PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR FOSTER HOMES IN B.C.:

VIEWS OF RESOURCE SOCIAL WORKERS

by

MARION SCOTT TAYLOR

B.S.W., The University of Victoria, 1993

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(The School of Social Work)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

November 1997

©Marion Scott Taylor, 1997
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **Social Work**

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date **January 19, 1998**
Abstract

In this study the views of resource social workers regarding public and private sector foster homes in British Columbia were investigated. Questionnaires were sent to Ministry of Social Services (Ministry) resource social workers and their responses were analyzed. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and translate quantitative data. Written statements were subject to a content analysis.

This study found that Ministry foster homes were resource social workers' preferred placement option for children. Private sector foster carers and the array of services provided by the agencies/contractors were viewed as providing a valuable specialized service for children with challenging behaviour. Monitoring, standards and accountability were identified as issues because of the lack of standards and policy guiding resource social workers' practice when contracting with agencies/contractors to provide private sector foster care. Smaller caseloads and additional resource social workers were viewed as a prerequisite for Ministry resource social workers in order to provide a similar service to that of the private sector.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................. ii
Table of Contents ........................................ iii
List of Tables ............................................. vi
Acknowledgments ......................................... vii
Chapter One: Introduction .............................. 1
  Purpose of the Study ................................... 8
Chapter Two: The System ............................... 10
  Structure and Role ................................... 14
Chapter Three: Literature Review ..................... 23
  Permanency Planning ................................. 23
  Profit and Non-Profit Foster Care Services ....... 25
  Specialized Foster Care ............................. 26
  Training Foster Carers ............................... 28
  Contracting with the Private Sector ............... 29
  Licensing Foster Homes .............................. 32
Chapter Four: Research Design and Method ............ 34
  Participants ......................................... 34
  Procedures .......................................... 35
  Measures and Methods ............................... 37
  Statistical Analyses ................................ 46
Qualitative Analyses ................................................. 46

Chapter Five: Presentation of Data ............................. 48

Participants ......................................................... 49

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Private and
Ministry Foster Homes .............................................. 49

Views on the Process, Practice and Relationships of
Resource Social Workers and Private
Agencies/Contractors who Provide
Foster Care Services .................................................. 59

Recommendations for the future Use of Private and
Ministry Foster Homes ................................................. 74

Chapter Six: Analysis and Discussion ............................ 78

What Do Resource Social Workers See As the Difference
Between Ministry and Private Sector Foster Homes ........ 79

Resource Social Workers’ Views on the Process,
Practice and Relationships Between Resource Social
Workers and Private Agencies/Contractors Who Provide
Foster Care Services .................................................. 81

What Rationale Do Resource Social Workers Use When
Contracting With Agencies/Contractors to Supply Foster
Homes ................................................................. 88

Policy, Practice and Standard Implications ................. 90

Training Implications ............................................... 92

Resource Implications ............................................. 92

Permanency Planning Implications .............................. 93

Ideas for Future Research .......................................... 94

Limitations of the Study ............................................ 95

Concluding Comments ............................................. 97

Bibliography ......................................................... 99
Appendix A: Questionnaire ........................................ 106
Appendix B: Letter of Initial Contact ............................. 117
Appendix C: Explanatory Letter .................................... 119
Appendix D: Postcard .................................................. 121
Appendix E: Ethical Approval and Consent from the Ministry .................................................. 123
List of Tables

Table 1. Resource Social Workers' Views Of The Advantages And Disadvantages Of Ministry And Private Sector Foster Homes And Resource Social Workers' Views Of Non-Profit And For-Profit Foster Care Services .............. 77
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank you, Professor Roopchand Seebaran, for your support and advising during the course of this study. As well, your course on community fostered a great deal of information that I use in my day-to-day work and was the high light of my year at UBC.

Thank you Dr. Brian O’Neill for your insight and feedback into this study. As well, thank you Peggy Pictin for your support and feedback during out years together at the Ministry and during this study.

Thank you to all the resource social workers through out B.C. who took time out of their busy workdays to respond to the questionnaire. Without your responses I could not have completed this study.

If it were not for the member of the A44-Ministry of Social Services Resource Team I would not have been able to attend UBC or complete this study. Thank you to: Debbie Samija, Judy Tallas, Susie Ross, Olga Campbell, Maria Pirito, John Silman, Jodi Haywood, and Debbie Shankland. I would also like to thank Ray Wargo and Kathy Torhjelm for all their support when completing this study.

Thank you to my family: Shawn Smith who is my best friend and a master teacher, my mom and dad, Jenni and Tom Taylor, my sister, Allison Taylor, and my great aunt, Anne Brooks.

Lisa Moy and Norah Miner my two friends from UVic, thank you for your help as well.
Chapter One: Introduction

In presenting a background to this study it is important to share that my experience over the last two years has been focused in the field of child protection and as a "resource social worker" within the Ministry of Social Services (the Ministry). Part of my job responsibility was recruiting and negotiating out-of-home placements for children. The majority of the children who required out-of-home placements within the region in which I was working were placed in foster homes that had been recruited, evaluated and supported by Ministry resource social workers. These foster homes are referred to as "Ministry foster homes" in this study. I also had the opportunity to arrange and negotiate placements for children in foster homes that had been recruited, evaluated, and supported by agencies and contractors in the private sector. These foster homes are referred to as "private sector foster homes" in this study. The agencies and contractors who were providing private sector foster care services were not government employees, they contracted with the Ministry to provide a service.
The Ministry's Family and Children's Service Policy Manual, Volume 2 (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992a) guided the standards to which I adhered in my practice when working with Ministry foster carers. There was no Ministry policy on the standards with which private sector foster homes and their agencies/contractors were expected to comply.

The lack of policy led me to question the practices of resource social workers in terms of their use of private sector foster homes. Did Ministry offices throughout B.C. place children in private sector foster homes and what criteria and practice did they engage in when the homes were used? The lack of policy led me to consider the need to collect information on resource social workers' practice with private sector foster homes.

Whitelaw's (1995) report: Child Welfare Contracted Services in British Columbia: Final Report was written for the Report of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection: Matthew's Legacy (1995). Whitelaw's report states that there is an increase in the use of private sector foster homes within B.C. (no numerical data was provided in Whitelaw's report relating to this finding). Whitelaw (1995) suggests that the increase in private sector foster homes raises questions with regard to the accountability,
legal responsibilities and processes for approval, access and communication of private sector foster homes with Ministry resource social workers. These questions highlight the need to obtain information and make it available to the community in terms of exploring resource social workers' relationships and experiences with agency/contractors providing foster care services. As well the questions Whitelaw's (1995) report raises with regard to private sector foster homes led to this study's exploration of what rationale resource social workers use when placing children into private sector foster homes.

In 1996, there were approximately 200 private sector foster homes in B.C. Despite this, the Ministry does not appear to publish statistics in a variety of areas such as:
- the number of private sector foster homes which are profit and non-profit;
- the total number of children in the homes;
- the cost of the homes; or
- the number of contractors/agencies operating the homes.

My inability to gather what would appear to be "public" information lead me to question the use of private sector foster homes and resource social workers' views of the attributes the agencies/contractors possessed.
The approval process and monitoring of foster homes has been recently highlighted through the critical injury of two infants in Ministry foster homes: The first case was that of two-month-old Molly DeLaronde. The second was Baby J. who was admitted to Victoria General Hospital with brain injuries (Meissner, 1997, May 9).

The Honourable Penny Priddy, Minister for Children and Families, announced on May 8, 1997 new measures to help keep B.C. children safe while in foster care. The measures included:

- $1.2 million in one-time funding to hire up to 30 new resource workers in communities throughout B.C. to clear a backlog in foster home assessments;

- a review of high-risk children in foster care, to be piloted in the Victoria region; and

- a task force to examine safeguards in foster care (British Columbia, 1997, May 8).

The critical injuries sustained by the two infants placed in Ministry foster care raises questions about the accountability, the approval process, and the communication between Ministry foster carers and resource social workers. This study hoped to explore these issues by seeking resource social workers' views of both private and public sector foster care services.
There are numerous stressors placed upon foster carers including: the double binds of fostering; the economic stresses; the lack of resources; and the effects of separation on the foster carer (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982 as cited in McFadden, Stovall, & Ziefert, 1984).

The double binds of fostering include:

-working with children who experience a wide range of emotional/behavioural problems yet not receiving complete information on the children-in-care from social workers;

-expectations placed upon foster carers to be accepting of parents who may have been abusive and/or neglected the child-in-care, and having no input into the case decisions affecting the child;

-working with social workers many of whom will change over a period of time; and

-receiving little or no pre-service training (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982 as cited in McFadden, Stovall, & Ziefert, 1984, p. 22).

The economic stresses placed on foster families include:

-the payment provided to foster carers is often substantially less than the actual cost of caring for children (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982 as cited in McFadden, Stovall, & Ziefert, 1984, p. 23).
Lack of resources for foster carers include:
- insufficient training programs;
- inaccessible mental health and child guidance counselling programs; and
- casework services are often substandard and lacking (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982 as cited in McFadden, Stovall, & Ziefert, 1984, p. 23).

The effects of separation on foster carers include:
- learning to live with anticipatory and chronic grief;
- knowing a child will be leaving and often experiencing feelings of loss in advance; and
- a sense of sadness over a child’s departure which in many cases is not adequately resolved before a second child is placed in the home (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982 as cited in McFadden, Stovall, & Ziefert, 1984).

Arlene Bishop, who is a district supervisor with the Ministry’s Nanaimo resource team, notes that the large number of older children and children with special needs has changed the nature of fostering over the years. Bishop notes that foster carers need to have sound skills in child rearing and behaviour management (Welbourn, 1997, May 6).

There appears to be an increase in the number of children requiring out-of-home care. In the Province of B.C. in March, 1994 there were 6,200 children-in-care, a
1.5 percent increase over the previous year. March, 1995 figures show a child-in-care population of 6,723, an 8 percent increase over 1994 (British Columbia Gove Inquiry into Child Protection, 1995, p. 32). At the end of November, 1995, 7,003 children remained in care (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, November, 1995). There does not appear to be a decrease in the number of children requiring out-of-home care. The need for foster care services will continue despite the growth in preventative services (Halper & Jones, 1984 as cited in Kadushin & Martin, 1988).

The B.C. Provincial Government budgeted $110.7 million dollars for foster homes and other Ministry residences for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1992 (British Columbia Auditor General, 1992). This amount was for a total of 5,975 children-in-care with 4,631 (77.5 percent) children placed in Ministry foster homes or other Ministry residences and 1,344 (22.5 percent) children placed in non-Ministry residences. Non-Ministry residences would appear to include residences run by the Attorney General, the Ministry of Health, or children placed in resources outside of B.C. The Auditor General did not report the cost of non-Ministry residences (British Columbia Auditor General, 1992, p. 41).
There are a number of issues affecting the recruitment of foster carers such as: the decline of the nuclear family, higher divorce rate, women working outside the home, the high cost of housing, and the difficulty in arranging child care or day care (Pasztor & Burgess, 1982; Smith & Gutheil, 1988).

A lack of cultural awareness and the exclusion of different cultural groups as potential foster carers has left a capable source of foster carers ignored. For example, the majority of First Nations children in the Ministry's care in British Columbia (77.45 percent) are placed with non-First Nations foster carers (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992c).

Foster carers quit fostering due to: lack of training, lack of support, lack of respite care, and the increasing severity of problems presented by the children placed with them (Chamberlain, Moreland & Reid, 1992).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate Ministry resource social workers' experiences with, and opinions of, private sector foster homes compared with Ministry foster homes. Three general research questions were developed:
1) What rationale do resource social workers use when contracting with agencies/contractors to supply foster homes;

2) What do resource social workers see as the difference between Ministry and private sector foster homes; and

3) What are resource social workers' views on the process, practices and relationships between resource social workers and private agencies/contractors who provide foster care services.

The following chapters include a description of the foster care system in B.C.; a review of the literature; the design and research method of the study; a presentation of the data; and an analysis and discussion of the data.
Chapter Two: The System

The research for this study was carried out between February, 1996 and June, 1996 and focussed on the Ministry of Social Services (MSS/the Ministry) as it existed at that time. In September, 1996, MSS' organizational philosophy changed and initiatives were introduced toward the development of the current Ministry for Children and Families (MCF). The research in this study focussed on resource social workers' views of MSS and not MCF. Therefore, when the term "the Ministry" is used in this study, it is in reference to MSS and not MCF.

For the sake of clarification the following terms are being defined since they will be used throughout this study. The definitions have been developed by the author using information from: A Guide to Contract Management (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992b), the author's own experience as a resource social worker, and from the data provided by respondents.

Agencies/contractors

Agencies/contractors provide services to the Ministry through contracts, which are legal agreements made between
two or more persons. Each party to the contract agrees to do something which benefits the other party i.e. foster care services (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992b).

Arms-Length
Contractors maintain arms-length relationships with the Ministry. Both the contractor and the Ministry act together to deliver a service, yet each acts autonomously. Government workers can not exercise control over the contractor's day to day operations, yet Ministry workers can outline the level of service expectations in the contract (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992b).

District Supervisor
District supervisors oversee the day-to-day operations in each Ministry office. They are responsible for giving the final approval of foster homes.

Private Sector Foster Care Services
Foster care services provided by the private sector include: support, recruiting, approval/home studies, training, individual programs and transportation for children-in-care.
Ministry Foster Homes
Foster homes which have been recruited, assessed/approved and are supported by Ministry resource social workers.

Non-Profit
Agencies/contractors who match revenues to expenses and therefore no residual profit is made.

Out-Of-Home Placement
Any placement where the child is out of his/her parental or guardian's home.

Private Sector Foster Homes
Foster homes that receive private sector foster care support services from private sector agencies/contractors instead of Ministry resource social workers. (see Private sector foster care services for a definition of services provided to private sector foster homes).

Profit Foster Care
Agency/contractor who receives revenue from the Ministry and determines their own expenses. The difference between the revenue and expense is the profit.
Residential Child Care Facility
Out-of-home placement for children i.e.: foster homes, or group homes for children.

Resource Social Worker
The role of the resource social worker is to recruit foster homes, conduct assessment/home studies, recommend approval of foster homes, outline expectations to foster parents, co-ordinate investigations into foster homes, act as a liaison worker which entails monitoring contracts with private sector foster homes (both profit and non-profit) and to support, monitor, evaluate and educate foster carers.

Satellite Homes
Same as private sector foster homes.

Social Worker
Every family who is involved with the Ministry has a social worker. The social worker makes a request to the resource social worker to locate a placement for a child. The family and child's social worker continues to work with the child and family while the child is in foster care. The resource social worker provides direct support to the
foster carer while the social worker provides support to the child and child’s parents/guardians.

**Specialized Foster Care (SFC)**

SFC programs appear to be designed specifically for children who display challenging behaviour.

**Support Workers**

Agencies/contractors who provide foster care services hire support workers who provide direct support services to private sector foster carers, children-in-care and biological parents/guardians.

**Structure and Role**

The Ministry is comprised of three main divisions:

- Income Support; Services to People with Mental Handicaps;
- and Child, Family and Community Services.

The Child, Family and Community Services division is responsible for services related to child and family welfare: intake, child and family services, permanency planning and adoption, and child care resources. The child care resources section employs resource social workers whose practice includes: recruiting and evaluating new foster carers, monitoring and evaluating Ministry foster homes; providing direct support services to Ministry foster
carers; co-ordinating investigations into foster homes; and acting as a liaison worker which entails monitoring contracts with private sector foster homes (both profit and non-profit).

District supervisors oversee the day-to-day social work practice of the resource social workers in their offices. As well, team meetings provide a forum for resource social workers to discuss practice issues with their colleagues. Resource social workers may also cover one another's caseloads when a colleague is out of the office or on holidays.

The Ministry is the state agency in British Columbia that oversees situations in which parents or caregivers fail to support the children for whom they are responsible to provide care. The Ministry defines children as people under 19 years of age. The guiding principles of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (1996) are that:

Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect and harm or threat of harm [and] . . . a family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents; [and] . . . if, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided. (p. 7)
When there is a need to remove a child from his or her home, the state is responsible for providing substitute parental care for the child.

The Child, Family and Community Service Act (1996) recognizes that the child's family is the preferred environment for a child as long as the child's safety and well-being can be protected. When a parent is not able to provide care for a child and there are no other options for the child and family, the parent can give temporary care of the child to a director\(^1\) through an agreement with the director or by court order. While children are in substitute parental care, the role of the Ministry social worker is to work with the family towards having their child returned to them, or long-term alternative arrangements need to be made for the child.

The Child, Family and Community Service Act (1996) has guidelines on how long a child can remain in care under agreement or court order. Voluntary care agreements are entered into when a parent is unable to provide care to their child due to an emergency or as part of a therapeutic treatment plan. Voluntary care agreements may be renewed

\(^1\) A director is a person designated by the Minister of Social Services.
for a maximum of 12 months\(^2\), 18 months\(^3\) and 24 months\(^4\).
Special needs agreements are entered into when a child’s needs exceed the parent’s abilities to provide the specialized care that the child requires. Special needs agreements may not exceed 6 months, but the agreement may be renewed for terms of up to 12 months each (Child, Family and Community Service Act, 1996). If a child is removed from his/her parent or guardian and the child is found to be in need of protection and can not be returned home, the child may be placed in the temporary custody of the director. The total period of time that a child can remain in the temporary custody of the director follows the same time frame (as per the age of the child) as a voluntary care agreement.

If a parent is unable to resume care for a child within a time limited fashion, permanent plans must be made.

2. If the child or the youngest child who is the subject of the agreement was under 5 years of age on that date (Child Family and Community Service Act, 1996).

3. If the child or the youngest child who is the subject of the agreement was 5 years of age or over but under 12 years of age on that date (Child Family and Community Service Act, 1996).

4. If the child or the youngest child who is the subject of the agreement was 12 years of age or over on that date (Child Family and Community Service Act, 1996).
for the child to ensure that the child does not remain in a state of limbo or foster care drift.

Recruiting foster carers.

The approval process for Ministry foster carers involves having a resource social worker complete an assessment of the applicants. The assessment takes the form of a foster home study consisting of the proposed foster carer's: motivation to foster; family background, education, personality and health; family functioning; parenting skills; physical characteristics of the home; reference checks; criminal record search; child abuse registry; and medical information.

The prospective caregiver(s) must be 19 years of age, stable and mature in order to provide care, willing to provide an environment free of abuse and physical harm, relevant experience and or training in caring for children, and complete a mandatory pre-service orientation (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1996). Annual reviews of foster homes must also be completed. The above mentioned policies are in place to protect children from exploitation and to ensure that they receive proper care.
Ministry policy does not require resource social workers to complete a foster home study on private sector foster homes. The only policy available on private sector foster homes specifies that the Ministry provide the contractor/agency with written authorization, including specific conditions to contract with other foster carers to provide care to the children placed in the homes. There are no Ministry standards which contractors and agencies must adhere to when recruiting and assessing foster carers. The Ministry is developing policy and procedures regarding private sector foster homes.

The Child Welfare League of America (1995) which has been setting standards in child welfare services since its formation in 1920 recommends public agencies (for example the Ministry) license private agencies that provide foster care services; set and maintain standards of care and protection; offer consultation to agency providers on the policies, procedures, and organizational considerations of the licensing requirements; and withhold licensing from those agencies that do not meet the licensing requirements (p. 129).
Role of resource social workers.

The Ministry requires that resource social workers have contact with foster carers at least every three months. This period can be shorter depending on the agreement between the resource social worker and the foster carer.

Social workers within the Ministry have been under a great deal of pressure for numerous years to provide quality service to families, children, and foster carers with increasingly high caseloads (British Columbia Government Employees' Union, 1985). Foley's (1996) report on workload, staffing and other issues related to the quality of services provided by Ministry social workers suggests that the size of social workers' caseloads is a factor in the erosion of service levels within the Ministry.

Characteristics of B.C. foster homes.


Family care homes are sub-categorized into restricted family care, and regular family care. Specialized family
care homes are sub-categorized into levels 1, 2, and 3 homes.

People who have known a child prior to the child requiring out-of-home care (for example, a child's neighbours or a school mates' parents) are the adults who usually provide restricted family care. Once the child is discharged from the restricted family care home, the home is closed.

Regular family care homes are, in theory, reserved for children who do not know the foster carer and do not present any challenging behaviour.

Level 1, 2, and 3 homes are provided to children who have moderate to extremely challenging behaviour or developmental delays. The level designated to a caregiver is based on their: education/training; child-related experience; knowledge; and demonstrated skills/abilities.

Rates for family care homes and level 1, 2, and 3 homes are fixed. When a child's plan-of-care requires additional support services, an assessment and recommendation is made to the resource social worker's supervisor.

The total number of restricted, regular and level 1 homes for the month of March, 1995 was 1,632 (Whitelaw, 1995). In November, 1995, there were 1,009 level 2 homes,
and 462 level 3 homes (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, November, 1995.).

The following chapter will present a review of the foster care literature affecting children-in-care and resource social workers' practice.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter will focus on permanency planning for children in foster care, profit and non-profit foster care services, specialized foster care programs, training foster carers, contracting with the private sector, and licensing foster homes.

Permanency Planning

Permanency planning focuses on the development of plans for children-in-care to ensure permanency in children’s living arrangements. Permanency planning has come about as a result of research suggesting that children-in-care remain adrift in the out-of-home care system without a specialized and individualized permanent plan (Galaway, 1990). Maluccio and Fein (1986) note that permanency planning is based on the value of rearing children in a family setting, the importance of parent-child attachment, and on the significance of children maintaining contact with their biological family.

Permanency planning has historically focused on the plan of returning children to their parents or severing parental rights and placing children for adoption.
(Forsythe, 1989; Galaway, 1990). This view is changing with the emergence of children who are not appropriate for adoption due to their age or lack of desire to be adopted (Barth & Berry, 1987). As well, parents may not be able to provide daily care for their child yet may wish to continue to have contact with their child. The literature indicates that foster care can be viewed as a permanent plan for a child as long as the child remains in contact with his/her biological family, or has continuity of care and the chance to attach with their foster carer (Thomlison, 1990).

Multiple placements and separation disrupt a child’s normal development (Rycus, Hughes & Ginther, 1988). Healthy attachments foster the development of language and communication, trust, self-esteem, anxiety reduction and a sense of security and self-reliance. When children have to be removed from their foster homes and re-placed into another foster home, it is often the result of a lack of appropriate or available foster home placements than a resource social worker making an inappropriate decision (Kadushin & Martin, 1988). Continuity in a child’s foster home placement is of primary focus in permanency planning.
Profit and Non-Profit Foster Care Services

There is no consensus in the literature on the philosophical values of using profit or non-profit agencies/contractors to deliver foster care services. Hudson, Galaway and Harmon (1989) note that all professionals whether in the profit or non-profit sector, make money from human misery, by generating income from the difficulties experienced by their clients. Borne (1988) argues that a profit motive leads to a more efficient and effective service, and the social work field has been professionally socialized to believe that the non-profit sector is most appropriate and market concepts have no place in the delivery of child welfare services.

MacDonald (1984) reacts in an instinctively negative manner to the notion of organizing social services as profit-making enterprises. MacDonald's (1984) professional value system is built on the philosophy that the well-being of clients should not be compromised by measures that could result in exploitation for another's benefit.

Non-profit agencies/contractors may gain community and staff acceptance if they are perceived as altruistic enterprises (Shostack, 1987). Non-profit agencies/contractors are eligible for tax-exempt status and
may receive grants and equipment from foundations and businesses (Shostack, 1987).

Specialized Foster Care

Since 1975, the Child Welfare League of America has recognized that it is acceptable practice for a public agency to purchase, and a private agency to sell, foster care services.

Substantial research is available outlining the history of specialized foster care (SFC) which was identified by respondents as comparable to the services provided by agencies/contractors providing foster care services.

Nutter, Hudson, Galaway and Hill, (1995) describe SFC as serving children with special needs/behaviours and argue that if it were not for SFC, these children would be placed in relatively restrictive out-of-home treatment settings. Russell and Silberman (1979) describe SFC programs as serving disturbed non-institutionalized youth in the community.

SFC historical development has taken two separate routes in its emergence. Child welfare workers witnessed the need for a compromise between foster care and more restrictive group homes and institutions (Galaway, 1990;
Hudson, Nutter & Galaway (1992). Galaway (1990) states that one of the earliest SFC programs that emerged out of the above concerns was the PATH program established in Minnesota in 1971. PATH continues to provide SFC and is a private sector, non-profit, foster carer governed agency.

Hudson, Nutter & Galaway (1992) report that the second route of emergence of SFC was out of residential treatment programs in the 1950s and early 1960s. Residential treatment programs developed SFC to supplement and serve as an alternative to residential and psychiatric hospitals as well as to provide alternative transitional experiences for children and youth returning to the community (Hudson & Galaway, 1989; Hudson, Nutter & Galaway, 1992). Bryant, Simmens and McKee (1989) indicate that the private sector has pioneered the development of SFC programs due to the smaller, flexible, entrepreneurial and open communication within the private sector.

Baker (1989) focuses on the training foster carers in SFC programs receive in order to avoid stress and burnout so that placements of child-in-care can be maintained. Baker (1989) indicates that foster carers need to be active members of the treatment team, attend meetings with other foster carers for peer support, have weekly contact with support and educational staff, and have access to 24-hour a
day consultation in cases of crisis or for support. Van Den Briken (1984) describes the Eagle Village, Inc., SFC program in Michigan. The program is based on parental participation, foster carer training and education, professional treatment services (through a limited caseload on the part of the "counsellor"), family counselling (for the biological family and the child), foster parent support services (24-hour a day on call support services), and follow-up services when the child is returned to his or her parents.

Training Foster Carers

Accreditation and training programs for foster carers has been identified as enabling foster carers to obtain a professional status (Pedosuk, 1995; Tinney, 1985).

Pedosuk (1995) recommends that training programs offered by the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Association be established and accredited in order for foster carers entering the field to receive basic qualifications.

Tinney (1985) has suggested that the professionalism of foster carers would best be achieved through training offered at Universities or Community Colleges. This would work towards realigning the role and relationship of foster carers.
Contracting with the Private Sector

Contracting with the private sector has been viewed as allowing the government to extend their services without generating growth in the government workforce (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Government employees are viewed by much of the public as costly to the tax payers (Bell-Lowther, 1988; Kettner & Martin, 1993; Rekart, 1993). It is easier for the government to cut back on private sector services and for the private sector to mount programs to meet new and emerging needs than it is for government to do so (Rekart, 1993; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Ismael (1988) describes the privatization of social services as restraining the rate of growth of the public sector while rationalizing spending in a period of increasing demand for services.

Hasenfeld (1984) and The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and Public Sector (1993a) describe social service contracting with the private sector as a way for government to separate itself from private sector service delivery, creating an independent, non-liable government.

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and Public Sector (1993a) cites the current use of private sector contracts as based on:
successive provincial governments’ ideological preference for contracts over provision of services by government employees;

-the FTE (full-time equivalent) control mechanism established by the Financial Administration Act has meant that Ministries had money in their budgets, yet no authorization to hire staff; and

-recruitment procedures within the public service are time consuming, with the result that hiring a public service employee is often not a realistic option for responding to a public service initiative in timely manner (p. 43).

Callahan and McNiven (1988) question the Ministry’s practice of tendering contracts and the lack of competition among contractors. Continuity of care for children and families is noted to be paramount. Tendering contracts every year would be detrimental to children and foster carers. Callahan and McNiven (1988) note that this may affect the decision of practitioners to not change contractors. Smith and Lipsky (1993) acknowledge the inherent contradictions in applying market principles when contracting with the private sector.
Some human services, particularly those involving residential placement or long-term therapeutic relationships, depend upon continuity of care. In these service areas, responsible state officials must temper their interests in generating competition and cost saving with concerns for the client-provider relationship. (Smith & Lipsky, 1993, p. 194)

Borne (1988) values competition among contractors/agencies suggesting that competition encourages agencies/contractors to provide high quality service in the most cost efficient fashion.

A Guide to Contract Management (1992b) directs the Ministry’s contract work, and describes an arms-length relationship with the private sector. The arms-length relationship allows the Ministry and the contractor to work together to deliver a service to the client, yet each is still acting autonomously (British Columbia Ministry of Social Services, 1992b). The Report of The Commission of Inquiry Into The Public Service and Public Sector: Background Paper: Contracted Community Social Services (1993b) indicate that an arms-length relationship ensures that the government maintains independence from the agency/contractor. As well, an attempt is made to ensure that the government is not liable for the contracted services provided.
Licensing Foster Homes

The lack of accountability and standards are documented as problematic areas in government contracting with the private sector (Bell-Lowther, 1988; Ismael, 1988; Rekart, 1993). Whitelaw (1995) states that there has been a decade of absent standards within the Ministry.

The 1990 report, Public Services to Children, Youth and Their Families in British Columbia (1990) recommended the establishment of a licensing mechanism for contracted family-based resources due to the inconsistent and limited application of existing regulatory minimum standards of health and safety.

The British Columbia Gove Inquiry into Child Protection (1995) questioned the lack of evaluation in contracted services and the lack of obligation on the part of contractors to specify the qualifications and training required by child welfare workers. This inquiry also recommended that all child welfare resources become provincially licensed.

The Child Welfare League of America (1995) recommends public agencies license private agencies that provide foster care services and withhold licensing from those agencies that do not meet the licensing requirements.
Currently in B.C., group homes for three or more children must be licensed under the Community Care Facility Act and Community Care Facility Act Child Care Regulation. Foster homes are exempt from the requirements of licensing under the Community Care Facility Act. Gazan and Flynn (1986) identify the licensing of foster carers and their homes as the most effective and equitable means for preventing abuse, exploitation, or neglect of children. The licensing of group homes in B.C. is performed by licensing officers who work for health regions and enforce uniform minimum standards under the Community Care Facility Act and Community Care Facility Act Child Care Regulation. Resource social workers' activities however tend to be guided by internal office policies and professional practice (Gazan & Flynn, 1986).

The following chapter will present the research methods used in the study.
Chapter four: Research Design and Method

This descriptive research study employed a questionnaire designed to explore resource social workers' views of private and public sector foster homes. The design included both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This chapter describes the participants, procedures, measures and methods, statistical analyses, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis used in the study.

Participants

The participants identified in this study were resource social workers who worked for the Ministry in B.C. Ministry resource social workers who worked in Services for People with Mental Handicaps (SPMH) were excluded from the study.

All one hundred and ninety-eight resource social workers and district supervisors employed by the Ministry at the time of research were sent questionnaires (see Appendix A) that required approximately 20 minutes to complete. Eight questionnaires were returned uncompleted by one resource office which was unable to take part in the
study due to workload issues. The sample was, therefore, calculated at 190 with a return rate of 84 (44.21 percent; n = 84). The Lower Mainland region of B.C. made up 41.67 percent of the sample (n = 35); the Central Interior/Northern 32.14 percent (n = 27); Vancouver Island 16.67 percent (n = 14); and the Southeast 9.52 percent (n = 8) of the total sample.

Resource social workers who worked in offices which used private sector foster homes (67.80 percent) were asked to complete the entire questionnaire. Respondents who did not work in offices using private sector foster homes (32.20 percent) responded only to Section A.: Work Responsibility. A contingency question directed the respondents who did not use private sector foster homes to the demographic section of the questionnaire.

Procedures

Packages of questionnaires were mailed on February 27, 1996 to each resource district supervisor in B.C. (45 offices) with a letter of initial contact (Appendix B) attached to the package of questionnaires. An explanatory letter (Appendix C) explaining the study was attached to each questionnaire along with a return-addressed, pre-stamped envelope. All questionnaire responses were
anonymous and informed consent was understood with completion of the questionnaire. Respondents were informed in the explanatory letter that the completed study would be made available to them through the Ministry library to which all respondents have access. Postcards (Appendix D) thanking respondents for sending back questionnaires and to please fill them out if they had not been mailed were sent to all district supervisors (45 postcards) on March 1, 1996. A second batch of postcards was sent to Lower Mainland district supervisors (11 offices) on March 11, 1996 as response rate was low for this area at that time. Completed questionnaires from all areas of B.C. continued to be received up to June, 1996.

A self-administered questionnaire was used due to the relatively low cost, and direct access to a large pool of potential respondents. A questionnaire was chosen as the means of gathering data for this study as questionnaires have been shown to be "easier for people to answer threatening questions privately on paper than to speak the answers aloud to someone else" (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994, p. 369). As well, there is a high opportunity for all members of a population to be included in the sample (Dillman, 1978).
Measures and Methods

A questionnaire was developed and distributed among resource social workers in B.C. in an attempt to explore the following research questions: 1) What rationale do resource social workers use when contracting with agencies/contractors to supply foster homes; 2) What do resource social workers see as the difference between Ministry and private sector foster homes; and 3) Resource social workers’ views on the process, practices and relationships between resource social workers and private agencies/contractors who provide foster care services.

The questionnaire developed for the study used open and closed questions and Likert scales. The research questions were developed from my own experiences as a resource social worker, and from questions raised in the literature with regard to the safety of children-in-care, the increase in private sector foster homes, the lack of information on private sector foster care programs, and the statistics which indicate a rise in the number of children-in-care.

The level of research design was that of a descriptive study. The questionnaire designed for this study was not based on an existing or specific questionnaire.
Both qualitative and quantitative measures were chosen to give the questionnaire balance. The quantitative and qualitative measures, which were used in this study, allowed respondents to complete the questionnaire in approximately 20 minutes. Many participants do not enjoy the notion of attaching a number to their views and experiences. Therefore, the majority of questions were constructed so that Likert scales and closed questions were followed by open questions with room for comments by respondents.

The questionnaire was pilot-tested by six Ministry resource social workers who were versed in the use of private sector foster homes. The sample of professionals who pilot tested the questionnaires represented the total population in that they ranged in length of employment as Ministry resource social workers, job duties, and amount of experience with private sector foster homes.

The reliability of the questionnaire was unknown since repeating the mail out of the questionnaire was not possible within the study time frame. Internal consistency could not be estimated for the quantitative data as the study did not measure one single concept or one phenomenon. Chronbach's alpha and split half reliability are statistical tests used to measure internal reliability.
Chronbach’s alpha and split half reliability can only be applied to quantified observations of one kind and one concept or phenomenon (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994). Therefore, no statistical test to measure internal consistency was applied to the quantitative data as the study attempted to measure more than one concept and phenomenon.

The pilot test assessed the face validity of the questionnaire by gaining feedback from Ministry resource social workers who had varied work experience in their positions. After the pilot test, changes to a number of measures were made to eliminate wording bias and to increase face validity, as well as to minimize random error. Random error occurs when a measure is poorly developed and respondents do not understand what is being asked—this could then lead to inconsistent or random answers (Rubin & Babbie, 1989). The pilot testers felt that the questionnaire was impartial and presented questions in a manner that would yield accurate and comprehensive data, this ensured face validity. The measures reflected content validity as they were chosen and based on discussions in the literature.

The questionnaire was divided into six sections:
Resource Social Workers’ Work Responsibilities and Use of Private Sector Foster Homes;

Resource Social Workers’ Experiences and Opinions Regarding the Practice and Services of Private Sector Foster Homes Compared With Ministry Foster Homes;

Resource Social Workers’ Experience and Opinions Regarding Profit and/or Non-Profit Private Sector Foster Homes;

Monetary Data;

Resource Social Workers Views of Their Relationship with Agencies/Contractors Providing Foster Care Services; and

Statistical Information.

The following are some of the selected measures that were used in this study and are highlighted in bold print. For a total account of all the measures used in this study please see Appendix A: Questionnaire.

Resource Social Workers’ Work Responsibility and Use of Private Sector Foster Homes.

Respondents were asked to check yes or no to the following question: Does your office use private sector foster homes at all? A contingency question directed the respondents to the end of the questionnaire to answer demographic questions if their office did not use private
sector foster homes. It was hoped that this measure would make it possible to gain an understanding of the different regions in B.C. who were and those who were not using private sector foster homes as these statistics were not available from the Ministry when requested.

Resource Social Workers' Experiences and Opinions Regarding the Practice and Service of Private Sector Foster Homes Compared with Ministry Foster Homes.

Two Likert scale questions were presented in a parallel format, designed to provide comparative views of the use of private and Ministry foster homes. To what extent does your office use private sector foster homes and to what extent does your office use Ministry foster homes. It was hoped that these measures would provide an overview of resource social workers' views with regards to the extent that Ministry and private sector foster homes are used.

Three Likert scale questions were designed to gain an understanding of resource social workers' views of their offices' social work practice and relationship with private sector contractors/agencies in terms of standards and accountability placed upon the private sector. 1. Do social workers in your office read private sector foster home studies, 2. Are private sector foster home studies
available to your office if resource social workers want to
read them, and 3. Are you given the qualification(s) of
the person in the private sector who is conducting the
foster home study? Question 1. and 3. were followed by
open questions asking respondents to comment.

Two open-ended questions were designed to permit
respondents to comment about any concern they had about the
quality of service of both the private and public sector.
It was hoped that this measure would provide feedback with
regards to differences between the quality of service of
the Ministry and the private sector. What is your opinion
about the quality of service provided by the private sector
and what is your opinion about the quality of service
provided by the Ministry?

Resource Social Workers’ Experience and Opinions
Regarding Profit or Non-Profit Private Sector Foster
Homes.

This section was designed to gain an understanding of
resource social workers’ values and the criteria they use
when choosing between profit and non-profit private sector
foster homes. Does the profit or non-profit status of an
agency/contractor affect resource social workers’ decision
to use a private sector foster home? Are there
agencies/contractors who are both profit and non-profit
providing foster care services in B.C.? Ministry policy does not stipulate that agencies/contractors must be profit or non-profit. It was hoped that this section would add to the varied literature on social worker’s views of both profit and non-profit foster care services and if it affects their practice. 1. If you had the chance to work with a profit or non-profit agency/contractor in regards to a foster home placement for a child-in-care, which would you use: Non-profit agencies/contractor, profit agencies/contractors, neither, unsure, or this is not an issue. Respondents were asked to check the box that indicated their preference. Respondents were also asked for their written comments underneath the open question with the prefix: Why they responded as they did.

Monetary Data.

A measure on monetary data was developed to investigate resource social workers’ views on the cost of private sector foster homes compared with the cost of Ministry foster homes. It was hoped that this measure would provide information on resource social workers’ views of the differences between Ministry and private sector foster homes. 1. The per diem rate for private sector foster homes is: Greater, same or less than Ministry foster
homes. Respondents were also asked for their written comments underneath the open question with the prefix: Why they responded as they did.

Resource Social Workers Views of Their Relationship with Agencies/Contractors Providing Foster Care Services.

The following Likert scale measure was designed to explore the relationship between resource social workers and agencies/contractors who provided foster care services. Specifically, did resource social workers' view their offices as using a large pool or a limited number of agencies/contractors who provided foster care services. My office uses the same agency/contractor when the decision has been made to use a private sector foster home. Respondents were also asked to write any comments they had on the issue.

Two open-ended questions were asked: List two advantages of using private sector foster homes and Ministry foster homes; and list two disadvantages of using private sector foster homes and Ministry foster homes. This question was designed to explore the rationale that resource social workers' used when contracting with agencies/contractors to supply foster homes.
Statistical Information.

The demographic profile was used to assess similarities and differences in views among resource social workers and regions. Two open-ended questions were asked: How many years have you worked for the Ministry; and How many years have you worked for the Ministry as a resource social worker. Respondents were asked to check yes or no to the following question: Do you have any post-secondary education. If respondents answered yes to having post-secondary education, they were directed to a contingency question which asked respondents to check a box which listed 10 possible degree options. Respondents were also provided with space to specify any degree or post-secondary education they may have which was not listed.

Respondents were asked to check the box that indicated the region of B.C. in which they worked. Respondents were provided with the following categories: Lower Mainland; Central Interior/Northern; Vancouver Island; and Southeast.

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were also given the opportunity to provide any additional information that they considered relevant.
Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and translate quantitative data. This included the calculation of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Qualitative Analyses

Written statements made by respondents constituted the qualitative study data. The analysis of the written statements was subjected to a content analysis consisting of the following activities: data reduction, coding, recording the codes, data display, and drawing conclusions (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994).

Written statements made by respondents were transcribed using a word processing program. Statements were classified by questions asked on the questionnaire.

From the verified transcribed statements, themes were identified, and an attempt was made to identify categories "named by research participants themselves, termed in vivo or indigenous codes" (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994, p. 418). An attempt was made to give equal weight to all written statements made by participants.

Coloured highlighters were used to code themes identified for each qualitative question respondents
answered on the questionnaire. The coded text was then reproduced into coded passages. Under in vivo subheadings, an attempt was made "to give at least one direct illustration from the verbatim data of any important category utilized in the analysis. This display allows the reader to draw his or her own independent conclusion about the validity of the code" (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994, p. 426). An attempt was made to "create a forum for presentation of these experiences and ideas rather than seeking the most frequently expressed or the strongest opinion" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 162). The themes were then summarized and interpreted.

The following chapter will present selected results from the questionnaire.
Chapter Five: Presentation of Data

This chapter presents selected results from a questionnaire which asked resource social workers to quantitatively and qualitatively compare Ministry and private sector foster homes. The data obtained from the measures not selected was repetitious and did not appear to vary from the data presented here. An analysis of the data appears in chapter six: Analysis and Discussion. Therefore, there will be no commentary or analysis in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into four sections: (1) Participants; (2) Advantages and Disadvantage of Private and Ministry foster homes; (3) Views On the Social Work Practice and Relationship Between Resource Social Workers and Private Agencies/Contractors Who Provide Foster Care Services; and (4) Resource Social Workers’ Recommendations for the Future Use of Private and Ministry Foster Homes. The measures employed in the questionnaire are highlighted in bold print at the beginning of each sub-section. Sample quotations are included to highlight qualitative data.
Participants

How many years have you worked for the Ministry as a resource social worker?

Do you have any post-secondary education? If yes, please specify.

Respondents from all regions of B.C. have worked as resource social workers for an average of 6.88 years. Twenty-five percent of respondents were district supervisors. The education levels were fairly consistent with the majority made up of Bachelor of Arts (56.00 percent) and Bachelor of Social Work (44.00 percent) degrees. Master of Social Work degrees were held by 15.50 percent of respondents. Those respondents who indicated they had Master of Social Work degrees also indicated that they had Bachelor of Social Work degrees.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Private and Ministry Foster Homes

Does your office use private sector foster homes at all?

Of the 84 resource social workers that responded to the questionnaire, 58 worked in offices which used private sector foster homes. These 58 resource social workers were instructed to respond to the entire questionnaire. The 26 resource social workers who did not work in offices which used private sector foster homes responded only to section
A.: Work Responsibility and the demographic section of the questionnaire.

To what extent does your office use private sector foster homes?

Overall, 67.80 percent of respondents (n = 58) indicated that their offices sometimes used private sector foster homes (on a five point Likert scale M = 3.13, SD = .86; 3 = sometimes).

The Southeast (n = 1) and Vancouver Island (n = 5) regions of B.C. seldom used private sector foster homes (M = 2.00, SD = 0.00; 2 = seldom and M = 2.60, SD = 0.55 respectively). The Lower Mainland (n = 34) and Central Interior/Northern regions (n = 15) of B.C. sometimes used private sector foster homes (M = 3.23, SD = 0.78 and M = 3.12, SD = 1.06 respectively). The Lower Mainland and Central Interior consisted of 89 percent (n = 49) of respondents for this question.

To what extent does your office use Ministry foster homes?

Ministry foster homes were often used by respondents to place children (M = 4.43, SD = .48; 4=often; 5=always).
List two advantages of using private sector foster homes.

The following themes emerged with regards to resource social workers' views of the advantages in using private sector foster homes: extra support; individualized programs; increased skill level of foster carers; professionalism; willing to provide homes for children with challenging behaviour; and when no Ministry foster home was available, the private sector was used.

Extra support provided to private sector foster carers by their agencies/contractors (such as access to support services provided by their agency/contractor 24-hours a day) was viewed as a positive benefit when a very difficult youth was placed. The agencies/contractors were viewed by respondents as hiring support workers to provide 24-hour support services to the foster carer. Respondents viewed support workers in the private sector as having fewer homes to supervise and support on their caseloads than Ministry resource social workers.

Support workers have a more specific role than does a liaison resource social worker, therefore support is more encompassing.

They provide more support and training to caregivers than MSS homes receive.
The availability of private sector foster homes was seen as relieving resource social workers of time they would otherwise have to spend on those homes. Direct support services and supervision was viewed as being provided by the private sector to their foster homes. One respondent indicated that private agencies/contractors who provided foster care services created the following workplace environment:

I don’t have to worry about providing support to caregivers when I don’t have the time to do it. My job is focused on case management and administrative tasks now.

Providing “individualized”, “flexible”, and “specialized” placements which were tailored to a specific child’s needs as well as the needs of the child’s family was viewed as a positive element of the private sector.

The private sector home contractor has a greater ability to provide additional programs to meet the needs of children, including day program, 1-1 worker, counselling, school program, life skills/work experience program and emergency crisis intervention.

Ongoing training and encouragement to increase skill level was a positive aspect and reason to use private
sector foster homes. Three respondents indicated private sector foster carers were:

Encouraged to increase their skill level.

More skilled caregivers.

Skilled in a particular expertise.

A "professional attitude and conduct" was expected of private sector foster homes. Private sector agencies/contractors were viewed as creating an atmosphere where there was "more focus on professionalism" by both the agency/contractor and the foster carer.

"Willing" and "able" to take challenging children into their homes were verbs used to describe private sector foster homes. Numerous respondents indicated that these homes were willing to care for challenging children.

Greater ability to keep high needs children.

They take my difficult placements.

When no Ministry foster homes were available to place children into, resource social workers indicated that they were able to use the services of the private sector.
They are used only when no MSS homes are available.

When no suitable placement can be made in a MSS home, we contract out.

When children can not be placed into MSS homes the private sector usually can provide more on-going support to both the child and caregiver.

**DESPERATION**—no other MSS home available.

**List two advantages of using Ministry foster homes.**

Conducting the assessment and home study process of new foster carers, and having first hand knowledge of the foster carer’s skills, strengths and limitations were themes expressed by numerous respondents and viewed as advantages when using Ministry foster homes.

Knowledge of the contents of a home study, and meeting government standards and accountability, were expressed by respondents as safeguards which they were able to impose through their direct working relationship with Ministry foster carers.

I’m confident of the [Ministry] approval process, confident they [foster carers] are clear of rules and policy.

We personally study the homes and get to know them.
MSS homes have known quantities.

The ability to match children with foster carers was seen as the result of the resource social worker's experience, skills and knowledge of the placement.

**List two disadvantages of using private sector foster homes.**

The following themes emerged with regards to resource social workers' views of the disadvantages of using private sector foster homes: high cost when contracting with the private sector; standards and accountability were questioned; the skill level of private sector foster carers was identified as a concern; and communication and monitoring private sector homes was viewed as challenging.

Agencies and contractors were viewed by many respondents as charging a higher rate for the placement of children than Ministry foster homes. "Too expensive"; "Cost is too high"; and "Costly" were adjectives used to describe disadvantages to using private sector foster homes. There was also the view that the cost of private sector foster homes was high due to the administration fee paid to the agency/contractor.

More money in administration fee and less to client service.
Standards and accountability were questioned by many resource workers because private sector foster homes did not have Ministry approval, their standards were unknown, and some of the respondents were not aware of how the homes had been studied.

Not certain of the quality, skills, and taking someone else's word for it.

I don't know the approval process.

Not always approved.

The skill level of private sector foster carers was questioned. This contradicts the data indicating that resource social workers' viewed private sector foster carers as skilled.

Our office tried contracting with a private agency. We found the agency hired homes we had previously closed because of serious concerns. Also the agency did not complete home studies.

At times the private sector has opened homes where the caregivers don't have a lot of experience/skills in working with children. In fact I studied one such home where the caregivers were young, no children of their own and very limited related experience. I was able to offer them level one rates and would not have been comfortable offering them more to start with. A private society came along, offered them what was the equivalent to a level 3 contract without completing a home study, and actually had only met with the couple once.
Communication between private sector agencies and resource social workers was described as "third-hand communication." Resource social workers described themselves as communicating with a contractor/agency or support worker/coordinator instead of having a direct relationship with the foster carer. The latter is the relationship that resource social workers have with Ministry foster carers. Three respondents echo these concerns:

It is an extra relationship to maintain—the relationship with the caregiver, the social worker and the society.

Communication is often through the agency.

I spend time trying to work through the extra layers of bureaucracy.

Another respondent indicated that he/she is brought into problem situations only at,

a critical moment and MSS resource social workers don’t have all the information and understanding of the dynamics that led up to the crisis in the private home.

List two disadvantages of using Ministry foster homes.

Two themes emerged from the analysis of statements made by resource social workers of disadvantages when using
Ministry foster homes: Ministry foster carers were not viewed by respondents as having highly specialized skills, and Ministry resource social workers viewed themselves as unable to provide the support which Ministry foster carers required.

The absence of Ministry foster carers who were able to provide care to children with challenging behaviours was viewed as lacking.

Children placed in MSS homes are often too difficult for caregiver’s skill level.

Not skilled enough for the kids we need to place

Not usually as ‘expert’ at behaviour management.

Not enough highly skilled homes.

Ministry foster carers were described by two respondents as:

Unskilled volunteer caregivers.

Lack openness to learn skills and don’t see fostering as a career and approach it like they will be baby-sitting.

Respondents indicated that due to their large workloads, they were unable to provide the extra support
that many Ministry foster carers required when challenging children were placed with them. "Not enough time to support" and "support by MSS can be sporadic" were commonly expressed statements. One respondent stated that,

if the MSS had on-call intervention services, readily available day programs (when children are out of school) and respite services, our MSS model would work effectively.

The private sector was described as able to provide 24-hour a day service to their foster carers, a service Ministry resource social workers expressed they were unable to offer.

We can’t be available to provide resource support 24-hours a day. Our private agency has support available 24-hours.

Views On the Process, Practices and Relationships of Resource Social Workers and Private Agencies/Contractors Who Provide Foster Care Services

If you had the chance to work with a profit or non-profit agency/contractor in regards to a foster home placement for a child which would you use?

Given the personal choice to work with either a profit or non-profit agency/contractor in regards to a foster home placement for a child was viewed as not being an issue for 53.80 percent of respondents. Twenty five percent of respondents indicated they would use a non-profit
agency/contractor; 7.70 percent indicated they would use a profit agency/contractor; and 13.50 percent of respondents were unsure what their preferred choice would be.

Three contradictory themes emerged in the qualitative data: the best interest of the child should be paramount forsaking whether the agency/contractor is profit or non-profit; a profit motive is a deterrent to agencies/contractors providing high quality service; and the profit sector was viewed as providing a superior service.

Using the "best" option for the child whether profit or non-profit, and the importance of the foster home having the ability to met the child’s needs was viewed as the paramount issue at stake.

We try to place a child in an appropriate home, period.

I want the best home/CIC [child-in-care] match possible.

The child’s needs must come first.

I would attempt to advocate to use the option 'best' for the child whether it be profit and/or non-profit.

Respondents who indicated a preference for non-profit contractors/agencies did so due to the fact that they felt
that a profit motive when caring for children was a
deterrent to providing high quality service. Commitment to
children-in-care was viewed as based on integrity and
commitment rather than receiving a profit.

I don’t believe in contracting out MSS work. If
we must then at least it should be non-profit
due to moral issues.

Profit motive when caring for children is a
deterrent to providing adequate services.

Accountability was raised by one respondent in that a
non-profit agency,

has a board of directors which, if functioning
well, adds another level of accountability to the
director—accountability under the Societies Act.
Profit motive is not as ever present.

One respondent indicated that his/her office only
contracts with non-profit agencies/contractors and the
decision was made at the senior management level.

Respondents who indicated that they would rather place
a child in a foster home contracted by a profit agency/
contractor cited the effort, cooperation, flexibility and
professionalism of the profit sector. The profit sector
was described as having,
Greater flexibility both in program/service delivery and ability to create a resource to meet the needs of the child, cheaper, less administrative structure, few people to deal with and keeps costs down.

I believe 'profit' contractors do not carry ineffectual people in their organizations as frequently.

They continually, in my experience are more professional, cheaper, and offer better quality service.

Another respondent questions the term "profit" indicating that the system is made up of people profiting off of other peoples' problems:

This is not an issue really in terms of quality of service or wages being paid to caregivers. We all 'profit' from people's problems ... When you really look at it. It's just a matter of who pays us and how. Social workers would not have employment if there were no client problems. It's a matter still of management always getting paid more than the worker bees with public service, Nisha non-profit or Orenda.

Does your office read private sector foster home studies?

Overall, respondents indicated that they seldom (on a five point Likert scale M = 2.11, SD = 1.30; 2= seldom) read private sector foster homes studies. The regional data revealed that resource social workers have different
standards and policies for reading private sector foster home studies across different regions.

Two themes emerged from the qualitative data as to whether resource social workers were aware if their offices read private sector foster home studies: a wide variation was described in terms of internal office policies guiding practice; and the opposite practice was that resource social workers had no knowledge of private sector foster home studies.

Internal office policies when completing foster home studies included a collaborative process between the Ministry and agencies/contractors.

We now have a resource social worker from our office doing the satellite home studies.

Recently we have started to work with the private sector on jointly completing home studies.

Our guidelines are followed and the liaison worker does the final review and agreement.

District Supervisor approves.

These policies appear to have placed resource social workers in the position where they have direct knowledge of what standards the private sector is using to assess potential foster carers. One office’s policy was to use a
set of pre-designed forms and outlines that were given to the private sector contractor to use when completing foster home studies. Joint completion of home studies with the private sector in a collaborative approach was also expressed.

They are jointly conducted and completed by Ministry and contractor staff.

One respondent indicated that he/she does the entire foster home study and then gives the study to the agency who provides the direct foster care services.

Resource social workers whose offices did not have clear policy on the reading of private sector foster home studies indicated their experiences:

Private contractors don’t like to share home studies.

They are rarely if ever made available.

To my knowledge – I have questioned whether we should be allowed and so far have been told no, we don’t have the right.

The issue of confidential foster home studies was also expressed:
It apparently is seen as an issue of confidentiality. We can have information on caregiver's skills, abilities and experience but to actually read their home study has been declined in my experience.

Are you given the qualification(s) of the person in the private sector who is conducting the foster home study.

Two opposite trends emerged in respondents' qualitative comments with regards to qualifications of private sector staff: resource social workers were aware of the persons' qualifications in the private sector; and the second theme which emerged was that resource social workers had an arms-length relationship with the contractor/agency and relied on the contractor/agency to ensure their staff had the appropriate qualifications needed in order to complete foster home studies.

Respondents who indicated that they were aware of the private sector staff persons' qualifications appear to have a partnership relationship with the agency/contractor providing foster care services.

Most contractors have a well-known and established relationship with MSS, usually as previous MSS foster parents or community professionals.

We only deal with two or three societies that operate the homes and we know the staff conducting the home studies.
We usually know them as we have a working relationship.

Resource social workers that were not aware of the private sector worker's qualifications appeared to have had an arms-length relationship with the contractors/agencies.

Generally, we have an arms-length arrangement with contractors. They are responsible for making sure their caregivers fit the profiled needs of child to be placed.

Another respondent indicated that:

The understanding is that if you don't trust the contractors then don't deal with them. There seems to be no motivation to monitor qualifications. It is a pass/fail exercise.

The per-diem rate of private sector foster homes is: greater; the same; or less than Ministry foster homes.

The majority (76.90 percent) of respondents indicated that the per-diem rate of private sector foster homes is greater than Ministry foster homes.

Qualitative written comments indicated that respondents viewed the private sector as ensuring that all-foreseeable extras were included in contracts with the Ministry for foster care services, while the Ministry did not include the provision that foster parents may have to pay extras. One respondent indicated that it is,
to be expected in that private homes are able to receive support service whereas MSS foster homes may need to purchase such, i.e. relief given workloads of staff.

Another respondent indicated,

MSS foster homes are often subject to financial limits that may not adequately reflect the true cost of caring for youth. The private agencies appear to have taken the extras into consideration when contracting.

Ministry foster carers must request additional extras, as they are needed while the private sector accounted for them (on a specific basis up front).

The private sector budgets differently: Hires staff and . . . administrative costs. MSS homes do not include these extras so they are supplied as needed.

My office uses the same agency/contractor when the decision has been made to use a private sector foster home.

Qualitative results indicated that there was no clear trend with regards to offices using the same agency/contractor when the decision had been made to use a private sector foster home.

Many respondents' qualitative comments indicated that their offices used agencies/contractors who were previously known to them.

We use what we are familiar with and what can meet the child's specific needs.
Agencies/contractors were viewed as maintaining a positive reputation by meeting the child’s and the Ministry’s needs and therefore they continued to be used to provide foster care services.

We have several contractors who have a proven track record.

Good past performance.

Given the Choice to use a Ministry foster home or a private sector foster home, which would you use?

Given the choice to use a Ministry foster home or a private sector foster home, 89.50 percent of respondents indicated that they preferred using Ministry foster homes.

The following four themes were extracted from respondents qualitative statements in regards to whether they would use a Ministry foster home or a private sector foster home: cost; accountability; the best interests of the child; and availability.

As previously discussed Ministry foster homes were described as being less expensive than private sector foster homes. Respondents indicated there was no extra administrative costs to pay when working with Ministry foster homes.
Resource social workers viewed their practice with Ministry foster carers as "hands-on" and "direct".

Direct access and contact with caregivers gives me a better knowledge of the day-to-day operation. If I could provide the support etc. I would not use private sector foster homes.

There is no middleman to pay or add to the list of players involved in children's lives.

Though I like the nature and quality of support that agencies provide to their caregivers, I feel that a "hands-on" working relationship with caregivers is very important in order to track the needs of our CICs [Children-In-Care].

The direct relationship with Ministry foster carers was also viewed as creating clear lines of accountability.

I believe there is better accountability.

Direct relationship to the foster home. Clear lines of accountability. Ministry oriented and trained. Payment consistent with clear guidelines.

The MSS home involves less people and thus improves communication. Less cumbersome for goal setting and evaluation.

Respondents indicated how important it was that they themselves and their Ministry colleagues had completed the foster home study.
Standards of studies is known. Less unknown variable.

Prefer to be solely responsible in recruiting, conducting homestudy, liaising and monitoring as is the case in starting-up a MSS foster home.

There was a strong preference to place children with the foster carer who is able to meet the special needs of a child, be it a Ministry foster home or a private sector foster home. A number of respondents indicated that they would use the foster home which best met the child's needs foregoing all other considerations. Three respondents commented that they,

would use what I consider to be the best placement, match, 'fit' of child-in-care and placement if I had a choice.

Depends which type of placement best meets the child's needs.

Depends on the child, the difficulty of behaviours and the availability of the resource.

Another respondent indicated that,

this is a difficult choice to make and still respect the needs of the child.

The availability of placements was the final theme expressed. A number of resource social workers indicated
that they placed children in homes that were available.

Two respondents indicated that:

No preference—depends on supply and demand and what is available.

Our reality is that when selecting placements we first see what is available then (if we have a choice) we decide if the needs of the child match the skill/experience of the caregiver. Choosing between MSS and private sector is not an issue—availability is the more immediate problem.

What is your opinion about the quality of service provided by the private sector?

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on the quality of service provided by the private sector. Two themes emerged from the statements of resource social workers with regard to their views of the quality of service provided by the private sector. First, the private sector was viewed as providing a similar service to the Ministry, but they were viewed as providing additional support to caregivers. The second theme that emerged was quality of service depended on the specific contractor/agency.

In the opinion of respondents, the private sector was able to provide quality service due to a:

Smaller manageable process/task.
Yet, the skills of private sector foster carers were viewed as similar to Ministry foster carers:

Service provided by the actual home is often similar to MSS levels. What makes the difference is the built in crisis response, training etc.

They seem to be able to provide better support to their homes. The homes themselves are not much different.

The support the private sector was able to provide to their foster homes was listed as a pre-requisite to quality service. One respondent commented that his/her:

Overall impression is that private sector homes have a greater level of social worker support and this is reflected in quality of service.

A skilled, qualified contractor/agency who has a positive working relationship with the Ministry was viewed as correlating to quality service in addition to well-qualified and supervised staff.

Have had good service from selected contractors. A key is having good working relationship . . . and trust with the contractor--shared philosophy.

Our contractor is a local person, committed to the community and to providing us with good service. Very responsive to any MSS concerns.
When the contractor is skilled and very qualified, having lots of caregiving experience the services can be great and very qualified.

**What is your opinion about the quality of service provided by the Ministry?**

It was expressed that the burden of high caseloads precluded resource social workers from providing quality service to foster carers. Foster homes in the Ministry system were described as high quality, yet respondents indicated that there is little ability to support them due to workload issues.

Not enough time to adequately provide support to foster parents.

Quality of service is high but undermined by workload demands.

The average caseload in our office is about 28 to 30 homes/resources. So your ability to monitor and support your caregivers is limited.

One respondent commented that,

foster homes by and large are treated badly by the MSS system, undervalued.

Another respondent indicated that resource social work support is,
inconsistent. Too much work . . . this contributes to my support of our contractor.

The lack of support is described by one resource social worker as creating a climate where foster carers are,

becoming increasingly angry at the lack of time for support and thorough work i.e. crisis management.

One office has tried to ameliorate its lack of support by hiring a private behavioural consultant to support Ministry foster carers.

Recommendations for the Future Use of Private and Ministry Foster Homes

Please provide any additional information that you consider relevant.

Resource social workers were given the opportunity at the end of the questionnaire to provide additional relevant information. Two themes emerged from their qualitative responses: the Ministry can provide the same service as agencies/contractors, and if agencies/contractors are going to be providing foster care services, they must adhere to the same standards of assessing foster carers as the Ministry.
Respondents indicated that if they were able to access the same resources as the private sector, then they would not need to contract out foster care services.

If we had adequate staffing in resource teams to allow a greater focus on all aspects of resource work: recruitment, studying, training, placement support, monitoring and evaluation we wouldn’t need to contract out these other services.

Another respondent stated:

There would be no reason to use private agencies if budgets for foster home support could include the use of a pool of childcare workers, money to train on an ongoing basis and flexibility to provide extras when required. Resource workers’ caseloads would also need to be reduced to the size where they would be able to have the kind of supportive relationships necessary to maintain difficult placements.

A number of respondents expressed that there is a place for both the private sector and the Ministry to work together. Yet, standards must be in place.

If private sector resources/homes are to be an option they must be selected and monitored using the same standards as those for MSS resources.

Respondents who favored the use of both private and public felt that quality and standards need to be applied more consistently.
I would like to see recruiting, orientation and doing the actual home studies contracted out although MSS social workers should play a part in all 3.

For the past 20 months [name of respondent’s region] has been experimenting with the use of satellite care homes as an adjunct to our MSS foster homes. As a result of the experiment we are coming to the following conclusions:
- Private sector caregivers are less skilled and experienced than MSS caregivers;
- Recruiting and retention is a significant problem for both MSS and private sector;
- Support to caregivers in the form of 24-hour response service, respite service, day programming and transportation service, and clinical supervision is crucial. The private sector has been able to provide these supports—something lacking for MSS caregivers;
- Our most difficult kids are often going to the less experienced private sector homes. This occurs because MSS caregivers will not take these difficult kids. They might be willing to take these kids if they had the support.
- Ideally we need to meld the good parts of private sector homes (i.e.: support services to caregivers) with the good parts of MSS homes (i.e.: skills and experience).

The following table displays resource social workers’ views of the advantages and disadvantages of Ministry and private sector foster homes and resource social workers’ views of profit and non-profit foster care services.
### Private Sector Advantages
- extra support 24-hours a day
- individualized programs
- increased skill level
- professional attitude
- available homes for challenging children
- flexible
- on-going training
- encouragement to increase skill
- more skilled caregivers
- particular expertise
- take difficult placements
- use of support workers
- no set fee structure

### Ministry Advantages
- knowing the home
- assessment
- having first-hand knowledge of caregivers skills
- meeting government standards and accountability
- knowledge of home study
- direct working relationship with home
- ability to match children

### Private Sector Disadvantages
- higher cost
- questionable standards and accountability
- skill level of concern
- communication and monitoring
- question approval process
- third-hand communication

### Ministry Disadvantages
- do not have high-specialized skills
- unable to provide required support
- unskilled caregivers
- seldom available
- unable to offer 24-hour service
- not enough time to support homes because of high caseloads
- treated badly by the Ministry
- support is inconsistent
- undervalued
- set fee schedule for foster carers

### Non-Profit
- preferred by resource social workers
- accountable through Board of Directors

### For-Profit
- seen as a deterrent to quality service
- preferred by some resource social workers because of: effort; cooperation; flexibility; and professionalism
- seen by some as cheaper and offer better quality service

---

Table 1. Resource Social Workers’ Views Of The Advantages And Disadvantages Of Ministry And Private sector Foster Homes And Resource Social Workers’ Views Of Non-Profit And For-Profit Foster Care Services.
Chapter Six: Analysis and Discussion

Resource social workers provided an overview of the similarities and differences between Ministry and private sector foster homes and the reasons for their respective uses. The similarities and differences of Ministry and private sector foster homes raise questions as to when and how the homes are used.

This chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the data from a questionnaire distributed to resource social workers in B.C. on February 27, 1996. This chapter presents an analysis of the following three research questions: 1) What rationale do resource social workers use when contracting with agencies/contractors to supply foster homes; 2) What do resource social workers see as the difference between Ministry and private sector foster homes; and 3) Resource social workers’ views on the process, practices and relationships between resource social workers and private agencies/contractors who provide foster care services. As well, the implication of the study for policy, practice and standards; training; resources; permanency planning; ideas for future research;
What Do Resource Social Workers See As the Difference Between Ministry and Private Sector Foster Homes?

The quality of service that the private sector was able to provide to their foster carers was viewed as superior to that which resource social workers felt they were able to provide. Smaller caseloads of private sector support workers were viewed as correlating with the support workers' ability to provide a higher quality of service to private sector foster carers and children-in-care.

The 24-hour support provided by private sector support workers was viewed as unobtainable for resource social workers to provide to Ministry foster carers. The intensive support that private sector support workers were viewed as providing contrasted sharply to the support services resource social workers identified themselves as able to offer Ministry foster carers.

The large caseloads resource social workers' carried were identified as creating practice implications that negatively affected the service Ministry foster carers received.

The implications of large caseloads identified in this study are consistent with the literature indicating the
difficulty social workers have in providing quality service with increasingly high caseloads (British Columbia Government Employees' Union, 1985; Foley, 1996).

Ministry foster carers were not perceived as possessing the same professional status as private sector foster carers. Tinney (1985) argues that provincial government policy does not sanction foster caring as a professional undertaking. Tinney (1985) recommends that to increase the professionalism of foster carers, training through Universities or Community Colleges is needed to realign the role and relationship of foster carers. Contractors/agencies appeared to be in a position that allowed them to advocate for private sector foster carers to receive higher funding than Ministry foster carers. The relationship the Ministry has when entering agreements with Ministry foster carers is based on policy that dictates set fees to be paid to Ministry foster carers. There is no fee scale for private sector foster homes. Contractors/agencies are able to determine fees according to their views of a fair wage for themselves and their foster cares.

One resource social worker identified his/her experience when offering prospective foster carers a level 1 rate of pay. The prospective foster carers went to an agency/contractor and were offered the equivalent to a
level 3 rate of pay. If the need for private sector foster care services continues, prospective and established Ministry foster carers may explore the option of establishing themselves under a public or private agency for monetary or ideological reasons.


When resource social workers identify the need to contract with an agency/contractor to supply a private sector foster home, contracts were identified as not tendered to the public. The criteria for entering into additional contracts with the Ministry was identified as based on the success or failure of an agency/contractor, either through “good” or “bad” past experiences. Resource social workers’ past experience was viewed as the precedent to renewing and entering new contracts with agencies/contractors.

Callahan and McNiven (1988) identify the reluctance social workers may have in changing contractors due to the importance of continuity of care for children. “Thus the notion that contracting increases competition and decreases
cost may not be true in many social service situations” (Callahan and McNiven, 1988, p. 32).

The continual use of a select pool of agencies/contractors to provide foster care services within each Ministry office would appear to allow the agencies/contractors to specialize their services. Agencies/contractors, through their continued delivery of private sector foster care services would have the ability to focus their skills on specific regions' identified needs.

Contracting with a select pool of agencies/contractors to provide foster care services could impede the development of a competitive market among agencies/contractors delivering foster care services. Selectively contracting with a limited pool of agencies/contractors could lead to the underdevelopment of other potential agencies/contractors. Borne (1988) values competition among agencies/contractors and suggests that competition promotes high quality service in the most cost efficient fashion (Borne, 1988).

When the decision was made to contract with an agency/contractor to provide foster care services, resource social workers gave varying views as to whether their ideological preference was to place children in foster
homes that were delivered by the profit and non-profit sector. The best interest of the child was described as the prevailing factor if given a choice between profit and non-profit foster care services. Resource social workers that cited the best interest of the child as their paramount consideration did not appear to distinguish between any ideological differences that profit and non-profit agencies/contractors may adhere to.

A preference for placing children in foster homes run by the non-profit sector was viewed as an advantage due to the absence of a profit motive. Non-profit agencies/contractors were perceived as having a commitment to children based on integrity and commitment rather than working with children in order to receive a profit. Non-profit agencies with a Board of Directors were identified, as the mechanism needed to ensure checks and balances under The Societies Act. A non-profit status may have positive advantages such as eligibility for tax-exempt donations from individuals and corporations. Non-profit agencies/contractors may have access to donations that can be used to fund foster carers. As well, the possibility increases for receiving grants from foundations and businesses (Shostack, 1987).
Those resource social workers that placed a preference for using the non-profit sector are consistent with the ideology of MacDonald (1984) who reacts in an instinctively negative manner to the notion of organizing social services as profit-making enterprises. MacDonald's (1984) professional value system is built on the philosophy that the well-being of social service recipients should not be compromised by measures that could result in exploitation for another's benefit. Resource social workers may form more positive attitudes towards agencies/contractors if they perceive them as altruistic enterprises (Shostack, 1987).

An ideological preference to use only profit agencies/contractors was the minority view expressed. The profit sector was identified as having flexible and effective professionals who made an effort to provide high quality care. Working cooperatively with resource social workers in the Ministry was viewed as a positive characteristic of the profit sector.

The majority of resource social workers identified children's best interests as the foremost consideration as opposed to personal ideological preferences when selecting agencies/contractors who are profit and non-profit. This finding contradicts the widely assumed position that the
social work field has been professionally socialized to accept that non-profit provision of child welfare services is most appropriate, and that market concepts such as competition and profit have no place in the social work field (Borne, 1988).

There appears to be acceptance of both profit and non-profit delivery of foster care services if each sector is able to serve the best interests of children.

An arms-length relationship with agencies/contractors providing foster care services raised a number of concerns with resource social workers as to the agency's /contractor's assessment that their foster homes were safe and appropriate for children.

Goal setting and monitoring private sector foster homes was viewed as difficult due to the third-hand communication and the extra professionals involved in the delivery of foster care services. The additional professionals involved in the day-to-day operations of private sector foster homes were viewed as creating a parallel bureaucracy to that of the Ministry.

The numerous professionals involved in the private sector foster home's day-to-day activities created an environment in which resource social workers did not feel they were kept apprised of events in the placement. This
was viewed as making it difficult to monitor children. Often, only when a critical event occurred in a private sector foster home, would resource social workers be contacted and brought into the dynamics of the child's placement.

The direct hands-on knowledge of the day-to-day operations of Ministry foster carers was viewed as a positive practice characteristic when working with Ministry foster carers that enhanced the relationship between resource social workers and Ministry foster carers.

The hands-on, direct relationship resource social workers had with Ministry foster carers was viewed as creating a forum in which resource social workers were able to track children-in-care.

A sense of security was described by resource social workers when placing children in Ministry foster homes. First-hand knowledge of the foster carer's skills, and their strengths and limitations were viewed as positive characteristics of Ministry foster homes.

An arms-length relationship with private sector foster carers was viewed as a positive practice by the minority of resource social workers. Resource social workers that identified positively with arms-length relationships with agencies/contractors providing foster care services
described the focus of their job as administrative. An arms-length relationship with the private sector was viewed as a viable alternative to direct support service due to resource social workers' large caseloads. With limited time to provide appropriate services to a large caseload, private sector foster care was viewed as allowing resource social workers to focus on administrative tasks.

A partnership approach to creating policies and standards was practiced by the minority of respondents. The partnership approach between Ministry and private sector agencies/contractor involved the development of a number of systems including: Ministry resource offices developing forms for the completion of foster home studies, and providing the forms to the agency/contractor, resource social workers completing foster home studies and then providing them to the private sector, and the agency/contractor completing the foster home study and providing it to the Ministry district supervisor for approval.

Previous recommendations have been made to the Ministry with regard to the absence of standards when contracting with the private sector. The Annual Report of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (1992) recommended that the Ministry apply the same standards it
has for assessing the suitability of Ministry foster carers to all agencies/contractors within its service delivery system. The Annual Report of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia (1992) recommendations towards the delivery of standards for agencies/contractors is consistent with the views expressed by the majority of resource social workers.

**What Rationale Do Resource Social Workers Use When Contracting With Agencies/Contractors to Supply Foster Homes?**

Private sector foster care services were utilized when resource social workers required a placement for a child who displayed challenging behaviours. Private sector foster carers were viewed as professional caregivers willing and able to take challenging children into their homes. Quality service was identified as 24-hour a day support from professional support workers, higher levels of training and an array of services for children-in-care such as: day programs, one-to-one workers, counselling, school programs, and life skills/work experience programs. Resource social workers indicated that if these services were provided to Ministry foster carers, they would also be able to care for challenging children.
The program characteristics of private sector foster care services described in this study are comparable to those documented in the literature as program characteristics of specialized foster care (Baker, 1989; Meadowcroft, 1989; Meadowcroft, Thomlison & Chamberlain, 1994; Van Den Brink, 1984; Wells & D'Angelo, 1994). Specialized foster care services provide 24-hour a day support to foster carers; recruit foster carers who, with supportive services, have the ability to implement behaviour change; provide co-ordinated multisystemic programs created to fit the needs of children and their families; foster carers are treated as professionals and as part of the social work team; and specialized foster carers are provided with a higher wage than traditional foster carers (Baker, 1989; Meadowcroft, 1989; Meadowcroft, Thomlison & Chamberlain, 1994; Van Den Brink, 1984; Wells & D'Angelo, 1994).

The minority of respondents indicated that private sector foster carers' skill level/experience was of concern. Those private sector foster carers with limited skills may be able to provide care to children with challenging behaviours due to the additional support services provided by private sector support workers.
When children are placed in Ministry foster homes, programs for children are arranged by resource social workers, the child’s social worker and the foster carers. The support provided by the private sector and the array of services provided and arranged for children in private sector foster homes were identified as making a difference in resource social workers’ day to day job responsibilities, in that resource social workers were able to spend their work time on administrative tasks, as opposed to direct support to foster carers.

Contracting with agencies/contractors to provide foster care services for children with challenging behaviour will continue as long as resource social workers’ caseloads remain high. Both private and public sector foster care services offer programs that have both positive and negative implications to the children they serve and the adults providing the 24-hour a day care.

Policy, Practice and Standard Implications

The lack of province-wide policy with respect to private sector agencies/contractors providing foster care services is absent. There are no set standards that private agencies/contractors are to follow when completing foster home studies. This lack of policy appears to have
left resource social workers questioning their accountability for the experiences and outcomes of children in private sector foster homes.

Resource social workers were concerned about the lack of accountability applicable to agencies/contractors given that policy applicable to Ministry foster carers is not imposed on private sector foster homes. Numerous respondents indicated their offices created policy that appears to ensure some level of accountability is placed upon the private sector.

Resource social workers indicated that if private sector foster homes continue to be used they must follow the same standards which Ministry foster carers adhere to.

The majority of resource social workers indicated that they would prefer to use a Ministry foster home if provided with a choice between Ministry and private sector foster homes.

Providing a similar service to that of the private sector was viewed as a possibility for resource social workers, but they would need to be provided with adequate staffing in Ministry resource offices to allow a greater focus on all aspects of resource work.

Addressing the concerns expressed by resource social workers in this study might be remedied by hiring
additional resource social workers, yet the barriers to hiring additional resource social workers would appear to be great (British Columbia, 1993a).

Training Implications

Resource social workers' specialized educational background would appear to indicate that they would be able to offer training to foster carers on the diverse emotional, social, educational, cultural and developmental needs of children-in-care. The private sector was described as able to provide their foster carers with additional training that was not available to Ministry foster carers. The roadblock to resource social workers providing this service was described as the by-product of large workloads and limited time to provide additional training.

There is no basis in this study to suggest that resource social workers need additional training in regards to supporting foster carers.

Resource Implications

It does not appear that the need for foster carers will decrease as the rate of children requiring out-of-home care continues to increase. Therefore it could be
beneficial for the Ministry to engage in professional relationships with foster carers. With additional resource support and smaller caseloads the Ministry could potentially have the ability to provide a similar level of care to that of the private sector.

Permanency Planning Implications

Permanency planning promotes stability in the lives of children-in-care (Maluccio, Fein & Olmstead, 1986). It may be difficult for resource social workers to track children in private sector foster homes as there may not be direct contact with the foster carers and thus a reduction in the resource social workers' knowledge of the day-to-day events in the foster home. Maluccio, Fein and Olmstead (1986) indicate that collaboration and co-ordination in a particular placement can make or break a permanent plan.

Resource social workers indicated that the best interests of the child were the determining factors if provided with the choice between a private sector or Ministry foster home placement. Perhaps if the best interests of the child were the prevailing factors in foster home placement choice, a reduction in inappropriate placements would occur. Appropriate placement choices could lead to children maintaining permanency in their
placements as well as an increased possibility that the foster carer would be able to follow through on the goals that they are responsible for promoting in the child's permanent plan.

Ideas for Future Research

Further investigation is necessary to explore the cost of operating private sector foster care services compared with the cost of hiring additional Ministry staff to provide a similar and equal service.

The relative success of the private sector foster care system needs to be explored. This could be achieved through qualitative as well as quantitative methods to ensure that experiential data is captured. Former children-in-care who have experienced placements in both Ministry and private sector foster homes could be included in future studies to receive input from their experiences in both foster care systems. First Nations people need to be included in future research studies on Ministry and private sector foster homes to insure that research questions are developed to explore the views of First Nations children in both foster care systems.
Exploring the views of foster carers who have worked both with the Ministry and the private sector would provide data on the differences between the two systems.

A replication of the questionnaire used in this study could be conducted to explore if respondents' views changed over time. It would also serve to test the reliability of the study.

The views of Ministry resource social workers could be compared with the views of private sector support workers to explore their views and experiences in delivering foster care services.

Limitation of the Study

The foremost limitation of the study was that it only asked the views of resource social workers within the Ministry. It does not include the views of any other professionals involved in the Ministry or the private sector foster care system.

A limitation of the study was the limited time in which the study took place. A replication of the study could explore whether responses varied according to workload, time of year, geographic area, and other external forces. This would also serve to test the reliability and validity of the findings.
Given different circumstances, people responded differently to the same question. This was seen with written comments that accompanied certain questions, indicating that issues are far from clear. The issues surrounding the complexity of comparing private and public sector foster homes would perhaps be better examined through an exploratory study.

Receiving feedback from resource social workers with regards to the findings and discussion of the study would further enhance confirmability. Also triangulation of qualitative data sources by cross-checking consistency of information from several different sources, for example observation, and interviews would give more credibility to the findings.

Different characteristics for each geographic area make comparison difficult. For example, South East B.C. and Vancouver Island, seldom used private sector foster homes. As well, different areas of B.C. have different population sizes with different socio-economic profiles in each community. This would also affect the number of people who foster children, and the amount of children requiring care.

The questionnaire used in the study did not ask respondents the actual number of foster homes nor other
workload requirements of their caseloads. This limited the
study in that I was not able to correlate respondents' answers with the size of their caseloads.

A question must be asked as to whether the responses would have been markedly different of the people who did respond versus those who did not. There is the strong possibility that those with heavier caseloads would be less likely to respond. Their views could potentially deviate from resource social workers who might have had smaller caseloads.

Concluding Comments

The major findings of this study are that:

- the majority of Resource social workers (89.50 percent) indicated a preference for Ministry foster homes;
- the private sector provides a better quality of service because of: 24-hour a day support, training to foster carers, individual programs, skilled caregivers, and an ability to provide care to high needs children;
- that in making decisions about the use of private and Ministry foster homes, resource social workers would prefer to have the ability to choose a placement that is able to meet the best interest of the child; and
-resource social workers believe that with additional resource support and smaller caseloads the Ministry could provide a comparable service to that of the private sector.
Bibliography


Child, Family and Community Service Act, S.B.C. 1996, c.48.5


Community Care Facility Act, 1996.

Community Care Facility Act Child Care Regulation, 1996.


Appendix A:

Questionnaire
QUESTIONNAIRE

DEFINITIONS

**Private sector**: The private sector refers to an agency, society or contractor who contracts with MSS to provide a service.

**Private sector foster homes**: This refers to foster homes which are operated by the private sector. The private sector does a foster home study and supports the foster home. These homes can also be referred to as satellite homes, privatized foster homes or contracted foster homes.

**MSS Foster Homes / Public Sector Foster Homes**: These foster homes' work with MSS resource social workers. MSS resource social workers complete foster home studies on the potential foster homes, and support the foster homes.

The terms: private sector foster homes and MSS foster homes are used throughout the study. Please feel free to comment on any particular question as you are completing the questionnaire. There are no right or wrong answers, what is important is your opinion and your experiences.

You are ready to start, please turn over the page!
A. WORK RESPONSIBILITIES AND USE OF PRIVATE SECTOR FOSTER HOMES.

This information seeks to determine what your job responsibilities are and whether you and your office use private sector foster homes. Please put a check mark in the box indicating your response and fill in an answer on the blank provided:

1. What are your job responsibilities? Check all that apply:

- recruiting foster homes
- recruiting group home parents
- conducting foster home studies
- liaising and providing support to foster homes
- liaising and providing support to group homes
- liaising with a district office
- liaising with societies/agencies
- liaising with private contractors
- liaising with institutions
- locating foster home placements for children (0-12)
- locating foster home placements for adolescents (12-18)
- foster home investigations
- group home investigations
- supervising resource social workers
- other (please specify): ____________________________________________________________________

2. List the top two reasons why you would use:

Private sector foster homes: MSS foster Homes:

1. ____________________________ 1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________

3. List the top two reasons why you would not use:

Private sector foster homes: MSS foster Homes:

1. ____________________________ 1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________

over
4. Does your office use private sector foster homes?
   □ Yes □ No (go to section F, question #1, page 9)

5. Under what circumstances and conditions does your office authorize the use of private sector foster homes?

B. PRACTICE AND SERVICES OF PRIVATE SECTOR FOSTER HOMES COMPARED WITH MSS FOSTER HOMES.

This section questions you on your experience with private sector foster homes compared with MSS foster homes. Please circle your answer using the following scale:

KEY: 1=never 2=seldom 3=sometimes 4=often 5=always

1. To what extent does your office use private sector foster homes?
   1 2 3 4 5

2. To what extent does your office use MSS foster homes?
   1 2 3 4 5

3. Does your office read private sector foster home studies?
   1 2 3 4 5

Comments: ____________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

4. Are private sector foster home studies available to your office if resource social workers want to read them?
   1 2 3 4 5

over
5. Are you given the qualification(s) of the person in the private sector who is conducting the foster home study?

1  2  3  4  5

Comments:

Please circle the answer which indicates the extent (within your office) to which you agree or disagree with the following statements and fill in an answer on the blank provided:

KEY: 1=never  2=seldom  3=sometimes  4=often  5=always

6. The private sector recruits First Nations foster homes.

1  2  3  4  5

7. MSS recruits First Nations foster homes.

1  2  3  4  5

8. The private sector provides culturally diverse foster homes for First Nations children.

1  2  3  4  5

9. MSS provides culturally diverse foster homes for First Nations children.

1  2  3  4  5

10. The private sector is providing adequate support to their foster parents.

1  2  3  4  5

11. MSS is providing adequate support to their foster parents.

1  2  3  4  5

12. Placement breakdown occurs in private sector foster homes.

1  2  3  4  5

13. Placement breakdown occurs in MSS foster homes.

1  2  3  4  5
14. What is your opinion about the quality of service provided by the private sector.


15. What is your opinion about the quality of service provided by M.S.S.


C. PROFIT OR NON-PROFIT FOSTER HOMES.

This section asks about your office’s practice and your opinion on the use of profit and non-profit private sector foster homes. Please put a check mark in the box indicating your response.

1. When it has been decided to use a private sector foster home, does your office use:

☐ Non-profit agencies/contractors
☐ Profit agencies/contractors
☐ Both
☐ Unsure

2. If you had the chance to work with a profit or non-profit agency/contractor in regards to a foster home placement for a CIC, which would you use?

☐ Non-Profit agency/contractor
☐ Profit agency/contractor
☐ Neither
☐ Unsure
☐ This is not an issue

Why?


over
D. MONETARY DATA.

This section asks for your opinion on monetary arrangement with the private and public sector. Please put a check mark in the box to indicate your response:

1. The per diem rate for private sector foster homes is _________ than M.S.S. foster homes.
   - [ ] Greater
   - [ ] Same
   - [ ] Less

2. Requests for additional funding from private sector foster homes occurs:
   - [ ] Frequently
   - [ ] Sometimes
   - [ ] Never

3. Requests for additional funding from MSS foster homes occurs:
   - [ ] Frequently
   - [ ] Sometimes
   - [ ] Never

Comments: ____________________________

__________________________

__________________________

E. WHY THE PRIVATE SECTOR?

The following section asks for your opinion regarding your office's use of private sector foster homes and MSS foster homes. Please put a check mark in the box indicating your response and fill in an answer on the blank provided.

1. Given the choice to use an MSS foster home or a private sector foster home, which would you use?
   - [ ] Private sector foster home
   - [ ] MSS foster home

Why? ____________________________

__________________________

__________________________

over
2. I feel that I need to use private sector foster homes because: Check all that apply:

☐ I do not have time to recruit foster homes
☐ I do not have time to study foster homes once they have been recruited
☐ the agency/contractor provides support to the home therefore giving me more time for recruitment, studies and supporting MSS homes
☐ the private sector provides good homes while requiring less of my time
☐ none of this applies to me
☐ none of this applies to my office
☐ other (please specify): ____________________________

Comments:____________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

Please circle the answer which indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements using the following scale and fill in an answer on the blank provided:

KEY: 1=strongly disagree  2=disagree  3=neutral  4=agree  5=strongly agree

3. My office often uses the same agency/contractor when the decision has been made to use a private sector foster home.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:____________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

4. The private sector is able to help my office by having a readily available number of foster homes.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments:____________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________

over \ 
5. The private sector is able to help my office by taking the pressure off us in terms of recruiting and studying foster homes.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments:________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

6. Private sector foster homes make my job easier.

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comments:________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. List two advantages of using:

Private sector foster homes:  
1. ____________________________________________  
2. ____________________________________________  

MSS foster Homes:  
1. ____________________________________________  
2. ____________________________________________  

8. List two disadvantages of using:

Private sector foster homes:  
1. ____________________________________________  
2. ____________________________________________  

MSS foster Homes:  
1. ____________________________________________  
2. ____________________________________________
F. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

YOU ARE ALMOST DONE! This section provides a context in which to interpret the study’s results as well as a profile of who is using or not using the services of the private sector. Please fill in the appropriate response on the line provided and please put a check mark in the box indicating your response:

1. How many years have you worked for MSS? ____________

2. How many years have you worked for MSS as a resource social worker? ____________

3. Do you have any post-secondary education? □ No (go to question # 4) □ Yes

   If yes, (check all that apply):

   □ B.S.W. □ M.S.W. □ D.S.W.
   □ B.A. □ M.A. □ Ph.D.
   □ B.Sc. □ M.Sc. □ Doctorate
   □ B.Sc.N
   □ Other:________________________(please specify)

4. In what region of B.C. do you work?

   □ Lower Mainland □ Vancouver Island
   □ Central Interior / Northern □ Southeast

5. What is the approximate population of the city/town in which you work?

   □ 0-1000 □ 1000-10 000 □ 10 000 and over

Please use page 10 if you have any additional comments. Thank you very much for taking the time to respond to this questionnaire. Please use the stamped self addressed envelope provided to return the survey as soon as you have completed it. When completed, the results will be given to the MSS library in the fall of 1996.
Please provide any additional information which you consider relevant on this page.
Appendix: B

Letter of Initial Contact
Appendix C.

Explanatory Letter
Appendix D.

Postcard
Appendix E.

Ethical Approval and Consent from the Ministry