

Child Focus Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jill Marriott
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Date of last inspection	30 October 2006

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Child Focus Fostering Agency is an independent agency providing foster care for children and young people up to the age of 18 years. The service aims to provide safe and nurturing foster placements for looked after children by providing culturally diverse carers. At the time of inspection 32 children and young people were placed through the agency. A range of different types of placement are available. These include long term, permanent, continuing and time limited care. Assessment and emergency placements can also be provided. Child Focus Fostering is based in Leyton in the London Borough of Waltham Forest there are transport links close by.

Summary

The inspection of this independent fostering agency began with the planning day on 25 June 2007 and ended with a feedback session with the principal officer on 6 July 2007. The inspection took approximately 40 hours to complete. Interviews were held with the agencies acting manager (the principal officer), the chair of the foster panel, agency social workers, four sets of foster carers and five young people. The files for carers and children were seen and the agency's records, policies and procedures were examined. Positive feedback was received from one placing authority for two of the young people interviewed. From discussion with staff and carers it was clear that they are kept fully informed of changes to agency policies and procedures and also of new legislation. For example the inspector observed a team meeting and a carers training session. The team meeting discussion included issues related to new legislation and policies and procedures recently introduced. The training session for carers related to the recently implemented laws about smoking and to health and medical issues regarding young people in placement. Child Focus Fostering Service has worked hard to meet the requirements made at the last inspection. Evidence at this recent inspection shows that all requirements and recommendations have been met. The agency have improved in all areas, major improvements are noted in the sections regarding staying safe and the organisation of the agency. The principal officer has undertaken a review of the work of the agency since the last inspection. Improved work systems are now in place and a monitoring system has been introduced to ensure the service is working effectively. Only two actions are required at this inspection. The principal officer is working towards rectifying the issues identified. The first issue related to consultation with young people and ensuring this takes place with an appropriate person independent of the foster carers. The second is related to the interview process for newly recruited staff.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection on 30 October 2006, 17 requirements (actions) and eight recommendations were made. Since that inspection the agency have kept the Commission for Social Care Inspection and more recently Ofsted informed of the progress made to meet the National Minimum Standards. At this inspection evidence shows that the quality of the service has improved from inadequate to good. The Principal Officer and the staff team work hard to continuously improve the standard of this agency and are now providing good services for the carers, young people and the local authorities placing children with them.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency promotes the health of children placed through them with foster carers. To ensure children's health needs are met the agency is proactive in developing health plans, which are shared at the initial planning meetings. These are then monitored at each child care review meeting. Where possible children remain with their own family General Practitioner (GP) otherwise they are temporarily or permanently placed with a more local GP. Evidence was available to show that the agency social workers support carers to ensure young people's health needs are met and reviewed throughout the placement. Children's records identify health appointments made and the outcome of these. The principal officer explained that there are still occasions when appropriate information regarding children's health is not available from the relevant local authority. On these occasions the agency is proactive in ensuring the information is sought as a matter of urgency. Copies of letters requesting information are kept on files. Training with regard to the new smoking laws, healthy eating and the health needs of children placed through the agency was observed during the inspection. The training was informative and carers participated throughout the session. Appropriate handouts were available.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The agency does not have a registered manager in post at present. However until the post is filled the Principal Officer is acting into the post to cover the work. The Principal Officer has the relevant qualifications and experience for the role and will continue to cover until an appropriate manager is recruited. Eight actions were required to ensure the safety of children placed by this agency at the last inspection. All actions required have since been met. Four sets of foster carers were interviewed during the inspection. File information shows that reviews for each of these carers have been held within the appropriate time scales. Recruitment and assessment information was recorded. The agency has recently reviewed the initial assessment process for all carers and has added a quality assurance component to ensure assessments are up to date and complete when presented to the foster panel. Carers are aware of their roles and responsibilities and understand the agencies child protection procedures. They confirmed that they had received child protection training in the past year. Appropriate safe care training was included in the training profiles seen on carer's files and the monitoring forms for the training attended. Training includes caring for young people who have experienced abuse. Records show that each family is visited regularly by an appropriately qualified supervising social worker. Each carer interviewed confirmed that at least one visit per year is unannounced. Supervising social workers ensure that children and young people are seen at least on every second visit. Carer's and young people have separate files these are up to date and information is easily accessible. Children's files included information regarding health, education and family background. Each file includes a risk assessment, which is reviewed at least six monthly. Carers files included a record of supervision, training and review of approval. The agency has worked hard to ensure that files are presented in a way that can be easily understood. Carers and children's files are monitored regularly by the principal officer. The matching process has been reviewed and through the foster carers review process consideration is given to the age range, ability and cultural background of young people placed. Carer's and social workers said that the agency uses an holistic approach and will only place a child if it is clear that their needs can be met. Information was seen with regard to two young people placed with carers from a different background. Records clearly showed what issues had arisen and how they were dealt

with. The young people confirmed during the inspection that any issues identified have been dealt with. They said they are happy in the placement and would not want to move. One carer talked about a young person placed with her who could not understand English. A range of support was put in place to enable the young person to communicate with the carer. The foster carer had also been advised of the young person's background and their cultural religious and racial needs. Files show that health and safety checks of each foster home is undertaken at least yearly. These are carried out during supervision. Records show that these can be announced visits or unannounced. Carers said they are aware of the need to ensure the homes are safe and welcome health and safety checks. Carer's reviews include document evidence of electrical and gas certificates and details of home insurance. The agency has appropriate staff and carer recruitment arrangements. Files show that references and criminal records bureau disclosures are seen prior to a decision regarding recruitment being made. With a more recent possible recruitment it was clear that the usual procedure has not been fully followed. Following discussion it was agreed that a second meeting would take place with the candidate and an appropriate interview panel. An action has been required related to recruitment. The agency has reviewed its procedures for the operation of the out of hours rota. All supervising social workers and those who operate the out of hours system now have the appropriate qualifications to undertake the work. The foster panel was observed during this inspection. A new panel chair has recently been recruited and competently managed the panel business. All panel members have undertaken recent training to look at the needs of looked after children and how carers are supported. The quality assurance system recently introduced ensure that information presented to the panel is accurate. All recommendations made by the panel are presented to the agency decision maker for a final decision.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

It was evident from discussion with social workers, carers and young people that high importance is given to the needs of each child placed by the agency. Careful consideration is given at the referral and assessment stage of placement to ensure appropriate support is available to meet the individual needs of each young person. Care plans seen were based on the initial assessment and reflected the individual needs of the children. Files seen show that young people have personal education plans. There were copies of letters on each individual file seen introducing the fostering agency to children's schools. These explained the role of the agency in the lives of young people placed and asked to be kept informed through the carers of educational progress. Carers told the inspector that it is their role to maintain contact with schools throughout each placement. They attend school events and open evenings. The agency social workers discuss education progress with carers and young people during each monthly supervision session. During the initial placement of each child, carers are advised of their role and responsibility. This is reviewed during each child care planning meeting.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The placement plans for young people set out how the agency will meet their assessed needs. Where appropriate young people are supported to maintain contact with their families and friends. Young people interviewed confirmed that they were aware of the contact arrangements for them. They also said that they have made new friends at home and school during their placements and these friendships are encouraged. In general the fostering service promotes

consultation with young people and files clearly show that social workers talk regularly to young people about their placements. Independent reviewing officers are also involved in consulting young people for their care planning reviews. Young people said that they are asked for their opinion of the placement for the carers yearly reviews. During the fostering panel two carer reviews were observed. The reviews included comments by young people. In one case in the absence of an independent interpreter the foster carer had interpreted. The social worker confirmed with the young people at a later date that the information was correct. Further discussion took place during the inspection with the principal officer who agreed that in future where necessary an independent interpreter would be used in each case to consult with children. An action has been required with regard to consultation with children. The agency has a children's support group which offers children and young people the opportunity to meet together and speak with social workers and agency representatives in a relaxed environment. Trips and outings are also arranged for the group.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The files for children and young people included up to date information about personal education plans, placement plans and where appropriate pathway plans. Copies of letters were seen on children's files requesting specific up to date information from placing authorities. The files did indicate that the agency take notes of all planning and review meetings and these were seen during the inspection. Young people interviewed are aware of their future care plans and were able to accurately described these. They talked about being involved in cooking, keeping their rooms clean and learning about budgeting the benefits system and further education opportunities. Where appropriate young people are also given advice and information with regard to the legal system for seeking asylum. From records seen, from files and from discussion, it was clear that foster carer's receive appropriate training to enable them to support young people through adolescents and on to independent living. One young person who was placed as an asylum seeker has remained as a lodger with the same family since turning 18 years. Another young person said he has been given good opportunities since being in placement and is now looking forward to going to college in September to study for a worthwhile career. Following a policy review foster carer's files include details of the cost of caring for young people. Carers confirmed that they are given a breakdown of allowances and expenses prior to each placement. Allowances and expenses are reviewed yearly but are reviewed more regularly if necessary following a placement review meeting. Information regarding expenses and allowances is available in the foster carers hand book. All carers now sign a monitoring form to say that they agree to the allowances recommended.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Child Focus Fostering has an up to date statement of purpose which meets the required standards. The principal officer, a qualified social worker with appropriate experience is acting in the manager's post until a new manager is recruited. Supervising social workers are all qualified members of staff. Evidence recorded on staff files shows that regular supervision and appraisals take place. Issues related to staff performance are recorded and where further support and training is required this is discussed and planned during the supervision process. Supervision is also used to prioritise work and ensure all tasks allocated are carried out. The work of each member of staff is monitored regularly. Job descriptions are relevant to the posts held. The

agency has revised the induction process for all staff and this appropriately reflects the needs of new members of staff. Staffing levels for this agency were appropriate at the time of inspection. During the inspection a team meeting and a carers training session were observed. It was clear from these sessions that social workers understand their roles and are very much aware of the needs of young people and the carers with day to day responsibility. The training session observed was about children's health needs. It included information and policies related to the medical and medication needs of young people and was also linked to the new laws related to smoking. Informative handouts were available. It is clear from the statement of purpose, from the staff handbook, the induction process and from discussion with staff that the management of the service is effective. All staff employed including managers have the appropriate skills and qualifications for their roles within the agency. Carers who were interviewed understand their roles and are aware of the policies and procedures of the agency. As new policies and procedures are introduced carers are made aware of them and training is organised with regard to them. Recent training includes the new policies related to back up carers, the process for deregistration, and changes to the foster carers agreement. There is a clear strategy for working with carers. Carers said they are treated with respect and feel valued by the agency. They are offered a range of appropriate training and are supervised regularly. Four foster carers are working towards National Vocational Qualifications level 3 in child care (NVQ 3). Six other's have child care related qualifications. The agency has an appropriate training programme in place. Monitoring forms show regular attendance at training. Attendance on the training course observed during the inspection was high. Carers said that contact with the agency is good and there is always someone at the end of the phone for support if any issues arise. All carers are given regular up dates regarding the on call system and are kept informed of the details of who to contact in case of emergency. Children's records seen are well kept. The records were up to date and information was easily accessible. Each file has a front sheet showing relevant information about the young person's home address, their family, the carer, the general practitioner, professionals involved and the status of the placement. Administrative records are also in good order, these are monitored regularly by the principal officer. All records seen are up to date and information is easy to find. Separate records are kept for carers, children placed and for each member of staff. Carers and young people said that they are aware that they can have access their personal files. The agency keep all records required of them. These are in good order and are kept in locked filing cabinets. Records seen during the inspection included health and safety records, accidents, incidents, complaints and allegations. Records of complaints and allegations include details of the investigation and the outcome.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
15	ensure that all recruitment interviews are carried out by staff at an appropriate level in the organisation.	31 August 2007

11	ensure that interpreters are available for young people as required. Appropriate interpreters, independent of the foster carers must be available throughout the consultation process when young people are not able to speak English fluently.	31 August 2007
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.