In foster care, contact visits with birth families play an important role in relation to the child’s wellbeing. Studies shown that the main advantages of contact are preserving relationships that can benefit the child, bringing a greater sense of continuity to both the child’s life story and the process of identity development, enhancing the psychological well-being of the foster child and keeping alive the prospect of the child returning to live with the biological family (Farr, Grant-Marsney, & Grotevant, 2014; Taplin, 2005). In addition, that contact visits may contribute to more stable placements and help children both to understand their current situation and to have a more realistic view of their biological parents (Taplin, 2005). Other research has shown that contact with birth parents can be detrimental for children’s well-being and makes adaptation to foster care more difficult (Haight et al. 2005; Moyers, Farmer, & Lipscombe, 2006. Consequently, some authors strongly recommend that decisions about contact be made on a case-by-case basis, weighing up the individual benefits and threats to the child (Prasad, 2011; Sen & Broadhurst, 2011; Taplin, 2005). The main aim of this study is to give voice to social workers and foster families about advantages and difficulties of contact visits.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Two focus groups: 8 social workers from 4 foster care agencies in Andalusia (Spain) with responsibility for managing contact visits, and 8 foster families with considerable experience of contact visits (4 were recruited through the Association of Foster Families in Andalusia and 4 through fostering agencies).

**Procedure, design and analysis**

Access to foster care agencies and foster families was obtained through the official Andalusian Child Protective Services (SPM). The focal groups were audio-recorded.

Transcripts (of the two focus groups) gave rise to primary documents for the hermeneutic unit under study. All this information was exported from an Excel database to the ATLAS.ti v7.0 software. The transcripts were examined using an inductive method in order to identify themes among participants’ responses.

**RESULTS**

**Opinions from the focus groups regarding the benefits of contact visits**

The focus group of social workers and foster carers indicated that visits were important for a number of reasons (Table 1 and 2).

**Difficulties related to visits that were raised in the focus groups**

The difficulties identified by social workers and foster carers in relation to visits are shown in Table 3 and 4.

**DISCUSSION**

Results show that both groups agreed on the utility of visits to maintain the children’s attachment to their birth family, to bring a greater sense of continuity to the children’s life story, to enhance the psychological well-being of the foster children and to know the real situation of their birth family. In relation to the difficulties, one of the issues mentioned by both groups refers to a lack in the coordination among the social workers, the SPM and the foster families involved. The other issue brings together several complaints to the SPM, such as the fact of not providing information about taking decisions regarding the future of the child; the lack of support and preparation about visits; as well as the shortage of social workers and economic aids provided by the SPM.

**REFERENCES**


