

Ethically Approved Research - Summary Report

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Full Title of Research Study:	An Exploration of Foster Carers' Identity in the Caregiving Role: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.						
Name of Researcher/Researchers:	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 40%; text-align: right; padding: 5px;">Surname:</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Daniels</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">First Name:</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Maria</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">Existing post-nominal Letters:</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">PhD</td> </tr> </table>	Surname:	Daniels	First Name:	Maria	Existing post-nominal Letters:	PhD
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Student Research

If research was undertaken for an academic award please state:

Official title of the course:	PhD in Social Work
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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to explore the life experiences that influenced foster carers to take on the role of fostering. The aim was to develop a more in-depth understanding of how their experiences shaped their identity in the caregiving role and their developing relationships with the children in their care. A qualitative approach was adopted guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Seven foster families were recruited and data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analysed using IPA. Four superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis. The first theme *Complex Family Dynamics* identified foster carers' reasons for taking on the role of fostering were deeply personal and

related to their own subjective experiences. The second theme *Conflicting Identities* captured their feelings around the assessment process. The third theme *Developing Identities* related to their emerging identities as foster carers and developing relationships with the children in their care. The fourth theme *Enactment of the Role* outlined their approach to the task of fostering and relationships with professionals.

Narrative identity was the lens used to analyse the new findings related to the interchange between what foster carers bring to the role and the requirements of the system. Their experiences in the role emerged as contextual and deeply personal. Their identity as foster carers was shaped by their subjective experiences and this identity was different to the one imposed on them as 'ordinary' families who enter a system and are simultaneously required to adhere to statutory requirements and professionals expectations. The analysis of this research focused on foster carers' interpretation of their role and the implications for them, the children in their care and the system that recruits and supports them. The main conclusions are presented and lead to a number of recommendations for social work practice, support and training for foster carers, policy implications and future research. Underpinning these recommendations is an emphasis on the importance of considering foster carers' experiences through their lenses. The findings suggest further exploration of how foster carers are assessed in Ireland is needed to create a more authentic space for reflection for both foster carers and social workers. An examination of what foster carers bring to the role from their unique perspectives

would also give them a sense of self in the care they provide and build a foundation for future learning.

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