

Foster Care Associates - East Midlands

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC045338
Inspection date	17 September 2007
Inspector	Trisha Gibbs
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Foster Care Associates Anglia 160 Upper New Walk LEICESTER LE1 7QA
Telephone number	0116 285 4833
Email	contactus@thefca.co.uk
Registered person	Foster Care Associates Ltd
Registered manager	Steven George Blackwood / Davina Adella Stewart
Responsible individual	David John Oldham
Date of last inspection	24 May 2006

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Foster Care Associates is a nationwide fostering agency. Foster Care Associates East Midlands consists of a regional office in Leicester and three additional offices in Peterborough, Nottingham and Derby. Within each office there is a team manager and a team of social workers and resource staff. Therapists and educational liaison officers work across the region. The Registered Manager for the four offices is a Foster Care Associates Director. There is also an Assistant Director for the region. For the last three years the inspection has been carried out from a different office base. The following inspection was carried out at the Derby office.

Summary

This was a reduced key inspection following a full key inspection last year. Full consideration was given to pre-inspection documentation submitted by the agency and other files and records were referred to during the inspection. Some of the staff team were interviewed. Foster carer homes were not visited on this occasion but discussions were held with a group of carers. Although questionnaires were sent to 12 sets of carers, young people and social workers only four of these were returned in time for the inspection. Foster Care Associates East Midlands provides a child-centred service and gives priority to achieving positive outcomes for children in their health and education. Children's views and contributions are highly valued and their identity positively promoted. Carers and staff are provided with a strong training programme and good support. Some aspects of carer support needs reviewing in order to ensure consistency when responding to children's individual needs.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The agency has introduced a very good new template that ensures that safe care policies are child-placement specific.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health needs of children are very well met. Their individual health needs are detailed in several documents including initial referral forms, placement agreements and personal profiles. Carers maintain details about all health appointments and routine health checks on a Health Passport provided by the agency for every child placed. This record captures important health information that will move with them when they leave the placement. Carer supervision includes good discussion about health related matters. At time of placement a dedicated medical consent form is signed and maintained on the child's file. Essential Looked After Children's documents were available on all files looked at. Health related training is provided to carers. Courses this year include Nutrition and Health, First Aid and Drug and Alcohol Abuse. A Looked After Children's Nurse has been invited to speak to the carer support group. Sexual Health workshops are made available to young people. A review of the agency's foster carers and smoking policy is currently taking place in order to bring this in line with guidance issued by Fostering Network and the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. Young people's records show that carers have a very good awareness of their developing needs as they move into adolescence. The agency provides therapeutic assessment and support for some children and young people.

Excellent examples of intensive therapeutic support through the agency's 'team parenting' model were seen during the inspection. This work has impacted positively on placement stability for the young people concerned.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Recruitment processes for all staff are solid and both the staff team and carers are issued with identity cards. Carers receive training to help children stay safe. This includes sessions about Bullying, Child Protection, Children who Sexually Abuse, and Safe Care. Very good information about staying safe is included in the carer's handbook. Some of this training is linked to National Vocation Qualification awards. All carers are visited annually on an unannounced basis. Rigorous health and safety checks are undertaken in each fostering household at the time of initial assessment. A safety compliance form is completed that details identified shortfalls. These are reviewed annually. Carers have a very good awareness of safe caring practices and the need to provide safe placements. A new child-specific safe care policy template has been introduced. This promotes more individualised and responsive plans, although one looked at was brief given the needs of the young person. Carers spoken to said that they involved children and young people wherever possible in drawing up safe care plans. A good example of this happening was seen on a child's file. Where young people display high risk behaviours the safe care plan is not developed enough to account for how these risks will be minimised within the placement. An example was noted where risks of self-harm and other concerning behaviours had been clearly identified in a range of documents but there was no plan anywhere to detail how these behaviours would be managed on a day-to-day basis within the home. Personal profiles are drawn up for each child and these include a risk profile, however again this does not address the management of the risk identified. There is good evidence to show that consideration is given to matching children to placement at time of referral and for any respite care episodes. Children whose placements were looked at during the inspection were very well matched to the carers in terms of cultural needs as well as carer competence and skills. Risk assessments of babysitters used by carers are currently being introduced in the absence of other statutory checks being available to the agency. The monitoring of all notifications including allegations and complaints is undertaken centrally by the Quality Assurance section at the agency's head office. Notification processes and systems are good and the agency is prompt in forwarding notifications to Ofsted. Fostering Panel processes are excellent and the Fostering Panel minutes reflect how and why the Panel members have made their final recommendations. The Panel membership is well qualified and since the last inspection the Panel has considered some difficult situations relating to carer allegations and complaints. There is good evidence that the welfare and safety of children has always been the primary consideration.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The Agency positively promotes equality and diversity. Children's cultural needs and differences are identified and celebrated. Each year a Black History Month is organised when all fostered children, birth children, carers and staff participate in a range of events and activities that recognise and celebrate black culture. Each year staff, carers and children organise a float for the local Caribbean Carnival. There are groups and forums for all children to attend where their identity is promoted and they can appreciate being who they are. The agency also has an intranet site for black workers. Children and young people are encouraged to express their

feelings about their heritage through poems paintings and music. An excellent example of such a poem was seen during the inspection. Staff and carers are representative of the different cultural backgrounds of children placed and good examples were seen of culturally appropriate placements. Training programmes for carers and staff explore equality and diversity and carers made positive comments about recent diversity training. The agency invests highly in the promotion of the education of children. At the time of inspection approximately 95% of children placed had an appropriate education provision. Two dedicated education liaison officers provide intensive educational support to all placements prioritising those assessed as having the most need. The agency aim is for all children to have a school placement and a Personal Education Plan. All school placements are monitored and tracked for attendance, progress and achievement. Where necessary the liaison officers work directly with schools to support and stabilise places. In some instances additional time-limited or task-specific funding is provided for classroom or lunchtime support. Year 11 young people are especially targeted for additional input and provided with extra home tuition where necessary in preparation for their GCSEs. Excellent training opportunities are made available to carers and staff including 'Promoting Literacy', 'Education for Under 5s' and 'Supporting Children and Young People to Achieve their Education Potential'. A special education handbook is provided to all carers in addition to access to education websites. Training and 'toolkits' are provided to support workers working with young people who are out of school. Children whose files were looked at during the inspection had school placements. In one instance a considerable amount of partnership work had been undertaken with the school to sustain a very challenging placement. The education officers attend the agency's 'team parenting' meetings where children have been assessed as needing therapeutic support. This ensures a holistic and consistent approach to the child's needs. Children and young people's individual achievements are celebrated on a regular basis through recognition in the agency's colourful publications and awards ceremonies.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Contact arrangements are appropriately managed and supported by the agency. Special facilities are available at the office where family contact can be supervised. These are comfortable and informal and are equipped with play materials and books. Where contact is deemed not appropriate the reasons why are clearly specified in documentation on file. The agency supports the Life Story work process with some children and training for this is provided to carers and staff. A memory box is given at the time of each new placement to enable carers and children to collect photographs, programmes, certificates and other pieces of memorabilia that will form a part of the child's history of that placement. Children and young people are positively encouraged to take part in agency activities and to contribute wherever possible to regular news bulletins. They are valued for the contributions they make in whatever form. For children who may not be able to easily express themselves through conversation there are opportunities to draw, paint write poems or make things. There are different groups and forums, some feeding into national groups, where they can feel safe to have fun and express themselves in this way. There are paintings and photographs around the office and these give evidence as to how important the personal experience of each child is to the agency. Some of the artwork and poems are used in calendars, cards and books. Over the year there are many events and activities provided for children and foster families that mark key festivals in addition to an annual football tournament. Recently a talent show that involved staff and foster families proved to be a great success and children especially enjoyed the experience being on a stage and gaining applause and recognition for their contribution, however small. Children are provided with a range of

booklets, an interactive guide and other material to tell them about their rights. This includes an excellent Children's Charter. They are told how they can complain and are provided with a card to do this if they wish. They are routinely consulted at the time of their carer's review. They are involved in drawing up a personal profile about themselves. As a result of consulting with children the agency is currently appointing a national care experienced advisor to enable children and young people to have their say.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Foster Care Associates have looked at how young people manage when they approach the time to leave care and face the need to live independently. A range of support packages can be provided to support this experience. A national leaving-care coordinator has been appointed. Some positive developments are taking place regionally and a senior supervising social worker post has been dedicated to promote the services being offered to carer leavers in placement. Special training provision is available to carers about promoting young people's independent skills and additional guidance is provided in the carer handbook. The education liaison officers also actively participate in assisting some young people who may have no formal educational qualifications to achieve recognition for short units of practical or academic work. This scheme is known as the AQA (an alliance of exam boards) Unit Award Scheme

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a comprehensive national Foster Care Associates Statement of Purpose that includes an insert about the regional East Midlands branch. Age-appropriate colourful Children's Guides are provided to children and young people at time of placement. New proposals regarding the East Midlands offices are currently being considered and include the possible amalgamation of two of the four offices. The current staff team across the region is sufficient to meet the needs of carers and children, however, the recent longer-term absence of a supervising social worker at the office inspected resulted in some inconsistencies in the cover support provided to some carers. While they confirmed that the team manager had provided valuable support it was noted that there was a lack of clarity and consistency about the role of independent part-time social workers. Carers managing challenging placements particularly found this to be a difficult experience. Many of the staff at the office inspected assist in the delivery of training and some work across the region. All staff spoken to were appropriately experienced and qualified to fulfil their role. They were observed to work together well as a team at all levels. Staff are provided with a good level of supervision and appraisal and very good opportunities for career progression. An excellent training programme is available to staff across all disciplines. External courses, for example, with Fostering Network or British Association for Adoption and Fostering, can also be accessed. Carers are also provided with very good relevant training opportunities at core, specialist and advanced level. There is an expectation that carers attend for four courses a year from an annual programme. Some of these are linked to NVQ modules. 11 carers across the region are working toward NVQ level 3 and four have achieved this. Carer files looked at included typed supervision sessions in addition to full assessment documentation and annual reviews. Comprehensive annual reviews are chaired by a dedicated reviewing officer and reported to the Fostering Panel. Training needs are evaluated and identified at this time. Carers are recognised very much by the agency as part of the fostering team and their achievements are acknowledged. An out of hours duty support service is available to

carers at all times. Files and records are maintained in an orderly accessible manner and securely stored. Children and carer records were clear and events easy to track. A very good index at front of file assists with the swift location of important documents. Very good information about maintaining, storing and returning children's records is provided to carers. Foster Carer Associates provides a very good range of recording tools and guidance for carers and staff to ensure that essential information is captured and placements are properly informed. Concerns were raised by several carers that the agency's resource workers were not always referring to the personal profiles maintained on children's files and sometimes not adhering to the information detailed in the profiles. This was resulting in the inconsistent management of some difficult behaviours which then negatively impacted on the placement. Given that the resource workers spend a significant amount of time supporting children, some of whom display high-risk behaviours, a high level of communication about children's needs and consistent working with carers is essential. The activity and performance of the agency is monitored through a central quality assurance team. Information about incidents and events is forwarded at specified times by the regional offices. Complaints and allegations are recorded and processed as part of the agency notifications system. A separate record is not maintained within the region to bring together data on the complaints and allegations that relate to the four offices. Given the geographical location and distances between offices this could result in the Registered Manager lacking an overview of the progress of investigations that might be taking place at any one time.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- ensure that where children and young people display high risk behaviours, safe care plans or risk assessments account for how the risks will be managed and where possible minimised within the foster placement. (National Minimum Standard 6.6)
- ensure that in situations of longer-term staff absences contingency plans are made clear to carers and that they are provided with a consistent level of support and supervision. (National Minimum Standard 22.1)
- review the service provided to carers by the resource workers to ensure that a consistent approach is provided to both support the carers and to meet the needs of the child appropriately. (National Minimum Standard 21.2)
- implement a system for maintaining separate records about allegations and complaints within the region. (National Minimum Standard 22.10 and National Minimum Standard 23.13)

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.