



Re-thinking foster care through community practice: Insights from St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate in Kenya

Esther Kalekye¹
Nelson Ng'arua Ndiritu²
Sarah Roelker³

¹estherkalekye@gmail.com (+254 722 110 680)

²endiritu2013@gmail.com

³info@saint-martinkenya.org

¹Independent Development Consultant, ²Laikipia University, ³St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate, ^{1,2,3}Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that shape the success of foster care placements within the community-based foster care programme implemented by St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate (CSA) in Kenya. The study is guided by the Attachment, Family Systems and Ecological Systems theories, which together provide a framework for understanding how individual, family, and sociocultural factors influence child wellbeing in foster care settings. A qualitative case study design was adopted, focusing on foster parents, foster children, former foster children, programme staff, and the District Children's Officer involved in the foster care programme. The study also drew on foster care case files maintained by the organisation. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation of both successful and unsuccessful foster care placements. The overall sample comprised ten foster care case files, nineteen individual participants, three programme staff, one District Children's Officer, and two focus group discussions involving foster parents and former foster children. Data were collected through document review, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, and analysed using content and thematic analysis. The findings show that successful foster care placements are influenced by a combination of foster parental commitment, parenting practices, and the provision of emotional support. Family-level factors such as acceptance within the household and relationships among family members also play an important role. In addition, the emotional adjustment and relational capacity of foster children affect placement stability. Cultural and religious values within the community were found to reinforce caregiving practices and support foster parenting. The study further highlights the importance of careful assessment and matching processes in strengthening foster care outcomes. The study concludes that community-based foster care models can provide effective and sustainable alternatives for children without parental care when supported by appropriate caregiver selection, strong family environments, and continuous programme support. It recommends strengthening assessment procedures, enhancing family support systems, and deepening community engagement in foster care initiatives.

Keywords: Africa, Child Protection, Community-Based Practice, Foster Care, Kenya, Social Work Practice

I. INTRODUCTION

Across the world, increasing attention has been given to the need for appropriate care arrangements for children who are unable to remain with their biological families (Wissö et al., 2022). For many years, institutional care was widely used as a response to the needs of such children. However, growing evidence has shown that institutional settings often limit children's opportunities for emotional attachment, social development, and stable integration into society. As a result, there has been a gradual shift toward family-based care as a more suitable alternative for ensuring the well-being of vulnerable children (McCarthy & Guerin, 2022). Foster care has emerged as one of the key approaches within family-based care systems. It provides children with the opportunity to grow up in a family environment where they can receive emotional support, guidance, and protection (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van Ijzendoorn, 2024). Unlike institutional care, foster care allows children to experience everyday family life and to develop meaningful relationships with caregivers. When effectively implemented, foster care can contribute to improved developmental outcomes and provide children with a sense of belonging and stability (Chartier & Blavier, 2023).

Foster care in African contexts is best understood through frameworks that emphasise relationality, community embeddedness, and culturally grounded caregiving (Ronkvist et al., 2023). According to Mugumbate et al. (2024), African social work scholarship cautions that statutory definitions of foster care, when applied without contextual adaptation, risk disconnecting caregiving from the social ecosystems that sustain child wellbeing. This study, therefore,

situated foster care within African relational, communal, ecological, and faith-informed theoretical perspectives. African social work theory, as posited by Mugumbate et al. (2024), foregrounds the relational nature of child wellbeing, viewing children as socially situated within families, communities, and cultural institutions. Foster care is conceptualised as an extension of long-standing kinship and communal caregiving traditions. The philosophy of Ubuntu provides a foundational lens, emphasising interconnectedness, shared humanity, and collective responsibility (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Applied to foster care, Ubuntu frames caregiving as an ethical commitment rather than a contractual arrangement, contributing to social legitimacy, reduced stigma, and sustainability.

Across Sub Saharan Africa, child protection systems continue to grapple with the complex realities of poverty, disability, social exclusion, family breakdown, gender-based violence, and the enduring impacts of HIV and AIDS. These structural and social pressures have historically resulted in large numbers of children growing up outside family environments, often in institutional settings that are increasingly recognised as inadequate for nurturing holistic child development (Haffejee & Levine, 2020). In response, African governments and child welfare actors have, over the past decade, intensified efforts to transition from institutional care toward family-based alternatives that are anchored in community participation, cultural relevance, and relational care (Ronkvist et al., 2023).

Community-based child protection theory reinforces the importance of local actors in identifying vulnerability and supporting families (Chilwalo, 2020). Foster care is most effective when socially embedded, monitored, and supported within community structures. Further, Kuyler et al. (2023) assert that ecological systems theory highlights the interaction between household, community, institutional, and structural factors, demonstrating that placement outcomes depend on both caregiver capacity and broader social conditions. Additionally, faith-informed social work is particularly relevant in African contexts where faith institutions function as moral reference points and social support systems. When aligned with rights-based principles, faith-informed practice strengthens caregiver motivation, community trust, and accountability (Adedoyin et al., 2021). In Kenya, the demand for alternative care arrangements has been influenced by various social and economic challenges that affect families and children (Otuoma et al., 2020). Situations such as poverty, illness, and family breakdown have contributed to the increasing number of children who require care outside their biological families. In response, both government institutions and community-based organisations have developed programmes aimed at supporting vulnerable children through family-based care approaches (Otuoma et al., 2020).

Among these initiatives is the foster care programme implemented by St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate (CSA). The programme focuses on placing children in family environments within the community to promote their well-being and social integration. Through collaboration with government child protection systems, the organisation facilitates the identification of children in need of care, recruitment and assessment of foster parents, and ongoing monitoring of foster care placements. The foster care model implemented by St Martin CSA emphasises community-based placement for children in family environments rather than institutional care. The programme involves several stages, including identification of children in need of care, recruitment and assessment of foster parents, matching of children with suitable families, preparation for placement, and continuous monitoring and support. Foster parents are selected based on their willingness and ability to provide care, as well as their capacity to integrate the child into their family. Once placement is completed, the organisation continues to provide guidance and follow-up support to both foster parents and foster children. The model also places emphasis on treating foster children as full members of the family and encouraging their participation in daily household activities. In addition to family-level support, the model is influenced by community values and social norms that encourage care for vulnerable children. Cultural and religious values often shape the motivations of foster parents and contribute to their commitment to fostering (Adedoyin et al., 2021). These elements make the St Martin CSA model a relevant case for examining how community-based foster care operates in practice.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing emphasis on family-based care, there remains a limited empirical understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of foster care placements within community-based programmes. While foster care is widely promoted as an alternative to institutional care, not all placements result in positive outcomes for children or foster families (Ljones et al., 2025). In particular, there is a need to better understand how foster parental characteristics, family dynamics, child-related factors, and sociocultural influences interact to shape foster care experiences. Without such understanding, it becomes difficult to design effective foster care programmes and to ensure that children are placed in environments that meet their needs.

Although the foster care programme implemented by St Martin CSA has been operating within the community, there is limited documented evidence on how the model functions in practice and the factors that influence its success. This creates a gap in knowledge regarding the effectiveness of community-based foster care approaches and the processes required to support successful placements. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the factors that contribute to the success of foster care placements within the St Martin CSA model and by exploring how assessment and matching procedures can be strengthened to improve care outcomes.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine foster parental factors that contribute to the success of foster care at St. Martin CSA.
- ii. To assess foster family factors that contribute to the success of foster care at St. Martin CSA.
- iii. To assess foster child factors that contribute to the success of foster care at St. Martin CSA.
- iv. To examine cultural and religious factors that contribute to the success of foster care at St. Martin CSA.
- v. To suggest procedures for the assessment of cases and matching for foster care at St. Martin CSA.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study of foster care can be understood through theoretical perspectives that emphasise the role of relationships, family systems, and broader social environments in shaping child development and wellbeing. In this study, the attachment, family systems and ecological systems theories provide a useful lens for examining the factors that contribute to the success of foster care placements. Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how foster parental characteristics, family dynamics, foster child factors, and cultural and religious influences interact to shape foster care outcomes. They support the study's overall objective of examining factors that contribute to the success of foster care placements within a community.

2.1.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory provides an important foundation for understanding the role of caregiving relationships in the development and well-being of children. Thompspon et al. (2022), through the lens of the attachment theory, suggest that children require stable, consistent, and nurturing relationships with caregivers to develop a sense of emotional security, trust, and social competence. When such attachments are formed, children are better able to regulate their emotions, build relationships, and adapt to new environments. In the context of foster care, children are often placed in new family environments following separation from their biological families. This transition can affect their sense of security and emotional stability. The ability of foster parents to provide responsive, patient, and supportive care, therefore, becomes critical in helping children adjust to their new surroundings. Foster parents who are attentive to the emotional needs of children and who create safe and supportive environments are more likely to facilitate the development of secure attachments (Thompson et al., 2022). This perspective is directly relevant to the objectives of the study, which focus on foster parental factors and foster child factors. It helps explain why parenting practices, emotional support, and the ability of children to form relationships are central to successful foster care placements. Where strong attachments are developed, children are more likely to feel accepted and integrated within the foster family.

2.1.2 Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory views the family as a unified and interconnected system in which each member influences and is influenced by others. The theory emphasises patterns of interaction, relationships, and the overall functioning of the family unit (Bald et al., 2022). Changes affecting one member of the family, such as the introduction of a foster child, have implications for the entire household. Within foster care arrangements, the placement of a child into a foster family involves integration into an already existing family system. The response of family members, including biological children and extended family members, plays an important role in shaping the experience of the foster child. Acceptance, support, and positive interaction within the household contribute to a sense of belonging and stability for the child (Chartier & Blavier, 2023).

This perspective supports the study's focus on foster family factors as a key determinant of foster care success. It highlights the importance of assessing not only the foster parent but also the readiness of the entire family to receive and support the child. A cohesive and supportive family environment enhances the likelihood of successful placement, while strained relationships within the household may create challenges for both the child and the foster family (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van Ijzendoorn, 2024).

2.1.3 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory provides a broader perspective by emphasising that child development is influenced by multiple layers of the environment, ranging from immediate family settings to wider community and societal contexts. According to Antony (2022), the theory recognises that children do not develop in isolation, but within systems that include family, community, and cultural structures. In the context of foster care, this perspective draws attention to the role of community values, cultural norms, and institutional support systems in shaping caregiving practices. Foster care programmes operate within specific social and cultural environments that influence how caregiving is perceived and practised. Cultural and religious values, in particular, can shape attitudes toward fostering and influence the willingness of individuals to care for vulnerable children (Adedoyin et al., 2021). This theoretical perspective aligns

with the study's objective of examining cultural and religious factors that contribute to the success of foster care. It also helps explain the role of community-based programmes such as St Martin CSA in supporting foster care arrangements. By situating foster care within a broader social context, the theory underscores the importance of community engagement and social support in sustaining foster care placements.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Foster Parental Factors in Foster Care

The success of foster care placements is strongly influenced by the characteristics and motivations of foster parents. Foster parents play a central role in providing emotional support, guidance, and stability for foster children. Their willingness and ability to respond to the needs of the child often determine whether the foster care arrangement will be successful (Wissö et al., 2022). Motivation is an important factor influencing the commitment of foster parents. Individuals who choose to foster children are often motivated by a desire to support vulnerable members of the community, provide care to children in need, or contribute to the welfare of society. Williams et al. (2023) suggest that these motivations can shape the level of dedication that foster parents demonstrate in caring for foster children.

Parenting practices also influence the experiences of children in foster care. Foster parents who are able to provide nurturing environments and who treat foster children as members of the family are more likely to foster positive relationships with the children placed in their care. The capacity of foster parents to provide emotional support, discipline, and guidance contributes significantly to the stability and effectiveness of foster care arrangements (Wissö et al., 2022). Additionally, the ability of foster parents to meet the physical, emotional, and educational needs of foster children is critical to the well-being of the child. Foster parents who are able to provide stable living environments and supportive relationships create conditions that allow foster children to adjust more easily to their new family settings (Bakermans-Kranenburg & van Ijzendoorn, 2024).

2.2.2 Foster Family Factors in Foster Care

Beyond the role of individual foster parents, Sutherland et al. (2022) point out that the broader foster family environment also plays an important role in determining the success of foster care placements. Foster children become part of existing family systems, and their experiences within the household are shaped by the interactions they have with other family members. Acceptance by other members of the foster family is particularly important in creating a supportive environment for the foster child. When biological children and other family members accept the foster child and treat them as part of the family, the child is more likely to develop a sense of belonging and emotional security within the household (Chartier & Blayier, 2023). This sense of inclusion can significantly influence the adjustment of the child to the foster care arrangement. Family dynamics, according to Ljones et al. (2025), also influence how foster children integrate into the household. Foster families that are able to maintain positive relationships among members are better positioned to support the emotional and social development of foster children. The willingness of family members to share resources, responsibilities, and family experiences with foster children contributes to the overall success of foster care placements.

2.2.3 Foster Child Factors in Foster Care

A systematic review by Maguire et al. (2024) posits that the characteristics and experiences of foster children also influence how they adjust to foster care arrangements. Children entering foster care may have experienced a range of challenges prior to placement, including loss of parental care, family instability, or other forms of vulnerability. These experiences can affect how children respond to new caregiving environments. The ability of foster children to adapt to new family settings is therefore an important factor in the success of foster care placements. Children who are able to develop relationships with foster parents and other family members may find it easier to adjust to a new environment. At the same time, Ljones et al. (2025) assert that the support provided by foster parents and family members plays an important role in helping children overcome emotional and social challenges associated with their previous experiences. Positive relationships between foster children and foster parents contribute to the development of trust and emotional attachment. These relationships can support the child's emotional well-being and help create stable family environments in which children feel secure and valued.

2.2.4 Cultural and Religious Factors in Foster Care

Cultural and religious values can also influence foster care arrangements and the commitment of foster parents to providing care for vulnerable children. In many communities, cultural norms emphasise the responsibility of individuals and families to care for children who are in need of protection and support. These values can encourage families to open their homes to children who require alternative care (Adedoyin et al., 2021). Religious beliefs may also shape the motivations of foster parents and their willingness to provide care for vulnerable children. Hodge et al. (2025) highlight that faith-based values often emphasise compassion, charity and service to others, which may inspire

individuals to participate in foster care programs. In community-based foster care initiatives, such values can strengthen the commitment of foster parents and contribute to the sustainability of foster care placements. In programs implemented by organisations such as St Martin CSA, community and religious values may therefore play an important role in shaping caregiving practices and supporting foster families. Understanding how these values influence foster care arrangements is important in identifying the factors that contribute to successful foster care placements within community-based programs.

Table 1
Key Factors Influencing the Success of Foster Care Placements

Category of Factors	Key Elements Identified in the Literature	Relevance to Foster Care Outcomes
Foster parental factors	Motivation to foster, parenting practices, emotional support, ability to meet children's needs	These factors influence the quality of care provided to foster children and contribute to stable and supportive caregiving environments.
Foster family factors	Acceptance of the foster child within the family, relationships with biological children, and family dynamics	A supportive family environment promotes the child's sense of belonging and facilitates adjustment within the foster home.
Foster child factors	Child's adaptability, emotional adjustment, and ability to develop relationships with caregivers	Children's responses to foster placement influence the stability of foster care arrangements and their overall well-being.
Cultural and religious factors	Community values, cultural expectations regarding care for vulnerable children, and faith-based motivations	Cultural and religious values can strengthen the commitment of foster parents and support the sustainability of foster care placements.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the foster care model implemented by St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate (CSA) and to explore factors that contribute to successful foster care placements. A case study approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to gain an in-depth understanding of foster care practices within a specific organisational and community context. The case study design enabled the researchers to explore the experiences of foster parents, foster children, and program staff while also examining institutional records related to foster care placements. By focusing on a single program, the study was able to generate detailed insights into the procedures, relationships, and contextual factors that shape the success of foster care arrangements. The approach also allowed for the use of multiple sources of data, including documents, interviews, and focus group discussions, thereby providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the foster care system implemented by St. Martin CSA.

3.2 Study Area and Context

The study was conducted within the foster care programme implemented by St Martin CSA, a community-based organisation located in Nyahururu in Laikipia County, Kenya. The organisation works with vulnerable and marginalised members of the community and has developed programmes that address issues such as child protection, social inclusion, and support for disadvantaged families. Within its child protection initiatives, St Martin CSA facilitates foster care placements for children who cannot remain with their biological families. The organisation collaborates with the Department of Children Services and the Children's Court in the recruitment, assessment, and placement of foster parents as well as in monitoring foster care arrangements. The foster care model implemented by the organisation involves several stages, including identification of children in need of care, recruitment of foster parents, matching of children with foster families, preparation for placement, and continuous monitoring and support of foster care placements. The programme therefore provides a suitable context for examining the factors that contribute to the success of foster care placements within a community-based framework.

3.3 Target Population

The study focused on individuals and records associated with the foster care programme implemented by St Martin CSA. The target population included foster parents, foster children, former foster children, programme staff involved in foster care management, and government child protection officers working with the organisation.

Additionally, institutional records related to foster care placements were also considered an important source of information. These records provided background information on the children placed under foster care as well as insights into the procedures and outcomes associated with the foster care programme.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 Sampling Procedures

The study used stratified random sampling to identify both documentary sources and informants for interviews and focus group discussions. Stratification was used so as to capture experiences associated with both successful and unsuccessful foster care placements within the programme. Participants were categorised according to their involvement in foster care and the outcomes of foster care placements. The categories included successful foster parents, unsuccessful foster parents, successful foster children, and unsuccessful foster children. Members within each category were then randomly selected to participate in the interviews and focus group discussions. This sampling strategy allowed the study to capture a range of perspectives on foster care experiences and provided insights into the factors associated with both successful and unsuccessful foster care placements.

Table 2

Distribution of Cases Reviewed in Foster Care Files

Category of Foster Care Case	Number of Cases Reviewed
Successful foster care placements	5
Unsuccessful foster care placements	5
Total case files reviewed	10

3.4.2 Sample Size

The study drew on multiple sources of data. A total of ten foster care files were selected for document review. These records included files of both male and female foster children and represented cases with both successful and unsuccessful fostering outcomes. Additionally, the study conducted interviews with key informants involved in the foster care programme. These included three members of the St Martin CSA staff working in the foster care programme, as well as the District Children's Officer responsible for child protection services in the area. The study also engaged nineteen informants, including foster parents, foster children, and former foster children, who were selected from cases with both satisfactory and unsatisfactory foster care outcomes. Furthermore, two foster group discussions were conducted. One focus group consisted of five foster parents, while the second consisted of six former foster children. The combination of these different data sources provided a diverse set of perspectives on foster care experiences within the programme.

Table 3

Summary of Data Sources and Participants

Data Source	Participants/Materials	Number	Purpose in the Study
Document review	Foster care case files	10	To examine background information on foster children, placement processes, and foster care outcomes
Key informant interviews	St Martin CSA programme staff	3	To understand programme implementation, recruitment of foster parents, and monitoring of placements
Key informant interview	District Children's Officer	1	To provide a government perspective on foster care processes and collaboration with St Martin CSA
Individual interviews	Foster parents, foster children, and former foster children	19	To capture personal experiences and perceptions regarding foster care placements
Focus group discussion	Foster parents	5 participants	To explore shared experiences of fostering and factors influencing successful placements
Focus group discussions	Former foster children	6 participants	To understand children's experiences of foster care and their adjustment within foster families

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study employed three main data collection methods, and they included document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.

3.5.1 Document Analysis

The research involved a review of ten foster care files maintained by St Martin CSA. The documents were examined through a process of skimming, detailed reading, and interpretation so as to extract relevant information about the foster care programme. The records provided background information on the children placed under foster care, the



circumstances leading to their admission into the programme, and the processes involved in their placement with foster families. Document analysis also provided historical insights into the experiences of children in foster care and the challenges encountered during the foster care process.

3.5.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with foster parents, foster children, former foster children, staff members of St Martin CSA, and the District Children’s Officer. The interviews were designed to obtain first-hand information on the experiences, motivations, and perceptions of participants regarding foster care arrangements. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experience while also enabling the researchers to explore issues related to the demands, benefits, and challenges associated with foster care placements. Interviews with foster children focused on their experiences in foster homes and their perceptions of the care provided by foster parents.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group discussions were conducted so as to generate a wider range of perspectives on foster care experiences. One focus group involved foster parents, while the other involved former foster children. Focus group discussions provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences collectively and to reflect on common issues affecting foster care arrangements. These discussions also helped identify broader patterns and themes related to the success and challenges of foster care placements. Interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded with the consent of participants, and additional notes were taken during the discussions. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others were conducted over the telephone, where necessary.

Table 4

Summary of Data Collection Methods

Method	Description	Type of Data Generated
Document analysis	Review of foster care case files maintained by St Martin CSA.	Background information on children, placement processes, and case outcomes.
Semi-structured interviews	Interviews with foster parents, foster children, former foster children, programme staff, and the government officer.	Individual experiences, perceptions, and insights on foster care placements.
Focus group discussions	Group discussions with foster parents and former foster children.	Collective reflections on foster care experiences and shared challenges.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected through interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and translated into English where necessary. The analysis involved a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was used to organise the data into categories related to the key issues addressed in the research. Thematic analysis was then applied to identify recurring patterns and themes emerging from the data. These themes formed the basis for understanding the factors influencing the success factors of foster care placements. Additionally, basic quantitative information derived from the documentary records, such as the number of successful and unsuccessful cases and their demographic characteristics, was summarised using descriptive statistics. The integration of qualitative and descriptive data helped to provide a comprehensive understanding of the foster care experiences documented in the study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process, particularly because the study involved children and sensitive personal experiences. Participation in interviews and focus group discussions was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study before data collection. Confidentiality of participants was maintained by avoiding the use of identifying personal information in the presentation of the findings. Foster care records reviewed in the study were also treated with strict confidentiality, and the identities of foster parents and children were not disclosed.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Foster Parental Factors Contributing to the Success of Foster Care

The first objective of the study was to examine the role of foster parental characteristics in shaping the success of foster care placements. The findings are summarised in Table 5.



Table 5

Key Foster Parental Factors Influencing Successful Foster Care

Foster Parental Factor	Observed Influence on Foster Care Outcomes
Motivation to foster	Foster parents motivated by compassion or religious values demonstrated a stronger commitment to fostering.
Parenting practices	Nurturing and supportive parenting promoted positive adjustment of foster children.
Emotional support	Foster parents who provided emotional care facilitated stronger bonds with foster children.

These findings highlight the importance of selecting foster parents who demonstrate both commitment and the capacity to provide supportive caregiving environments. This study found that one of the most important factors influencing successful placements was the motivation of foster parents to foster children. Most of the foster parents reported that their decision to foster was influenced by a sense of moral responsibility to support vulnerable children within their community. In several cases, religious beliefs and compassion for children without adequate parental care motivated individuals to offer their homes to foster children. Findings of this study align with those of Wissö et al (2022) and indicate that foster parents play a central role in determining whether foster children adjust successfully within foster families.

Parenting practices were also found to influence the success of foster care arrangements. Foster parents who adopted nurturing parenting styles, demonstrated patience, and provided emotional support were more likely to facilitate positive adjustment among foster children. Another important factor was the ability of foster parents to provide emotional support and guidance. Children who experienced supportive relationships with foster parents were more likely to feel accepted and valued within the family environment. These supportive relationships contributed to the stability of foster care placements and improved the well-being of the children. In the same breath, Willims et al. (2023) found that such parenting approaches helped children develop trust and a sense of security within the foster family.

4.1.2 Foster Family Factors Contributing to the Success of Foster Care

The second objective of the study sought to explore the role of the broader foster family environment in shaping the experiences of foster children, and the findings are summarised in Table 6 below.

Table 6

Foster Family Dynamics and Child Adjustment

Foster Family Factor	Influence on Foster Care Success
Acceptance by family members	Positive acceptance enhanced children’s sense of belonging.
Relationships with biological children	Harmonious relationships supported successful placements.
Household environment	Stable and supportive homes promoted the adjustment of foster children.

Findings indicate that the success of foster care placements is influenced by the dynamics within the foster household. One of the key factors identified was the level of acceptance of foster children by other family members. Foster children who felt welcomed and accepted by members of the foster family were more likely to develop a sense of belonging within the household. Similarly, Ljones et al. (2025) highlight that having positive relationships with other members of the family contributed to emotional stability and facilitated the integration of the child into the family structure.

The relationship between foster children and the biological children of foster parents was also found to influence placement outcomes. In cases where biological children accepted and supported the foster child, the placement was more likely to be successful. Conversely, tensions between foster children and other children in the household could create challenges for foster care arrangements. These findings suggest that successful foster care placements depend on the willingness of the entire family to embrace the foster child as part of the household. Additionally, Ronnkvist et al. (2023) found that the overall family environment played an important role in shaping the experiences of foster children. Households characterised by stability, cooperation and supportive relationships were more likely to provide environments in which foster children could thrive.

4.1.3 Foster Child Factors Contributing to the Success of Foster Care

The study further examined the characteristics of foster children and how these characteristics influence their adjustment to foster care placements. The findings are summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7*Foster Child Characteristics Affecting Foster Care Outcomes*

Foster Child Factor	Influence on Placement Stability
Emotional adjustment	Children who adapted emotionally adjusted more easily to foster homes.
Behavioral characteristics	Behavioural challenges sometimes affected family integration.
Ability to form relationships	Strong relationships with foster parents strengthened placement stability.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding the emotional needs of foster children and providing supportive environments that promote healing and adaptation. One important factor identified was the emotional and psychological adjustment of foster children. Correspondingly, a study by Chartier and Bloavier (2023) found that children who were able to gradually adapt to their new environment tended to integrate more easily into foster families. Adjustment often depended on the child's prior experiences and the circumstances that led to placement in foster care.

Another factor influencing foster care outcomes was the behavioural characteristics of foster children. Some foster children experienced emotional challenges resulting from previous trauma or separation from their biological families. These findings align with those of Sutherland et al. (2022). In such cases, the ability of foster parents to provide patience and understanding played an important role in supporting the child's adjustment. The ability of foster children to develop relationships with foster parents also contributed to successful placements. Children who formed positive emotional connections with foster parents were more likely to experience stability within the foster family and to benefit from the caregiving environment.

4.1.4 Cultural and Religious Factors Contributing to the Success of Foster Care

The fourth objective of the study was to examine how cultural and religious factors contribute to the success of foster care, and the findings are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8*Cultural and Religious Influences on Foster Parenting*

Cultural or Religious Factor	Role in Foster Care
Religious motivation	Faith-based values encouraged individuals to foster vulnerable children.
Community values	Cultural norms supported caregiving for children without parental care.
Moral responsibility	Social expectations reinforced commitment to fostering.

The study found that cultural and religious values play an important role in shaping attitudes toward foster care within the communities served by St Martin CSA. Religious beliefs were identified as a significant motivating factor for foster parents. Many foster parents indicated that their decision to foster children was based on faith-based values that emphasise compassion, service to others, and responsibility toward vulnerable members of society. Cultural values within the community also encouraged individuals to provide support for children who lacked parental care. In some cases, the community viewed the care of vulnerable children as a collective responsibility rather than solely the responsibility of individual families. These findings align with the perspective presented by Adedoyin et al. (2021), who highlight the importance of religion and culture in driving the foster care processes. These cultural and religious influences helped create an environment in which foster care was socially supported and valued. These findings suggest that community-based foster care models can benefit from the integration of local cultural values and religious motivations that support caregiving for vulnerable children. Likewise, Hodge et al. (2025) found that religion was effective in supporting adoptive and foster care processes. As a result, foster parents often felt encouraged by community norms that emphasised generosity, compassion, and social responsibility.

4.1.5 Procedures for Assessment of Cases and Matching for Foster Care

The final objective of the study was to suggest procedures for improving the assessment of cases and the matching of children with foster families. Findings from the study indicate that effective foster care placements depend heavily on careful assessment and appropriate matching processes. The foster care model implemented by St Martin CSA involved a systematic process that included the identification of children in need of care, recruitment and assessment of foster parents, preparation of both children and foster families for placement, and ongoing monitoring of placements. These procedures help ensure that children are placed in environments that are capable of meeting their needs. Participants emphasised the importance of matching children with foster families whose characteristics and capacities align with the needs of the child. These findings are similar to the highlights by Cotton and Oduor (2025) indicating that appropriate matching of children and families in the process of foster care is critical. Considerations such as the age of the child, emotional needs, family environment, and parenting capacity were viewed as important factors in determining appropriate placements. Continuous monitoring and follow-up by programme staff were also identified

as critical components of successful foster care arrangements. Regular visits and communication between programme staff, foster parents, and children helped address challenges that arose during foster care placements and supported the stability of placements. The findings suggest that structured assessment procedures and careful matching processes are essential for improving foster care outcomes and ensuring that children receive appropriate care within foster families.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the factors contributing to the success of foster care placements within the community-based foster care model implemented by St Martin Catholic Social Apostolate (CSA). The analysis focused on foster parental characteristics, foster family dynamics, foster child factors, and the cultural and religious context within which foster care operates. The study also explored procedures for assessing cases and matching children with foster families. The findings demonstrate that successful foster care placements are shaped by a combination of individual, familial, and sociocultural factors. Foster parental motivations, particularly those grounded in compassion, moral responsibility, and religious values, emerged as important drivers of commitment to fostering vulnerable children. Foster parents who demonstrated nurturing parenting practices and provided emotional support were more likely to create stable and supportive environments for foster children.

The study further found that the broader foster family environment plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of foster children. Acceptance by other family members and positive relationships with biological children contributed to the successful integration of foster children into foster households. These dynamics highlight the importance of considering the family as a whole when assessing potential foster placements. Foster child characteristics also influenced placement outcomes. The ability of children to adjust emotionally to new environments, develop trusting relationships with foster parents, and navigate the challenges associated with separation from biological families affected the stability of placements. These findings underscore the importance of providing foster children with supportive caregiving environments that promote emotional healing and social integration.

Cultural and religious values within the community were also found to play a meaningful role in supporting foster care arrangements. Religious beliefs and community norms that emphasise compassion and collective responsibility for vulnerable children helped create a supportive context for foster parenting. These sociocultural dynamics contributed to the sustainability of the community-based foster care model implemented by St Martin CSA. Finally, the study highlights the importance of effective procedures for assessing cases and matching children with foster families. Careful assessment of both children and foster parents, combined with structured placement processes and ongoing monitoring, contributed to the stability and success of foster care arrangements. The findings suggest that community-based foster care models, such as the one implemented by St Martin CSA, can provide viable alternatives for children who are unable to remain with their biological families. By integrating family-level support, community engagement, and structured placement processes, such models contribute to the well-being and protection of vulnerable children.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings of this study have several recommendations and implications for child protection practice, foster care programming, and policy development. First, foster care programmes should place greater emphasis on the selection and preparation of foster parents. Assessing the motivations, parenting capacities, and emotional readiness of prospective foster parents can help ensure that children are placed in supportive environments. Training and ongoing support for foster parents are also essential in enabling them to respond effectively to the needs of foster children. Second, the findings highlight the importance of considering the entire foster family system when placing children in foster care. Programmes should assess not only the foster parents but also the readiness of other family members to accept and support foster children. Strengthening family-level support mechanisms can contribute to more stable placements.

Third, foster care programmes should provide psychosocial support for foster children to help them adjust to new family environments. Many foster children may have experienced trauma, loss, or separation from their biological families. Providing counselling, emotional support, and monitoring can help children navigate these transitions and enhance their well-being. Fourth, the study suggests that foster care programmes can benefit from engaging local cultural and religious institutions in supporting foster care initiatives. Faith-based values and community norms that emphasise care for vulnerable children can strengthen community support for foster parenting and encourage greater participation in foster care programmes. Finally, effective assessment and matching procedures are essential for improving foster care outcomes. Programmes should develop structured approaches for evaluating the needs of children and the capacities of foster families, as well as mechanisms for monitoring placements and addressing challenges that arise during foster care arrangements. Future studies may explore the long-term outcomes of foster care placements, the perspectives of

biological families, and the experiences of foster children as they transition into adulthood. Additional research may also examine how community-based foster care models can be strengthened through policy support, institutional collaboration, and improved child protection systems.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The donors had no role in the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or decision to publish. The views expressed are solely those of the authors.

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