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Biological children in the foster family: relations between official guidelines and everyday family practices

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Abstract

The focus and aim of this study was to illustrate and explore how biological children in foster families experience preparation and follow-up by Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service. Further, I wanted to look at the parents' role in the process and especially how the children experienced information and preparation by their parents. While exploring the experiences in five foster families it was important to gain a wider understanding of how it was to live in a foster family, how the foster child affected the family dynamic and further which other implications fostering could have.

Based on semi-structured interviews with biological children, foster parents, one informant from Bufetat and one informant from the Child Welfare Service, I got the empirical data to analyse and explore my research questions. I also chose to use family maps as a method with the children to gain a broader understanding of the family relationships.

My main findings is divided into three analysis chapters which seeks to understand the biological children's point of views of the information, preparation and follow-up, both by the agencies and their parents. Further, I explored the relationships in the family and the families' experience of the first period after the foster child moved in. Implications in terms of challenging behaviour and how the foster child's biological family might affect the foster family have been important issues. To get a more nuanced view on the family situation, the parents were included in the study as well, and I found that they had information their children did not reveal.

Children's voices and the lack of involvement from the Child Welfare Service in terms of the children were important findings and although all the foster families found the process of the placement differently, there were some recurrent issues in most of the families. Not being heard and having little or no contact with the Child Welfare Service, lack of time for preparation and family relationship was expressed as important in most families.

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1 Introduction

The demand for foster homes in Norway has in recent years increased dramatically, and by the end of 2012, more than 10 250 children lived in foster homes (Barne-, ungdoms- og familiedirektoratet, [Bufdir], 2013). Approximately 800 children are placed in foster homes each year, and the increase of the placements might be connected to the general increase of children and young people in the Child Welfare Services and the fact that fewer children are placed in institutions (Backe-Hansen, Havik & Grønningsæter, 2013a). This underlines the importance of more research on foster families, in order to understand the consequences this has for the family in particular and the society in general.

The focus of my thesis is to gain more knowledge about foster families' experiences of fostering, and the role of the Child Welfare Service[1] and Bufetat[2] in this process. In this chapter I will introduce my aim of the study and the research questions. To get a better understanding of the field of fostering I will start by introducing some issues that are important in the Norwegian context, especially previous research that is relevant for my study.

1.1 Aim of study

The aim of my study is to explore how biological children of foster parents are prepared and followed-up by the Child Welfare Services and Bufetat in Norway, and furthermore to what extent there is a need for this type of follow-up. Related to this, I want to explore how the biological children experience living in a foster family and what sort of implications fostering might have for the family. Backe-Hansen, Havik & Grønningsæter (2013b) found that because of the major increase of foster homes the last 25-30 years, more responsibility lies with the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat in terms of recruitment, improvement of services and guidance of the foster homes, although nothing is specifically mentioned about the biological children in the home. As far as I have discovered there is limited research on the issue of biological children in the foster home. The aim of my study is to gain more information about how foster parents and their biological children experience fostering, and the Child Welfare Services role in the fostering process. In 2011, BLD[3] assigned a group to evaluate the foster home service in Norway. The group found that biological children in foster

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[1] Norwegian: Barnevernet
[2] Norwegian: Barne,- ungdoms og familieetaten. English: Norwegian Directorate for children, youth and family affairs. They are responsible for making sure that children, youth and families get help, support and sufficient information in regards to for instance foster home placements
[3] Norwegian: Barne-, likestillings og inkluderingsdepartementet. English: Ministry of children, equality and social inclusion

homes are often ignored, they further stated the importance of taking care of these children (Frydenberg, 2011). With more information about foster families and particularly children's experiences, the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat might gain valuable information from a study like this. Furthermore, foster families might find this study valuable in terms of preparation and follow-up regarding their own biological children. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and family maps I will use a qualitative approach in my in-depth study of five foster families. In addition to this one informant from the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat participates in the study.

I will start with explaining how a foster family is defined in a Norwegian context, and furthermore include some previous research on foster homes in Scandinavia.

1.2 Definition of a foster home

According to the Child Welfare Act[4], this is the definition of a foster home "*private homes that takes on children to raise on the basis of the Child Welfare Services decision of assistance according to the Child Welfare Act § 4-4, or in conjunction with shift of care according to the Child Welfare Act § 4-12 or § 4-8*" (Barne, likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet, [BLD], 2013c). Goody (1982) defines a foster home as a delegation of aspects of parenthood (Goody, 1982 in Ulvik, 2007, p. 17). A foster home is an emergency solution in situations where there are significant concerns about the child's development, and in cases where the parents are unable to give their child adequate care. There are different types of foster homes in Norway; ordinary foster homes outside the family, family placements, emergency homes [5] and reinforced homes (Ulvik, 2007). Emergency homes are usually temporary solutions where the child can live until the Child Welfare Services find a permanent foster home. Reinforced foster homes are suitable for children with additional needs, and the foster parents receive extra financial support to stay at home with the child in a shorter or longer period of time (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). In my study both ordinary foster homes and family placements are represented.

1.3 Previous research

To get a better understanding and overview of foster families in a Scandinavian setting, I will present previous research on this topic. Relevant research about the biological principle and the biological parents of the foster child is also included.

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[4] Norwegian: Barnevernloven
[5] Norwegian: Beredskapshjem

1.3.1 Biological children in the foster home

Höjer (2001) states that knowledge about how biological children of foster parents are affected by growing up with foster children, is limited. The information gained is usually secondhand information from the foster parent's point of view, and research reveals that foster parents often have a more positive view of their children's situation than the children have (Höjer, 2001). The reason for this could be that adults find it difficult to understand children's perspectives, although they might think they are able to interpret and analyze what is happening. Furthermore, foster parents might find it difficult to acknowledge that their decision about fostering could have negative repercussions for their own children (Höjer, 2001).

A Swedish study (Nordenfors, 2006) focuses on the effects fostering has on the biological children's lives. Her aim was to discover how biological children experienced living in a foster family and how it affected their personal life. She found that the relationship between the biological children and the foster children varied descriptions of friendship to family bonds (Nordenfors, 2006). Every foster family is unique and whereas some children find fostering primarily positive, others could experience difficulties in relation to the foster children. Nordenfors (2006) identified that biological children often experienced difficulties in terms of discussing their feelings about fostering with their parents. Some of the children explained that their parents expected them to treat the foster child differently because of their difficult background. Girls would to a larger extent than boys feel the need to nurture and take care of their foster siblings. Most of the biological children, now young adults, expressed that they had learned a lot from living in a foster family and that there were mostly good experiences although they had to share their parent's time and attention (Nordenfors, 2006). One could assume that Sweden and Norway are similar in regards to fostering, and that this study will most likely apply to Norwegian families as well. Although Nordenfors' study explored the effect fostering has on the biological children, little was said about the responsibility of the Child Welfare Services and their role.

As my study involves both foster homes outside the family and family placements, I would like to go more in-depth of the difference between these placements. The Child Welfare Service will examine if someone in the child's family or close network can be chosen as a foster home. If they find suitable candidates within the network, they will still need to fulfill the requirements as any other foster family (BLD, 2013a). A family foster home is defined as a home where the child is biologically related to one or both of the foster parents (Holtan,

2002). Bufetat is in charge of finding foster homes outside the family, where they consider the child's needs in comparison to what the foster parents are capable of offering.as a part of this process, foster parents are advised to attend a PRIDE[6] course where they in cooperation with Bufetat will discover if they are suitable foster parents (BLD, 2012a).

The responsibility of the foster homes is divided between the Child Welfare Service and the Foster Home Service. Where the Child Welfare Service is responsible for the follow-up of the foster family and finding a supervisor, the Foster Home Service takes care of training and guidance of the family. In addition, Bufetat is responsible for the recruitment and dissemination of foster homes (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). Foster parents go through a process before they are approved, and they are considered to be competent, cultural actors who can create a childhood in line with the cultural standard (Ulvik, 2007).

Poland & Groze (1993) argue that researching the effects of fostering on the biological children in the family might help decrease home determinations, because the whole family can receive the support they need. Fostering might have the ability to continue the relationship between the foster child and its biological family (Kelly and Gilligan, 2000), which the Child Welfare Services in Norway focus on as an important aspect.

1.3.2 Foster families and foster parents' biological children

The relationship between siblings is often devoted little attention in research whereas the child-parent relationship gets most attention (Höjer, 2001). The definition of a sibling is two or more children who has one or both parents in common, but there are also other categories of siblings, as step-siblings, adopted siblings and foster siblings. Kosonen (1999) further argues that siblings in the same family might define each other with different terms. Sharing with each other and adjusting to each other, which are important socialization skills for growing up in a society, is learned between the siblings. Moreover the majority of children have one or more siblings and sibling rivalry is very common, but the rivalry might become harmful if one child is favored by the parents (Elgar & Head, 1999).

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[6] PRIDE: Parent-Resource-Information-Development-Education. It is a preparatory course which aims to convey important skills in fostering, and to assess if people are suited to become foster parents. The course is led by Bufetat

When a foster child moves in with a family the roles might change and distribution of power might be different (Triseliotis, Borland & Hill, 2000). Karim (1999) found that over 90% of foster parents have biological children, this implies that many children will be affected by fostering in a direct and indirect way. Höjer (2001) argues that the foster parents' biological children will to a high degree be affected by their foster siblings whilst growing up. She states that fostering has both positive and negative effects on the family's biological children. In her study the biological children stated that they achieved a greater understanding of other people's difficulties, gained more self-confidence and had a greater appreciation of their caring parents. The negative effects included less time with their parents, but this could also be viewed as autonomy as children have the opportunity to be more independent. In relation to this, some of the biological children explained that they hesitated telling their parents about difficult situations with the foster child (Höjer, 2001). These findings are supported by Larsen in Denmark and Twigg & Swan in Australia who found that the biological children felt the need to protect their parents (Larsen, 2008; Twigg & Swan, 2007). Larsen (2008) states that biological children try to ease the fostering process for the parents, and take on more responsibility than they did prior to the placement. Höjer (2001) argues that the biological children understood that their parents could be struggling with the foster child and were especially considerate regarding this. Poland & Groze (1993) found that the biological children were confused because they were expected to be tolerant and understanding towards the foster child, but at the same time their feelings toward him or her might be negative. Furthermore, biological children will often focus on being good role models for the foster child in the family (Johansson & Sundt, 2007).

1.3.3 Support in the foster family

The Child Welfare Service do home visits at least four times a year in the foster family, but they can give more guidance if the process is especially difficult (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). Poland & Groze (1993) identified that the biological children stated that appropriate preparation and sufficient support was important in the foster home placement and some suggested that it would be helpful with a learning session just for the biological children. Spears & Cross (2003) found that contact with other biological children would be useful for the families and that a program called Integrated Service Program, which is a support group for the biological children, was helpful (Spears & Cross, 2003). In terms of the biological children's relationship with the Child Welfare Service and other instances, the experiences

varies, some find it strange that they need to relate to these people who come by their home once in a while. Others find it natural and relates to the professionals in a good way, and the conclusion is that children would want the option to talk to these professionals (Larsen, 2008). The foster home handbook states that biological children needs guidance and help as well as the foster parents. There are no guidelines in terms of how much information the biological children should get about the foster child, but some information is needed so the biological children can understand how to handle unexpected situations (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). It is important that the biological children are remembered in the placement process, and the caseworker[7] should show interest in terms of talking to them about their expectations prior to the placement. The caseworker should in cooperation with the foster parents decide how much information the biological children should get about the foster child (Johansson & Sundt, 2007).

1.3.4 Foster parents

A foster family is different than a "normal family" in certain ways. The relationship between the foster child and the parents might be temporarily and foster parents get paid for the job they do (Ulvik, 2012). Kaplan (1988) states that mothers are likely to minimize their biological children's worries and expect greater maturity than the children are capable of. His study showed that parents did not understand that their children might have separation anxiety regarding a possible situation where the foster child had to move out. Larsen (2008) found that the biological children appreciated alone time with their parents, and it should be the parents responsibility creating this alone time. Most of the children explained that it was nice to be with their parents without the foster child (Larsen, 2008). Foster parents might have different boundaries for the foster child compared to their biological children (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). It might be different reasons for this, but foster parents must acknowledge that foster children's difficult background needs to be considered in all aspects of the upbringing.

1.3.5 Challenges in the foster family

Larsen (2008) found that biological children had a great understanding of why the foster child needed more attention than themselves in periods, but some felt the need to compete with them in order to state that their parents were not the foster child's real parents. Nordenfors (2006) identified that even though the biological children experienced special treatment and more attention towards the foster child in periods, most of them said it was expected and that

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[7] Norwegian: Saksbehandler

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they had learned from it. Biological children often normalize foster children's behavior and would rather focus on how their own behavior could change in order to better the conflict situations (Nordenfors, 2006). As stated in other studies, Larsen's study confirmed that the biological children felt more mature after the foster child came into their family, but one could discuss if this is a positive consequence or not (Larsen, 2008).

Biological children stated that some disadvantages of fostering could be confusion regarding their role and uncertainty in terms of expectations about acting as a peer or a counsellor (Spears & Cross, 2003). Parents might have expectations in relation to how their biological children should act towards the foster children, and sometimes they expect them to treat the foster child differently because they are older (Nordenfors, 2006). In terms of communication, some children experience a great deal of loyalty towards their parents, and find it difficult when the foster child talks to their parents in a foul way (Johansson & Sundt, 2007).

1.3.6 The biological principle

Foster homes are regulated by the Child Welfare Act of 1992 (Lov om barneverntjenester). Children shall primarily grow up in their biological family, and this is an important value in Norwegian Child Welfare, which is known as the *biological principle* (NOU 2000:12). Ulvik (2007) states that because of the biological principle, foster homes in Norway are more like a supplemental parenthood rather than a replacement parenthood. When children live in foster homes the Child Welfare Service focuses on maintaining the contact with their biological family (Ulvik, 2007). The biological principle is in compliance with article 8 in The European Convention of Human Rights, which involves respect for family life, and article 9 in the UNCRC[8] which states that children should not be separated from their parents against their will (Backe-Hansen, 2004).

The biological principle states that children should primarily grow up with their biological parents. The connection and bond between children and their biological parents are considered valuable in itself and moving children from their home is considered a trauma. It does not seem to be a consensus regarding what should be at stake before the Child Welfare Service should intervene (NOU 2000:12). Backe-Hansen (2004) argues that it is presumed that children's meetings with their biological parents are valuable in itself, although it is hard

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[8] UNCRC is short for United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child

to find evidence that children have a better development with these meetings compared to no meetings. By contrast, Triseliotis, Borland & Hill (2000) argue that studies show that frequent contact with biological parents is good for the children's sense of belonging, identity and general well-being. The biological principle has currently been investigated by a group of experts, and their findings are presented in NOU 2012:5 *Better protection of children's development.* The group found that the biological principle is a judicial principle which can be divided into two parts; children shall in principle grow up with their birth parents and if the child for some reason does not live at home, he should remain in contact with the birth parents. Furthermore the principle of best interest of the child should always be the most prominent principle in all cases regarding children. The group also suggested that there should be a new principle called *utviklingsstøttende tilknytning* [9], this principle should have precedence over the biological principle in cases where interaction, affiliation and the quality of the relationship is damaging for the child (NOU 2012:5).

1.3.7 Biological parents of the foster child

Haugli & Havik (2010) state that foster parents express complex issues in regards to how the visitations with biological parents affects children's development, and the visitation is seen as both a protection and a threat to the child's development. Children's right to be heard is important in terms of visitation, and there are three important issues in this context. The first issue is that children are not always asked about the visitation although conversations with children have been a priority in the Child Welfare Services in recent years. The second issue is that children need access to information in order to make it possible to have an informed opinion. The third issue is that children should be informed about the use of their statements, they need to be reassured that all parties in the trial are familiar with the information they have shared (Haugli & Havik, 2010). NOU 2012:5 suggests that biological parents should have to document changes in their situation in order to raise their case, and there should be more research about the Child Welfare Service and their measures in particular. The expert group evaluated the best interest of the child regarding the law about biological parents' right to raise their case once a year after the County Appeal Board made the decision that the child should move out of the home. The law has yet to be changed, so biological parents have the right to raise their case even though there is no change in their situation (NOU 2012:5).

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[9] English: Developmental supportive attachment

1.3.8 Children's voices in the fostering process

Children are born social and it is important that people around them listen, and are sensitive to the signals children send out (Thrana, 2008). Most of the children in Larsen's (2008) study remembered that their parents asked their opinion about fostering, but the amount of information the children received about the foster child varied, and this could be related to the age of the children. Larsen (2008) further states that even though the biological children are asked if they agree to the placement, they do not necessarily feel that saying no is an option. In this regard, children often hold back feelings regarding the foster child because it is taboo and difficult to open up about it (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). This might hinder children to speak up about their own situation and their voices might not be heard.

1.4 Statement of problem

Previous research on foster homes in Norway is mostly focused on foster parents, biological parents or foster children. Less research is carried out on the effects on foster parent's biological children and their experiences of the fostering process. There is a clear gap in the research about biological children in the foster family, to support this; a recent Norwegian report concludes that the biological children are insufficiently included in the fostering placement and the follow-up after (Frydenberg, 2011). With a study that focuses on the biological children's experiences, one could explore in a broader sense how it is to be a foster family and what type of guidance and support is offered to the family. When a foster child moves in, it might have various implications for the biological children and I find it important to explore these issues.

1.5 Research questions

Based on the knowledge about previous research that I have found I have chosen to explore these following questions:

1. How does Bufetat and the Child Welfare Services prepare and follow-up the families in relation to the placement?
   a) Which guidelines do they have for these processes?
   b) How do the parents experience the preparation and follow-up?
   c) How do the children experience the preparation and follow-up and to what extent do they have a say in the preparation phase?

2. How does the family members experience living in a foster family on an everyday basis?

    a) How do the foster parents view the family practice?

    b) How do the biological children view the family practice?

3. What kind of implications and challenges do the family members experience?

    a) How do the foster parents view the implications and challenges?

    b) How do the biological children view the implications and challenges?

1.6 Structure of thesis

My thesis is divided into eight chapters. In the first chapter I have aimed to briefly present the aim of the study, previous research about the subject and my research questions. Chapter two is a presentation of the Norwegian context in terms of foster homes and the processes regarding foster home placements, to get a better understanding of the different agencies' roles in the process. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework I have chosen for my analysis; it includes views on children and childhood, family theories and children's rights. Chapter four is the methodological concepts of my research, my chosen methods, ethical considerations and how the research was conducted. I have divided my analysis into three different chapters based on my research questions. Chapter five presents the analysis of Bufetat's and the Child Welfare Services guidelines in terms of information and preparation of the foster families, and the foster parents and biological children's experiences of information, preparation and follow-up. Chapter six explores family practices in the foster families, where family relationships and children's right to have a say are important issues. Chapter seven aims to illustrate the implications fostering has for a family, for instance how trials and the biological family of the foster child affects the relationships in the foster family. Chapter eight is my concluding remarks and discussions about my main findings.

2 The Norwegian context

In this chapter I will present the Norwegian context related to the Child Welfare Service and fostering to gain a broader understanding of the process. I will include more information about judicial rights in the fostering process, guidelines in terms of Bufetat's- and the Child Welfare Services' responsibilities, and other current debates regarding laws that affects fostering. Firstly I will include a brief introduction about Norway as a Welfare State.

2.1 Norway as a Welfare State

Norway is a relatively small country, with approximately 5 million inhabitants. There is a broad political consensus in Norway about the need for the state and municipals to ensure citizens a minimum regarding school, health and the opportunity to be active participants in the society (Aasbrenn, 2010). The Norwegian Welfare State secures everyone a right to education and guarantees help if the members of society have health issues, social needs or loss of income. In terms of children and family, the Welfare State ensures child benefits, parental leave and kindergartens. The Social Democratic Welfare Model in Norway is very different from the Liberal Welfare Model in the USA. In USA, the benefits you have a right to is based on what amount of money you have contributed with, the Norwegian model is based on the value that everyone have the same rights. Equality between genders is an important value in the Norwegian society, and your gender, culture and beliefs should not affect the help you receive from the State (Store Norske Leksikon).

2.2 The legal process

Before the decision of removing a child from its biological parents is made, there are different guidelines and laws the Child Welfare Service needs to consider. Their first priority is to help children in their own home, and take measures so parents get the help and guidance they need to be able to take care of their children. If guidance and other measures are insufficient, a decision[10] will be made by the County Appeal Board[11] where they rule that the child should be taken into care, either by a foster home or an institution. The Child Welfare Services opinions and views are important in terms of what type of follow-up the children need and the County Appeal Board will consider these views. If the Board rules that the child should move into a foster home, the foster parents will on behalf of the Child Welfare Service gain custody

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[10] Norwegian: Vedtak
[11] Norwegian: Fylkesnemda

of the child. The County Appeal Board also considers the visitation rights and can decide that children should have no contact with their biological parents in consideration of the best interest of the child (Lov om barnevernstjenester). In my research there are variations in terms of how involved the biological family of the foster child is in the foster child's life.

2.3 Guidelines for foster homes

To gain a better understanding of how the Norwegian Child Welfare Service is structured, it is important to define some terms regarding the foster home work. *The care municipality* is the municipality who raised the child's case, or adopted a resolution about foster home as a solution. In most cases this is the municipality where the child lived when the case was raised. Further, the care municipality is in charge of follow-up and control of the child's situation in the foster home. *The foster home municipality* is the municipality where the foster home is situated. If the child is placed in the same municipality where he lived before, there is no need to divide between the two terms. The foster home municipality is in charge of approving the foster home and make sure the foster child has a supervisor (BLD, 2013a).

Responsible Services in the foster home process are first and foremost the regional and municipal Child Welfare Services. In addition, the fylkesmann[12] is responsible for supervising the Child Welfare Services in the different municipalities, and make sure they comply their responsibilities and obligations regarding foster homes. The state Child Welfare Service[13], also called Bufetat, is in charge of recruitment and dissemination of foster homes and necessary guidance and training of foster homes. Furthermore, the local Child Welfare Services are responsible for approving foster homes, follow-up and control of the individual child's situation in the foster home, and appointing a supervisor (BLD, 2013a).

Foster parents hold the daily care and responsibility for the foster child either on behalf of the Child Welfare Services, or on behalf of the biological parents. The Child Welfare Service shall give foster parents necessary advice and guidance in the placement process, and for as long as the placement lasts. The guidelines state that guidance, follow-up and control of the situation in the foster home might be the most important feature in making sure that the placement is optimal. The Child Welfare Service should consider the need for follow-up of the biological children in the foster family and have private conversations with them if

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[12] English: Head of County
[13] Norwegian: Statlig regional barnevernmyndighet

necessary. The main rule is that the Child Welfare Service shall do home visits as often as necessary to ensure proper follow-up and control of the child's situation in the foster home. In cases where the foster parents have biological children it is important that the training of the foster home include these children and their needs. The supervisor should as a main rule not be an employee by the Child Welfare Services, in order to be a neutral person (BLD, 2013a).

2.4 Changes in the Child Protection Law

There have been several discussions about foster homes in Norway in the recent years and the role of the Child Welfare Service in these cases. In this part I will give some background information regarding suggestions and new thoughts about the follow-up of the foster child and how the best interest of the child could best be addressed.

The foster home handbook states that both foster parents and biological children need guidance and help prior to the placement process, and after. The Child Welfare Service have two different roles in the foster homes, where one person, the supervisor[14] from the municipal where the foster child grew up in, is in charge of supervision, and the other person from the Child Welfare Service is in charge of home visits after the placement, and writes reports on the development in the family (Johansen & Sundt, 2007).

The proposition[15] which suggests better quality in the Norwegian Child Welfare Service, states that the supervision of children in foster homes are insufficient. The proposition argues that some supervisors [16] lack competence, and suggest changes that will give a more professional supervision of the foster homes. The Ministry of Children-, Equality- and Social Inclusion suggest an introduction of a new overall provision in the Child Protection Law, where children's participation should be prominent in all aspects that affect the child. The purpose is strengthening children's position and to give them better legal protection. The Child Protection Law has four important principles; the best interest of the child, the biological principle, mildest intervention principle and children's participation (BLD, 2013b). NOU 2012:5 states that biasing the biological principle may cause children to grow up under unfortunate care conditions if the relation to the caregiver is weak. After considering this statement, the Ministry would like to change the basic values to; the best interest of the child,

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[14] Norwegian: Tilsynsfører

[15] Proposition: Suggestion from the Government to the Parliament, it could be suggestions of changes in Laws or suggestions of new Laws.

[16] The foster children have a right to have a supervisor that makes sure they are doing well in the foster home, the supervisor should visit the foster family at least four times a year

affiliation- and relation quality, biological bonds, mildest interventions and children's participation. The Ministry will also consider if and how the principles could be clearer in the Child Protection Law (BLD, 2013b).

2.5 PRIDE

To be approved foster parents in Norway, one is advised to attend a preparatory course called PRIDE, led by the office for Children- Youth and Family affairs[17]. The PRIDE-course was introduced in Norway in 1997 and is developed by the Child Welfare League of America. The aim is to convey important skills needed to understand and safeguard foster children's needs, and the course is also an assessment whether parents are suitable for fostering. PRIDE's responsibility is to create a good relationship between foster parents and the Child Welfare Service. There are some important themes in the course, such as; care and the ability to raise children, how to meet children's need for security and safety, support a relationship between the child's biological family and how to deal with loss. In the last part of the course, the participants are encouraged to invite biological children and other close family to observe a panel debate. The panel is represented by foster parents, biological parents, foster children, siblings and representatives from Bufetat and other Services that is involved in the fostering process (Bufdir, 2014). The aim of the panel debate is that foster parents, their children and other family members can gain more knowledge about fostering through having their questions answered by the panel.

As most foster parents attend the PRIDE-course, and it is included as one of the topics in my analysis, it is relevant to include a short evaluation of the course by Havik, Jakobsen and Moldestad (2007). Their overall findings were that foster parents found the course useful and the information they received was regarded as important in their new role as foster parents. The foster parents stated that they would have appreciated more focus on their biological children and the challenges they might face in the fostering process, especially after the placement. The main impression was that the parents seemed satisfied with the information they received during the course and they found it helpful in the process. The evaluation group suggested that the panel debate in the course could be replaced with a meeting that focused on the foster parent's biological children, this was also a request from several of the foster parents (Havik, Jakobsen & Moldestad, 2007).

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[17] Norwegian: BufDir

2.6 Biological parents' rights

In this section I will present biological parents' rights but specifically in cases where the Child Welfare Service have raised a case and where the biological parents no longer have the daily care for their children. Biological parents of foster children can in some cases decide that their children should live somewhere else for a period of time, but this is not the situation described here. It is relevant to include biological parents' rights as these will be discussed further in the analysis in relation to implications these rights might have for the foster family.

A year after the decision of the County Appeal Board is made about visitation rights, the biological parents have the opportunity to raise the case again, and they might raise the case once a year in the future. The right for visitation is closely linked to the biological principle which states that the relationship between biological parents and their children has an intrinsic value (BLD, 2013b). In NOU 2012:5 an expert group evaluated the best interest of the child, particularly linked to visitation rights. The group suggested that there should be a limitation regarding the biological parents' option to raise their case about visitation rights. Biological parents have with today's laws, the opportunity to raise their visitation rights case once a year without prominent changes in the child's or the parents' situation. The expert group suggested that the biological parents should have to document changes in their situation or the child's situation in order to raise their case in the County Appeal Board (NOU 2012:5). In relation to this, the child has a right to obtain the information necessary to make up his own views in the case, a child over 15 years has procedural rights and a right to access all documents in the case. There is a tension between children's right to participate and children's rights to protection, it is important that both principles are addressed. Although children have a right to express their view, it does not mean that their view is decisive (Haugli & Havik, 2010).

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework which is relevant for my study and prominent within the sociology of childhood studies. Firstly I will present views and perceptions about children through history and continue with the "new sociology of children and childhood". Theory about family, relationship between family members and user participation is also important aspects in this chapter. Children's rights overall, and particularly children's best interest and children's right to be heard is included, as these are prominent issues in my analysis and discussions.

3.1 Children through history

To get an insight in the perception of children and childhood through history, I will start with a short summary of the background of children and childhood. Prior to the 1970s the dominant view of children was that they were human becomings, and they should gradually be transformed into members of the society they lived in. In the 1950s and '60s there was an emphasis on structures that shaped the society, and little room for considering that individuals had part in this shaping (James, 2009). Adults were viewed as rational and complex beings, and children as simple and irrational, on the path to adulthood. Furthermore, there were little attention given in terms of the social context children lived in (Prout & James, 1990).

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a changing awareness of children's position in society, what we call a *paradigm shift*. 1979 was the International year of the child, and the media contributed to images of children who represented different childhoods around the world. There was a greater focus on child abuse, and these factors contributed to a different view on children in society (James, 2009). Interactionist sociology was an important factor before the paradigm shift, as researchers looked at the social activities of everyday life and viewed social reality as non-constant (Prout & James, 1990). Children were eventually viewed as social actors and active participants in the society. The paradigm shift resulted in viewing children as worthy of studying in their own right, and that children contribute to the society as active members (James, 2009).

3.2 Structure and agency

Qvortrup (2002) sees childhood as a structural form and argues that it is a permanent social category, as there will always be some children experiencing childhood. The interrelatedness between structures and agency became more prominent in the late twentieth century, one

commonly thought about childhood as a period, but within structural terms it has no beginning and no end. Children's childhood and the way they live their lives changes constantly, so one could say that childhood both changes and has a permanent structural form (Qvortrup, 2009). Mayall (2002) argues that structures are the ideologies and practices involved in childhood and the power these contain, this also involves how adults view childhood.

Agency could be described as the capacities, competencies and activities children use to create their life world. Agency is also related to how an individual feel about his abilities and confidence in acting out his agency (Robson, Bell & Klocker, 2007). In relation to this, Mayall (2002) argues that there is a difference between an actor, who is someone who does something, and an agent who does something with other people. An agent will in this case contribute to a wider social process. Children's agency will be affected by the complex understanding of what childhood means (Mayall, 2002). Children have different social positions in society according to age, gender and other social and cultural factors. In this regard, there are both opportunities and limitations for children's agency according to their position in the social order, all children have agency but their ability to exercise it might vary. The questions might be how much freedom children should have to exercise their agency and if all children have the same capacity of agency? (James, 2009). Agency is an important issue in my research, as it is important to discover the biological children's agency both in preparation before the foster child moves in, and in the family practice after the placement.

3.3 Childhood as socially constructed

Ariés argues that childhood did not exist as a term in the medieval society and because of this childhood must be socially constructed (Ariés, 1982). Jenks (1982) states that children are both familiar and strange to us and further argue that children's status has boundaries made by institutions like for instance family. Furthermore, Jenks debates that children should be viewed as active in the construction of their own social life and the relationship with others (Jenks, 2004). Within a socially constructed world there are no absolutes, there are several childhoods and not one universal childhood for all children (Jenks, 2004; Franklin, 1995; Solberg, 1990). Kjørholt (2004) argues that one needs to emphasize the diversity and particularities in childhood, and contextualize children's experiences. She further states that we should avoid viewing children in their future role as adults.

Mayall (2002) reviews three different directions within the sociology of children and childhood. *Sociology of children* focuses on children as agents who construct knowledge in their daily experiences, and where their experience of the social world and the relationship with people around them are the main issues. According to Mayall, another direction in the sociology of children and childhood is called *deconstructive sociology of childhood* which focuses on different discourses about childhood and children and how childhoods are locally defined. The third direction is called *structural sociology of childhood,* where it is debated that childhood is a permanent social category in the society, where children and society change, but childhood as a category remains the same (Mayall, 2002).

The social construction of children and childhood faces challenges in the modern society where parents meet situations that they have no experience with from their own childhood (Øia & Fauske, 2010). This argument can also be related to research, where researchers need knowledge about today's childhood to understand children's point of view. As the society is changing, research about today's children and the challenges they might face, is important also for the Child Welfare Service in order to facilitate their help and support in the best way possible.

3.4 Social status and citizenship

Mayall (2002) found that children understand childhood comparatively with adulthood, where children are at the bottom of the scale the adults are on the top. The children in Mayall's study argued that their parents and other adults controlled their lives, but they said this was the way it was supposed to be.

Citizenship is debated when it comes to children, and particularly the question whether they are fully citizens as they do not hold all the rights as adults do. Citizenship involves status and rights, participation and practice which promote participation and democracy of for instance public services (Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum, 2010). For adults, citizenship involves belonging and interacting with others in a group or the society in general. It is debated if one should include children as citizens, as they have no right to vote, but on the other hand it should be possible to acknowledge children as citizens on different premises than adults (Backe-Hansen & Frønes, 2012). Slettebø & Seim (2007) argues that citizenship involves both chores and rights. Furthermore, they argue that there is a symbolic value of children's participation and adults and children have different experiences in terms of exercising the

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participation. Hart (1992) has created a diagram called the ladder of participation, which can enlighten children's participation in projects. Hart describes eight steps in the ladder where the three at the bottom revolves around non-participation. The ladder shows that children can participate in various ways and be more or less involved in research. It is important to state that Hart (1992) finds it is important to listen to how much children want to participate in research. One might say that children's right to participate in research is a part of being citizens (Backe-Hansen & Frønes, 2012). The debate around children and citizenship often revolves around the differences between children and adults in terms of rights and participation (Kjørholt, 2004).

3.5 Children and family

Family might be something we take for granted, and one believes that everyone defines family in the same way. The nuclear family is defined as mother, father and children who live in the same household, but this definition does not suit all families, for instance foster families (Haugen, 2001).

The family represents a social context within which children discover their identities as 'children' and 'selves' (James & Prout, 1996, p. 42).

Changes in family structures lead us to define the family in different ways compared to earlier (Øia & Fauske, 2010). Roche (1996) argues that the idea of family privacy is strong in Western societies and this could involve both positive and challenging aspects. It is important that one view the family in connection to the society in general. The relationship between family members might indicate something about the family situation, and often will the focus on parent's relationship with children be more prominent than the relationship between siblings. Siblings might experience their relationship with each other in different ways, where the little sister looks up to her older brother; he might find her annoying (Höjer, 2001). One might argue that children grow up with different social identities in terms of the social setting they are situated in (Roche, 1996). Many children experience restructuring of their family and kin networks, and how children make sense of patterns of family is a relatively unexplored issue (O'Brien, Alldred & Jones, 1996). Holtan (2002) describes the family as socially constructed and it is an interpretation of personal relationships, and family is a process that changes over time.

Family is not only biological bonds, but it involves the individual experience of who one considers as family members (Morrow, 1998). In foster families there are not necessarily any biological bonds to the foster children, but the biological children and the foster parents might consider them as a family member despite of this. Morrow (1998) found that children define family as individuals who are important to them, and for some that might be parents and siblings, to others it might be grandparents and step-parents. Morrow identified three important themes when children defined their family; roles/functions (care, nurture), relationships (love) and household structure (mum, dad, siblings). Family relationship and the relationship between biological children and the foster child is a focus in my analysis. And furthermore exploring how relationships in the family affect the everyday life of the biological children.

3.6 Family theories

Family theories are based on four important notions. The first notion is that compared to other social groups, the family last a considerably longer time, and one might say that people involuntary belongs to a family. The second notion is that a family has an intergenerational component where children need care and nurture, and there is usually a caregiver and someone who receives care. The third notion is that members of a family usually have both biological and legal relationships, both biology and socialization is regarded as important. The fourth notion is that family's includes blood, marriage and fostering, in other words; families are tied together in many different ways, and people within the same family might define their family in various ways (White & Klein, 2008).

One could look at different frameworks in researching families and when focusing on children, children's participation and the value of children's voices, it is relevant to look at the feminist framework. Phenomenologists within the feminist framework focus their research on viewing families as a part of the everyday world, but at the same time they generate private understandings. The public world outside the family acknowledges that the family is a relatively private sphere. The feminist framework focuses on a contextual understanding and the feminist scholar's state that the family is not monolithic but rather contains diversity in roles and cultures (White & Klein, 2008). Although the family is important, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2003) identified that individual choices in today's society is more prominent compared to earlier, and the family is less in charge of children's choices.

Smart (2007) presents what she calls *relatedness* as an important term in family theory. Relatedness revolves around the fact that if people do not have formative and on-going

relationships, they are not able to develop their own sense of either individuality or personhood, and people one relate to is not necessarily blood-relatives. Relatedness is important in terms of cultural, personal and emotional aspects of a person's life. The definition acknowledge that people can relate to each other even though they are not related by blood, and this is an important notion as families are varied, and people value friends and others in their network as family. Smart further argues that it is difficult for people to express negative feelings about relationships that are on-going, and it is especially difficult for children to criticize their parents (Smart, 2007). Hochschild (2003) argues that there are certain expectations in terms of how we should feel, and the reactions we show should be socially acceptable. Smart (2007) states that children might think they are disloyal towards their parents if they reveal negative aspects of their family, so it is important that there is some sort of democracy within the family, and that all family members respect each other. She further defines "personal life" as something that involves families, not only the conventional family but also new family forms and networks of kinship. Relationality will influence the choices we make and form a context for the everyday life.

A family is a public social institution and our personal choices in the family are shaped by social structures (Seccombe, 2012). In other words, every family is unique and defined both by the members of the family and others outside it. Family ideology involves many aspects and Cheal (2008) argues that parts of the everyday family life are seen in a certain way and others are not seen. Although we see different constructions of families, the nuclear family is one of the ideologies that is favored and might be seen as a desirable form of family. Through interaction with each other, family members define expectations and give meaning to their lives they live together (Cheal, 2008). Morgan (1996) presents the term *family practice* which includes practices of for instance marriage, kinship and parenting, and the expectations and obligations associated with these issues. The social actors within the family might understand situations differently, but family practice is the relationships and activities within the family. I will use this term in my analysis where the foster families talk about their relationships within in the family.

3.7 User participation in the Norwegian Child Welfare Services
The UNCRC maintain that children should be able to participate in all matters that concern them, but children are also in need of protection and help. In some cases children's rights will be conflicting, but the best interest of the child should always be the main principle (Slettebø,

Oterholm, & Stavrum, 2010). User participation[18] can be a tool in the efforts of creating more openness in Norwegian Child Welfare, where the individuals should be heard and allowed to suggest changes and their views should be emphasized. One might divide between two different models of participation; individual and collective participation (Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum, 2010). Individual user participation[19] is the users' rights and choices available in the support services, cooperation between the Child Welfare Services and the child, where the child's voice and perspective is visible. The collective user participation involves influence at a political level, both national, local and administrative (Thrana, 2008). Research shows that children, here foster children, are more often participating and talked to in cases that involve them now compared to earlier, but children have to a small extent the opportunity to express how they experience their own situation (Thrana, 2008). Even though this is research on foster children, it is most likely applicable to the biological children in the foster family as well, even though they might not be considered as "the user" in the system according to the Child Welfare Services

3.8 Children's rights

The UNCRC can be divided into three different rights; provision rights, protection rights and participation rights. The rights are limited and conditional (Alderson, 2000). The UNCRC can be interpreted in different ways because the wording is quite unclear, however the main focus with the UNCRC is to emphasize how the states can maintain children's rights in a better way (Smith, 2012). Fottrell (2000) argues that the UNCRC is both ambitious and far-reaching, and the convention has increased children's status as independent right-holders. The UNCRC acknowledges children's abilities to be autonomous decision makers in their own lives, and in matters that involves them (Franklin, 1995). Related to this, Lee (2001) states that there is a tension between the need for children to have a voice and be heard and a traditional view that only adults are worth listening to.

In Norway a child is defined as article 1 of the UNCRC "…a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (Unicef, 2013). This is a universal definition of children, and might be viewed differently according to society, gender and cultures in different parts of the world.

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[18] Norwegian: Brukermedvirkning
[19] Norwegian: Individuell brukerstyring

All articles in the convention are important, but article 3 and 12 are particularly relevant because they revolve around the best interest of the child and their rights to participation, which are important issues in my study.

3.8.1 Article 3 and 12 in the UNCRC

Article 3 states that the best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children, and the State should secure that children are protected and cared for (Unicef, 2013). The notion of best interest of the child is not a natural idea and will vary across different cultures and contexts. Class, gender and ethnicity are factors that might affect the debates around the best interest of the child (Kjørholt, 2004). In a foster family the article is applicable for all children in the family, including the biological children of the foster parents. Children's best interest is relative, and what might be best for one child, might not be best for another child (Haugli, 2012). Children might have independent interests from their family so the parents and the community should make sure that children have a possibility to be heard (Roche, 1996). It is important that people who work with children have the knowledge necessary to make good decisions, and the principle of the best interest of the child should be clear in laws and regulations. Article 3 should be viewed in context with article 12, and children's voices are important in terms of discovering children's best interests (Haugli, 2012).

Article 12 states that children should be able to express their views in cases that involves them and that their views should be weight according to their age and maturity. Furthermore, children should be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings that involves them (Unicef, 2013). This article recognizes children as independent individuals, and is traditionally considered as one of the four general principles in the UNCRC. This means that the article should be integrated in the execution of all other rights while it simultaneously is an independent right (Sandberg, 2012). Article 12 recognizes that children are able to speak for themselves and the importance of listening to them and weigh their views. Lee (2001) argues that there are specific terms as age and maturity regarding children's ability to express themselves, and further questions who should decide how much weight should be given at what age and maturity, and in which cases. Even though the article might be ambivalent, it raises awareness about the importance of giving children a voice in society (Lee, 2001).

Children have a right to be heard and this implies that someone has the responsibility to make sure this happens, whether it is politicians, law makers or other adults. The Norwegian Children Act §31 (Lov om barn og foreldre) states that parents have a duty to listen to their children's voices before they make decisions about personal conditions for the child (Sandberg, 2012). Making the decision to foster is clearly something that involves children personally, and it is stated that it is a parental duty to make sure that their voices are heard.

4 Methodology

In this chapter I will present my methodological approach and go further into which methods I have chosen for my research. Ethical issues and the reason behind my choice of participants will also be discussed in this chapter. Methodology is the principal and fundamental ways of thinking, or ways of understanding which is grounded in the development and use of different methods. Methods refer to the concrete approach for implementation of specific scientific studies (Grønmo, 2004). My approach in this study is to explore the subjective experiences of five foster families and representatives from the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat. Although my research involved both children and adults, my main focus in this chapter will be on the children.

4.1 Qualitative research with children

Qualitative methods have gradually been more accepted and used in social science. The close contact between the researcher and the participants raises a range of methodological and ethical challenges (Thagaard, 2011). Through qualitative research one might ask questions that explore various issues by actively engaging in the participant's lives, and often ask questions that no one else has asked (Fraser, 2004). In my research I have chosen to use semi-structured interviews and family maps as my research methods. I will also focus on the participant's everyday life to gain a better understanding of how they experience fostering. I found the qualitative approach most suitable because I focus on subjective experiences in a small-scale research, and the main aim was to get a broader understanding of life as a foster family and the visibility of the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat in the process.

Research involves discovering something undiscovered or something that is predicted to be in a certain way, but is yet to be confirmed (Fraser, 2004). Within the qualitative research field there are different approaches, and I have decided to place my research within a phenomenological approach which seeks to understand social phenomenon from people's own perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A researcher who uses the phenomenological approach seeks to understand the participants' world view as they experience it, and the outer world becomes less important (Thagaard, 2011). As my research revolves around the experiences and thoughts of a few individuals, the phenomenological approach seems to be most appropriate as my aim is not to generalize my findings into a common truth.

Researching children's experiences implies that one choose not to view children as a homogenous group but rather respect children as unique and valued in their own right (Greene

& Hill, 2005). Ethical issues might occur when researching children and young people, but this should not overshadow the importance of researching, because we need a better understanding of children and their social life (Lewis, 2004). The "new sociology" of children and childhood focus on children's own autonomy and children as social actors in their own lives (Christensen & Prout, 2005). The paradigm shift has had implications on how children are researched and viewing children as subjects rather than objects accounted for new methods in researching children (Christensen & James, 2000). When researching children and young people, it is important to focus on oneself as a researcher, because the researcher's opinions and views about children's competence will affect how the study is conducted. Kjørholt, Moss & Clark (2005) argues that one should avoid viewing children as either autonomous and competent, or vulnerable and dependent and rather view them as complex human beings. It was important for me to emphasize to the children that I was only interested in their points of view

4.2 Choice of methods

To gain a better understanding of the children's own experiences, I decided that semi-structured interviews and family maps would be my two main methods. The participants did not necessarily know each other prior to the interviews, so I found that one-on-one interviews would be the best approach.

When preparing for the interviews, I was inspired by Clarks' (2005) methods called the mosaic approach. I was not intending to use the same methods as her, but I saw the value of what is grounded in the belief system of this approach. Clark (2005) states that children are competent and active beings and that one should value their opinion. She focused on finding children's own voices when researching. When researching children and young people, one should always keep in mind that children's perspectives, views and feelings are accepted as genuine and valid evidence (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). Listening to children's own voices is the most important aim in my study, although including the foster parents and professionals from the Child Welfare Services and Bufetat was important in terms of enlighten the similarities and differences in children's experience and adult experience.

4.3 Children's perspectives

Solberg (1996) argues that researchers might have difficulties distancing themselves from the adult ways of reflecting around, and conceptualizing children and childhood. Even though the

researcher is aiming to understand children's point of view, it might be difficult because adults does no longer have a child's view of the world. Qvortrup (2002) states that adult researchers are not able to view childhood as they are children because they are not qualified to do so, and interpretations of children's experiences is always challenging. According to Roberts (2000), to recognize children and respect their worth as human beings, it is important that we listen to them, and listening to children, hearing children and acting on what they say are three different things. Adult researchers are responsible for making the research experience at best fun and at worst doing the children no harm (Roberts, 2000). This was a consideration when I chose the specific age group for my participants, I was concerned about asking younger children about themes and subjects that might be harmful toward them.

4.4 Access, informed consent and confidentiality

Getting access to the informants was a challenge I had prepared for. Children are rarely free to decide whether to participate in research or not, as parents and other adults act as gatekeepers and could prevent children from participating, and expressing their own views in research (Masson, 2004). Already in the beginning I found an obstacle when organizations like The Foster Home association were unable to help because they were concerned about the breach of anonymity and confidentiality regarding their members. Confidentiality is an important aspect and this is a sensitive subject for foster families, and as the Foster family organizations decided not to participate I had to find the participants through my own network.

My research was approved by NSD[20] after an application explaining my methods and aims for the research. According to Norwegian Law, underage children can participate in research if their parents give consent. Prior to the interviews I talked to the foster parents and explained my study, my aim and which methods I was going to use. I asked them to communicate this information to their children and ask if they wanted to participate. Only one family chose not to participate, but the other families were very interested and expressed the importance of focusing on biological children in the foster home.

Before the interviews, I explained the main aim of the study to the participants and told them that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and refrain from answering some of the questions. According to Alderson & Morrow (2011) children might not understand what they

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[20] Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste (English: Norwegian Social Science Data Services). See appendix.

give consent to in certain cases. As the young people in my study were all 12 years or above, I believed they had a fair understanding of the aim of the study, and understood that they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they wished.

Alderson (2004) debates right based research which considers the three P's in the UNCRC; children should be well informed and one should listen to their opinions without prejudice. Before starting the interviews I explained the participants about confidentiality and anonymity, so they could get a better understanding of what a research project involved and make sure they understood that none of the information could be used against them later. Alderson (2004) argues that when children are aware subjects in the research it means that they are informed about the study and that they have given consent to participate. Furthermore, data that might identify the participants should not be available to other than the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I conveyed to the participants that the recordings would be deleted when I was finished with the research, and nothing I would use in my work would identify them.

4.5 Sampling

When a researcher uses her own network to find participants, the sampling method is often called snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is where the participants suggests other participants that might be suitable for the research (Grønmo, 2004). This approach is often used for locating information-rich key informants who meet the specific criteria of the study (Patton, 1990). Usually the researcher has specific criteria for the participants so it is important that the participants are aware of these criteria before suggesting other participants (Grønmo, 2004). I had decided the age of the participants, but other than that I was open to the fact that families were in different stages of the fostering process, and that the families could be very different from each other. Mason (2002) suggests that one needs a strategic purpose in the sampling process to create a well-founded argument. She further argues that there should be a relevant range in the samples. I regarded the differences in the families as valuable, and the experiences around fostering were the most important. By expressing to friends and family that I was looking for participants for my study, the ball slowly started rolling and I managed to find five foster families that wanted to participate in my research.

Different municipalities were represented through the Child Welfare Services, and might in this way lead to different experiences for the foster families. The foster homes were represented in terms of a variation in gender and age and also a variation in types of foster

homes. Four of the families knew the foster child before the placement, including one family who were related to the foster child, and one family had no familiarity with the foster child beforehand.

4.6 Participants

One issue in the sampling could be finding a fair selection of participants where both genders and different age are represented (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). As it was challenging finding participants, gender and age difference was not the main focus for me, but participants from both genders are represented and there was also a variation in the participant's age.

To start with the case sampling (Flick, 2002) I had first narrowed it down to foster parents, biological children, the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat. I chose to have an age limit for the biological children which were 12-18 years old. Hill (2005) argues that there are distinctions between adolescents and children in the way they can express themselves verbally. Further, he states that one must also consider the fact that there could be a variation between children even though they are in the same age group. As my main aim was to discover how biological children were followed-up by the Child Welfare Services, I believed that older children had more of an understanding of how the system worked and the positive and challenging parts of living as a foster family.

Participants (14)	
Family 1	Jane, foster mother
	Brian, 12 years
	Frank, 14 years
Family 2	Gary, foster father
	Sophie, 14 years
Family 3	Mia, foster mother
	Rachel, 17 years
	Tom, 15 years
Family 4	Susan, foster mother
	Gina, 14 years
Family 5	Anna, foster mother
	Lena, 15 years
Bufetat	1 informant
Child Welfare Services	1 informant

This is a concrete overview of the different participants in the study with changed names to ensure their anonymity

4.7 My methods

In this part I will go more in-depth in the methods I chose for my study. Although semi-structured interviews and family maps were my two main methods, I have included document review and observation of a panel debate. The document review was important in terms of getting to know the legal system in Norway better, and to understand more about the processes of fostering. The panel debate was initially not a planned method from the start, but occurred as an opportunity during my research and became valuable in terms of my interviews.

4.7.1 Document review

Before starting the interviews it was important to understand the Norwegian laws regarding the Child Welfare Service, to gain more knowledge about the system and which debates are currently important in the Norwegian society. I have read quite a few NOU's (Norway's

public reports[21]) (for instance NOU 2000:12 and NOU 2012:5), and through this learned the current debate regarding the biological principle and the Child Welfare Service in Norway. Other documents from the government were also important when I needed more knowledge about the structure of the Child Welfare Service, and to discover who is responsible in the different parts of the fostering process. It was especially important to learn more about the laws and regulations before interviewing the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat to ensure that I got rich data from the interviews.

4.7.2 Observing a panel debate

The opportunity to observe a panel debate related to the PRIDE-course occurred during my research, so this was not initially planned from the start. One might say that this was a result of the snowball sampling, because I had informed my friends about my research, and I was contacted and asked if I wanted to attend this debate. The panel consisted of foster children, foster parents, biological parents, biological children, case workers and other professionals within the fostering field. The participants in the PRIDE-course were encouraged to ask questions to the panel to gain a better understanding of fostering, and to get different perspectives regarding the parenting job. Through this observation I had the opportunity to listen to experiences directly from a biological daughter's point of view, and she explained how her parents prepared her prior to the placement. I also got valuable information about the fostering process from different viewpoints and the follow-up by the Child Welfare Services. Furthermore the panel debate was useful in terms of obtaining more background information about each of the parties involved in the fostering process, and this was helpful when preparing the interview questions.

4.7.3 Family maps

Before the interviews started, I asked the young people to draw a family map where they explained who the different people in the map were. Using family maps has been a popular methodological tool where participants in some shape or form are asked to draw their families. The roots of the method originate from psychometrics and social work, and were used to measure social integration and family relationships. The subjective meaning of family is changing and one can see that family maps could be very different from the typical mother, father and two siblings (Silva & Smart, 1999). Trost (2005) explains that making a list of

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[21] Norwegian: Norges offentlige utredninger

names or a drawing could be a good starting point for the participant to talk about his family, and who they are. He further argues that one should never interrupt the participant, but let him or her explain their drawing. Haugen (2007) found that asking the participants to draw a family map was a good way to gain a better understanding of the family relation in that particular point in time. It was interesting to see that some of the participants included the foster child in the family map, and some of them did not, and there were also a difference in how many people the children included in their maps.

4.7.4 Semi-structured interviews
A qualitative interview will often come close to an everyday conversation, but the interview has a specific aim, approach and technique (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). There are different ways to approach a qualitative interview, and as there were certain themes that were important to know more about, I decided to use the semi-structured interview in my research. The positive features of a semi-structured interview is that one can prepare themes and subjects prior to the interview, but the order of the questions could be different from time to time, as the descriptions from the participants might vary (Roulston, 2010). The questions in a semi-structured interview are often open ended to ensure that the participant can answer freely without the pressure of a right or wrong answer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In order to gain more knowledge about the experience of living in a foster family, it was important to get in-depth answers where both the parents and the young people felt they could talk freely about their experiences and thoughts. I found it valuable to have an interview guide[22] to make sure that I had some questions and themes I could focus on, but at the same time be open to the fact that the interview could take a different direction, and that the participants might mention themes that I was not prepared for.

To try out my questions and my interview guide, I conducted three pilot interviews to see if the questions gave me the data I needed for my research. After the pilot interviews I assessed what I needed to change and which subjects would be useful to gain more knowledge about. The three pilot participants participate in the study because I got valuable data from the interviews, but the foster mother was asked further questions after the interview.

Prior to the interviews, I asked my participants if I could use a tape recorder to ensure that I did not miss vital information they gave. Hill (2005) argues that if one uses a tape recorder it

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[22] See appendix

is customary to ask the participants if they feel comfortable with this. In addition to recording, I also wrote down topics along the way if there was something I wanted to ask more about, or if other topics came into mind during the conversation. Body language, and other features that was difficult to capture on tape was also noted.

From a researcher's point of view it is important to encourage the participants to give a precise and descriptive explanation about their situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I found it different interviewing the young people compared to their parents, and I had to ask more probing questions to get more in-depth answers from the young people. Solberg (1996) questions if there is a difference between researching children and adults and focus on the researcher's role in the process where adults might find it difficult to grasp children's view of their own world. My experience was that the young people answered shorter than their parents, and some of the participants seemed like they had not reflected much around a few of the questions asked. Haugen (2007) states that there is often a difference in the adult perspective compared to children's perspective, and adults often decide the position children have in society in terms of which issues they are old enough to have opinions about. in relation to this, one might argue that children and adults are different in various ways such as legal, physical and social, but the tendency is to look beyond the differences, and rather focus on how children can participate in research to a larger degree (Boyden & Ennew, 1997).

I chose to interview my participants in their own home because talking about personal issues was not suitable for a more public space. According to Trost (2005), conducting interviews in the participants' home might bring a feeling of safety, and it is important that there are no people around so the interview can be as private as possible. Punch (2002) regards the research setting important because many places are adult settings and children might feel more comfortable in their own setting. She further argues that children and young people are used to pleasing adults and might fear consequences if they say something wrong. I thought the best approach would be to start by conveying to the young people that this was a situation where they held the important information and right answers. It was also important that the participants were in control of how personal and private they wanted to be.

I experienced a personal development as I got further in the interviewing process, and I felt more secure after finishing a few interviews. I became more secure in my role as a researcher and found it easier to ask more probing questions and focused less on my interview guide. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) state that interviewing is learned by practice and not from books

and it is crucial to be well prepared for the interview, and for things that might be surprising. The young people focused on the questions I asked them and none of them refused to answer, although they were informed that they should only answer questions they felt comfortable with. Their parents would more often go beyond the questions and explain more about their situation in general, which created more questions about subjects that proved to be important.

The issue of privacy was important because the participants had never met me before, and I assumed there were subjects they might not be as open about. It was important to give them enough time for each question, so I did not rush to the next question but gave them time to think and pause along the way. I consequently adjusted my interview guide in the research process where I found that some subjects were more prominent than others. After a few interviews I found it useful to interview the parents before the children, because they could hold information that was useful when I interviewed their children. I had to be careful not to breach my confidentiality to the other members of the family, as the parents could express information that I would not be able to use in the interviews with their children. Hill (2005) argues that one of the confidentiality issues is where a family member reveals something about another member in the household. It was important to avoid using the parents' personal thoughts regarding different topics, but only use facts that were already common knowledge in the family. For instance one mother stated that the foster child had challenging behavior in some situations, and this was factual information I could use in the interview with her children, where I could ask about their feelings in those situations.

4.8 My role as a researcher

During the research process I acknowledged the importance of reflexivity, and that researching is a process that might change along the way. Reflexivity is about critical thinking in the research process and revisiting the reason for choices in all parts of the research. Qualitative research can never be completely objective, but the researcher should recognize that personal thoughts, actions and decisions will shape the research (Mason, 2002). One has to revisit the interview questions and review the recordings from the interviews to make sure that personal assumptions do not affect the interview (Lewis, 2004). I found that my research was changing slightly after each interview as different topics came up and were regarded as important for the foster families. Some of these topics revolved around questions I asked, but others were beside what I had in mind before the interviews, though this is not to say they were less important. A major change was also within me as a researcher along the way. I gained more confidence as the research progressed, and the interviewing became easier along

the way both because of the practice, but also because I gained more knowledge about fostering and the Child Welfare Service.

4.9 Power

The issue of power is important in all research with children and young people. The researchers' view of children will be crucial in terms of the power relation between the participants and her (Robinson & Kellett, 2004). Abebe (2009) states that power will always be present because the adult researcher decides the agenda of the research. When interviewing the young people, I was aware that I as an adult were asking them fairly personal questions, so trust was an important issue. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argue that the interview will never be a conversation between equal partners because the researcher decides the interview topics, defines the interview situation and has a scientific competence. Power has many different aspects and one of them is age, and as I was older than my participant, this might be perceived as I was a more powerful person than them, although this did not seem to be a major issue.

4.10 Challenges

The first challenge was as mentioned finding participants for the research and I acknowledge that this process became more time consuming that I had anticipated. Although I had expected that some of the organizations related to foster homes could be reluctant to participate, I did expect some of them to help me especially because they would like to contribute with more research on this subject. After finding participants, I experienced that the greatest challenge was interviewing the young people. Most of them seemed to be quite shy and it was at times difficult to get them to open up. I believe this might be related to both the power issue and the fact that I had never met them before. The power issue is prominent because often when children and young people speak to adults they do not have a personal relationship with, they are expected to give the right answers. Although the young people were shy in the interviews, I felt it was easier for them to open up as the interview progressed. There could be an underlying loyalty towards their parents during the interview even though no one stated this directly, and maybe the participants were hesitant to criticize their parents too much.

4.11 Analysing data

The analysing of the data started during the first interview when I found which topics and issues were prominent. Researching is a process that develops in every stage and I think the

analysis started before I sat down with the transcriptions. I began by transcribing the interviews and connecting them with my "field notes" where I had written down my personal thoughts about the interviews immediately after finishing. Boyden & Ennew (1997) argue that analysis and triangulation involves fitting the pieces together and to try as best as possible to cancel out the biases. After transcribing my data it was important to find similarities and differences, and to do this I used color coding to make it easier to distinguish different themes. When one look at different themes that emerges in the data gathered it is often called cross-sectional analysis (Thagaard, 2011). My focus was both on finding similarities and differences in the interviews and color coding was an efficient way of starting the analysis.

When analysing the interviews I marked the unsaid parts such as laughter and long pauses to see if this was important in contextualizing the interview. Sullivan (2012) suggests writing a summary of the most important issues in each interview to get an overview of the similarities and differences in the findings, which was very helpful[23]. Through the analysing process it is important to be reflexive and focus on my own role as a researcher (Mason, 2002). During the writing up of the analysis I found support in previous research and theories that supported or contrasted my findings. Secondary data is also important in the analysis, and reading the data critically as one would with one's own data (Boyden & Ennew, 1997). I was critical towards the secondary data and made sure to investigate if the data was contradicted in other research.

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[23] As my interviews was conducted in Norwegian I had to translate the quotes I wanted to use in my theses. As all the participants spoke a Norwegian dialect, the translation is not necessarily directly translated word by word, but rather in the best way possible to bring out the meaning of the quotes in the best way.

5 Information, preparation and placement

In this chapter I will focus on my first research question. I will start by discussing the preparations by Bufetat and the Child Welfare Services prior to the placement and the guidelines they have in terms of information and preparation. Further the foster parents and children's experiences of the information, preparation and follow-up by the Child Welfare Services will be discussed, and the findings will be compared with the guidelines and practice. Lastly I will discuss if foster parents and the biological children experienced the follow-up as sufficient. All my analysis and discussions are influenced by "the new sociology of children and childhood" where children are viewed as active social participants in the society (James, 2009).

5.1 Preparation by Bufetat and the Child Welfare Services

In this part I will explain Bufetat's and the Child Welfare Service's role prior to the placement, and discuss what they state as important issues. Both guidelines and the interviews with the informants will be discussed and analysed.

As explained earlier, Bufetat is in charge of recruiting new foster homes. Bufetat will as a part of the PRIDE-course conduct three home visits with the foster family and might meet the biological children during these visits, but they have no guidelines which specify that they are required to talk to them. The informant from Bufetat stated that they encourage parents to involve their biological children in the process, and focus on the importance of talking to them to create an understanding about fostering, and listen to their thoughts. During the PRIDE-course the foster parents create a "life book" which has a segment where their children can express their thoughts about fostering and their opinions on why some children must live in foster homes. As the last section of the PRIDE-course, family and close friends are invited to listen to a panel debate where biological children of foster parents are represented, this is the only time the biological children are physically involved in the course. Data shows that Bufetat has no specific guidelines in terms of having one-to-one conversations with the biological children. In my study, four out of five families did not attend the PRIDE-course prior to the placement, but three of the families attended the course after the placement.

5.1.1 Matching

In a note by NOVA[24] (n.d.) where they suggest more research on foster families, the matching of foster parents and foster children are questioned in terms of what type of criteria the matching is based on. It is argued that matching is a non-specific term that is used in the process to find a suitable foster child for the family, and it is unclear which conditions regarding the foster parents and the foster child that are emphasized. It is identified that matching can be a term to describe external characteristics such as cultural background, age of the foster child and the biological children and disabilities the foster child might have. Furthermore, the importance of further systematically analyze in what way matching is conducted to refine and make the matching criteria clearer is a prominent issue (NOVA note, n.d.). The informant from Bufetat explained that foster parents should describe their children in the best way possible to get an insight in their strengths and challenges in order to find a foster child that is suitable for the family. Although one might assume that parents know their children well, one might question why Bufetat choose not to talk directly with the children to get their viewpoint. As illustrated in my data, the criterion that is emphasized in the matching process varies and differs in network placement compared to placement where parents attend the PRIDE-course.

When Bufetat find a home for the foster child, the Child Welfare Service do a home visit where they assess the foster parents' and biological children's resources to see if it is a good match. The quote below explains how the informant from the Child Welfare Services views their responsibility and the parents' responsibility as divided;

> *Will they (the foster parents) manage the job with this child, and if we find they will, then the foster family would have to clarify this with their own children prior to this.* (Informant from the Child Welfare Service).

The informant further stated that the biological children in the family would have to agree to foster before they get assigned the home from Bufetat. Again there is a division between which agency is responsible in the different stages of the process. She further explained that after the foster child moves in, they talk to the biological children about their experiences of having a foster child in the family, they ask if there are big changes in the family life and generally ask if everything is going well. The informant experienced that biological children

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[24] Norsk institutt for forskning om oppvekst, velferd og aldring. English: Norwegian social research

in most cases convey that everything is fine, and explained that the parents are responsible of clarifying the fostering with their own children, but did not express to what extent they could support the parents in this process.

5.1.2 Age

Age was mentioned both by the informant from Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service, and the matching process was connected to the age of the biological children in some cases. The informant from Bufetat stated this about matching and age;

> *…When we consider which family that would be most suitable for a child, we think a lot about how the biological children are and how the foster child is. During the PRIDE course we ask parents to describe their children and what they (children) tolerate… in principle we try not to place children in the same age as the biological children, but we do have some network placements and in these cases the foster child and the biological children might be in the same class at school, so network placements are different.* (Informant from Bufetat).

As the quote above shows, age is a central issue when parents attend the PRIDE course prior to the placement, but is stated as a minor issue when Bufetat arrange network placements. In network placements the foster child and the foster family have a connection to each other, they might for instance be related or their children go to the same school. Bufetat stated that network placements are different compared to other placements, and there might be different criteria that is more important than age in these cases. The Foster Home Regulation[25] states that family and close network should always be investigated to examine if there are appropriate foster parents that the foster child is familiar with (BLD, 2013c). When Bufetat stated that age is less important in network placements, they might find that a feeling of familiarity and safety weights heavier than considering age as the main factor.

When a case has been raised in Fylkesnemda and the Child Welfare Services get the responsibility for a child, they contact Bufetat in order to find a family for the foster child if a relative or network placement is not applicable. I asked the informant from the Child Welfare Service about the evaluation they did of the foster family before the placement;

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[25] Norwegian: Forskrift om fosterhjem

We primarily want the foster child to be the youngest in the family, this is also because it should not affect the biological children in the family. (Informant from the Child Welfare Service).

As Bufetat, also the Child Welfare Service mentioned age as a factor. Bufetat stated that the principle where the foster child should be the youngest in the family is something they have focused less on in later years. This is both because of the lack of foster families and because they have experienced that a youth can fit well into a family with younger children. The Child Welfare Service relies on Bufetat to recruit families they can match with a foster child and cooperates with them to find a suitable family for the child. Although Bufetat considered age as a less prominent issue compared to the Child Welfare Service, this might indicate that the views on this issue vary according to different caseworkers.

5.1.3 Children's voices

Children's voices were an important topic both in terms of the guidelines for the foster homes and in the interviews with Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service. Firstly I will look at what the guidelines state and then go further into what the informants described about their practice.

Before the placement is finalized, the foster parent's sign a Foster Home Agreement[26] which describes the obligations and responsibility of the Child Welfare Services, guidance and follow-up and termination of the agreement among other themes. There is only one sentence about the biological children in the Foster Home Agreement between the foster parents and the Child Welfare Services:

In case the foster parents have biological children and the foster parents wish, the Child Welfare Services should have separate conversation with the siblings and the foster parents. (BLD, 2010, p. 6).

This quotation in the Foster Home Agreement is in regards to what information the biological children should get about the foster child. This document illuminates the foster parents' authority, and they should decide whether it is necessary that the Child Welfare Services have

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[26] Norwegian: Fosterhjemsavtalen

separate conversations with their children. There is nothing in the Foster Home Agreement that includes the biological children in the follow-up process or when the supervisor meets with the foster child after the placement, but the guidelines states that when foster parents have biological children the training of the foster home should include them (BLD, 2013a). Both Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service stated in the interviews that the biological children were an important factor both prior and after the placement.

Mayall (2002) points out that adults views of children and childhood contains a great deal of power, and this power affect the ideologies and practices regarding childhood. This identifies the importance of children's right to be heard because adults have power in determining which social positions and opportunities children have in the society (James, 2009). My data shows that one foster mother had to ask the Child Welfare Service to talk to her daughter about challenging issues after the placement. Although this situation happened after the placement it is an example of how the parents are responsible if they want contact with the Child Welfare Service.

Haugen and Rantalaiho (2010) researched children's role in the mediation after parents separation, and found that the power parents have in defining what is best for their children was very prominent. Children's right to be heard is often a right that is left up to their parents, and one might question if the parents definition is the accurate one (Haugen & Rantalaiho, 2010). There are different ways of conceptualizing power, it can be perceived as an object or a possession, or rather as a relational factor than does not operate independently. Power can be viewed as a power of place, how and where children are situated in society. Focault argues that whenever power is exercised there will be resistance and adults influence children whether they are supportive or controlling (Punch, Bell, Costello & Ponelli, 2007). The Child Welfare Services is in charge of parts of the fostering process and will in these cases possess a great deal of power, but the parents do as well. Children and young people manage power relations in terms of their opportunities and constrains depending on their physical and relational environment (Punch, Bell, Costello & Ponelli, 2007). Children and citizenship is also a perspective worth mentioning, as citizenship involves individuals' status, rights and participation (Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum, 2010). Defining children's citizenship involves defining their position in society and Kjørholt (2004) found that the citizenship debate often revolves around the difference between children and adults in terms of their rights and ability to participate. Through their work, the Child Welfare Services have a part in defining

children's position in the society and can in the fostering process affect children's participation by involving them to a large or small degree.

When foster parents attend the PRIDE-course after the placement the structure of the course is different and the biological children do not have the opportunity to attend the panel debate. It was important to explore why such a difference occur, and the informant from Bufetat stated;

> *When the placement is done, the parents have already made a decision on behalf of their children. In the course after the placement the focus is on laws and information about the Child Welfare Services.* (Informant from Bufetat).

The wording is worth debating as she stated that the parents have made a decision on behalf of their children. Højer (2001) found that the final decision about fostering was made by the parents and the parents expressed that this was the way it should be. If we look at article 12 in the UNCRC, which states that children have a right to have a say in all matters that affect them, they also have a right to voice their opinion in family situations (Unicef, 2013). On one side it might sound like Bufetat believe that children's voices are less important after the placement, but as they are not responsible for the follow-up, the responsibility is delegated to the Child Welfare Services. Children might achieve a greater understanding of what fostering involves after the placement and a panel debate[27] similar to the one in the PRIDE-course where they are able to ask questions and hear experiences from other biological children in foster families could be equally important after the placement.

It is questioned to what extent research based knowledge is used when working with foster homes. NOVA requests more research about the type of theory and conceptual understanding used in the Child Welfare Services and Bufetat, and questions how much of the knowledge is based on local experiences (NOVA note, n.d.). Haugen and Rantalaiho (2010) found that practice in the mediation is often interpreted and handled in different ways depending on the subjective assessment and local practices. One might argue whether it is good practice to allow each individual case worker decide what kind of follow-up the family and particularly the biological children get (NOVA note, n.d.). One might argue that it would be difficult to consider the biological children's needs for follow-up and support if the representatives from

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[27] See more on page 11-12

the Child Welfare Service have little contact with them. Although only one representative from Bufetat and one from the Child Welfare Service participated in my study, the children's experiences will show differences in the practice, which I will come back to later.

In Højer & Nordenfors' (2006) study of biological children in the foster family, several of the children expressed that they had no say in terms of being asked by the social worker about fostering. When children express they have no say, one might debate whether they are capable of using their agency in these situations. Robson, Bell & Klocker (2007) argues that agency is both the capacities children have and how confident they feel in terms of using their agency. Children's agency is affected by the understanding of childhood (Mayall, 2002). James (2009) explains that all children have agency, but their ability and opportunity to exercise the agency might vary according to different factors in their family and society. One might say that how the foster parents' and the agencies' involved in the process view children is important in terms of how children are able to exercise their agency. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) argues that uncertainty about how much information children should get might be an explanation for why they had little or no say in terms of discussing fostering with the social worker. This is also illustrated in my data where the biological children expressed little or no contact with the Child Welfare Service or Bufetat prior to the placement.

5.1.4 Network placements

Havik (2013) identified that it was quite common to be either an emergency home[28] or respite care[29] prior to network placements. An issue in Norway is a general lack of foster homes, so when Bufetat finds a foster family that is suitable in the network, this might be regarded as more important compared to other criteria. One might argue that the fostering process could be different for the biological children when they already know the foster child before he moves in. The participants were asked about network placements and knowing the foster child prior to the placement, and one of the girls stated;

> *I think it has been easier when someone we did not know moved in because you sort of learn to know them like siblings.* (Rachel, 17 years).

Rachel had experienced both knowing the foster child before the placement and having someone unknown move into the family. She focused on the relationship with the foster child

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[28] Norwegian: Beredskapshjem
[29] Norwegian: Avlastningshjem

and explained that it was easier to connect as siblings when the foster child was someone they did not know. One might question if it is more difficult for the biological children to express doubts about fostering when it is someone they know who will move in. The biological children could feel a close relationship with the foster child before he moves in, and the term relatedness (Smart, 2007) is relevant in these situations. Smart (2007) points out that individuals can relate to others without being related by blood or married into a family, which can be the situation in foster families. In cases where the biological children already know the foster child they might have a certain relationship with them and Smart (2007) argues that it is difficult to express negative feelings about an on-going relationships. This might indicate that the biological children find it difficult to express their views on fostering if they already have a relationship with the foster child prior to the placement. One might question how the parents and Bufetat can make it easier for the biological children to have a voice in these situations, especially when there is a connection or some sort of relationship between the biological children and the foster child before the placement.

5.2 Parents' experience of preparation

To explore if the children and their parents experienced the preparation prior to the fostering in the same way, it was important to get the parents' perspective on the process as well. Foster parents that attend the PRIDE-course prior to the placement, have home visits by Bufetat. The foster mother who met with Bufetat prior to the placement, explained the meeting like this;

When they came here and presented which child that should come here, two of my biological children were home and they talked a little bit with them, not like…I do not remember exactly what they said but it was something about the foster child might demand a lot of attention in the beginning and things like that. (Jane, foster mother).

Jane experienced that Bufetat briefly spoke to her biological children in this meeting, but they did not talk to them alone. As the fostering process for this family went well, Jane did not have any objections in terms of how Bufetat handled their situation. On the other hand she acknowledged that if the situation had been different, the need for more information and involvement from Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service could be necessary. All foster families have different needs, both because families are unique in the first place and because

the foster children are different. Some placements turn out to be an easy transition for the family members, and other placements have various difficulties.

In one of the foster families a close relative moved in as a foster child and the foster father expressed this about the Child Welfare Services involvement in their case;

> *They (the Child Welfare Services) kind of did not want Sophie to hear what we were talking about the first times they were here…so Sophie was downstairs or she left the house, so they did not talk to her…but I think maybe there was a need for it.* (Gary, foster father).

This quote could indicate that the Child Welfare Services focus on the parents rather than on the biological children in the family. In this particular family they had the opportunity to talk to the daughter, but focused on having a conversation with the foster parents alone. Several of the foster parents expressed that the Child Welfare Services played a minor role in the preparation of their children.

A study by Bufdir (2011) found that foster parents focused on courses, training and preparations as important prior to the placement. One might assume that as foster parents found preparation important, the biological children would appreciate a more established preparation as well. All the foster parents in my study stated that their biological children were an important focus prior to the placement and further said their opinions weighed heavily in terms of whether they chose to foster or not. The foster mother in the family who attended the PRIDE-course prior to the placement stated this;

> *We were pretty careful in terms of the child we wanted for our family because we wanted her to fit in, and because the boys had each other and our daughter was kind of alone, we wanted a girl that was younger than our daughter.* (Jane, foster mother).

Jane and her family focused on finding a foster child that could be suitable for their situation and both gender and age was important for them. Although it was the family's initiative that the foster child was the youngest, this was also recommended by the Child Welfare Services at the time.

Some of the parents talked to their children about why some children have to live in foster homes, this was also a part of the preparation in terms of how children can be "different" when they have experienced difficult childhoods. One of the mothers stated;

When we attended the PRIDE-course we talked a little bit with them about why children have to live in a foster home and things like that, and we talked quite a lot about if they thought we could be a foster home, and they agreed that it could be fine. (Jane, foster mother).

Information about why children have to live in foster homes can be important for the biological children in terms of understanding more about the foster child. In relation to involving children in deciding process, one mother stated:

When we were asked to be a foster home, it was a bit up to them (biological children) if they wanted that, because we had had her here for a while in periods and we felt it was up to them what they wanted. Two said yes straight away and the other one was more hesitant. (Anna, foster mother).

The parents seemed to take their children's opinions very seriously and enabled them to have a voice in the decision, which one might say is a platitude, but at the same time parents rarely ask their children if they want more biological siblings. One of the families had previously had other foster children in their family, and the foster mother explained that her children were an important part of the decision process;

Our children have been important all along, they have all participated in deciding if we will go for another "round" or if we are finished. And I really admire them, and I have told them that many times as well, because the first time was really hard, it was hard for all of us. (Mia, foster mother).

Mia acknowledged that it was difficult for everyone the first time and she praised her children for wanting to do it again. She recognized that it was a decision that affected the whole family, and might even cause difficult times for the family. Without no one expressed it directly, the underlying tone was that the parents felt they had discussed fostering more with their biological children than the children themselves expressed. This might imply that there

could be a difference in how adults and children express themselves, and as the parents had talked to their children about this subject, their children might not be that engaged in the conversation. However parents might feel they have discussed it more with their children compared to what the children feel, and maybe parents are more concerned about the fostering issue than their children. Children who are capable of expressing their own views should be given weight according to their age and maturity (Unicef, 2013). Bufetat stated that if the biological children did not want a foster child in the family, the family should not foster, and this underlines that someone need to give the children an opportunity to voice their opinions. Someone have to discover what the children think about fostering, whether it is their parents or a representative from Bufetat or the Child Welfare Services.

Both parents and children are unique and some families are used to discussing and listening to each other's point of view to a great extent, and some families might not. It could be difficult for parents to prepare their children for how the fostering will turn out when they are inexperienced with it themselves. Hart (1992) developed a diagram which described children's participation in research, but it can also relate to participation in other situations. He argues that children can participate in various ways and to a various extent. Højer (2001) found that it was more difficult for younger children to understand the information they got about challenges with the foster child, they rather focused on getting a new playmate. Her research discovered that the children's reaction varied, some of the children were positive towards the foster child and some were more negative. When preparing and discussing fostering with their children, it might be hard for the parents to know if everyone feel they are heard because some children could be very talkative and some more quiet. And how do we know if the children are honest when their parents ask their opinion? One might draw the lines to the girl in my study who chose not to answer about fostering although she really did not want the foster child to move in. Smart (2007) argues that children are loyal towards their parents and it is difficult for them to criticize them without feeling disloyal. This could also be an issue in the interview setting where children are careful of criticizing their parents about the fostering issues, although none of the children stated it specifically, all of them talked about their parents in a positive manner.

5.3 Children's experience of parents' preparation

Four of the families in my study were either emergency homes or respite care before they were foster homes, so the children and the rest of the family had to some degree gotten used to the fact that another child occasionally lived in their home. The participants expressed different experiences in terms of how their parents prepared them before the foster child moved in. All of them said that they had to some extent talked about it prior to the placement, but in some families the placement happened so fast that it was difficult for the parents to have enough time to discuss it in-depth with their children. In one of the families the placement happened very suddenly and the foster mother explained;

..It was a sudden placement so the Child Welfare Services came to our home after school and talked to them (her biological children) and they have had one conversation with my two oldest children after that. (Susan, foster mother).

In terms of the parents' preparation, Gina who is Susan's daughter expressed her parent's preparation like this;

It would have been nice to know it a bit earlier, it would have, but we did know her already though. (Gina, 14 years).

This quote illuminates that time might be an essential factor in the preparation of the biological children prior to the placement. When the placement happens suddenly it seems like the biological children have less opportunity to be prepared both by their parents and the Child Welfare Services. The data shows that the biological children talked to their parents about fostering, but none of them elaborated on how much they discussed it and to what extent they were able to ask probing questions about what fostering involved. However all of the children expressed that they did participate in the decision. In relation to how much the parents prepared their children prior to the placement, one of the boys stated;

We did not talk a lot about it. Mum told me that there was a foster child moving in and then she told me why, when and approximately how long she would live here. She told me where she came from and which school she went to. (Tom, 15 years).

Larsen (2008) questions how easy it is for children to say no in these processes, and if it is an option that children could disagree with their parents? Even if the children agree to fostering, how much information do they have prior to the placement, and is the information sufficient in order to understand what fostering involves? Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that age was a factor regarding how involved the biological children were in the fostering process. Older children felt they had the option to voice their opinions to a larger extent than younger children, and some of the youngest children said they were too young to have a say in the matter. In my study the age of the participants varied, some of them had been fostering for several years, and some of the children stated that they did not remember much of the discussion prior to the placement as it was such a long time ago. For some of the families the placement happened recently and they had a clearer memory regarding their participation in the process. Children participate in family life in various ways, but they are viewed as having the capacity to be involved and participate (Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal, 2000). Three of the children stated that they agreed to the placement and one girl expressed that she did not give a clear answer, but she was against that the foster child should move in. This girl was not asked by Bufetat, only by her parents, and one might question if Bufetat should have been more actively involved when children are in doubt prior to the placement.

Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that 63% of the children in their study felt they had a say in the decision about fostering. If 63% participation is a sufficient number could be debated, as all children have the right to participate in family matters that affect them, but at the same time one might assume that some children are not as interested, and as some of the children in their study argued, they felt they were too young to have a say. Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum (2010) argue that in order to create more openness in the Child Welfare Service there is a need for more user participation so the individuals can be heard, although this is aimed at for instance foster children, it is also relevant for other family members in the foster family.

As there are no guidelines in terms of what information biological children should get prior to the placement, the parents' responsibility in terms of discussing and informing their children about the foster child is even greater. However parents might be restricted in terms of how much information they are able to share with their children, because some information is confidential by law (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). This could lead to difficulties after the placement where the biological children experience challenging behaviour and their parents are not able to tell the whole story about why the foster child behaves in this manner. The

Child Welfare Service decides how much information the foster parents should get about the foster child and they advise the foster parents about how much information their children should get (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). One of the foster mothers admitted that there had been some challenges in the family in relation to unknown information about the foster child, but she acknowledged that there was some information that even the Child Welfare Services could not know prior to the placement;

Yes we have to be honest and say that it has been (challenging), because they carry a baggage that could be difficult to understand, and it does not show all at once, it is more like unwrapping a gift and you never come further than the next gift and the next paper, you never reach the end of it, and the oldest (of the biological children) have to understand this. There are many considerations and there are some reactions which they are not used to which can be very intense and difficult to deal with. (Susan, foster mother).

There is a balance between the information the Child Welfare Services can give the biological children and the confidentiality in terms of the foster child and its biological family. In some cases like the quote above underlines, none other than the foster child knows the whole story. It is difficult to know how the new family practice will change after the foster child moves in, although the family should be prepared for changes in their everyday lives.

5.4 Children's experience of Bufetat's and the Child Welfare Services' preparation

It was important to explore how involved the Child Welfare Services were in the preparation process according to the biological children, and they were encouraged to explain about their meetings with the Child Welfare Service.

All of the participants in my study, who were children, either answered that they did not remember if the Child Welfare Services had talked to them prior to the placement or that they knew they had not. There is a clear gap between the biological children's experience of conversations with the Child Welfare Services and the practice the Child Welfare Services stated they had in terms of this issue. One girl expressed that she was not allowed to participate in the conversation with the Child Welfare Services when they came to her house;

They talked to my father and my stepmother and when I came home from school I was asked to go downstairs. (Sophie, 14 years).

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Later in the interview Sophie explained that the Child Welfare Service came to their house after the foster child moved out;

They were here when I came home from school and I was able to talk to them, they asked me how everything had been and things like that. (Sophie, 14 years).

This quote underlines the importance of children's voices and that they could be important informants in terms of challenging and positive aspects regarding the fostering experience. The other participants also explained a lack of information and conversations with the Child Welfare Services, this does not correspond with the answers the informant from the Child Welfare Services gave. One could question if there should be specific guidelines in terms of the follow-up by the biological children to avoid that the cases are dependent on what each representative from the Child Welfare Service decides to do in each individual case. According to article 12 in the UNCRC, all children should be able to voice their opinions in all matters concerning them (Unicef, 2013). Kjørholt & Lidèn (2004) argues that children and youth are to some extent given a voice in matters that affect their lives, but at the same time the extent of participation is unclear. This is also illustrated in my data where the biological children had different experiences in terms of to which extent they participated in the preparation by the Child Welfare Service.

Listening to children and their participation in research has been more prominent in the child and childhood research the later years, but which status do children have in the Norwegian society? Stang (2007) explains that Western societies have financial and political opportunities to facilitate good childhoods by prioritizing children in an economic, cultural and political way. Children are developing mentally, emotionally and physiologically and can be viewed as vulnerable, but this does not imply that children should have less rights than adults in areas where children and adults are quite similar (Stang, 2007). The view of professionals working with children is important in these matters. If they perceive children as vulnerable and unable to make decisions about their own lives it might affect the way children are seen and heard. All adults that work with children are different and their views will not be similar in all cases, but this underlines the importance of guidelines and laws so children are able to have support in these matters.

Making sure that families have freedom of choice has been a central issue in the last few years and the choices parents make are assumed to be good for the children, but this makes children's situation vulnerable. In conflict between parents best interest and children's best interest there seems to be a change towards considering children's best interest as most valid (Collin-Hansen, 2012). We know that parents make decisions on behalf of their children and in some cases they might have to because children are too young or it is in their best interest even if they might disagree. By assuming that parents make decisions that is best for their children, do we acknowledge children's agency? There are limits to how adults can situate themselves into children's situation because adults cannot be children again, but a certain understanding of children and childhood is important when trying to understand children's perspective (Stang, 2007). It was important to illustrate how Bufetat viewed their own role and the parents' role prior to the placement, and this is how the informant answered;

...we encourage the parents to include their children in this process and that they talk to them along the way about what they think and things like that, so we try to do that... (Informant from Bufetat).

This quote focuses on the parents' responsibility in the process without focusing on Bufetat's responsibility in terms of the biological children. The loyalty children have towards their parents might prevent them from expressing challenging aspects of the process. Children's right to have a say is also linked to the best interest of the child, and this might involve protecting children in terms of what is best in that particular situation (Stang, 2007). This emphasise the balance between children's voices and parents responsibility in terms of protecting their children.

Research about children within the Child Welfare Services shows that children in many cases are not heard and might not even be asked about their views (Stang, 2007). Even though this is research on children, such as foster children, one might assume it is applicable to children who are more indirectly involved as well, such as biological children in the foster family. Stang (2007) suggests some reasons behind these findings and argues that there might be an ambivalent view on children and childhood, lack of trust in children and viewing children as immature. Perceiving children as immature beings was common before the 1980s but James (2009) argues that children are more and more viewed as active members and social actors in the society. There seems to be a difference in opinion, and one might point out that children

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can be viewed differently in different situations. Stang (2007) found that there could be different opinions in the field that works with children and they might be reluctant to take in the reality of children's issues and experiences, some also felt they needed to protect the child. These findings underline that there could be various reasons why the Child Welfare Services have little contact with the biological children. At the same time the informant from the Child Welfare Services stated that they had conversations with the biological children.

As children's experiences, knowledge is also to a large degree controlled by adults. Adults might think they know more than children and if all information goes through adults first, the information children get would be second hand (Lee, 2001). Most of the biological children stated that the Child Welfare Services had talked to their parents more than they had talked to them, and in these cases one might say that the information is second hand as it goes through their parents first. In these cases the information might change and this will be the same the other way around, if the Child Welfare Services go through the parents to find out how their children are doing, they might get different information compared to if they talk to the children directly. One girl stated that;

> *We came home from school and then she (the foster child) sat in the sofa and someone from the Child Welfare Services was here and we were told that she (the foster child) should move in and live here permanently.* (Gina, 14 years).

As pointed out by the Child Welfare Service, children should have a say in the fostering process, as illustrated in the quotation above this is not the case for all children. There is a difference between "being told" and "being part" of a discussion where the biological children are able to express their point of view. When Gina explained that the decision was made when she came home, it might indicate that there is little opportunity for participation. As Gina expressed, the placement happened suddenly which again points out that time might be an issue in network placements.

As the quotation below illuminates, some children are more uncertain about the fostering process and in some cases they do not want a foster child in the family. Lena already knew her foster sister as a friend and they were in the same class at school. This is how she explained the question regarding fostering;

It was difficult to choose, I do not really think I wanted to…but I did not answer at all so it happened anyway. (Lena, 15 years).

Lena expressed that she did not want the foster child to move in, but as she was hesitant to answer when her parents asked, they decided to try it. In general terms one might question if children and young people have enough time and information in terms of giving a valid and thoughtful answer about fostering. In this particular family, the mother stated that her daughter was very quiet when they discussed the placement and she acknowledged that the process was more difficult than anticipated. If one compares this quote with Gina's quote above, there are two examples where adults make decisions on behalf of children.

5.5 Child Welfare Services' role after the placement

In this part I will look more closely at the follow-up by the Child Welfare Services after the placement and how the biological children and the foster parents experienced the follow-up. I will start by focusing on the children's experiences and then I have divided the foster parent's experiences into challenging and positive aspects.

5.5.1 Children's experiences of the follow-up

The Child Welfare Services are in charge of the follow-up of the foster family, where a caseworker will come to visit at least four times a year and a supervisor[30] is assigned to make sure the foster child is doing well in the family. One of the children said that the Child Welfare Services had never talked to her and she had not heard of the role of the supervisor. The Child Welfare Services should have the opportunity to inform the family about the different roles they have and the role of the supervisor even though the biological children might never meet her. The quote below shows how Rachel experienced the contact with the Child Welfare Service:

I have only talked with them once that I can remember and that was between the first who lived here and before someone new came. They were here and talked to me then, but that was the only time they talked to me. (Rachel, 17 years).

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[30] Norwegian: Tilsynsfører

Rachel had experienced different foster children in her family over several years and she expressed that she only remembered the Child Welfare Service talking to her once. One might question if this follow-up is sufficient in terms of listening to all the members of the family. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that the biological children expressed that they to a small extent participated in the meetings with the social worker, as illuminated in my findings.

It was important to focus on how the biological children experienced the follow-up from the Child Welfare Services, and if they felt that the follow-up was sufficient in terms of getting help and answers if they had any questions. Rachel was one of the girls who had reflected a lot on the Child Welfare Service's role in their family, and she stated;

> *I think it is a bit bad[31] at least if it is that way for all foster families …we have not had very difficult cases but I feel it would be good to tell them (the Child Welfare Service) how we feel as well…my parents might not always pick up on everything that we children do and because of this it would be nice to talk to them so they can hear from different sources.* (Rachel, 17 years).

This quote identifies that children can experience both difficult and unexpected situations with the foster child, where they in some cases might not want to tell their parents. In one of the families the foster mother explained that her daughter was threatened to silence by the foster child. The foster child confided in her daughter, but did not want the foster parents to learn what she had said. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that secrets were an issue in some foster families, where the foster child told secrets that the biological children were not allowed to tell others. These secrets could be information about the foster child's background which they did not want the foster parents to know about, but the study showed that most of the biological children chose to tell their parents anyway (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). Only one of the families in my study stated that secrets were an issue and the biological children in the other families mostly conveyed a good and open relationship with their parents, which might indicate that they would find it easy to forward potential secrets to their parents.

Including the whole family in decision and changes regarding the foster child could be important, so the biological children are prepared. Gina explained that she had little contact with the Child Welfare Service and wished they had been better at giving her information;

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[31] Norwegian: Dumt

I would not mind if they (the Child Welfare Service) had talked to us and explained more about what is happening, because suddenly things happen without our knowledge, we do not talk to them at all. (Gina, 14 years).

The Child Welfare Service should inform the family if there are changes in the foster child's situation but sometimes it might not be sufficient to only inform the foster parents because changes could also affect the rest of the family. A foster family are not in all cases free to decide their own boundaries because foster parents are employees that take care of a foster child, and this makes the family more "open" and less private in some contexts (Højer, 2001). One of the foster mothers had an example regarding this situation;

..because there is so much more that follows you know, your home is..everyone comes by either the caseworker or the Child Welfare Services, parents or siblings, so there are times where they (her children) think there are too many people coming by "is someone coming again" (pretending to be one of the children). (Susan, foster mother).

White & Klein (2008) state that one involuntarily belongs to a family and a family is a relatively private sphere, which is something the world around the family accepts. Susan explained that there is not only the foster child that is a consideration but also other instances and family members, and this might lead to a lack of home privacy.

The data shows that the informant from the Child Welfare Services focused on the biological children in the family, but when Gina was asked about the Child Welfare Service she answered like this;

They do not really talk to us, they have not talked to the youngest two at all…we usually go downstairs so they can sit in the living room. (Gina, 14 years).

The recurrent answer from the biological children was that they had little contact and conversations with the Child Welfare Services. Two of the children stated that the follow-up was most needed right after the foster child moved in, and it was fine if they phased it down after a while. Some of the children felt satisfied with the follow-up because things were going so well and they had nothing to talk to them about. On the other hand they stated that if the

situation were different they would like the opportunity to talk to the Child Welfare Services by their initiative. Slettebø & Seim (2007) argue that both parents and children should have more power and influence towards the Child Welfare Services than today, and that user participation should be possible through all stages of a process. To have real influence children needs necessary information so they can express their opinions both verbally and written (Oppedal, 2007). One might say that there is a difference regarding who it is that initiates the contact, whether the Child Welfare Service contacts the children or if it is the other way round. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) identified that there was an ambivalent relationship with the social worker. On one side she was a reminder that the foster child is not a "normal" family member, but on the other side she was a support. My data showed that there was little contact between the Child Welfare Services and the biological children, but there are variations in terms of their experiences of the necessity of the follow-up as well.

Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that ¾ of the respondents in their research were satisfied with the contact they had with the social service, but the study showed that as they became older they wanted more contact. In my study the oldest girls reflected around the fact that they would like more contact with the Child Welfare Services, and the importance of expressing their point of view in case there were issues their parents did not know about. James, Jenks & Prout (1998) argue that children are the group in society with less possession of power. There might be a balance between protecting children on one hand and participation on the other hand that is difficult to manage both for the Child Welfare Services and the parents.

5.5.2 Parents' views on positive aspects of the follow-up

One of the foster mothers expressed that the follow-up had been sufficient because the foster child was normal functioning and fitted well into the family. Smart (2007) argues that family is generally defined to a degree of relatedness and a degree of co-residence, but people can also relate to others with no biological bonds. It has been a development in family theories where the focus has shifted towards how wider social forces affect the understanding of family life. Some families might find it easier than others to foster and some foster families might meet unexpected situations that they had not prepared for.

In one of the families the foster mother explained that the Child Welfare Services had some conversations with her children after the placement. She stated that her daughter was more interested in these conversations compared to her son, and suggested that it might be a difference between boys and girls in terms of how interested they are. Højer & Nordenfors

(2006) found that care was more prominent among the girls compared to the boys in the family. Furthermore that the relationships were better if the biological child was a girl and the foster child a boy compared to the other way round. This will be discussed further in the next chapter. This family had been fostering for several years and because they have had foster children moving in and out they had met with different case workers, some of them had arranged meetings with the biological children and some came by more casually. All in all, the foster mother was very pleased with the follow-up and she stated;

I do not think our children think about the fact that they have a voice in this really...we as foster parents often imprint our own children with "that is the way it is, we just have to deal with it" and that is not bad, but I do not think they understand that they have a say. (Mia, foster mother).

Children's voices came up as an issue, and whether they know they have a voice in the process and if they are involved enough to want to have a say. One foster father said that a representative from the Child Welfare Services was at their house about two or three times, and he had expressed that he wanted them to come if there were any negative messages they had to be informed about. He further stated that they thought they had little follow-up but in retrospect, after talking to other foster families, they realised they had quite a lot in comparison with others.

5.5.3 Parents' views on challenging aspects of the follow-up
The supervisor's job is to make sure that the foster child is doing well, and one foster mother stated that the supervisor had never talked to her biological children and hardly to her and her husband either. One might argue that the supervisor could get a better insight in the family life if he talked to the biological children and the foster parents. The guidelines in terms of the supervisor states nothing about the biological children in the foster home and the main priority is to ensure that the foster child receive adequate care in the foster home (BLD, 2006). As the supervisor has no responsibility in terms of the foster family besides the foster child, it is up to the individual caseworker if they choose to talk to the biological children.

One foster mother explained that no one from the Child Welfare Services had talked to her biological daughter, neither prior to the placement or after. In this family, the foster parents

had asked the Child Welfare Service to talk to their daughter because they felt she might have difficulties with some issues concerning the foster child, but the daughter expressed that she did not want to talk to them. She further explained that the foster child had meetings with the supervisor, but her biological daughter had never met her because they met at another location. Even though this family expressed that the involvement from the Child Welfare Service concerning their daughter could be improved, they were satisfied that they tried their best to find solutions to help with a successful placement, although the foster parents felt they were running out of options. Most foster parents care about having a good relationship with the Child Welfare Service and they want to collaborate. It is argued that user participation is an important issue in the Child Welfare Services both in terms of children and adults and the user participation is not as good as desired (NOVA note, n.d.). The data from my interviews might indicate that the user participation varies, especially in terms of the biological children.

Susan explained that she had expressed a wish for the case worker to talk to her biological children because she knew they were told things they initially were too young for;

> *They (her biological children) have experienced quite a few episodes, because they are involved as well, as our oldest daughter has been the confidant and told stories about how it was for the foster child at home. We have asked if she can come to BUP[32]and have some conversations with them because she should be able to handle what she is told (by the foster child).* (Susan, foster mother).

Susan further explained that earlier when the foster child had visitation with her biological parents, a representative from the Child Welfare Services took her biological children to another room to play with them and read for them. She expressed that this was a good arrangement both because the foster child and her parents got some alone time but also because someone paid attention to her children. This arrangement was only in the beginning when the visitation happened at their home, but ceased when the foster child started visitation in her biological parents' home. In this situation the biological children had the opportunity to talk with someone outside the family about their situation, and at the same time have someone to give them attention, because the foster mother explained that it was a lot of fuzz when the biological parents came to visit;

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[32] BUP (Barne- og ungdomspsykiatrisk poliklinikk) English: Child- and youth psychiatry

She (the representative from the Child Welfare Service) was able to see them (her biological children) as well because there is a lot of focus on the foster child, it is like "now she has visitors again" and it is a big happening with bags of presents. (Susan, foster mother).

The importance of being seen and heard is prominent in these situations, the foster child gets a lot of attention from his biological parents and the Child Welfare Services, and the biological children might feel left out.

One of the foster fathers criticized the Child Welfare Services for not having prepared them enough regarding issues that could occur with other family members during a placement with a relative. Holtan (2002) researched foster children that lived with relatives and found that there could be an unspoken competition between the biological parents and the foster parents that went through the foster child. When the foster child expressed emotions and affiliation towards her biological parents, the foster parents might experience this as rejection. The guidelines states that the Child Welfare Services should as far as possible make sure that the families can deal with the double role and the possible loyalty conflict of being both related and foster family at the same time (BLD, 2013a). The foster father stated that the follow-up in terms of his daughter had not been good enough, because during the visits the Child Welfare Services had the opportunity to talk with her, but they chose not to do it.

5.6 Suggestions for better practice

As there were variations in the reflection around the follow-up from the Child Welfare Services, I asked if some of the participants had suggestions in terms of how things could be better. One girl stated this in terms of having someone to talk to, particularly in a group with other biological children;

For some it might be good, but I am not that found of talking so I do not think I would have joined, but it might be good for others. (Lena, 15 years).

One must respect that not all children will have interest in or even time to talk to someone, but the issue is whether the opportunity is presented, rather than forcing someone to do it. Several

of the children expressed that they would not mind if the Child Welfare Services asked about their opinions. One of the girls had really thought about how she could contribute to a better experience as a biological child in a foster family;

I had an idea a while ago, if we kind of take all the foster siblings in X (name of town) and arrange that we meet, only us, not everyone in the foster home, without parents and things like that, so we can meet someone in the same situation if you know what I mean..so we can talk to someone who knows what it is like, because it is not that easy talking to friends about it because they do not understand what it is like. (Rachel, 17 years).

Rachel had specific plans about how one could arrange such meetings and she reflected around how little the Child Welfare Services was involved in the biological children's experiences. She knew several foster families and she wanted to create an arena where they could meet and talk about their experiences in an environment where everyone could relate to each other's stories. One could draw on Smarts (2007) term relatedness, where children relate to someone in a similar situation even though they might not know each other previously and they can connect to the same issues. Rachel brings forward an idea about what can be done, but the practicalities of it might be more difficult in terms of where to meet, confidentiality and so on. Bufetat in Oslo have a meeting point for children whose parents have divorced, where they can meet and share their experiences and help each other. Children will in these meetings have the opportunity to talk about different issues concerning the divorce, for instance how they experience living in two different homes and how the divorce process took place (Bufetat, 2013). This is an example of an arrangement that is similar to what Rachel described, and some of the foster parents also suggested a meeting point for the children. A few of the parents argued that their children might benefit from a more similar course as the PRIDE-course, only for the biological children in the family. Furthermore, they suggested there could be a representative from the Child Welfare Services there to answer questions and lead the meeting;

I think it is equally important that the biological children met at a course or a gathering of some sort, I think that would be very beneficial. (Anna, foster mother).

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It would have been good if the biological children could come as well (to the PRIDE-course) to talk to someone in the same situation and talk to someone about their experiences, that would be good. (Gary, foster father).

The foster father suggested that the biological children should be able to have one-to-one conversations with the Child Welfare Services because of the loyalty they might feel towards their parents, and the fact that it is difficult for children to criticize their parents in their presence. These suggestions will be further discussed in my concluding remarks in chapter eight.

6 Everyday family practice in the foster family

In this chapter I will focus on my second research question which aims to explore the everyday life in a foster family, mainly from the biological children's point of view. I will illustrate the variations in how the families started fostering, positive aspects in a foster family and the relationship between the family members in general and between the biological children and the foster child in particular. The analysis in this chapter will draw on Smart's (2007) term relatedness and Morgan's (1996) definition of family practice.

6.1 Variations in the foster home placement

All the families in my study had different stories about how they started fostering, and to get a better insight in their experiences of the process, the foster parents were asked how it all started and their thoughts behind it. Further the children were asked how they experienced the first period after the placement and their thoughts around the process. One of the foster mothers who attended the PRIDE course prior to the placement stated;

> *...I do not know exactly...it is the thought of helping someone though.* (Jane, foster mother).

These thoughts were a common finding in a survey done by Bufdir, where foster parents were asked about the motivation behind fostering. The most common response was a desire to help someone who needed it, and this was one of the main reasons behind the interest of fostering (Bufdir, 2011). Although some of the foster parents in my study said they did not plan to be foster parents, some of them expressed that they had extra time and energy to help someone. This is illustrated in the following quotation where one of the mothers stated this;

> *We never came to the point where we wanted to be foster parents, we never came to that thought before it just happened.* (Mia, foster mother).

My data could indicate that the process of network placements might take less time because the foster parents already know the foster child. The foster parents still have to be approved, but this process seemed to take less time compared to foster parents who attended the PRIDE-course. The guidelines states that the Child Welfare Service should pay special attention towards giving the foster parents suitable guidance because the recruitment process often

occurs rapidly (BLD, 2013a). Bufdir's survey revealed that most foster parents and foster families knew the foster child prior to the placement (Bufdir, 2011), so one might assume that network placements are fairly common. Even though this is a small scale research, four out of five families knew the foster child before the placement. I asked the respective biological children about knowing the foster child prior to the placement and how the transition was when they moved in. Most of the children had fairly similar answers in terms of both discussing fostering before the placement and the experience after the foster child moved in, and "strange" was a common term;

It was a bit strange and then I thought…it was a bit strange because it is a new person who is living here and things like that, there are new things happening. (Sophie, 14 years).

I do not remember that much, but it was kind of strange when there was someone in my class and I knew them very well, it was strange that they suddenly would live with us. (Rachel, 17 years).

It was a bit strange, kind of not right; all of a sudden she would come here and live with us. (Gina, 14 years).

It was strange…well it is not that strange but..it was someone new in the family kind of and there were more talking. (Brian, 12 years).

I thought it was a little bit strange…I do not know, I thought it was different. (Frank, 14 years).

Most of the children described the situation as "strange" and that it was strange that someone new moved into their house. Morgan (1996) states that the home might be a source of identity and stability and when there are changes in the home this could threaten the balance between these two factors. The home is also notions of self and when a foster child moves in this notion of self might change. Furthermore, the home is something private and includes both private property and private space, which might both be affected when a foster child moves in to the house (Morgan, 1996). Rachel expressed that she believed it would be better if she did not know the foster child before she moved in, because it would be easier to define her relationship to the foster child as a sibling relationship. This could be a distinction that is

different for the biological children compared to their parents. Although parents know the foster child prior to the placement, they might have a more undefined relationship with them compared to their children. Haugen (2007) argues that there is often a difference between the adult perspective and the child perspective. It might not be an essential issue for the biological children to define their relationship with the foster child, but in some cases there might be a conflict of interest when you are in the same age, in the same class and living together. If strange is a negative or positive loaded word depends on how one choose to define it, but it was interesting that almost all of the children answered in a similar way and had equal experiences of the transition.

6.2 Children's experiences of positive changes in the family

Although fostering might have challenging aspects, I also wanted to discover if the biological children found if there were positive changes after the foster child moved in. Several of the children expressed that they had learned something about how other children grow up and how children's childhood affect their behaviour. One girl stated that;

The family changed, we have become much more patient with each other and we have learned a lot from the experience, but it is different, it is hard to remember how it was before as well. (Gina, 14 years).

Nordenfors (2006) found that biological children focused on tolerance, consideration and a new understanding of other peoples' situation, as positive features in fostering. This coincides well with the quote above, and some of the other children also expressed that they had learned something about different aspects of childhoods. The participants had very different experiences in terms of how long the foster child had lived with them, and this might have affected the answers of how they experienced changes in the family. Some of the children found it difficult to remember how the family life was before the foster child moved in, but it seemed as most of the families had conversations about the positive and the challenging issues of fostering.

In the interviews, the girls seemed to reflect more on learning outcomes than the boys. This might indicate that the girls had a closer relationship with the foster child because they were the same gender. In terms of positive learning outcomes one of the girls stated;

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One learn about families who is not doing that well…yes we have learned a lot, we see
many things that we did not before, connections and things like that. (Gina, 14 years).

Gina reflected around learning about children and families, who were struggling, and she
mentioned connections, one might assume that involved the connection between family life
and how children behaved, as she talked about that earlier in the interview. Nordenfors (2006)
argues that there are certain expectations towards gender and people expect different things
from boys compared to girls. She found that girls were more concerned about issues regarding
the home and the relationships in the family and the boys were more concerned with
individual projects. The learning outcome for the biological children involved a lot of gained
knowledge, but on the other hand the stakes were high and the knowledge did not come for
free (Nordenfors, 2006). Foster children might have various struggles because of their
upbringing. For the biological children the issues in the foster child's upbringing might lead to
challenging situations in the family, and although they might learn from these situations it
might also affect them in a negative way.

Another issue mentioned by the biological children were the relationship with their parents
had changed for the better. Both more openness between children and their parents, and room
for expressing emotions in difficult situations came up as positive aspects. One of the oldest
girls expressed this;

I think my relationship with my parents has been better after…especially with my mother
because we talk a lot more together, it has become easier to talk to her (mother) about
stuff, so I kind of have someone to talk to if I feel things are difficult. (Rachel, 17 years).

Højer & Nordenfors (2006) had some respondents that expressed a better relationship both
with their parents and their biological siblings. How open and honest members of a family are
will probably vary, but a good relationship with parents might make the fostering process
easier for their biological children. Nordenfors (2006) found that some of the children avoided
talking to their parents about issues with the foster child because they did not want to worry
them, and they rather pretended to be happy and hid their own emotions. This does not
coincide with the answers in my study, but if one assumed that children hide their own
emotions to protect their parents, this highlights the importance of having adults to talk to.
Again we can draw the lines to a better support system and follow-up by the Child Welfare

Service, where biological children could benefit by having other adults to talk to. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) state that some of the children compared their own problems with the foster child's problems and felt guilty because they had really nothing to complain about. One could imagine that the children find their problems trivial compared to the issues the foster children might struggle with, but as most of the foster children in my study were relatively well functioning children, this did not come up as a prominent issue. Overall the children expressed a good relationship with their parents, although there could be some challenging situations with the foster child, which I will come back to in chapter seven.

6.3 Relationship between the biological children and the foster children

Morgan (1996) uses the term family practice to describe practice as parenting, marriage and kinship within a family. These practices are expectations and obligations associated with relationships in the family, and the social actors within one family might view these practices differently (Morgan, 1996). Fostering is labelled as a care arrangement and a "family like" institution. One strives to make it as close to a conventional family as possible. Foster parents are often uncertain about how long the foster child will stay in their family, and this could make the relationship between them more challenging, both for parents and children (Ulvik, 2007). A sibling relationship might be the longest relationship we have in our lives (Mullender, 1999) but this might be different in foster families as foster children might move out after a period of time. Although the biological children have no common genes with the foster child they might still have some common values, history and culture (Elgar & Head, 1999). Øia & Fauske (2010) explain that when the family structure changes, the sibling relationship changes. Sibling relationships vary in a family and some siblings are closer than others depending on different factors, so I was interested in exploring the relationship between the biological children and the foster child. Before the interviews the participants were asked to draw a family map and it varied whether the children included their foster sibling in the map or not, and this was consistent in the answers they gave about their relationships as well. One girl explained;

> *Both she and we (Rachel and her biological siblings) were quite old when she moved here so it is not the same but it is kind of the same anyway because she does everything we do, so she is like our sister. We know she is not our biological sister, but she kind of is anyway when she has lived here for this long.* (Rachel, 17 years).

Rachel included her foster sister in the same aspect as her biological siblings in the family map. She expressed that the length of the placement was a reason behind why she would define her as a sister. This is also illustrated in Nordenfors' (2006) study where children who had a personal relationship with the foster child often had lived together for a while. The length of the placement is also a factor in how close the relationship between the biological children and the foster child is, children need time to create a bond with each other and feel a sense of belonging (Kosonen, 1999). The quote by Rachel contrasts what Lena experienced with a foster child who imitated her, and she argued they were better fitted as friends than siblings. Another point is that Lena did not mention her foster sister in the family map;

> *We are as good friends as before, but we do not work as well as siblings, we do not fight and things like that but we do not really talk much with each other.* (Lena, 15 years).

Smarts' (2007) term *relatedness* acknowledges that people can relate to others without being related by blood or married into a family. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that there was a significant connection between the amounts of information children got about the foster child in terms of creating a good relationship between them. The biological children engaged in the foster child and engagement can be experienced in different ways depending on how involved the biological children are. This involvement is also affected by the biological children's sense of participation in the fostering decision (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). It is relevant to include this quote below to underline the findings from Højer & Nordenfors, where Lena initially did not want the foster child to move in, this might have had an effect on their relationship;

> *I feel I get more annoyed and angry sometimes and I did not use to be like this before, it is because of the fact that I really do not want her living here…I am much more alone, I usually sit in my room or spend time outdoors.* (Lena, 15 years).

The relationship between Lena and her foster sister causes Lena to spend more time alone because she felt angrier due to her foster sister moving in. Højer (2001) found that children's relationship with their siblings will affect the development of their personality. Højer & Nordenfors' (2006) research shows that 71% of the respondents considered the foster child as a "real" sibling and many of them stated that they never divided between foster siblings and

biological siblings. This might indicate that sibling relationships are highly important in the family, and one of the girls stated;

It depends how it is, like today I think everything has been fine, she is like a normal sister and we cooperate and things like that, but if she has a bad day it is different. (Gina, 14 years).

There seemed to be a contextual understanding in terms of how the biological children defined their relationship with the foster child. Holtan (2002) states that family is socially constructed and children interpret their personal relationships, which changes over time. This is supported by Jenks (2004) who argues that children construct their own social life and relationship with others. As Gina explained it depended on the foster child's behaviour if she would characterize the foster child as a "normal sister" or not. Further, she considered the foster child as a sister even though she acted differently than her biological siblings in some cases. Nordenfors (2006) found that foster children's difficult behaviour could at times make it challenging for the biological children to relate to them as "real" siblings. Mayall (2002) argues that children construct knowledge through daily experiences and relationships with others around them. One might argue that the relationship between the children and the foster child will to a high degree affect their daily experiences and the family practice.

When drawing the family map, Gina included her foster sister in the same line as her biological siblings. White & Klein (2008) explain that members within the same family can define their family and family members in various ways; this is supported by Haugen's (2007) findings in her research involving children in divorced families. An example of this is found in my data where Rachel included the foster sister in her family map and her brother Tom did not. This is how Tom explained the relationship with his foster sister;

I do not really consider her like a sister I look at her more like a cousin that lives with us…I do not talk to her as much as my brother for instance. (Tom, 15 years).

Tom did not define the foster child in his family as a sister, and this coincides well with what Nordenfors (2006) found, where the biological children might define the relationship with the foster child in various ways. Levin & Trost (2000) divides between the terms *direct* and *indirect* relationships. An indirect relationship is where one includes people who are close to

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people, who are close to oneself (Levin & Trost, 2000 in Haugen, 2001). One might say that Tom have an indirect relationship with the foster child, and relationships within one family might be defined in different ways which was the case in this family.

One could also draw the attention to the difference in gender and Nordenfors (2006) found that boys were often more occupied with individual project rather that focus on the relationships in the family, as girls more often are. Tom was further asked what his answer would be if anyone asked how many siblings he had, and he said three siblings and a foster child. In addition to this, he said with a smile that on a good day he might include the foster child as his sister. Because foster children might have different behaviour compared to the other siblings in the family, it might make it harder to include them as "real" siblings (Nordenfors, 2006). This could be an explanation to why Tom viewed his foster sister as more like a cousin, because his mother explained that the foster sister had difficulties with social codes and behaved differently than other children her age. The fact that the foster child behaved badly around the siblings' friends was regarded as a negative issue about fostering (Nordenfors, 2006). In terms of gender, Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found that boys with a female foster child had a poorer relationship compared to girls who had a male foster child, but the majority of the children recognized the foster child as a natural part of the family. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) state that children live different lives even though they grow up in the same family with parents who treats them similarly. Gender is socially constructed, and gender expectations vary in terms of culture and history. The first arena where children meet gender expectations is in the family, and parents often treat boys and girls in a different way (Seccombe, 2012). With a small number of participants I will not draw any conclusions in terms of how gender affected the relationship between the biological children and the foster child, because there were not any clear distinctions either way in my findings.

Nordenfors (2006) found that there might be an expectation in terms of acknowledging the foster child as a "real" sibling because this will make them feel "as much worth" as the other siblings, and this will again lead to them feeling more "normal". My findings revealed different views on the relationship between the biological children and the foster child, as the quote below shows, Sophie revealed daily routines with her foster sister;

> *We were together and we played football together as well and then my father drove us there and then we did homework together, and shared duties.* (Sophie, 14 years).

In Sophie's case the foster child was related to her and had moved out when I did the interview. The foster child was not included in the family map, and she explained that they had hardly had any contact after she moved out. Sophie expressed that she occasionally tried to contact the foster child, but the conversations were superficial and short. Smart (2007) argues that relationships do not cease to end although people do not live with each other anymore, like in this case. Sophie did not elaborate on her feelings about the foster child moving out, but one might assume that this was difficult for the whole family, especially when they were prepared for a long time placement. Not knowing how long the placement was going to last might be worrying for the children and this might affect their relationship with the foster child (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). The foster father in this family pointed on another issue that might be more prominent in placement with relatives, and that was how the placement might create conflicts between the foster family members and the members of the biological family. In this case, the biological parents and grandparents had turned against them, and this affected his biological daughter in terms of meeting her grandparents rarely at the time the foster child lived with them. Sophie's father questioned why these issues had not been indicated from the Child Welfare Services side, and he called for more information about issues that could occur when a foster child moves in with close relatives.

6.4 Children's voices in the daily life

James (2009) argues that agency is both capacities and competencies children have, and their ability to exercise these. Children's agency is closely linked to article 12 in the UNCRC which states that children should have the opportunity to express their views (Unicef, 2013). I found it important to explore if fostering was something the children felt they could talk about in their daily life, and if it was an issue they discussed in the family. One girl stated that;

> *My brother and I talk about it sometimes because my other siblings do not really understand it.* (Gina, 14 years).

Gina explained that her biological siblings were too small to remember how the family life was before the foster child moved in, and they were too young to understand much of the fostering issues. Morrow (1998) found in her study about fostering, that some of the children felt they had a say in family matters and some did not, but most children felt it was important to have a say in matters affecting them. Gina was further asked if she talked about different issues regarding fostering with her friends, and she replied that she did not talk much about it.

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She knew another family with a foster child so she used to talk with that girl, because they had a lot in common. The importance of having someone to talk to is brought up as an important aspect. Listening to children is also important in terms of assessing the services provided for the foster family (Gilligan, 2000). Smart (2007) argues that it might be difficult for parents to be so close to their children on one hand and understand that they are separate individuals with their own views. From the foster parents point of view it seemed as fostering was an issue discussed, but mostly in the families where the process had different implications on their family life. In the other families I got more of the impression that this was their family life, they were used to it, and it worked out quite well. This might imply that there are more discussions about fostering in the families where challenging implications are more visible.

7 Implications and challenges in the foster families' everyday lives

In this chapter I will explore and discuss various implications and challenges of having a foster child in the family. These discussions will relate to research question three, and the participants were encouraged to talk about challenging and positive aspects of the fostering and how this affected their daily life. Some of the issues presented in this chapter are time and attention, how the biological family of the foster child could affect the foster family and the foster child's challenging behavior.

7.1 Time and attention

Larsen (2008) found that the biological children had an understanding of why the foster child needed more time and attention in periods, but they could get jealous despite of this understanding. Nordenfors (2006) identified that sharing time and attention with the foster child could be a challenge, but most of the biological children accepted this. I wanted to discover if the time and attention from the parents had changed after the foster child moved in, and if less time with their parents affected the biological children's everyday life. A few of the participants felt they had the same amount of time with their parents as before the foster child moved in;

It is pretty much the same. (Lena, 15 years).

I do not know, they have enough time for me anyway..I do not feel that they spend too much time with her and too little time with me, so it is fine. (Tom, 15 years).

The most common answer was that the children felt they had enough time with their parents even though the foster child could demand a lot of attention in periods;

...I am the oldest so I stay up longer in the evenings but they (her parents) are very good at setting aside enough time for everyone I think. (Gina, 14 years).

I further suggested that in some instances the foster child might demand a lot of attention compared to the other siblings and Gina replied;

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If they (her parents) experience that, they are very good at catching up with us again, because she (the foster child) believes that all attention is good attention so it might be a little much in periods but my parents are good at making it even I think. (Gina, 14 years).

Larsen (2008) found that the biological children considered alone time with their parents as important and there was no need for special activities, just the fact that they could spend time with their parents alone. Gina's quote about time and attention was supported by her mother who explained;

...we try to be good at finding time for each of them (the biological children) alone and take one and one child, me or my husband....But in periods we notice it well, especially around visitation, because then she (foster child) wants to sleep in our bed. She retreats[33] and becomes very "little" and needs a lot of attention, and that takes up a lot of time and the others (her children) notice this as well...But if we use this time we might prevent more turbulence and emotion peaks. (Susan, foster mother).

Nordenfors (2006) found that one third of the participants said they got less time and attention from their parents. The children in my research did not state that less time and attention was a major issue in their families, and some of them explained that their parents did a good job in dividing their time between their children. Højer (2001) explains the term *compensation strategies*, where parents ensures alone time with their biological children, often dividing them, so each of the parent can do something with different children. One foster mother talked about how they prioritized their time between their biological children and the foster child;

...we have tried to split them up, they can go to different friends or have friends at our house without being together, we cannot change the fact that they go to the same school and it is the same with the leisure activities...but in the weekends we try to do different things with them, my husband might take our daughter to things around here that we know the foster child is not that into. (Anna, foster mother).

Anna further explained that there was more focus on the foster child in periods because of the baggage she carried in terms of a difficult childhood. She had seen that her daughter found it

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[33] Norwegian: Regrederer

difficult, and the placement was generally more negative than positive. This was the only family that considered the fostering in such a negative way, although some of the other families had various challenges with the foster child as well.

Parents try to care for their children and facilitate good time division between care for the foster child and their own biological children. Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal (2000) did a study about how children perceive care in a family setting, and found that children are active in care both as receivers and givers. *"Central to the concept of care are notions of relationships and connectedness and a desire to create a well-being in others"* (Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal, 2000, p. 2). White & Klein (2008) argue that there are both care givers and care receivers within a family and this makes the family tied together in different ways. What we can see examples of in the foster families in my study, is that the parents tried to care for their biological children by setting aside enough time for them alone. Some families had the option to get help with the foster child form the Child Welfare Service, so the foster family could spend some days alone. One of the foster mothers appreciated this opportunity and she explained;

> *I am sure that it is hard at times but it is all about making it work with respite[34] care so that we can be only us.* (Mia, foster mother).

My data shows that the foster parents had different ways of coping with dividing their time between the foster child and their biological children. The foster parents were more focused on less time with their biological children than the children themselves, which might indicate that these particular foster families had found a good balance in their use of time.

7.2 Children's views on challenging aspects

To get a better insight in the family practice of a foster family, I asked the children if there were any challenging aspects concerning the foster child. Parents and their children could as Haugen (2007) pointed out, view the relationships and other practices in the family in different ways, and as the biological children's perspectives were most important for me, they were asked about challenges in the family. Gina expressed this about the subject;

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[34] Norwegian: Avlastning

I thought it was difficult in the beginning because she was upset and things like that, and that was difficult…it was difficult because I did not know what to do. (Gina, 14 years).

Challenging behaviour was something that Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found as a major issue in the foster families. The foster child might have unusual behaviour compared to what the biological children are used to, and it might be difficult to know how to respond to such behaviour. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) stated that it was difficult for the biological children to talk to their parents about challenging aspects regarding the foster child. Susan, one of the foster mothers, told this about the difference between the foster child and her own biological children;

…it is a little bit different, it just is, and not only boundaries and things like that because she receives so many things as well. It can be hard to understand why she gets 20 Christmas presents and you only get 7, when you are 6-7 years old. (Susan, foster mother).

Susan also mentioned that although her biological children understood why there were different boundaries in terms of the foster child, it could be hard to accept it in certain situations. Smart (2007) argues that children might escape emotionally in situations they are not able to physically escape from, and they distance themselves from the negative issues. There are also certain expectations in terms of how one should act in certain situations (Hochschild, 2003), and these expectations might make it more difficult for the biological children to voice their feelings. One might again highlight the importance of preparation and guidance in the fostering process, and although children cannot be prepared for all situations, information is an essential issue.

Foster families are different compared to other families, the relationship between the foster child and the rest of the family members might be temporarily, and the foster parents get paid for the job they do with the foster child (Ulvik, 2012). On the other hand one could assume that these families are a lot like other families with good periods and more challenging periods, and one boy stated;

There comes those days when I get tired and just imagine we could be…not be a foster family. (Tom, 15 years).

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Tom is touching on the issue of privacy, and privacies within the home could be perceived differently (Morgan, 1996), where Tom might have other expectations compared to his foster sister. Tom's mother explained that the foster sister had some social challenges and could disturb him when he had friends over;

...it can be pretty intense because the foster child can be quite nagging without making too much fuss.. if it had been a 3 year old little sister who were screaming all the time you would understand the annoyance, but she can sit straight up in the sofa and say nothing when you have friends over, and then you do not really get any sympathy for the annoyance. (Mia, foster mother).

Højer & Nordenfors (2006) explain that each family often has its own character and atmosphere that might change when a foster child moves in. As this quote illustrates the foster child is not loud, but she had her own way of acting that was perceived as annoying when Tom had friends over. It is natural that the biological children sometimes want things to be as they used to when there are periods of challenges. Nordenfors (2006) identified that boundaries might feel different and the foster children got away with behavior that none of the biological children would get away with. My data showed that some of the children mentioned boundaries, but they understood why the foster child had different boundaries compared to them.

7.2.1 Identity
In one of the families, identity and imitating behaviour came up as challenging issues. Even though this was prominent in only one family, the challenges revolving this subject were so interesting that I found it important to discuss. Christensen, James & Jenks (2000) found that social space, such as home is important in the identity making. Furthermore, identity is achieved and challenged rather than fixed. Being young involves trying out your independence, testing boundaries and finding your identity (Øia & Fauske, 2010). Lena, 15 years old, lived with a foster child of her own age, they were in the same class at school and had many of the same leisure activities in their spear time. Lena expressed some issues about having a foster child in the family and issues around the friendship with the foster child;

We are together at school and when we come home we might make dinner together, and then we go to our own rooms and do our homework. We both play in the marching band so we have rehearsals together…and then we are just at home, not together, sometimes we are together but for the most part not. (Lena, 15 years).

The fact that they were spending so much time together was compromising her alone time, which was important to Lena. The quote says something about their relationship as they were more alongside each other than together when they were home at the same time. Christensen, James & Jenks (2000) identified that the home is valued as important in terms of social identity. They further stated that *"a sense of togetherness and belonging is established in everyday life by family members simply being together in the same space"* (Christensen, James & Jenks, 2000, p. 146). One might argue that Lena did not experience this sense of belonging with her foster sister, and rather wanted some space that was only hers. Smart (2007) identified that people can usually walk away from relationships they experience as unsatisfying, but children cannot escape from relationship they find difficult within the family. Another issue for Lena was that she felt the foster child was imitating her hobbies and interests, and this could be frustrating;

…she usually takes up the same interests as me, because I like to do photography and then she started with that, I like climbing and now she does the same, she copies my interests and stuff like that. I really like to go skiing…she has not started with that yet, she came once and…yes it would be even harder if she starts that as well because then I would have nothing to myself. (Lena, 15 years).

Højer & Nordenfors (2006) identified that foster children around the same age could experience issues regarding friends, identity and belonging. Being in the same social group might be difficult because young people try to find their own identity, and it is important to be independent and at the same time "fit" into a social group. Some of the young people explained that their foster sibling "stole and imitated" them (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). Frønes (1998) found that imitating is common in close relationships. When children grow up they need to find their own place and feel unique, and Højer & Nordenfors (2006) explain that in the age group 13-17 years, imitation by the foster child was a prominent issue. Furthermore, the imitation was more common when the young people were around the same age, where friends and belonging were two important themes, and sharing the same social

arenas could lead to conflicts and challenges. Although imitation and belonging to the same social arenas could be an issue with biological siblings, with foster siblings it might be more difficult to know how to react because of their background.

Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2003) explain the term individualization, where more individual choices are prominent and where individuals adapt to different conditions in society. Smart (2007) argues that individualization is a focus on the individuals and their choices. The family is less in charge of children's choices compared to earlier, and there is a demand on the individuals to be flexible in terms of the changing society. Individualization involves having a life of our own, our own space and being independent (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2003). Without going too far away from this particular situation, young people today have a need for independence and even though they belong to a group of friends there is a need for finding oneself and finding individual interests and likes. Furthermore, Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal (2000) explain individualization with the fact that children are encouraged to have a voice in society and become individual personalities. When you have someone that constantly imitates you it could be difficult to find yourself and your own personality.

Højer (2001) concludes that biological children could have a strong impact on foster children when growing up. Twigg (1995) found that gender was an important factor and that fostering could often be more difficult for children with the same gender (Twigg, 1995 in Højer, 2001). In my data it was difficult to find strong distinctions between the genders in terms of their relationship with the foster child, but one might argue that Lena's experience could have been different if a boy moved in them. Lena explained that she found it difficult that one of her friends moved in as a foster child. The foster mother in this family expressed that she understood her daughters' issues with the foster child, and further said that she felt they had tried what they could to make the situation better;

> They (the Child Welfare Services) are willing to do what it takes to make it work, but it is difficult to know what we can do to make the situation better for Lena, because they spend so much time together, so that is difficult. We are participating in terms of what we want (from the Child Welfare Services) but it is difficult to know what more we can do. (Anna, foster mother).

Højer (2001) found that there could be a dilemma between the foster child's best interest and the biological children's best interest. Foster parents are dedicated to do the best job possible with the foster child, and sometimes the focus might move from their biological children to the foster child (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). In this regard, if fostering affects the biological children in such a negative way that the foster parents find it damaging, this is a contributing factor in determinations of placements (Johansson & Sundt, 2007). Anna's family felt they were on the verge of giving up, and Anna expressed that she did not understand why the foster child should live with them when she could have as much contact as she wanted with her biological mother.

7.2.2 Unexpected behavior

Foster children have experienced trauma in their childhood and might react differently in certain situations compared to what the foster family are used to. This could be a challenge when the family life used to be quiet and calm and a foster child is more used to shouting and making more noise (Nordenfors, 2006). I wanted the biological children to explain if there were any situations they found challenging with the foster child, and Gina stated;

I think it is a bit difficult if she has a reaction to something, but the people around us usually knows what she is like, so it is okay but it is not exactly fun either. (Gina, 14 years).

Gina's mother explained that they had to be considerate when the foster child had intense reactions, because her children were not used to these reactions. There might be two sides to these situations, and on one side children might learn from these experiences and gain a greater understanding of dealing with these type of situations. On the other hand they might get scared and insecure about how to react when these situations occur. Furthermore, Gina's mother stated that at least one of her children feared that the foster child would act out in public, and that they found it difficult to deal with tantrums and objects thrown around the room in anger. Related to this, Nordenfors (2006) found that the biological children often want to "guide" their foster siblings and try to contribute to the well-being of the foster child. The children do not want to upset the foster child and they have understandings of how to act. One might say that all children are different and biological siblings might experience situations like this without having a foster child in the family, but how will these type of situations affect the children? There might be good and bad days in the foster family as in

other families, but foster families might have other challenges than compared to "normal" families. Gina stated this about challenging days;

I try to avoid her and try to keep my good mood because it is very contagious when she has a bad day, the atmosphere changes, but the rest of the family tries to be in a good mood so we get through it. (Gina, 14 years).

Nordenfors (2006) states that biological children often feel responsible towards the foster child and that the biological child might pretend to be more happy and content with the situation than they actually are. Different strategies might in some cases be important to be able to manage difficult days with the foster child. Smart (2007) points at different coping strategies from her studies with children, and states that some children might say they do not bother, and try to distance themselves from the situation, and others try to change themselves or their perception of the situation. Hochschild (2003) identifies certain rules in terms of how we are expected to feel and further that social patterns manage our emotions. Furthermore, she explains the term *transmutation* where one suppresses ones "real" feelings and rather convey feelings that are socially expected. One might expect foster children to have different experiences in terms of which emotions and reactions that is socially acceptable because they come from a home where the parents are not capable to taking care of their upbringing. People can adjust their feelings according to situations and when our feelings do not fit with the specific situation we try to imagine and ask our self how we should act (Hochschild, 2003). Smart (2007) argues that emotions are given meaning when other people appreciate these emotions. Children can experience one situation very differently and cope with their emotions in equally different ways. It is important to acknowledge how children express themselves and enable them to have a voice in situations that affect them; either it is negative or positive. Foster families have various challenges and it might depend on age, gender or other aspects how close the biological children are to their foster siblings.

7.3 Implications related to the foster child's biological family

Some foster parents expressed complex issues regarding visitations by biological parents and how this might affect the foster child's development (Haugli & Havik, 2010). As a few of the participants mentioned the biological family of the foster child in the interviews, I was interested in exploring how this affected the everyday family life in the foster family. Some

foster children have many visitations with their biological family and others might not meet their biological family at all. Foster children must relate to a duality in their lives where they both belong to a foster family and their biological family, this could involve a difference in culture, boundaries and traditions (Holtan, 2002). Lena lived with a foster child that had regular contact with her biological family, and this is how she experienced the situation;

If they are to meet she will most likely go there, and if she has a birthday they will come here, it is only the first time it feels weird, after that it becomes normal. For me it is normal but for those who might not have had this experience it might be weird…I do not really think about it, it is just like she has two families. (Lena, 15 years).

Lena explained that for "other people" it might be strange that one have two families to deal with, and she stated that it became normal for her that the foster child has two families. This might indicate that Lena is fine with this situation, but an example from Gina in the quote below gives a different story about the biological family;

Sometimes when they come to pick her up they stay for a little while…I do not like it that much in terms of what it has been like with the court cases and everything. I do not find it very pleasant, but they are nice when they are here, but it feels kind of strange because next time they are against each other in court again. (Gina, 14 years).

Gina explained that her feelings towards the foster child's biological parents are affected by the stories the foster child had told her about growing up with them. In a survey by Bufdir (2011) foster parents answered that handling visitation with the child's biological family was a difficult issue. Holtan (2002) states that the biological parents' issues might affect the child even after the child moved out. In Gina's family, both visitations by the biological parents and the court cases[35] affected the foster family in terms of the behavior of the foster child. Ulvik (2007) found that it is common that foster parents are loyal towards the visitation rights the Child Welfare Services has decided, and are very cautious towards them. Furthermore, the foster child's visitations with his biological parents might disturb, or makes it impossible to have a "normal" family life.

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[35] Read more about the court cases on page 14

As previously mentioned, the situation in one of the foster families was initially different because they had a relative as a foster child, and the foster father explained some difficult aspects regarding this;

It suddenly became our fault, it was difficult…the other relatives found it difficult to have contact with both us and the biological parents you know…so they had to choose and then they chose those who had lost their children, to support them…so we felt that that was a bit unfair. (Gary, foster father).

Gary brought up an issue in relation to family members where they were they chose sides and furthermore continued to have little contact with them. Although his daughter did not mention this in the interview, Gary acknowledged that this could have been difficult for her in this period, but fortunately the situation improved a while after the foster child moved out.

In one family, the foster child talked a lot about what had happened to her when she lived with her biological family, and she chose to confide in the daughter in the foster family. The foster mother stated that her daughter had learned about things that were not suitable for children. In this regard she asked for her daughter to have sessions at BUP[36] so she could talk to someone who was experts in the field. This was something that had been done because the mother asked for it and not something that the Child Welfare Services had recommended. Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal (2000) argue that even though children are viewed as competent beings, they are still seen as vulnerable in some cases, for instance adult problems they should not have to take responsibility for. Triseliotis, Borland & Hill (2000) found that 39% of the foster parents in their research admitted that their own children found fostering more difficult than anticipated, mostly because of behavioral and emotional challenges. Behavioral challenges are also present in my findings and two of the foster parents admitted that the fostering process had been harder than they expected.

If we go back to the discussion about foster children's biological family, one of the foster mothers experienced that the foster child had frequently contact with her biological mother and found this straining;

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[36] Norwegian: Barne- og ungdomspsykiatri. English: Child and Youth psychiatry

There is often something special about the foster children whom grow up with neglect and there are great holes in the upbringing and other things we need to take care of, and especially the fact that the biological mother is not willing to cooperate, so she control our lives a little bit. (Anna, foster mother).

Anna felt that the biological mother in some sense controlled their lives and she explained that she did not understand why the foster child had the opportunity to have as much contact with her biological mother and still live in a foster home. Another foster mother remembered back to when they first started fostering and compared their current situation to how it was the first time;

The foster children were not difficult, but the mother struggled with her issues and it was very intense and a lot of family here, so the first year was absolutely the toughest. I think that was okay, because then you do not have any expectations in terms of it being easy the next time either. (Mia, foster mother).

The first time, the foster family was affected by visitation from the biological family of the foster child and they thought it was too much in periods. By contrast, this time around they had a very relaxed relationship with the biological family and it worked very well. Højer (2001) found that there were less private boundaries in foster families because of the biological family of the foster child, and because people from the Child Welfare Services used to come by. James, Jenks & Prout (1998) also found that the privacy of the home was intervened by social workers. My data showed a variation in terms of how much contact the foster children had with their biological families and again how much this affected the foster family. Two of the families had current issues with the biological family and only one of the foster families found the relationship unproblematic.

7.3.1 Biological family and the justice system

In some foster families the placement involves uncertainty in terms of how long the foster child will stay in the family. As explained earlier, the biological parents have the opportunity to raise their case in the court once a year as long as they have not stated that the full parental responsibility is transferred to the Child Welfare Services and the foster parents. In some foster families the court case affected the families' daily life;

...Sometimes everything is fine and suddenly nothing is right, often when something happens with her parents it is not good...I do not think it is fun, everything is so turbulent in the house and the foster child do not understand what is happening, she really wonders where she is going after the trial. (Gina, 14 years).

Gina expressed that the trials where the foster child's biological parents wanted to regain custody was difficult for the whole family. The foster child expressed that she was insecure in terms of what would happen after the trial and if she had to move back to her biological parents. A major challenge for the foster child is the uncertainty related to the court cases, it gives the foundation for uncertain future plans, and maybe a hope for a return back to the biological parents if this is something the children wants (Holtan, 2002). The biological children found these periods difficult and it affected the mood in the family because the foster child expressed many emotions that was hard for the biological children to know how to deal with. Gina's foster mother explained that the biological family had chosen to take their case to court every year since the foster child moved in, and these periods lead to worry and anxiety for the foster child. The foster child found it difficult to have to deal with talking to new people every time about her thoughts regarding the case, as she was too young to witness in the court case she had a lawyer that could be her voice in the court case. Children are able to express their opinion in the court case but when the person they represents them is someone new each time it might be difficult to trust them. The fact that the child has the opportunity to not participate directly in the court case could be regarded as the best interest of the child as there might be disagreement between the parents in the case. In terms of the court cases, children have the right to have a say but they are not obliged to. Children might find cases with loyalty conflicts very difficult and it is an important value that they do not have to voice their opinion (Sandberg, 2012). Susan questioned the rights the biological parents had in terms of raising their case every year even though not much had changed in their situation, although she understood that biological parents do whatever they can to get their child back. NOU 2012:5 also questions the biological parent's right to raise their case every year when no change has happened in their situation[37]. The foster mother questioned why it had to be a new person every year that was the voice of the foster child, so she had to explain her story again and again.

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[37] See more on page 14

In the other foster family where the court case was an issue, the foster child was over 15 years and had the opportunity to be a witness in the court case to express her point of view. She chose not to participate in the trial and rather have a lawyer represent her. The foster mother questioned if it is in the child's best interest to have the opportunity to take part in a trial where her parents accuse each other of lying in order to make their own case stronger. One might argue that it is understandable that biological parents try their case when the law is on their side; one might assume is in most parents' interest to see their child more. As discussed earlier, the biological principle[38] in Norway is very important and the fact that children have contact with their biological family is viewed as important in itself. Although, children's best interest are not necessarily the same as the biological parents' interests. There have been debates about the biological principle compared to the best interest of the child and even though the child's best interest is the foundation of the Child Welfare Services, they have to consider the strong impact the biological principle has according to the law.

7.4 Parents' views on various implications

The foster parents had different experiences regarding how the family had changed, and some of them reflected around positive and challenging aspects about fostering. One mother said her daughter had a stronger connection to her biological siblings, and she regarded this as a positive aspect;

> *What I have seen about Lena, she has two older siblings and I think their relationship has been stronger this fall, so I have seen that the bond between them has become stronger.* (Anna, foster mother).

This quote matches what Højer & Nordenfors (2006) found, where some of the children reflected around a better relationship between the biological siblings after the foster child moved in. The reason for this could be that they wanted to cooperate in making the process as good as possible for the foster child (Højer & Nordenfors, 2006). A good relationship between siblings could be important on difficult days and it might be easier to talk to your siblings than your parents. One of the participants were asked who he talked to when he did not want to talk to his parents, and he expressed that he would talk to his biological brother. Smart (2007) argues that it is difficult for people to talk about negative issues in the family or

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[38] Read more about the biological principle on page 7

with close kins. The importance of talking to someone that understands what you are going through seemed to be an important issue, and your biological siblings might better relate to your issues than friends and other family members.

One mother explained that the atmosphere in the family had changed after the foster child moved in;

> *It has become more quite, the mood can be a bit heavy, because they (the foster child and her daughter) spend so much time together they have nothing to talk about, so at times the atmosphere[39] is a bit heavy* (Anna, foster mother).

The Child Welfare Service focus on helping the foster family in any way they can to make sure the placement is successful. But how focused are they on helping the biological children in the family? Højer (2001) argues that important issues in a successful placement is a good relationship between the foster parents and the case worker, a good relationship between the foster parents and the child (especially the foster mother) and that foster parents tolerated disruptive behavior. On the other hand she identified that children might be scared of talking to their parents about negative issues with the foster child because they were afraid that the foster child would have to move out. In addition to this, the foster family has implicit expectations of being the "good family" and foster parents express gratitude towards their biological children for the help they get with the foster child (Højer, 2001). When the placement becomes difficult, could it compromise the positive aspects of fostering in terms of the biological children's experience?

One foster mother explained that it was acceptable to show feelings in their family and it was perfectly fine for her biological children to be angry or upset with the foster child as long as they did not take it out on the foster child. This mother expressed an educational aspect of fostering, and stated;

> *I think there are positive aspects about fostering, you can say that we gain a lot for "free" in terms of teaching the children that everyone is different and when they grow older they understand that what happens around children has consequences in terms of what kind of person you become.* (Mia, foster mother).

Mia believed that they were able to give their children a solid upbringing through fostering, where they learned that children are different and there should be room for everyone.

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[39] Norwegian: trykkende stemning

Consequently she thought that her children were able to set things in perspective, be more tolerant and have a greater understanding of how family and other factors affect what kind of person you grow up to be. This was also a common finding amongst other foster parents (Nordenfors, 2006; Højer, 2001). One might assume that the educational aspect is an important factor for the foster parents, and it might be more important for the biological children as well when they grow older and can look back at their experiences as a foster family.

8 Concluding remarks

In this thesis my main aim has been how and if the biological children in foster families are followed-up by the Child Welfare Services and Bufetat. In order to gain more knowledge about the need for this follow-up, it was important to explore how the biological children and their parents experienced fostering. I have focused on positive and challenging aspects of living in a foster family to get a better understanding of the implications fostering might have for these specific families. In this chapter I will discuss which knowledge the participants in the study has created, as there were certain themes that came up as important in several of the families. I will also discuss if these specific subjects needs more research and what type of knowledge is needed in order to secure that the biological children in the foster families have a voice in the fostering process.

8.1 Time

My main findings show that fostering is experienced in various ways both for the biological children and the foster parents, but there were certain topics that reoccurred in most of the families, and time was one of these topics. Time is relevant to discuss both in terms of the preparation process and in relation to how long the foster family had been fostering. To start with the preparation phase, time came up as an issue particularly in the network placements. Both foster parents and their children stated that there had been too little time to discuss and prepare before the foster child moved in. A few of the families stated that the placement had happened suddenly and there was not enough time to prepare the children prior to the placement. According to the Child Welfare Authorities and Bufetat, children's voices and opinions are important in their work in the placement process. One might argue that when the placements happen suddenly, there is not enough time to listen to the children and this could be a breach in the guidelines and laws concerning children. Although time might be crucial in terms of finding a foster home for the foster child, research has shown that information and good preparation is important for the foster family (Poland & Groze, 1993). One might say that it is in the best interest for both the foster family and the foster child to ensure that the preparation is sufficient, because everyone benefits from finding a good family for the foster child. If using more time prior to the placement ensures more successful placements, this should be an important focus for the Child Welfare Services and Bufetat.

Time has also another aspect in terms of how long the foster child has lived with the foster family. Nordenfors (2006) found that the length of the foster home placement affected how close the biological children and the foster child were. Children needs time to create a bond to

each other and become close (Kosonen, 1999). So according to this, how long the foster home placement has lasted is an important aspect when evaluating the relationship between the family members. Højer & Nordenfors (2006) points out that the biological children's involvement in the foster child was affected by how involved the biological children were in the foster home decision. To feel like a "normal family" it might be important for children to have a functioning sibling relationship with the foster child. Most of the participants defined their relationship with the foster child as they would a "normal" sibling, but others had a more distant relationship with the foster child. Although time was an important aspect, age and gender could also be factors that influence the relationship between the foster child and the biological children. So if we are to conclude, time is an important aspects in various ways of the fostering process, and children's involvement both prior to the placement and after the placement might be affected by the aspect of time.

8.2 Children's rights in practice

Article 12 in the UNCRC states that children should be able to express their views in all matters that concern them (Unicef, 2013). This is also an important value in the Norwegian Child Welfare Service, and participating in an important decision such as fostering should be a prominent focus. Lee (2001) argues that there is a tension between the need for children's voices to be heard and the traditional view that only adults are worth listening to. In my study, there seemed to be a lack of children's participation especially in relation to the Child Welfare Service, as most of the biological children stated that they had little or no contact with them. In order for the children to have a good relationship with the caseworker and other professionals from the Child Welfare Services, they need to experience that someone would like to listen to them about concerns and issues regarding the foster child. Deciding to foster should be a matter where all children have a voice and where the biological children can express their thought and opinions and most importantly; be heard. Although the responsibility of the parents is important in these cases, most of the children expressed that their parents had involved them prior to the placement and that they had an open relationship with their parents in terms of talking to them about difficult issues. One the other hand one might assume that children are loyal towards their parents and might find it difficult to criticize issues about the foster child. As Smart (2007) identified, children find it difficult to express negative emotions towards people they have an ongoing relationship with.

James (2009) questions if children have freedom and opportunity to exercise their agency and that there are both limitations and opportunities in terms of children's agency. Having a voice

in important decisions is a part of exercising one's agency and although children have the opportunity to talk to their parents, there could be a need for other professionals to talk to as well, such as the Child Welfare Service. This is also related to how adults view children and if one acknowledge that children are fully citizens in the same line as adults. Citizenship involves the ability to participate and have certain rights in society (Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum, 2010). Although children are viewed as competent and the UNCRC states that they have certain rights, as for instance the right to have a say in matters that concerns them and that their best interest should be the focus in the Child Welfare Service, the practice might show different results. I found that both Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service stated that the child's best interest and their opinions was a focus in the fostering process, where the biological children should be included, but the children themselves explained the practice differently. In order to have a good relationship with the children, the Child Welfare Services must make an effort to try to get to know them, because it might be difficult confiding in someone you have hardly met before.

8.3 A gap between guidelines and practice

The foster families had various experiences in terms of the relationship with the Child Welfare Service. Whereas most of the foster parents were quite content with the help and support they got, their children had little or no relationship with the Child Welfare Service. There seems to be a gap between the laws, regulations and guidelines and the practice that is experienced by the biological children. Johansson & Sundt (2007) state that it is important that the foster parent's biological children are remembered in the placement process, and the caseworker should show interest in terms of talking to them about their expectations and thoughts prior to the placement. Although biological children are valued as important in all parts of the process, the participants in my study stated that the contact with Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service was rare. Slettebø, Oterholm & Stavrum (2010) argue that individuals should be heard and allowed to suggest changes within the Child Welfare Service. The informant from the Child Welfare Service stated that they talk to the biological children in the family to get their opinions about how it is to live with the foster child, but some of the children could not remember talking to either the caseworker or the supervisor. Both Bufetat and the Child Welfare Services stated that parents holds a lot of the responsibility in the fostering process, but children might be affected by their parents' views and thoughts, and this

is why it is important for the Child Welfare Services to talk to the children alone without their parents.

8.4 Improvement of practice

One might argue that the practice towards biological children in the foster home is not sufficient in terms of the responsibility the Child Welfare Service have, and the foster families had some suggestions for better practice. The most common suggestion was that children should generally be more involved in all stages of the process, and there could be a course or a meeting where biological children have the opportunity to talk without the presence of their parents. It could be a part of the PRIDE-course, but as found in my research, some families do not attend this course prior to the placement. In these cases it will be important that the children could participate even though their parents attend the PRIDE-course after the placement. Bufetat in Oslo provide children from divorced families the opportunity to meet professionals to talk about issues related to the divorce, and these are group meetings without their parents (Bufetat, 2013). Smart (2007) argues that it is important for children to relate to others in the same situation, and through meetings like these children can relate to each other's situation. More focus on the biological children in the foster family is generally something all the foster parents stated as an important issue. Some of the children wanted more information and involvement from the Child Welfare Service, but others found the support sufficient, dependent on what sort of implications and challenges the family experienced in relation to the foster child.

8.5 Further research

My research has shown some implications and challenges foster families might face, and it is important to explore these issues further. All foster families have different experiences of fostering and to discover children's opinions it is important that research focus on their voices and thoughts. Haugen (2007) states that there is often a difference between the child perspective and the adult perspective, this is why it is important to include children in research and not only take their parents thoughts as valid information, because they might not be able to situate themselves in their children's experiences. Children's voices and perspectives should be accepted as genuine and valid and one should respect children as important social actors (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000). More research is needed on the quality of Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service both in the matching process, preparation and follow-up of the foster families. They should be more involved in talking to the children prior

to the placement, preferably alone without their parents. There is also a need for more research on network placements and how this is experienced by the biological children, both where foster children are placed with relatives, and in foster home where they already know some of the family members. In my study, some of the children said that it was difficult to define their relationship as a sibling relationship when they knew the foster child prior to the placement and this could be interesting to explore further.

8.6 Final thoughts

There are great variations in the different foster families, and it is clear that fostering has had an effect on the family, in some situations it might be challenging and in other families it is experienced as mostly positive. Although fostering might have positive aspects, the Child Welfare Service must acknowledge that proper information and preparation is important for the foster families. Foster parents care greatly about both their biological children and their foster children and I found that they facilitate good solutions in order to make the everyday family life the best possible. There are certain areas in the fostering process that could be improved, especially in terms of the relationship between the biological children and Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service. I hope my study has contributed to illustrate that biological children are important in the fostering process, and they might, as the foster parents experience challenging implications related to the foster child.

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Appendix 1: Interview guides

Introduction (all interviews):

- Inform about the project, informed consent and that all data will be handled confidentially. Quotes used in the thesis will be anonymous. Participation is voluntarily, and one might withdraw from the study at any time.

Interview guide - Siblings

<u>Draw a family map</u>

- Ask the informant to draw a family map over the family and state that there is no right or wrong way to do it. Ask them to talk about their relationships with their family members.

<u>Family life:</u>

- Thoughts around fostering. How long has the foster child been in the family?
- How was your relationship with your parents before the foster child moved in? And after?
- How is your relationship with the foster child, positive and challenging aspects.

<u>Preparation:</u>

- How did your parents prepare you prior to the process? Were you able to voice your opinions and thoughts?
- How did the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat prepare you?
- Did you have one-to-one conversations with the Child Welfare Service or Bufetat prior to the placement? What information was useful/not useful?

<u>Follow-up:</u>

- What follow-up did you get from the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat?
- Have you talked to Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service one-on-one after the placement?
- Your thoughts around the follow-up.
- Did you need extra follow-up and someone to talk to after the placement?

Interview guide - Bufetat/Child Welfare Service

Can you tell me a little bit about your background and work with foster families? The process of the foster home placements.

<u>Preparation:</u>

- Guidelines in terms of preparation of biological children.
- What information do you focus on?
- How do you prepare the foster parents?
- How do you prepare the biological children?

<u>Follow-up:</u>

- Guidelines in terms of follow-up of foster families?
- Guidelines in terms of biological children and follow-up?
- Do you have one-to-one conversations with the biological children?
- What can you offer biological children that need extra support?
- Do you have a general follow-up of the biological children?

Interview guide - foster parents

<u>Preparation:</u>

- Why did you want to be a foster family?
- How did you prepare your own children prior to the placement?
- How did the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat prepare your children?

<u>Follow-up:</u>

- Has the fostering changed your family? In what way?
- Did the Child Welfare Service and Bufetat have separate conversations with your children during home visits?
- How do you experience the follow-up of your children in terms of the involvement by Bufetat and the Child Welfare Service? Positive and challenging aspects
- How do you think the fostering has affected your children?
- General thought about the whole process.

Appendix 2: NSD approval letter

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

NSD

Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
. www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Gry Mette Dalseng Haugen
Norsk senter for barneforskning
NTNU
Loholt Allé 87, Pavillion C
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 25.06.2012   Vår ref:30843 / 3 / HIT   Deres dato: Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 14.06.2012. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

30843	*Living with foster children: a study about how non-biological siblings of foster children are followed-up by the child welfare authorities in Norway*
Behandlingsansvarlig	NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Gry Mette Dalseng Haugen
Student	Anne Lise Skauge

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.
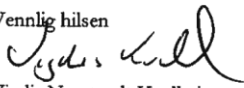
Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.
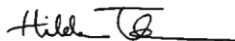
Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 15.06.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim

Hildur Thorarensen

Hildur Thorarensen tlf: 55 58 26 54
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Anne Lise Skauge, Willmannsveita 4, 7012 TRONDHEIM

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