

'Basically it's a recognition issue': Validating foster parent identities



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It is widely recognised that support, financial assistance, and ongoing training are important resources provided to foster carers in Australia. While acknowledging the importance of these resources, this paper suggests that there is also a need for *other* forms of recognition in the lives of foster carers. One of these, it is suggested, pertains to issues of identity and the attendant recognition of carers as parents.

Beginning in 2004, the Australian foster care community introduced an award for foster, relative or kinship carers who make outstanding contributions to the foster care sector. Primary among the requirements for the award are 20 years of active service as a carer, the provision of details of the number and types of placement provided, a declaration of the nominee's character as provided by the carer's agency and, where possible, a statement of support from a current or former foster child of the nominee. Awards such as these (and their attendant application requirements) represent a very important acknowledgment of the vital role that foster carers play in the provision of services to young people requiring care. Nonetheless, there is a pressing need to examine the manner in which recognition is accorded to foster carers in ways that may not only preclude those who are currently ineligible for such an award, but which may also limit the forms that such recognition takes for those who *are* eligible. Examining how understandings of recognition circulate within the foster care sector in Australia may help in the development of what is termed here a 'critical' approach to responding to the voices of foster carers themselves.

Over recent years we have seen a marked increase of such critical research on foster care internationally, including a focus on the limitations of carer assessment (Hicks, 1996; Riggs, 2007; Ryburn, 1991), the biases that may be inherent to public policy (Riggs, 2006), the ways in which we understand foster care provision (Delfabbro, Taplin, & Bentham, 2002; Hicks, 2005), and the ways in which foster carers' stories are understood (Kirton, 2001; Wilson, Petrie, & Sinclair, 2003). Much of this research has drawn upon work in the area of sociology and philosophy, and in particular upon the work of French social scientist Michel Foucault, who provides a clear rationale for understanding how it is that institutions such as foster care systems often promote (intentionally or otherwise) a particular understanding of what it means to be a 'good carer' or an 'understanding social worker' or to have a 'good placement'. Such understandings are obviously important in the context of public policy that must direct how the needs of children who are placed into foster care are responded to. However there is also an attendant set of needs that often receive little attention, possibly because they require an understanding of foster care that may be considered by many to be unnecessarily complex or obtuse.

It is the aim of this paper to introduce issues about recognition in foster care that are seldom given space within much of the literature on foster care, or in public policy or advocacy documents themselves. To do this we introduce a theoretical framework that draws upon the work of Foucault, and we develop from this some very 'real world' applications in regards to foster carer recognition. More specifically, the topic of recognition will be discussed in relation to a need for validation on the part of foster carers. It will be suggested that this need extends beyond an acknowledgment of services provided, and must encompass the complex needs of foster carers to be acknowledged as people of worth. This is particularly the case in a system that often presents conflicting images of foster carers, and which can result in a failure to validate the identities that foster carers hold for themselves. Such an approach, while mindful of the important current debates around the professionalisation of foster care (e.g., Butcher, 2004; McHugh, 2003), extends such debates by examining what Kirton (2001) refers to as the intersections between 'love and money' – the ways in which reimbursement and support will always be important to foster carers, but that the family context within which foster care is often provided means that the needs of carers will always exceed simple reimbursement or training, and will also necessarily encompass issues of recognition, validation and identity.

In order to explore these issues, the following sections of the paper move from an examination of some of the current ways in which recognition is accorded within the South Australian foster care system, with a focus on some of the potential limits this places upon foster carers, and towards an examination of extracts of talk from a public forum on foster care convened in South Australia in 2006 as part of the State inquiry into sexual abuse in state care.

Recognition: The current context

Although the framework in regards to recognition alluded to in the introduction to this paper holds important implications for foster care provision nationwide, this paper focuses on documents pertaining to foster carer identities and recognition in South Australia. As Bromfield and Higgins (2005) point out, although the eight state and territory jurisdictions governing child protection across Australia are relatively diverse in their intake and assessment procedures, they are relatively similar in their case management strategies. Their summary of differences and similarities across jurisdictions suggests that while the reasons for which children come into care across jurisdictions may differ, the ways in which foster carers themselves are treated once placements are made are largely commensurable. Thus we suggest that an analysis of how foster carers are recognised in South Australia may allow us to draw inferences as to how foster carers are treated in other jurisdictions.

The primary document of relevance in South Australia in regards to foster carer recognition is the Foster Care Charter, most recently revised in late 2005. This document outlines what it is that foster carers can expect from the foster care system, and the important role that carers play in the lives of children in crisis. The Charter gives a very clear picture of the forms of recognition that are accorded to foster carers. Largely due to the status of foster children in South Australia as being predominantly under the guardianship of the State, and considering the ongoing relationships that many children in care have with their families of origin, foster carers are primarily depicted within the Charter as

active "members of a team" (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, p. 3) that seeks to develop "collaborative partnerships" (p. 4) in order to "provide the best care for children" (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, p. 6). In return, it is acknowledged that:

"Recognition and support of foster carers is an important plank in the South Australian Government's Keeping them Safe child protection initiative. The Government is committed to giving foster carers the support they require to meet the needs of the children in their care" (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, p. 4).

In this sense, recognition takes two forms – an acknowledgment of the challenging role that carers undertake in providing care, and support to provide the best possible level of care to children. In regards to the latter, and as the above statement demonstrates, support is primarily aimed at care provision – at meeting the needs of foster children, ensuring placement stability, and providing adequate reimbursement for costs incurred, all of which are outlined within the document as "rights" of foster carers (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, pp. 8-9).

There is no doubt that these are indeed important forms of recognition, for without support, financial assistance, and ongoing training many carers would find the challenges of care provision insurmountable. Although the necessity of the aforementioned two forms of recognition (acknowledgment of the foster care role and support for implementing this role) are beyond doubt of considerable importance to the needs of foster carers, the Charter also documents another form of recognition that receives considerably less attention.

In the glossary a distinction is made between a 'foster carer' and a 'foster parent'. This distinction marks an important shift between the use of these terms historically, where a move away from the latter and towards the former has been gradually evidenced within the foster care system in South Australia. The acknowledgment of the dual usage of these terms within the foster care system in thus an important aspect of the Charter. The glossary defines a foster carer as:

"An approved and trained person (who is not a guardian or relative of the child) who, with the assistance of a regular allowance for expenses incurred in caring for a child, acts as a substitute parent, providing care and support for a child or young person in their own home" (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, p. 15).

This definition focuses primarily on the role that foster carers play *in the lives of foster children*. In other words, the Charter is child-focused in its attention to the role that foster carers can play in meeting the best interests of children. In contrast, however, the Charter's definition of a 'foster parent' turns our attention to the *needs of foster carers themselves*, and in particular a need for recognition that extends beyond acknowledgment of services, support or reimbursement. A 'foster parent' is defined in the Charter as:

"A foster carer who is seen by the child as providing them with parenting as a long term commitment. The term 'foster parent' may be the term of choice for these carers. The term 'foster parent' gives recognition to the different role of a carer who has the child in their care on a long term basis and who may fulfill many, or most, of the responsibilities of a parent" (Department for Families and Communities, 2005, p. 16).

Again in this definition it is the needs of children that are paramount – it is primarily children who see 'foster carers' as 'foster parents', though importantly it is also acknowledged

that individual carers may see themselves as 'parents'. This definition of a 'foster parent' thus accords a form of recognition to the needs of foster carers that exceeds the Charter's primary focus on recognition through acknowledgment, support, and reimbursement. Most importantly, this definition affords a space for foster carers who may be struggling with a desire for recognition that they do not see reflected in foster care policy more broadly. When, as is the case for many carers, they are both identified and identify as a parent to a particular foster child, it is important to consider the implications for this if they are not identified as such by workers, friends, family or in public policy. How may this impact upon the care they provide and their long-term engagement in foster care provision? Questions such as this are central to understanding some of the factors that motivate carers to remain within foster care systems. As the preceding examination of one particular document on foster care in South Australia shows, such questions require greater attention for the implications they hold for addressing the needs of foster carers for recognition. More specifically, they highlight the ways in which issues of recognition may be far more about a recognition of identity and a sense of place in the world, and far less about acknowledgment, support or reimbursement.

Recognition: What are foster carers saying?

The data analysed in this section are taken from a verbatim transcript of a forum convened by Commissioner Edward Mulligan as part of the South Australian Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry (2005). Participants in the forum were informed that the event was to be both audio and video recorded and that a transcript of the audio content would be made available to members of the public (the transcript can be freely accessed via the website of the Inquiry – see references). The extracts selected for analysis in this section were chosen both for their breadth of coverage of issues of recognition, and also for their clarity of expression; however issues of recognition were a pervasive feature of the transcript's 54 pages, and were not limited to these particular extracts.

The approach to data analysis employed in this section draws upon the work of Foucault (e.g., 1996). Foucault's research agenda may be categorised as one that sought to explore how it is that access to material resources is shaped within particular social contexts. More specifically, he examined the ways in which individual people are differentially granted resources on the basis of their social status, and in particular as this status is accorded to them as a result of their relation to particular social norms. Examples of this include his work on understandings of criminality, mental illness, (homo)sexuality and other forms of social difference that are often accorded a label of pathology. Of particular relevance to this analysis is Foucault's suggestion that certain identities will be accorded value at the expense of other identities, and that this relationship between privilege and oppression is the result of power imbalances that, while often seeming insurmountable, are indeed open to challenge and change. In regards to foster care, we may understand that foster carers are often in a position of disadvantage as a result of the difficulties associated with the naming and recognition of their parenting role if this conflicts with the role of the State in its location as guardian of foster children. Such difficulties may, however, be addressed through the validation of a 'foster parent identity' that emphasises foster children's

and carer's relationships to one another, as will be elaborated throughout this analysis.

Following Foucault, the analysis below seeks to examine firstly how it is that foster carers consider their position in society as one that is in many ways undermined by the foster care system, and secondly some of the potential suggestions that foster carers make in regards to generating alternate forms of recognition of foster carers that may shift the power imbalances that currently shape their lives.

In the first extract below, the speaker identifies some of the problems that she sees currently in the foster care system in South Australia, and in particular the ways in which power is played out in everyday interactions between foster carers and social workers.

Eunice: The other thing you were talking about was the system. I think the biggest thing that is lacking is the mutual respect from the system to us. I would like to be respected as a parent. A couple of comments have been made about workers coming in, telling how to bring up a child. I have workers who are younger than my own children, my boys, telling me how to look after children – which needless to say, I take a little bit of affront to... (Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, 2005, p.34)

Eunice: I think in a lot of ways some of the stories I hear it's still happening with a lot of kids, not maybe that dramatic, but kids are still introduced as foster children. I have people come up to me and say, "These are your foster kids." "No, these are my children," I say. You know; "We're in public. These children have feelings. Don't introduce them as foster children. These are children who happen to be in foster care," but then don't put a stigma on foster care either (Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, 2005, p.36).

Here the speaker talks about what she sees as lacking within the system – a form of 'mutual respect' where foster carers should have their experiences and feelings validated. Most importantly, the speaker desires to have her identity as a parent recognised. While the speaker's experience of feeling "affronted" by a social worker may be read as a rhetorical argument aimed at asserting the superiority of her knowledge over that of the social worker (e.g., in her statement that: "I have workers who are younger than my own children"), it may potentially be more productive to read this dismissal by the speaker (of the knowledge that social workers bring with them) as a response to her own feelings of being denied a claim to a parenting role. Perhaps what the speaker is calling for is not an understanding of foster care that places carers and workers in an adversarial relationship, but rather one where the knowledge that each person holds can be validated and utilised to meet the needs of children in care.

Again, in the second extract from this speaker we see a discussion that largely centers on issues of respect and recognition. While the speaker poignantly states that there shouldn't be 'a stigma on foster care either' (i.e., that acknowledging a child is in care should not be conceived as an inherently negative experience), she nonetheless makes an important argument that signals the effect that particular forms of language use have upon the experiences of foster carers and foster children. While upon first reading the second extract may appear to assert a form of ownership (where the speaker states "No, these are my children"), we may instead understand this as a response to the perceived derision of the foster carer-child relationship that inheres to the implication of the statement "These are your foster kids" (the word missing from the sentence, though implied by it,

is 'just' – “these are *just* your foster kids”). The speaker displays her attention to this matter when she provides the corrective: “Don't introduce them as foster children. These are children who happen to be in foster care”. In so doing the speaker highlights the central role that must be accorded to naming practices within the foster care system – how are carers made to feel recognised through their use of a particular form of naming, and how is such naming thus of great importance at a symbolic level to carers' and children's experiences of the foster care system?

Similar themes are evident in the following extract from another speaker. This extract, while brief, clearly captures some of the limitations that foster carers experience as a result of their location within a system that often fails to validate or recognise their needs and those of the children in their care.

Ms. Jarvis: I have been a carer for 15 years. There are a few things that I'm wanting to say. First thing: I really appreciate being called a foster parent rather than a foster carer and I think if we can have that mentality filtering through that that will change a lot of focuses and will make us have permission to be their mums and dads rather than just a carer (Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, 2005, p.38).

orientates to an understanding of recognition that largely focuses on the work that foster carers do – “Raising of foster children requires extra special care, extra special attention, and I think we need to recognise that”. The emphatic nature of this statement signals the importance of recognition that is based upon acknowledgment of care provided, and which potentially entails greater support for carers who have to do such 'extra special' things in their everyday lives. This is followed by a series of statements about how to achieve this form of recognition, including “promot[ing] the value of foster care [and] promot[ing] instances of successful foster placements”. To recognise carers in this sense is to acknowledge the hard work they undertake and to promote better understandings of this within the public sector and within the community more widely.

The speaker also introduces a second understanding of recognition in the first extract, where he draws attention to the lifelong commitment that carers make to children. While it may be considered somewhat problematic that the speaker draws direct analogies between biological children and foster children (an analogy that holds the potential to overwrite the specific experiences of foster care that children may have), it is nonetheless evident that the speaker is calling for

Carers seek to negotiate particular identities that are often perceived as being denied to them.

From this extract we may draw a number of conclusions in regards to the speaker's reference to the need for a 'change of focuses and mentality'. Such statements make implicit reference to what may be considered the 'focuses' that currently require change – those which deny the parenting role that many carers identify with, and the power relations that carers are located within which effectively curtail both their needs and desires, and those of foster children who may feel that they are not permitted to refer to carers as 'mums and dads'.

What follows from this implicit critique of the foster care system are some suggestions for how carers may be recognised on their own terms. An example of this occurs in the following extract, where the speaker clearly orientates to issues of recognition that exceed calls for support or reimbursement.

Tony: I'd also like to reinforce a couple of comments that have been made. When we take these children into our families, we take them in for life. 18: that's no special age, as you pointed out earlier. They're part of our family: they are brothers and sisters and children, just the same as our biological children. And that needs to be recognised...

The last point that I'll make is in answer to your earlier question about what do we need to do to get more carers. I strongly believe that the most important job in the country bar none is the raising of our children. Raising of foster children requires extra special care, extra special attention, and I think we need to recognise that. We need to promote the value of foster care, promote instances of successful foster placements - and there are many, many of those; find out why they've been successful and try and permeate that through the rest of the foster system. But basically it's a recognition issue, in my view. Thank you. (Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, 2005, pp.28-29).

The speaker's use of the word 'recognition' in these two extracts would appear to signal at least two differing meanings of the word. In the second extract, the speaker

recognition of the identities and roles that foster families produce – a recognition that exceeds acknowledgment of 'extra special' work, and which instead sees foster care provision as fundamentally being about family making. Where the speaker's biological/foster analogy makes sense in this extract is thus not in its potential for claiming commensurability between experiences of identifying as either a biological or foster child, but rather in the speaker's reference to the *shared* experience of forming families that are recognised as such.

These points about recognition of a role or identity that far exceeds simple 'child care' is evident in the following final extract:

Ms. Weston: I know other foster parents that when the child reaches 18, just like the department, they decide that the child needs to move on. Now, I and other foster parents who remain committed to children like my child, we need help. It's not just about money for material things for these children; it's recognition that the carer is probably the one person that's going to be there for these children throughout their lives, because at every stage of their life there's going to be problems that arise that someone has got to be there to help them move through. And that carer is the consistent person that will move through those stages with them (Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry, 2005, p.31).

In this extract the speaker emphasises the continuity of care provided to children in long-term placements. This emphasis appears to be less about claiming ownership of a foster child, or less about seeking 'money for material things', and more about recognising the life-long commitment that carers and children may often make to one another. Importantly, however, the speaker does acknowledge that not all foster parents will desire this form of ongoing commitment, and thus that the forms of recognition desired by carers will differ according to individual circumstances. This is an integral feature of any understanding of recognition. The problems in relation to recognition as identified within this paper thus

far have been concerned with the ways in which recognition is often imposed upon foster carers in particular forms. This last extract highlights the complex ways in which recognition is negotiated within particular relationships between carers and children, and that it must largely be driven by individual carers/children as to what forms recognition will take.

Drawing on Foucault's focus on power relations and their implication in the production of certain forms of 'acceptable identity', the analysis presented here has drawn out some of the complex ways in which carers negotiate the foster care system, and the calls they continue to make for recognition, both of the specific work they undertake, and the roles and identities they either adopt or are accorded to them. Of particular note has been the ways in which carers seek to negotiate particular identities that are often perceived as being denied to them (i.e., being recognised as 'parents', or 'mums and dads'). Repeatedly the speakers reported here employ the term 'recognition' to refer to a desire for an acknowledgment not simply of the care they

the world will hold sway. Such regimes may well shift over time – for example, within the foster care system we have seen shifts in the past two decades from policy that was about early, long-term removal of children from abusive situations, to a situation more recently where attempts at reunification are made and where long-term orders are less likely to be granted. Such shifts are often the result of the work of those who are the focus of such regimes of truth, where individuals question the validity of particular regimes of truth and call for change that reflects their needs.

The quote from Butler also highlights the considerable potential for foster carers (for example) to challenge the forms that recognition typically takes – foster carers continue to state their identities as parents rather than carers; as Mums, Dads, Aunties, Uncles and Grandparents rather than as simply 'members of a team'. Such assertions do not deny the role that the State plays in defining the foster carer role, but rather seek to acknowledge the specific experiences and identities that foster carers and children share, at the same time as they represent a challenge to bureaucratic

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provide, but of the identities that adhere to this. In the following concluding sections one particular framework for understanding recognition is provided, and some practical opportunities for implementation are then elaborated.

Recognition: A framework for validation

As mentioned in the introduction, what is perhaps called for is the development of a theoretical framework through which to address issues of recognition that does not sidestep the complexities of social theory, but which rather takes onboard the important role it may play in supporting foster carers. In this spirit, the following quote from the work of Butler (2005) is provided as one possible starting place for a discussion on theorising recognition within foster care. In this extract Butler elaborates the work of Foucault in developing an account of recognition that acknowledges the complex interplays between social norms and prohibitions and the potential for social change:

"In Foucault's account of self-constitution . . . a regime of truth offers the terms that make self-recognition possible. These terms are . . . presented as the available norms through which self-recognition can take place, so that what can 'be', quite literally, is constrained in advance by a regime of truth that decides what will and what will not be a recognizable form of being. Although the regime of truth decides in advance what forms recognition can take, it does not fully constrain this form. Indeed, *decide* may be too strong a word, since the regime of truth offers a framework for the scene of recognition, delineating who will qualify as a subject of recognition and offering available norms for the act of recognition . . . This does not mean that a given regime of truth sets an invariable framework for recognition; it means only that it is in relation to this framework that recognition takes place or the norms that govern recognition are challenged and transformed" (p. 22).

Butler's reference here to a 'regime of truth' may be understood as alluding to certain forms of social institutions or relations that produce accounts of our lives and the world around us that are taken as self-evidently being true. Within any given regime of truth a particular way of understanding

categories of naming and recognition. And this is where there is a potential for using theory such as that provided by Foucault and Butler to shift the terms through which recognition is understood. Butler's words highlight the limitations that may continue to exist for foster carers seeking to negotiate their own identities and place in the world. While regimes of truth can be challenged, it is nonetheless the case that we all understand ourselves in relation to particular dominant frameworks. Thus some of the extracts in the analysis make reference to notions of 'my children' or foster children being 'just like' biological children. While it has been suggested that statements such as these may not necessarily imply claims to ownership, they are still positioned in a relationship to particular regimes of truth around what it means to be a family, what it means to call oneself a carer or parent, and the implications of this for the intersections of public policy and individual practice.

In order to develop an account of recognition that moves away from simple acknowledgment, support or reimbursement (as important as these may be), it is necessary to understand the complex ways in which carers and children live in a relationship to particular frameworks that often limit, but do not totally control, their experiences. By taking the voices of foster carers *on the terms they set for themselves*, it may be possible to engender an understanding of recognition that shifts attention away from 'child protection' *per se*, and towards the promotion of mutually respectful relationships. Such a move may assist in an acknowledgement of two conflicting yet potentially reconcilable issues pertaining to foster family relationships: 1) the fact that foster carers and children live in a relationship to rules and regulations that shape their lives, and in a context where foster care exists as a social phenomenon precisely because of issues of child protection; and 2) that foster carers and children nonetheless live in families, relationships, and forms of caring that are fundamentally about how they see themselves in the world, and the forms of identity that they claim for themselves.

To speak of recognition in this sense is not to afford foster carers carte blanche control over how they relate to the children in their care, or to deny the voices of social workers who act as legal guardians. Rather, the point is to explore modes of recognition that validate a 'foster parent identity'. Such an exploration may hold the potential for moving away from notions of biology, or ownership, and towards forms of relating that value the key role that foster carers play in the lives of children in need of care. This would also serve to acknowledge the central role that such care provision plays in foster carers' own sense of self and place in the world.

Recognition: In practice

While providing a largely theoretical interpretation of issues of recognition in foster care, this paper has also pointed towards a number of key implications for foster carer training, case management, and public policy. In regards to training, there is a pressing need to develop tools for "inviting carers into parenting relationships" (Ralfs, Riggs, Cunningham, & Carden, 2006). Such an approach to training would recognise both that carers in many situations have limited options over how they parent children or the choices they may make for children, but that they nonetheless function as parents in the lives and minds of children. Speaking of parenting and families as practices that are negotiated between people may assist to develop caring cultures within foster care systems that allow for the development of parent-child relationships without promoting forms of relationships that center on propriety. While there has understandably been concern about foster carers who potentially hinder attempts at reunification on the basis of their own attachment to children, this should not prevent carers engaging in parenting relationships with children and in working with children to develop family networks on the basis of a shared recognition of relationality.

In regards to case management, it is important that case-workers ensure adequate consultation with carers in order for carers to have substantive input into the parenting of children in their care. While on a day-to-day basis foster carers typically negotiate most parenting duties for children in their care, this may differ significantly from aspects of parenting (such as decisions around contact, placement directions, and the long-term plans of children themselves) that are often directed primarily by caseworkers. As key members of a 'caring team' in their role as providers of safety, security and wellbeing for foster children, foster carers need also to be considered and included in broader decision making. While caseworkers (acting for the Minister in each respective jurisdiction) must legally make decisions in regards to particular aspects of child protection for each foster child, this need not prevent foster carers from being recognised as parents who will have their own investments in outcomes for children in their care.

Finally, and perhaps most difficult in the context of foster care systems that largely prioritise a white middle-class heterosexual nuclear family model (Riggs, 2006), there is a need to broaden the ways in which caseworkers and those involved in policy direction understand 'family relations'. Much like all families, foster families will take many differing shapes. Yet, at the present moment, it would appear that there is considerable resistance to diverse family forms, which manifests itself in an inability to validate and indeed accept the types of families that some foster carers may create. Examples such as step-foster families and foster families

comprised of 'parenting collectives' are currently unable to be straightforwardly negotiated within Australian foster care systems. While individual carers may manage to negotiate recognition for the specificities of their foster family, this is often largely contingent upon the goodwill of caseworkers. Similarly, the utilisation of a particularly limited understanding of families and parenting impacts negatively upon many Indigenous carers. The diversity of Indigenous kinship structures, and in particular the greater use of extended family networks amongst Indigenous as opposed to non-Indigenous families, means that particular Indigenous foster carers and their families may be disadvantaged by the imposition of particular forms of recognition for parenting upon Indigenous carers (Higgins, Bromfield, & Richardson, 2005; Libesman, 2004). Considering the ways in which such families may be recognised for their unique strengths, and developing means for negotiating foster care systems that are not typically designed around the involvement of multiple carers, may help to shift the focus away from the granting of particular (and often limited) forms of recognition to foster carers, and instead may move towards accepting the terms for recognition that foster carers (who may diversely identify themselves as parents) set for themselves.

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