent safety of the children placed in its foster homes are crucial to Organization X, and they take this responsibility very seriously. Subsequent operating practices include recruiting and marketing activities outside typical Monday- Friday working hours. Many marketing/recruitment events to obtain potential foster parents are performed on weekends, requiring employees of Organization X to work on the weekends. Noticeably, the operating guidelines and expectations of a TFC agency are extensive and challenging to achieve. The challenge is even greater for a small TFC agency with minimal staff, such as Organization X.

Analytical Strategy

Since foster parents are such a necessary component in delivering services to children in foster care, a major concern for TFC agencies is strategically recruiting and

retaining families (Ahn et al., 2017). Furthermore, another concern is recruiting sufficient numbers of families and opening enough homes to support the increasing number of children coming into care (CHAMP, 2019). Effectively recruiting and retaining foster families is a function that TFC agencies must be able to execute successfully to promote organizational sustainability. The intent of collecting and analyzing data during this case study process is to go beyond exploratory functions and present a product that will serve a practical purpose for Organization X and other TFC organizations.

How Information Was Obtained

The data and subsequent information were verbally received during face-to-face meetings with the leaders of Organization X. Face-to-face interactions were conducted with the COO and executive director of Organization X at their office. A series of previously prepared questions were asked of both leaders, and their responses were captured through tape recording. Permission to tape their responses was verbally obtained before being conducted. Additional information was obtained through vital sources such as the organization's website, policy & procedures manual, quality improvement plan, and review of foster parent files, specifically from foster parent applications, home studies, and notes from monthly monitoring contacts with foster parents.

Usefulness of Information

Information about the organization's structure provided keen insight for my practice problem, supporting my new and small partner organization with identifying and implementing successful recruitment and retention strategies for foster parents that will be easy to execute. Data relevant to the presenting problem were not readily available as

the leaders of Organization X did not have a process to track trends and obtain data about foster parent recruitment and retention strategies. The leaders of Organization X could present a list of marketing events they participated in; however, they did not have a process to fully analyze information to track trends and obtain data, such as which recruitment activity yielded the most responses. Because the leaders of Organization X conducted many interactions using its electronic record system and were also tracking telephone inquiries, they could provide numbers for foster parent inquiries. These data points are instrumental in gleaning insight into one component of this study's presenting problem: foster parent recruitment.

Limitations to Data Collection Processes

One limitation regarding this data collection process was that some telephone call information could have been lost. In 2022, the potential foster parent inquiry calls received by Organization X were taken by whichever employee answered the telephone. There was no formal process in place to collect and store that data. Additionally, an inquiry left as a voicemail message could have been mistakenly erased. Some of the data information that was available to use for this case study was information reported by Organization X from 2022. In 2022, retrieving and storing data was not a priority for the organization, as they were not focused on how data would/could be of value at a later time. As of January 01, 2023, Organization X has implemented an inquiry call contact sheet completed during each inquiry contact. Furthermore, Organization X has created a tracking system for inquiries through online processes. That data collected starting from January 01, 2023, was easier to track and will be of value for a future case study.

Summary

With so many other responsibilities such as managing daily operations, making sure the organization is adhering to licensing and other governing body standards, as well as staff development and satisfaction, it is surmised that the additional responsibilities of marketing, recruitment, training development for foster parents, as well as the responsibility of monitoring their homes became a monumental mission for the leaders of Organization X. Due to the small size of Organization X, a residual impact of its leaders' responsibility of dividing their time, energy, finances, and support into all components of the organization resulted in their inability to devote the time and attention needed for this small TFC agency to focus on targeted strategies to recruit foster parents effectively.

Subsequently, due to a lack of viable data and limited employee resources, the leaders of Organization X have been restricted in their ability to support dissatisfied foster parents in this small TFC agency. The issues discussed above have resulted in Organization X's limited ability to develop effective processes: tracking trends and areas of concern to improve foster parent recruitment processes and prevent current foster parents from terminating their services in their small-sized agency. Addressing that issue through data collection and analyses is the focus of Section 3. The discussion of data collection, measurement, and analysis in the next section will provide further evidence of the relevance of this case study for Organization X.

Section 3: Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Components of the Organization

Introduction

The situation that prompted this doctoral study was the lack of viable foster families to support the number of children in care who need a safe, loving, nurturing home. In 2021, when Organization X opened as a TFC agency, there were approximately 400,000 children in foster care within the United States according to the AFCARS Report #29, disseminated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2022). FosterVA (n.d.) reported that nationally, there are only an estimated 200,000 licensed foster homes to support the needs of the children in foster care. The literature further reported that many foster parents end fostering for various reasons (Cleary et al., 2018). In 2022, Organization X experienced a decline in the number of foster homes opened and endured three homes closing. The organization's leaders recognized that as a small agency, it was operating with limited finances and workforce to execute large-scale recruiting activities; however, successful recruitment must occur if the organization is to experience sustainability. Therefore, in this doctoral study, I examined the strategies that small organizations such as Organization X could implement to enhance their recruiting and retention practices and increase their foster parent census.

Section 3 of this case study explores the recruitment and retention systems of Organization X. I focus on how Organization X identifies and develops measurement tools and analyzes the organization's data, trends, problem areas, and knowledge

management components to address the recruitment and retention problem of foster families.

Furthermore, this section addresses the relevance and impact of the areas mentioned above on the daily practices and operations of the organization. Because foster parent recruitment and retention was the focus of this study, it was important to also explore how the leaders of Organization X share information with foster parents and employees, clients, and other stakeholders. Ultimately, the leaders of Organization X want to use the data and information collected to develop operational practices and inform decision making to address their problem of implementing effective foster parent recruitment strategies and increasing retention rates.

Analysis of the Organization

Workforce Environment

When asked about its current workforce, the leaders of Organization X expressed that they executed an intentional plan when deciding what type of employees they wanted to be associated with the organization. The leaders conveyed that as a new TFC agency working with limited funds, they recognized that they would need to be strategic concerning what position(s) to fill first and what qualities those individuals needed to possess. They further conveyed that to build an effective and supportive workforce, and they would need to hire people with experience to help expand the organization. This is a key indicator that the leaders of Organization X can operate with intentionality and practicality when building their workforce.

Workforce Strategies

The leaders of Organization X explained their first strategy would be to assume the role(s) of the majority of the positions themselves, specifically the positions that did not require much contact with the children placed. For example, the executive director of Organization X also conducts foster parent recruiting while the COO also performs all the billing and administrative duties. The leaders of Organization X explained that by assuming those responsibilities, they could be strategic and save those salaries for hiring individuals for the direct-care staff positions (caseworker and casework supervisor). The leaders of Organization X explained that in recognition of the importance of the direct-care staff positions, they intentionally employed individuals with previous experience and knowledge of working in the child welfare system. With an understanding that people with experience expect a commiserate salary worthy of their experience, the leaders of Organization X used their limited funds to secure highly qualified and experienced employees. Hiring experienced individuals could increase foster parent recruitment and retention rates.

Focus on Employees

The leaders of Organization X also sought to secure employees who understood they would be performing other functions in addition to the responsibilities of the position they were hired for. To accomplish this, the leaders of Organization X established their current workforce by hiring two individuals whose work ethic was conducive to the organization's needs. The leaders of Organization X further explained that they also knew the principles and professional skill sets of these two individuals and

believed they would buy into and assist with accomplishing the mission and vision of the organization. Subsequently, the individuals employed by Organization X also expressed faith-based beliefs, which aligned with the workforce expectations of the leaders of Organization X because they placed a high value on operating under faith-based principles.

Workforce Engagement

Organization X is a small company with four employees, which has allowed its leaders to engage with its employees on an intimate level. It was conveyed to me by the leaders of Organization X that, as a small company, they have developed a family-like environment. The leaders stated they hand-picked their employees and are committed to doing what it takes to ensure they feel valued and stay committed to working with the organization.

One approach the leaders of Organization X have implemented to accomplish this is through a daily check-in with their employees during the virtual morning meeting. The leaders of Organization X explained they want their employees to feel valued and listened to and to know that their well-being is also important. The leaders of Organization X further shared that they have established a culture in which engagement, outside of typical work hours, not work-related, is encouraged. Employee engagement includes attending minor league baseball games, holiday celebrations, and employee birthday parties. The leaders of Organization X noted that they are always seeking new ideas to keep their employees engaged and committed through efficient communication and engagement practices.

Communication Practices

Organization X's small size has also influenced how the leaders and employees of Organization X regularly communicate. As a result of being a small organization, the leaders of Organization X typically interact and communicate with their employees daily. These communications start with a daily morning virtual meeting to discuss any crisis that may have occurred overnight and share what will be worked on that day. This meeting typically lasts no longer than 30 to 45 minutes and is conducted virtually to support staff participation from home. The leaders of Organization X shared that they established the daily virtual meeting to get their employees comfortable with and used to engaging with each other daily.

Additionally, as a TFC organization, there are continual communications throughout the day between the employees and leadership of Organization X, all conducted through email, telephone calls, and text messages. Moreover, employees performing multiple job functions must be comfortable communicating with each other. Hence, the entire team knows daily tasks, client-related issues, and other programmatic operations. Because the workforce of Organization X provides a service that supports children, they must consistently communicate to ensure the children's safety and that their needs are met. Furthermore, constant communication is expected, even after traditional business hours, especially when there is a crisis or if a placement is needed.

Tools to Facilitate Communication

To support the communication between employees, the leaders of Organization X have supplied employees with cell phones and laptops so that communications involving

clients outside of the office do not violate the HIPAA and are not at the employees' expense. The leaders of Organization X also use monthly meetings, email blasts, and a bimonthly Newsletter to engage and communicate with its employees. These strategies enhance the key services and work processes of Organization X.

Key Services and Work Processes

Both leaders of Organization X, the executive director and COO, have previous experience with and exposure to TFC. That experience guides how the leaders of Organization X design, manage, and improve key services and work processes. The leaders shared that the executive director worked as a caseworker at a TFC agency before opening their agency. Furthermore, being foster parents for 5 years and then adoptive parents assisted in their natural transition to becoming leaders of a TFC agency.

The executive director of Organization X shared that while working as a caseworker, she experienced many situations where she felt the services were inadequately addressing the needs of the youth. She then stated that she became disenchanted and frustrated with how services were identified and implemented for children in foster care and saw it as their mission to one day take action to make a change. The leaders of Organization X reported that their decision to operate their agency was influenced by their own experiences when they were foster parents themselves, noting the numerous times they experienced situations when they felt as if they were not supported.

They further noted that support and resources were essential for building strong foster parents. Their vision, as expressed by the COO during a personal communication

on December 30, 2022, was to serve as a concierge for foster parents. The leaders of Organization X expressed that they designed their organization with the intentional focus of shaping practices around the experiences and needs while offering children in foster care normalized opportunities and life experiences such as hobbies or playing on a basketball team, cheerleading, or being a Boy Scout. Ackerman (2017) noted that these socialization experiences are sometimes not recognized as important for children in foster care and are sacrificed to ensure that practical needs, such as safety, are being met. However, the leaders of Organization X are believers in training and contended that with highly skilled and trained employees, services can be developed and implemented that address all needs, including socialization.

Identifying Key Services and Work Processes

To identify key services and the most functional work processes that will benefit children in their care, Organization X conducts assessments to uncover the unique needs of each child/youth. Assessments are conducted within the first 30 days of placement and at least annually after that. Assessments may also be conducted at any time based on changes in a child/youth's behavior or mental status.

Assuring Staff Competency

To ensure their ability to focus comprehensively on each child, Organization X implemented key process approaches such as making services for each client person-centered. The leaders of Organization X researched person-centered programs within a 30-mile radius of their office and identified an organization that teaches person-centered service plan development. The leaders of Organization X established a collaboration with

this organization and contracted their services to train staff to develop effective person-centered service plans. The leaders of Organization X mandated that all employees participate in a 3-day training course conducted by that organization. The anticipated outcome of this key process is that each child/youth will have an individualized service plan, developed by a well-trained employee, that supports behavioral, mental health, educational, independent living, and social skill development.

Additional Program Design Processes

The leaders of Organization X further shared that their program design process also included researching how other TFC organizations operated and then gleaning knowledge from those entities. For instance, the leaders of Organization X noted replicating practices and procedures implemented by TFC organizations that have been successfully providing foster care services for more than 10 years. As expressed by a leader of Organization X during a personal communication on April 08, 2023, “Why try to reinvent the wheel? If a process works and is available, it would be lunacy not to use it.”

Another work process approach taken by the leaders of Organization X is that they are not afraid to ask for help and are open to new ideas. The leaders of Organization X established relationships with people who previously worked and continue to work at other TFC agencies, in the Department of Social Services, and other areas of the mental health field. These individual leaders of Organization X sought guidance, knowledge, and support when they decided to establish a TFC agency. Through these contacts, the leaders of Organization X began learning about establishing and operating a TFC organization.

The executive director shared that they met with these individuals at least four times before opening the organization to seek guidance and assistance with procedures and daily operations. She further noted that she often conducts virtual and face-to-face meetings with these individuals to discuss programmatic issues and ideas for services with them. During those meetings, the leaders of Organization X obtained knowledge and guidance on improving some of their services and work processes.

Other established services and developed work processes were determined for needs identified in the foster children placed in their foster homes or due to a lack of available resources to address a specific need. As mentioned, Organization X conducts daily Zoom check-ins with their staff each morning. During those check-ins, employees can express thoughts or concerns about a child's service needs, services that are not working, or new services to be implemented. Additionally, the relevance or effectiveness of the client's services is discussed during supervision, documented in monthly and quarterly reports, and discussed during annual treatment plan meetings. The leaders of Organization X noted that they are cultivating a work environment where employees are comfortable expressing concerns and sharing ideas they may have about a child's services. It is that type of team approach that helps to strengthen the organizations' ability to provide quality care to the children they serve and impacts organizational performance.

Knowledge Management

Improving Organizational Performance

Knowledge management focuses on how the organization measures, analyzes, and improves organizational performance. The leaders of Organization X readily

acknowledged that they did not initially place an intentional focus on processes for collecting, measuring, and analyzing data. Therefore, their current system is to capture information on paper and then collect it. Once collected, the information is reviewed and placed in an Excel spreadsheet.

The leaders of Organization X reported that they possess a list of marketing events they participated in and sign-in sheets identifying the people who visited their vendor table during that event. From the lists of names, they can obtain the total number of individuals they engaged with at marketing events every quarter. However, as expressed by the organization's leaders, this number is inaccurate due to misplaced sign-in sheets. Additionally, using an Excel spreadsheet sheet, they tracked telephone and email inquiries, resulting in their ability to capture a total number of foster parent inquiries each month. However, the leaders of Organization X noted that their Excel sheets were unreliable as information was not consistently placed on the sheet. The leaders of Organization X also conveyed that in 2022, they conducted a satisfaction survey of their foster parents, and only two out of their eight foster parents returned the survey. With such a low number of respondents, the leaders of Organization X disregarded any potential information gleaned from that survey process. They reportedly will attempt another one in 2023, hoping for a better response rate.

When asked about data, the leaders acknowledged they did not have a data analysis of organizational performance, such as which recruitment activity yielded the most responses. Additionally, the data from trends, such as the month they received the highest number of inquiries, was not readily available. Organization X's executive

director expressed that their goal is to analyze the collected data to track trends and eventually assess the effectiveness of current recruitment processes to make decisions on new strategies.

Barriers to Using Data Effectively

The leader noted a major barrier in achieving the goal of collecting and analyzing data to assess the effectiveness of current recruitment strategies is workforce-related. Specifically, the organization does not possess enough employees to support a full-time initiative focus on quality and performance improvement processes such as collecting, tracking, and analyzing data. The executive director reported that another goal of Organization X is to hire an employee by 2024 to execute job functions involving quality and performance improvement measures. The organizations' leaders acknowledged that their current processes do not support organizational improvement; however, they stressed their commitment to establishing performance and outcome-improving processes.

Management of Information Processes

The leaders of Organization X reported their goal was to secure a reliable information system that would offer security, confidentiality, and ease of access to employees. The COO shared they are using reliable cloud-based, encrypted, remote server information systems, allowing all employees to access the areas they are authorized to access at all times and across all devices. Organization X has also established a data security privacy policy that is adhered to by all employees. The COO

explained that employees review and sign the policy when new hire paperwork is completed.

As this study mentions, Organization X provides all its employees with laptops and cell phones. Communications throughout the organization must be conducted utilizing these devices provided by the organization. This includes email, text messages, and telephone calls. The COO shared that all company work must be completed and accessed through these devices, ensuring company information and data will be secured and stored in the cloud.

Additional Management Processes

To further manage processes, the leaders of Organization X explained how they established a quality improvement plan to support their goal of providing care and services according to high efficiency and quality standards while maintaining ethical principles and achieving state regulatory standards. Organization X's quality improvement plan, developed by the executive director, COO, and casework supervisor, is reviewed during quarterly meetings. Organization X's quality improvement process is modeled after total quality management, which identifies customer-focused improvements and then makes continuous small changes over time to optimize processes.

The identified changes resulted from suggestions provided by staff and foster parents through problem-solving strategies, root cause analysis, staff meetings, and other suggestion-collecting processes. The information gathered is then analyzed to assess performance and inform needed change. During quality improvement meetings, the plan is reviewed to analyze its effectiveness in identifying areas of need, and the action plan is

developed to make anticipated improvements. The quality improvement plan is revised as needed; however, it is revised at least annually.

Summary

Key work processes, strategies, and interventions that improve organizational performance and an effectively managed information infrastructure are essential to a successful organization. If executed effectively, implementing these elements can help improve outcomes of sustainability for Organization X. Additionally, implementing these strategies also has the potential to assist Organization X to become a social change agent for the community it services. But how does an organization determine if its key work processes, strategies, etc., can deliver the outcomes they hope to achieve? How can this researcher determine if the questions and information gathered during this case study will sufficiently address the presenting problem? The following section will discuss how the data analysis collected during this case study addressed the research problem: exploring the strategies small organizations such as Organization X can utilize to inform its recruiting and retention practices and increase its foster parent census.

Section 4: Results–Analysis, Implications, and Preparation of Findings

Introduction

TFC families have been described in the literature as invaluable for foster care children with behavioral, emotional, intellectual, or medical needs (Mihalo et al., 2016). Therefore, developing and sustaining therapeutic foster homes is imperative as it impacts the lives of children in foster care who require the services of well-trained and qualified foster parents to manage their behaviors and support their daily needs. According to CHAMP (2019), TFC organizations spend a significant amount of time and resources each year identifying individuals and couples willing to open their homes to children in foster care. These organizations also use resources to qualify individuals or couples as foster parents by providing continuous training and monitoring of these homes. Larger organizations may have residual income and resources readily available when developing strategic planning for performance improvement; however, many small organizations do not possess large amounts of funds or resources, which impacts the strategies they can implement (Skokan et al., 2013). The latter describes some operating practices and strategic planning limitations of Organization X, a small TFC agency on the East Coast.

In this qualitative study, I examined the leadership skills and strategies of the leaders at a small TFC organization to identify the effectiveness and impact of their leadership on foster parent recruitment and retention strategies. Research has suggested many successful recruitment strategies for larger TFC organizations; however, small organizations often do not possess the finances, personnel, or other necessary resources to implement those strategies (Skokan et al., 2013). Therefore, in this qualitative study, I

examined the recruitment and retention strategies that leaders of a small organization should focus on implementing to inform its strategic recruitment activities and increase foster parent retention rates.

Section 4 consists of results obtained through data collection from Organization X and the analysis of that data using NVivo software. Through using NVivo I was able to conduct different queries and then create matrices and word clouds which offered the opportunity to explore themes derived from the data. The findings and the implications of those findings discussed in this section are used to address the RQs relevant to this case study:

RQ1: What are the recruitment strategies that influence individuals to become foster parents?

RQ2: How can leaders of new and or small TFC agencies strategically use knowledge of that information to improve recruitment efforts?

RQ3: How can leaders of new or small TFC agencies use that knowledge to develop practical strategies they can execute that will improve foster parent retention rates?

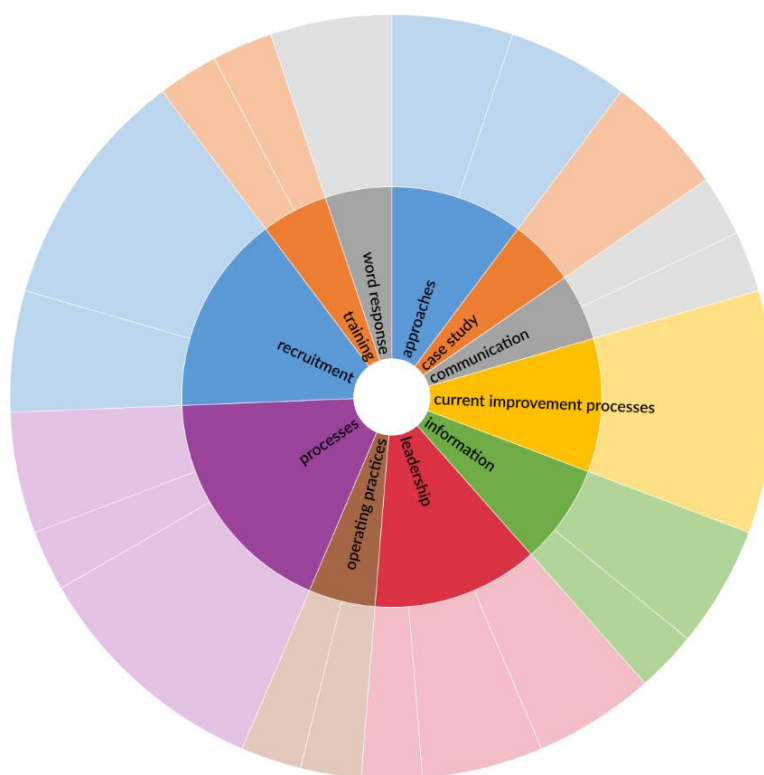
Evaluation of Programs, Services, and Initiatives

To conduct this study, I used evidence collected from four semistructured interviews with the leaders of Organization X and data collected as a result of an exploration through the organization's archives, such as foster parent files and recruitment event attendance Excel sheets. Subsequent sources of evidence that supported addressing this presenting problem and therefore useful in this case study included

Organization X's Policies and Procedures Manual, Quality Improvement Plan, financial report, regulatory guidelines, and the organizational chart. Further evidence was obtained through secondary data resources—the organization's social media platforms as well as information gleaned from supporting literature applicable to the presenting problem. An evaluation of the organization's data determined that processes, current improvement processes, finances, recruitment, and approaches were the five thematic areas that organization leaders need to focus on to achieve results addressing client programs, services, and new initiatives. Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchy chart coded themes from Interviews 1 and 2.

Figure 1

Hierarchy Chart Coded Themes From Interview 1 and 2



The leaders of Organization X were committed to establishing a different foster care agency. One that focuses on supporting and strengthening foster parents while enhancing children's overall care experiences. Existing literature, such as in Cleary et al. (2018), suggested that foster parent satisfaction is a primary factor related to foster parents' intent to continue to foster. The leaders of Organization X provided unorthodox support to and for its foster parents, such as linking them to an organization that established the Foster Parent's Night Out program. This unique support provided foster parents with a safe environment to bring their foster children so they could enjoy an evening of self-care. Additional new initiatives used by Organization X were partnering with other organizations whose focus was providing support, such as clothes and food, to foster families. The leaders of Organization X were staunch advocates of supporting its foster parents and ensuring they linked them to needed services; however, capturing if their interventions were effective was not a priority for the organization's leaders.

In an exploration of Organization X's records, there were no satisfaction surveys, interviews, focus groups, or other data collection processes completed by foster parents that addressed whether the initiatives and programs that Organization X had in place were effective in accomplishing identified outcomes such as supporting foster parents and improving their satisfaction. Mihalo et al., 2016) suggested that foster parent satisfaction and commitment play an important role in retaining foster parents. It cannot be presumed that the services and support that Organization X provided positively impacted foster parent satisfaction; without data to collect and analyze, it is unclear if the programs and initiatives were what foster parents wanted, expected, or found useful.

Client-Focused Results

Organization X is a small and new TFC agency established in an area saturated with competing agencies. Many of Organization X's competitors have existed for 10 plus years and have been well-known and highly regarded in the foster care community. As a result of the competition they faced, the leaders of Organization X recognized they needed to be strategic to procure clients. Therefore, the leaders established client-focused relationships by integrating into the foster care community, participating in community events and partnerships with other organizations, such as hosting a hot chocolate bar with two local social services departments and conducting a holiday toy drive every year. The leaders of Organization X conveyed that the intent of participating in those and other activities was to develop a presence and identity within their local community and the foster care community and demonstrate through action a clear depiction of the mission and vision of the organization.

Organization X shared Excel sheets that captured data about recruitment event activities for 2021 and 2022. Some data for both years was inconsistently captured as the organization did not have one designated staff member responsible for inputting the data onto the spreadsheet. The data captured on Excel sheets were collected and analyzed to inform the information needed for client results. From an analysis of the evidence collected, it appeared that Organization X conducted the same number of recruitment activities in 2022 as in 2021; however, there was a decline in the number of recruitment participants in 2022.

Thus, the leaders of Organization X strategically moved to a more substantive media presence in 2022, hoping for increased inquiries through that marketing approach. Recognizing the importance of when to enact innovative business strategies is beneficial to the performance of small businesses (Skokan et al., 2013). The increase in social media awareness positively impacted the number of inquiries as phone inquiries increased; however, the number of email inquiries decreased. The increase in the organizations' social media awareness presence did not impact the number of participants in informational sessions, as that number remained the same. Furthermore, Organization X only opened four new foster homes in 2022, a reduction from opening seven homes in 2021, suggesting that Organization X has more work to do to turn inquiries into informational session attendees and open foster homes.

Workforce Focused Results

As a small organization with limited capital, it is not difficult to see the workforce capabilities and capacities of Organization X as an area that needs improvement, which may be due to the lack of small business owners' abilities to develop strategies that will ensure sustainability (see Warren & Szostek, 2017). For example, the workforce of Organization X started with three employees in 2021 and only added one additional employee in 2022. Presently, Organization X has an employee pool of four employees executing all the work functions necessary to satisfy the responsibilities of a TFC agency. Each employee performs more than one job function, and the leaders of Organization X acknowledged this could quickly lead to employee burnout or resignations.

Data collected from Organization X suggested a need for and a focus on securing additional employees. However, the dilemma was whether the leaders should hire a full-time or part-time position. The leaders of Organization X recognized that it would be beneficial to hire an employee to focus on either marketing and recruiting foster parents or training and monitoring foster parents. The data collected supported the need for both positions. However, it did not determine which position would be the primary one to be filled first or if organization leaders should hire a full-time or part-time employee.

Furthermore, the leaders of Organization X did not have a written strategic plan focusing on how to make securing another employee an achievable goal. Data collected about Organization X's operational practices suggested that processes are essential to the organization's leaders. Therefore, the lack of written internal processes focusing on workforce strategies has resulted in the organization's inability to use those data to inform strategic maneuvers.

Workforce Climate

To support current employees, the leaders of Organization X have developed a strong workforce engagement program, including employee recognition events and activities that focus on employee self-care practices. To maintain its workforce, the leaders of Organization X are executing a strategy focusing on daily operations and retaining its current employees. The workforce climate is also strengthened by effective communication practices, which, according to a thematic analysis of data, is placed at the same importance level as foster parent training. The result of an effective communication

process for Organization X is that all its stakeholders are aware of problems and issues and any organizational decisions or changes as soon as they occur.

Workforce Development

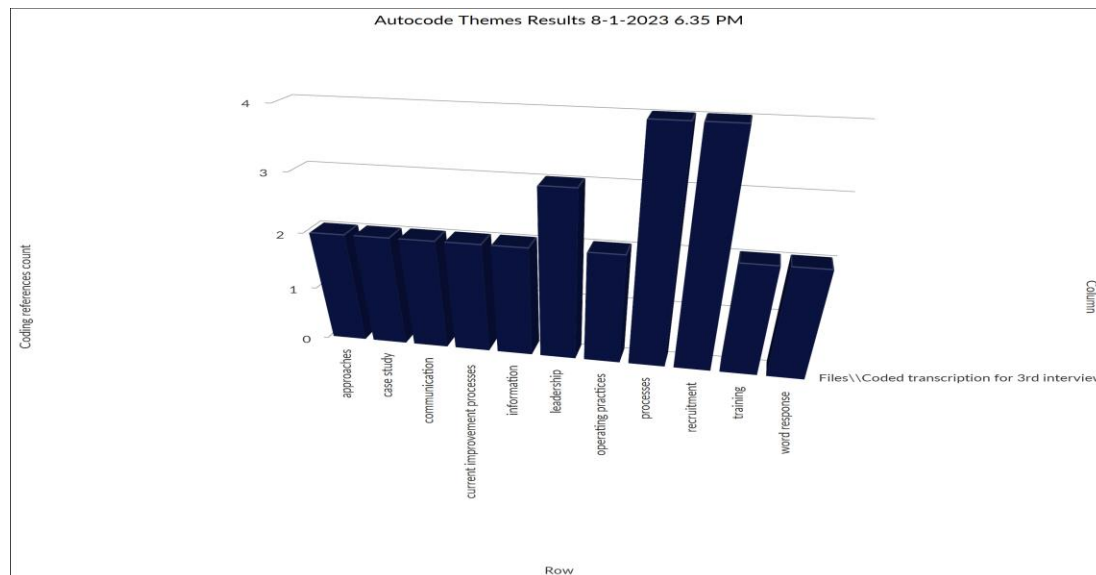
In 2022, Organization X experienced the voluntary closure of three of its foster homes, and they struggled to open new homes, only opening four. The organization leaders acknowledged that they needed improvements in marketing, recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents. According to a thematic analysis of the study data from a semistructured interview conducted, as observed in the Appendix, training and other areas that are beneficial for fostering parent growth and sustenance were not determined as primary areas of interest for Organization X. One leader of Organization X expressed that a major component of their challenges in areas impacting foster parents' recruitment and retention is due to "lacking employees that we can designate to work specifically in areas such as providing training." The leaders of Organization X shared that one future goal is to hire an employee whose job functions will be specifically for training and supporting foster parents; however, the leaders of Organization X do not have a plan to make this an achievable goal. Furthermore, the organization cannot support another salary at this time. As a result of a lack of employees and financial constraints, the growth and development of Organization X is at a standstill.

Marketing is another component of Organization X's workforce; the leaders expressed they needed improvements. Furthermore, they noted that improving their foster parent census is the first step towards growth within the program. One of Organization X's leaders shared that "without foster homes, we will not have a location to place

children when they are referred.” The data collected showed an increase in the organization’s social media presence (Facebook, Website, Instagram). However, the data also showed a decline in participants during recruitment events. The COO of Organization X shared their plan for implementing new marketing strategies: rebranding what the agency is known for and increasing their networking to build beneficial relationships. This is an excellent leadership strategy for the leaders of Organization X to employ, as Warren and Szostek (2017) informed that there is a positive correlation between networking and small business sustainability.

Leadership and Governance Results

The thematic analysis of data collected from Organization X suggested that when discussing leadership and governance results, the three areas of focus for Organization X were leadership, processes, and recruitment. Figure 2 shows the NVivo auto-coded theme results from Interview 3.

Figure 2*NVivo Auto-Coded Theme Results From Interview #3*

Organization X is a small agency with a total of four employees. The leadership team of Organization X initially consisted of the executive director and COO. In May 2023, the leadership team of Organization X expanded to include the casework supervisor. According to the executive director, this change was implemented to allow another voice to be heard during decision-making. Information shared by organization leaders during the June 08, 2023, interview informed me of a change in the organization's marketing strategy to include rebranding. However, it is unclear if this change resulted from an additional voice such as input from the casework supervisor in the leadership and governance of the organization.

Organization X's leaders rely on its internal processes and leadership strategies to improve foster parent recruitment and retention success rates. For example, effective

communication is the process relied upon by the leaders of Organization X to not only relay information internally but also to strengthen recruitment efforts. This process consists of continual daily communications between the employees, foster parents, referral and funding sources, community partners, collaborators, and leadership of Organization X, all conducted through email, telephone calls, and text messages.

According to a thematic analysis of data collected from Organization X, communication is a necessary component of the leadership strategies implemented by the leaders of Organization X. It is viewed as valuable as the organization's operating practices.

Governance, Laws, and Regulations

Organization X experienced their most recent state audit in January 2023, an audit of their 2022 performance conducted by a licensing specialist designated to monitor the organization by its State Board of Social Services. The COO of Organization X reported that they passed the audit, receiving only one violation related to documentation. As a result of a successful audit outcome, the organization is currently operating with a 1-year license to function as a TFC provider.

Society and Community Support

The leaders of Organization X recognized the value of community support to a small organization. They incorporated the involvement of its local community to include other organizations when implementing marketing and recruitment strategies. For example, each year, the leaders of Organization X conduct a Back-to-School Drive to support local families struggling to purchase needed school materials. Additionally, the organization spearheads a holiday toy drive to support local families who cannot

financially provide gifts for their children. Interactive community involvements such as these events are successful approaches for recruiting and retaining foster parents, according to The Annie E. Casey Foundation (August 2019). These two initiatives assisted Organization X in many ways, such as helping the organization maintain a positive image while simultaneously bringing awareness of the organization's existence to people who are not familiar with the organization. Furthermore, conducting these supportive events allowed Organization X to collaborate with other community organizations, demonstrating the organization's dedication to the community and desire to be a part of the community.

Financial and Marketplace Results

The leaders of Organization X rely on its internal processes and leadership strategies to improve foster parent recruitment and retention success rates, which will increase its financial status. Data from Organization X's financial records was not available for this study. However, a verbal attestation was shared by the leaders of Organization X stating that the organization is operating at a minimal profit margin. As expressed by Organization X's COO, "Our bills are paid in full each month, and we still have another check that does not have to go towards expenses." The leaders noted that their financial status changed when they made business decisions based on their means and capabilities, not what other organizations did.

When the operating practices executed by Organization X mirrored the recruitment and other operating practices of larger TFC organizations, the leaders spent much of the organization's minimal time and resources on opening TFC homes. They

followed the operating practices of other organizations, such as participating in expensive recruitment vendor events, which placed them in financial struggles and challenges since the cost of many of the events did not yield anticipated results. Organization X's leaders further acknowledged that, at times, spending money on high-cost recruitment events and attempting to achieve self-imposed financial goals occurred at the expense of relaxing original standards and expectations for foster parents. An example of this is when the leaders of Organization X admittedly sacrificed standards to open new foster homes. It is not a financially or ethically wise business decision for an organization to relax ethical principles or exhaust finances when recruiting new foster parents, as literature has informed us that many foster homes voluntarily discontinue providing the service within the first year (Ahn et al., 2017; Cleary et al., 2018; Davi et al., 2021).

Implications of Data Findings

To identify themes depicted from the data that address this study's RQs, a thematic analysis, defined by Scharp and Sanders (2019) as a qualitative approach used to identify, analyze, and report data, was conducted using NVivo software. There were many minor themes identified from the data; however, leadership's impact on recruitment, current improvement processes, what can hinder recruitment, foster parent training and development, and foster parent encouragement and support approaches were the five primary themes identified as a result of the thematic analysis. Data analysis was conducted to identify Organization X's leaders' most frequently used words during the four interviews. The results are in the two Word Clouds (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Please note that the words recruitment, processes, support, training, and foster parents,

for Organization X was offering a new and more supportive experience for foster parents. The leaders of Organization X expressed their vision of “being a concierge for foster families.” However, data from the last interview suggested that the organization’s leaders are moving in a different direction. This was supported by the COO of Organization X, conveying that they are in the process of rebranding how they want to be perceived as a TFC organization.

Implications to Positive Social Change

There are over 400,000 children in the United States in foster care and only 200,000 viable foster homes to support them (see FosterVA, n.d.). The recruitment and retention of foster parents has been a significant problem plaguing agencies providing TFC services (Cleary et al., 2018). TFC agency leaders face the daily challenge of trying to supply viable foster homes for the many referrals they receive. The struggle becomes even more insurmountable when they are not able to open new homes or keep the current foster parents that they have. Recruitment strategies such as targeted recruitment, a data-driven technique, direct an agency’s resources and efforts where they are most likely to yield results (CHAMPS, 2019). Although identified as a successful technique, it is not user-friendly for organizations such as Organization X that do not possess sufficient data to drive the technique.

Small organizations require recruiting strategies to link them to their communities and increase their current foster homes census. By providing small TFC organizations with strategies to effectively identify, collect, analyze, and interpret their internal data, the results of this study will offer a useful operational tool that will assist small agencies

in developing strategies they can successfully implement to stimulate foster parent recruitment and retention. By doing this, these agencies could potentially support some of the 200,000 children in care who need a viable foster home, which may lead to positive social change.

Study Strengths and Limitations

Study Strengths

One strength of this study is its design, as it used the effective approach of several semi-structured, open-ended interviews to capture data from participants as well as used archival secondary data sources. Another strength of this study is that it served as a starting point for future studies on the impacts of recruiting and retention strategies for small TFC organizations.

Study Limitations

As previously discussed, this study has numerous limits, including the sample size and the generalizability of the findings. Most of the primary data collected for this study were from interviews with the organizations' leaders, of which there were only two at the time of this study. The organization has experienced a restructuring, and an additional leader was added to the leadership team. This leader may have been a valuable resource to this study by adding new or opposing data to be collected and reviewed.

Another limitation of this study is how data was gathered and stored. Organization X used Excel sheets to capture data about recruitment event activities for 2021 and 2022. Some data for both years were inconsistently captured as the organization did not have one designated staff member responsible for inputting the data onto the

spreadsheet. The executive director was responsible for putting the information onto the Excel sheet, and she acknowledged being inconsistent with this task. Shenton (2004) explained that the findings must emerge from the data when ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. Therefore, data must be reliably collected and dependable. Therefore, the data from Organization X's Excel sheets must not be considered rigorous since the methods used to collect and preserve the data were inconsistent.

An additional limitation to be acknowledged is the study sample size. Mason (2010) suggests that the sample size used for a qualitative study must be substantial enough to assure that all potential perceptions related to the study presenting problem are represented. With a sample size of 8 another limitation of this study is the trustworthiness that all perceptions related to the presenting problem were captured.

A final limitation of this study to be discussed is the researcher and the possibility that my biases may have influenced how data was collected, analyzed and interpreted. Although I performed the action of bracketing, which is the act of reflecting on one's past personal experiences and intentionally be cognizant of not allowing my biases to impact the study (see Shenton, 2004) there is the possibility that some of my biases may have impeded on how the data was analyzed and reported.

Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

Analysis of the Study Findings

The practice problem guiding this doctoral study was foster parent recruitment and retention challenges experienced by small TFC agencies. The leaders of Organization X readily acknowledged the importance of foster parents to the organization's growth and sustainability. Without foster parents, the organization does not have safe and viable foster homes to place children in care (see James Bell Associates, 2019).

Organizational Value of Recruitment

As the doctoral study evolved, I observed a change in how the leaders of Organization X viewed recruitment at the onset of the doctoral study process and how they viewed recruitment after the study. Although the leaders of Organization X conveyed their intentions of being different and offering a unique product, their recruitment practices mirrored what other organizations were doing. Even when some recruitment practices conflicted with Organization X principles and standards, such as opening homes for individuals whose focus was not on fostering but on adopting a baby, the leaders of Organization X decided to execute them anyway. When asked about this, the leaders of Organization X explained they decided to mirror the recruiting strategies of more established TFC agencies because those established agencies must be doing something right. As expressed by the COO of Organization X, "Why reinvent the wheel?"

During the initial interviews with the leaders of Organization X, they passionately expressed their goal of offering foster parents a unique and more supportive experience

when fostering. However, the leaders did not possess a strategic plan that included objectives and measurable goals that would assist them with implementing successful foster parent recruitment or retention practices. It was as if the organization's leaders were operating under the belief that their vision and passion would somehow be relayed to people during recruiting events, thus inspiring their interest in becoming foster parents. The leaders of Organization X now view recruiting differently and are now being more intentional about their recruitment strategies.

Recommendations to Address the Presenting Problem

To address the presenting problem guiding this doctoral study, The Baldrige Excellence Framework was essential in shaping the recommendation that the five following themes be a part of Organization X's strategic plan: improving current improvement processes, leadership's impact on recruitment, what can hinder recruitment, foster parent training and development, and foster parent encouragement and support approaches.

Recommendation #1: Improving Current Processes

One recommendation to small TFC organizations to successfully recruit and retain foster parents to enhance their recruitment endeavors would be to develop and implement business model strategic recruitment methods that include objectives and measurable goals (Warren & Szostek, 2017). Although the organization would recruit foster parents and not employees, the result is similar: securing individuals who will execute a specific job serving as pseudo-parents for children in foster care. Foster parent recruitment is also similar to employee recruitment. It involves creating an appealing

organizational brand that will allow the organization to maintain its ethical principles while connecting with potential foster parents that align with their values and vision (Miloshevik et al., 2020).

I further recommend that small organizations implement recruitment strategies that the organization can continue to maintain with its financial status and employee pool (see Skokan et al., 2013). I based my recommendation on the knowledge I gleaned from articles and reports written by authorities in the business realm that addressed small business recruiting strategies. An example is from Miloshevik et al. (2020), who suggested that small organizations are more successful at recruitment when they use their unique story to build their brand. The authors also suggested that when developing recruitment strategies, business leaders of small organizations should use their small size to their advantage (Miloshevik et al., 2020). For example, when recruiting foster parents, one strategy they could use is to convey that because they are a small organization, they have the time and ability to provide personalized attention and support to their foster parents.

Small organizations like Organization X typically have limited employees, resources, and finances. Therefore, the recruitment and retention strategies developed by the organization's leaders must yield favorable outcomes. Existing literature has suggested that an organization can enhance effective foster parent recruitment and retention strategies by developing data-driven strategies informed by continuously monitored quality improvement processes (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019; CHAMPS, 2019). Therefore, this approach to developing recruitment and retention

strategies is another recommendation for Organization X's challenge with recruiting viable foster parents and retaining current foster parents. Implementing data-driven foster parent recruitment and retention strategies would offer Organization X intentionality regarding where to focus employee time, resources, and finances to yield a favorable outcome.

Recommendation #2: Identify What Hinders Recruitment

One operational practice that can hinder foster parent recruitment is not having data to drive goals and anticipated outcomes. Organizations X does not have a consistent and reliable data collection and analysis system to capture any data related to foster parent recruitment or why they decided to stop fostering. Pertinent data in areas such as inquiries or the number of recruitment event participants are relevant for small organization leaders to collect and analyze. Such knowledge can inform decisions regarding the most practical uses of organizational funds. Leaders of small organizations could also find it useful to compare the data annually to assess if certain recruitment events were financially based on costs and if they yielded any foster parents.

Additionally, by collecting and analyzing data, small organizations can identify the primary needs of children placed in their programs and use this information for intentional recruitment. This data-driven knowledge could assist leaders of Organization X in establishing objectives such as a sufficient number of well-trained and available families to meet the organization's ever-changing needs and assisting leaders with establishing a quality home matching system (see CHAMPS, 2019).

Furthermore, according to the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment (2016), data-driven and continuously monitored quality improvement processes can assist the leaders of small organizations with assessing the effectiveness of services they provide, identifying the support needs of foster parents, and evaluating their satisfaction with supports and resources offered. This knowledge can improve foster parent retention rates and strengthen leaders of small organizations' decision-making capabilities when addressing why foster parents decide to stop fostering.

To implement this recommendation, the leaders of Organization X can execute the following strategies:

- Identify an employee to operate as the designated quality assurance personnel responsible for collecting and inputting data into the system and updating it as needed. Enroll this employee in training and seek out free online training, if available, to ensure the development of their quality assurance skills.
- Use the current electronic health system software and develop tools to collect and store data. I recommend that organization leaders explore the data-driven capabilities of their current electronic health system software. The organization may have to purchase a more advanced electronic health system version if its software does not support data-driven activities.
- Review the data quarterly and track trends.
- Conduct foster parent satisfaction surveys annually.

- Be accountable for collecting and analyzing the data by creating and disseminating a report annually to foster parents and employees.
- Use data to inform the development of recruitment and retention practices.
- Use data to establish short-term recruitment goals for 6 months at a time. Review the goal outcome after 6 months and assess if they want to continue with the same goal or work towards a new goal.

Recommendation #3: Improving Foster Parent Training and Development

Another recommendation for small TFC organizations is developing a long-term retention strategy for foster parents that includes continuous monitoring and improvements in key areas such as training, support, and appropriate financial compensation. Ongoing and relevant training was described by Kaasboll et al. (2019) as a necessary tool that organizations must give to their foster parents to strengthen their knowledge and skills. Ongoing and relevant training can also provide foster parents with a sense of feeling supported, which can positively impact the foster parent's satisfaction (Kaasboll et al., 2019).

Recommendation #4: Assessing and Enhancing Leadership's Impact on Recruitment

Organization X's leaders should also participate in ongoing training and development to enhance their leadership abilities. Literature, including a study conducted by Ha-Vikstrom (2017), suggested that leaders who demonstrate effective behaviors in key areas such as innovative role-modeling, articulating a clear vision for the organization, offering relevant resources, and giving consistent feedback are leaders who inspire trust and motivation in others. Organizational leaders who are at least aware of

upcoming changes in the industry and are devising a plan to adopt or manage those changes can give foster parents a sense of security in the field of foster care (Mihalo, 2016). The leaders of Organization X can implement to improve foster parent retention rates by demonstrating confident leadership abilities. Leadership development training courses can teach these skills to those who attend.

Another way that leaders of Organization X can improve foster parent recruitment and retention is by keeping apprised of changes in the child welfare system that will impact TFC. One method to accomplish this is to get involved in or establish a roundtable group that consists of fellow small TFC organization leaders if it does not exist. By collaborating with other organization leaders, the leaders of Organization X can glean knowledge, learn industry tricks, and discover what is changing. Maybe it can start with just TFC but then expand to include other small businesses.

Recommendation #5: Assessing and Enhancing Foster Parent Encouragement and Support Approaches

The fifth primary theme identified from the thematic analysis is encouragement and support approaches for foster parents. There is an abundance of literature published by scholars such as Ahn et al. (2017), Cleary et al. (2018), and Hanlon et al. (2021), who identified foster parents as a crucial and vital component of the foster care process because they are the primary entities providing the care, safety, and nurturance these children require. Because foster parents are so relevant to this process, keeping them satisfied and engaged is necessary. Therefore, another strategic approach recommended to small organizations, such as Organization X, to improve foster care recruitment and

retention is to develop effective encouragement and support approaches they can implement and sustain. Small organizations can implement an approach to conduct satisfaction surveys of their foster parents to identify areas where they can offer more encouragement and support. The question of how encouragement and support can be offered could also be posed to individuals on the foster parent application and during an exit interview should foster parents decide to discontinue fostering. Additional support approaches recommended include these short-term objectives:

- Offering foster parents the opportunity to be a part of the decision making process by including a foster parent representative in strategic planning meetings and on the Board of Directors at Organization X.
- Developing a foster parent support group.
- Establishing a foster parent mentoring program where seasoned foster parents can serve as a support/mentor to new foster parents during their first year of fostering.
- Conducting annual foster parent satisfaction surveys and during the survey request services/support input from foster parents.
- Holding an annual Town Hall meeting where new policies and protocols are presented. Use this Town Hall as a foster parent Meet & Greet opportunity and simultaneously request service/support suggestions from foster parents.

Concluding Recommendation

The final recommendation as a result of this doctoral study is for the leaders of Organization X to focus on one strategic area, foster parent retention, which in time can assist in improving foster parent recruitment. For small organizations such as

Organization X, the literature has suggested that a beneficial strategy for improving recruitment efforts would be the retention of its current employees (Skokan et al., 2013). For a TFC agency, this would also include its foster parents. Additional literature has suggested that if employees and foster parents of small TFC agencies are satisfied, they will refer other people to the organization (Weber, 2020). Furthermore, there is literature that has recommended organizations build a strong foundation by ensuring foster parent satisfaction through their training, support and communication processes (Cleary et al., 2018). When people are satisfied about something, they are willing and at times excited to share their experiences with others.

Recommended Implementation Plan

Period I

Determine the necessary collaborators for plan development and implementation. At this stage, the leaders of Organization X will identify key people to assist with developing and implementing the plan, establish a strategic planning team, and schedule a meeting within 2 weeks. During this period, the executive director and COO of Organization X can attend leadership development training to enhance their leadership skills.

Period II

The executive director and COO of Organization X can demonstrate newly developed or enhanced leadership skills by scheduling a meeting with the strategic planning team members, conducting a brainstorming session, and determining the sequence of addressing the two presenting problem components: recruitment or retention.

These leaders can discuss initial obstacles that may be barriers to addressing the two presenting problems and assign responsible people to address specific tasks, such as researching foster parent recruitment and retention and potential obstacles to both. The leaders can reconvene in 30 days with all individuals completing their assigned tasks. All team members can submit their findings to the entire team 3 to 5 days before the next meeting.

Period III

Development: At this meeting, review all information from research and data collected to develop the initial plan. Decide on what processes to implement and how. Establish data collection methods, such as a foster parent survey containing questions to garner information about recruitment processes or retention issues. The executive director and COO should ensure that the survey also includes questions that solicit responses about foster parent engagement, support, and training and development. Identify the person(s) responsible for developing the survey. At this meeting, a deadline should be established for when the survey will be developed and presented to the team for review. Schedule the next meeting to occur in 2 weeks to avoid a time lapse.

Period IV

Implementation: Survey review, approval, and dissemination process. Determine how the survey will be dispensed, what team members will dispense it, and the deadline to return it. Identify what team members will receive the survey results, assess the responses, and put them in a report for the team. Establish that surveys will be sent, received, reviewed, and the report created within four weeks.

Period V

Continued plan implementation: The leaders of Organization X and team members will review data from the surveys and use the data to develop a strategic plan for foster parent recruitment or retention. They will also use survey data to identify potential obstacles and establish a timeline and methodology for implementing the strategic plan. The leaders will Plan to meet in 30 days to monitor the plan and assess its progress.

Period VI

Strategic plan review: The leaders of Organization X will schedule a meeting to discuss how the strategic plan is progressing and assess employee performance to ensure the plan is being executed appropriately. If the plan is working well, continue to implement and reassess it in 30 days. If the plan is not working, identify why it is not, then modify it depending on the problem area; then, implement the revised plan and schedule a meeting to reassess in 30 days.

Period VII

Strategic plan review: The leaders of Organization X will meet with team members to assess the progress of the strategic plan. If the plan progresses well, as evidenced by an increase in new foster parents or the foster parent retention rate improving, continue implementing the plan. Schedule to meet again to assess the progress of the strategic plan in 90 days.

Period VIII

Strategic plan review: Meet to discuss strategic plan progress. If the strategic plan continues to be successful, continue to implement it. Discuss the draft development of a follow-up survey to be disseminated to foster parents during the last week in September. Determine how the survey will be dispensed, who will dispense it, and the deadline to return it. Identify who will receive the survey results, assess the responses, and put them in a report for the team. Establish that surveys will be sent, received, reviewed, and the report created within 4 weeks. Schedule to meet again in 4 weeks.

Period IX

Survey results review. Meet to review the data collected from the most recent survey. Use that data to continue to improve recruitment or retention processes. Unless there is a major issue with the strategic plan during this meeting, the leaders of Organization X should schedule the next leadership meeting in 4 weeks to discuss addressing the presenting problem area that was not addressed in 2024. This presenting problem will be the strategic plan focus for 2025.

Period X

New strategic plan development: Final review of the 2024 strategic plan. At this meeting, the strategic planning team will begin strategizing a process for addressing the presenting problem not addressed in 2024.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This doctoral study was conducted by collecting and analyzing data obtained by interviewing two leaders from a small TFC agency in one state. When the interviews

were conducted, Organization X had only two leaders. However, they added another person to their leadership team towards the end of this study. Additional data for this study was obtained through exploring the files of the eight foster parents associated with Organization X. One recommendation for future studies on foster parent recruitment and retention is to interview as many of the organization's leaders as possible. Another recommendation is to conduct the study using an organization with a larger foster parent census. These recommendations are being made as literature informs us that the number of samples used in a qualitative study must be sufficient to ensure that most or all possible perceptions are represented in the collected data (Mason, 2010). To ensure data saturation, the researcher must use a sufficient sample size to offer exhaustive data to address the RQs (Hennink & Kaiser (2021). For future studies, having more than two individuals involved in providing data gleaned from interviews is anticipated to yield more rigorous results.

Furthermore, future studies should involve small TFC organizations in other states to obtain more generalizable data. Data generalizability is described in the literature as an integral component of a study, as generalizability would suggest that the study findings will add to universal knowledge and can be considered representative of the larger population (Hays & McKibben, 2021). This study was conducted with one small organization on the East Coast. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies be conducted involving TFC organizations in other states to assess if the study findings will be similar. Additionally, for the same reason, it is recommended that future studies

include small TFC organizations that have been in existence for a variety of years, all more than 5 years.

Dissemination of This Study to Organization Leaders

To share the findings of this study with Organization X, a well-designed yet brief PowerPoint will be created and presented, along with an executive summary report, at a meeting scheduled and conducted at the convenience of the organization's leaders. The leaders of Organization X will be encouraged to thoroughly review the executive summary report and present any questions or concerns after the PowerPoint presentation. After the PowerPoint presentation, time will be allotted to address any questions, comments, or concerns the leaders of Organization X may have

Conclusion

In this doctoral study, I examined the specific organizational problem of understanding the marketing strategies a small organization should implement to inform strategic recruitment activities and increase foster parent retention rates. I offered recommendations for the leaders of Organization X and other small organizations that did not compromise their integrity but aligned with its mission and vision while simultaneously addressing foster parent recruitment retention issues. The study contributed to the leader's decision making and process implementation by providing quality data that informed recommended changes in daily operations strategies in areas such as marketing, recruitment, support, and training. As intended, data gleaned from this study informed recommendations that will aid the leaders of Organization X in making reasonable and achievable internal programmatic changes and improvements.

Improvements may result in outcomes leading to the organizations' future sustainability (Mihalo et al., 2016).

Another contribution of this doctoral study to this and other small organizations is the development of leader self-sufficiency in identifying and resolving problems, growth, and development. The leaders of small organizations such as Organization X may identify areas in which they already excel and possess learned skills. This study could afford leaders of small organizations recommendations that they can presently and futuristically employ when problems and challenges arise (McNamara, 2006).

TFC homes are invaluable for children with behavioral, emotional, and medical needs who find themselves in the foster care system and need a safe, stable, nurturing home environment. One of the largest TFC organizations in the state where Organization X is located reports that there are 4,800 children in foster care with an average length of stay of 21 months (United Methodist Family Services (2021)). Many of those children have significant behavioral, emotional, and medical needs due to their lived experiences and require a foster family to support their elevated needs. By identifying effective strategies that leaders of small TFC agencies can implement to improve their foster parent recruitment efforts and stimulate retention in current foster parents, small TFC agencies will be able to offer viable therapeutically trained foster families to children when needed and make a relevant impact on positive social change.

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Appendix: Thematic Analyses of Data

One coding technique available to researchers conducting qualitative research, and the technique used during this study, is Thematic Analysis. The process of thematic analysis is first established by the structural operation of coding which enables the researcher to collect data that will be assembled, categorized and sorted into themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Those themes are then placed into categories, constructed through a thematic analysis. Once thematic patterns are established the researcher then further analyzes them to determine if the pattern identified address the research questions and therefore, the presenting problem in a meaningful way (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The results of the thematic analysis as a result of data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with the leaders of Organization X are presented in this appendix.

The following are the questions asked of the leaders of Organization X during one of the semi-structured interviews:

Leadership Abilities Questions

1. What leadership approaches have been developed, are being implemented to generate individuals' interest in becoming a foster parent.
2. What is the organization's/leadership satisfaction check-in process with foster parents? As a leader of Organization X how much contact do you have with stakeholders, Foster parents, etc?
3. How important is communication to leadership with regards to successful organizational operating practices?

4. What prompted the decision to disband your board of directors and what qualities are you looking for in your board members?

Recruitment Processes: Questions

5. As a leader of Organization X where do you rate the importance of foster parent recruitment in the success of the organization? How much time and resources are the leadership of the organization willing to commit for foster parent recruitment? What is leadership's involvement with the foster parent recruitment practices?
6. What processes have been developed to garner data on successful foster parent recruitment strategy approaches?

Foster Parent Support Questions

7. What are the organization's response practices when a foster parent puts in notice to close their home? How do the leaders of Organization X view self-care practices for foster parents?
8. What training and resources have leadership identified and implemented to train, strengthen, and support their foster parents? How much time and resources are the leadership of the organization willing to commit for foster parent support/satisfaction?

Organization Assessment Process Questions:

9. What outcomes/goals do you hope to accomplish that were not accomplished in 2022? What takeaways did leadership glean from goals not accomplished in 2022?

10. What trends did you see last year that you do not want to repeat?

Thematic Analysis results from Semi-structured Interview June 2023

