Lena Hedin has a master’s degree in Social Work. She has taught Social Work at the School of Law, Psychology, and Social Work at Örebro University since 2002. She is also a trained social worker with many years’ experience of social work, especially in the areas of foster care and probation services. Her primary research interest is foster care as seen from the perspective of foster children and youth.

In foster care research there is rather sparse knowledge about what it is like for young people to enter and live in a foster family. This thesis elucidates foster youth’s understanding of their everyday life in their different contexts, after entering various types of foster families: kinship, network, and traditional foster families. The results show that over time the young people face a highly changeable everyday life, and display vulnerability by being a foster child, but that they also can be active participants and agents in shaping their own lives. Negotiations about their doings, and family rituals like eating dinner, watching television, and taking holiday trips together, are strong inclusion practices that integrate the foster youth into the foster family. A lack of these mutual practices is observed before disruptions. Both structure and warmth are important features of the foster family. The concept of an ‘open foster family’ is proposed, which means a family open to inviting the adolescent into the family culture, as well as open towards his/her birth family. In this process joking, gentle teasing, and laughing together serve as a door-opener into the foster family and continue to be a crucial ritual in everyday interactions. Despite previous problems in school, it is possible to make educational improvements in a rather short time, based on the stability and support they receive in care and the support of peers and teachers in school. In the follow-up study after one year, most adolescents still living in the same foster home feel a sense of belonging to both their foster family and birth family, especially when both families cooperate, which is most evident in close kinship families. However, foster youth in previously unknown traditional foster families have also developed a sense of belonging in the foster family, even though they had not yet done so in the first interview. The inclusion of network foster families in the study serves to show the importance of foster youth’s involvement and active role in choosing the foster family, which in particular made the early period of the placement easier.