

# NCH - South West Fostering Project

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC031085
<b>Inspection date</b>	18 October 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Wilfried Maxfield
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	Adoption & Foster Care N C H South West Weir House 93 Whitby Road BRISTOL BS4 4AR
<b>Telephone number</b>	0117 300 5360
<b>Email</b>	swaafp@nch.org.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	NCH ACTION FOR CHILDREN
<b>Registered manager</b>	Joyce Mary Jenkin
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Jon Brown
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	27 November 2006

---

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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](http://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**

NCH South West Fostering Service has historically provided long term foster placements which offer children and young people permanency in a stable family setting. This is provided for children aged eight years and above or children with learning disabilities of any age, who need permanent substitute family care and for whom adoption is not appropriate. The agency began to develop a specialist permanency fostering scheme in 2000. In 2006 the service began to expand, due to changing demand, adding and recruiting foster carers who will provide short term fostering for children aged five to 18 years. The service generally recruits carers who live within a hours drive of Bristol, and provides placements for children and young people from around the country. The agency links with the Cotswold Community Residential School. (NCH operated 52 week residential school for boys aged nine to 15 years). Carers are recruited to provide weekend and holiday respite care to boys who attend the school. This service aims to provide the boys with family experiences, enabling the development of appropriate social skills, and allowing them time away from the school in a different environment. One young person was placed with the holiday fostering scheme in October 2007. In September 2007 there were 26 approved fostering households. Twelve households were approved to provide long term placements. Five households were approved to provide short term placements. 13 households were approved to provide respite care. A number of the above foster carers have dual approval. 25 children were placed with these carers. The service recruits, assesses, trains and supports foster carers and operates an independent fostering panel.

### **Summary**

The Registered Manager of the agency, who is also the Service Manager, and the Fostering Team Manager assisted during this inspection. The Service Manager holds additional responsibilities across the South West region of England. Both the Registered Manager as well as the Fostering Team Manager of the Bristol office assisted the inspection process throughout and helped to provide all the relevant local and regional information. This inspection report is also informed by the datasets provided by the agency. This includes pre-inspection information and fostering services self-assessment materials. A pre-inspection meeting prepared the inspection process to focus on all of the relevant outcome areas. The agency provided a timetable to help achieve this task in the 4 days available for this inspection visit. The agency also provided access to essential records during the time of the inspection, helped to establish and facilitate contact with foster carers, children and young people and guided the inspector through any other local aspect of managing the Bristol office. A random selection of foster carer's and young people's files and records were also studied. In a number of cases the study of files was complimented by case discussions with Social Workers and a subsequent follow up visit at the specific foster carers' homes and/or a formal interview with foster carers held at the NCH Bristol office. One visit to a foster home was conducted. During this visit one young person was met and offered views on the quality of the placement. The agency facilitated the visit of a meeting of the regional Foster Carers Support group. Views and wishes voiced by foster carers at this meeting inform a substantial part of this report. Recruitment and selections practices of the agency were scrutinized and general office management discussed with the relevant employees. This included the Administration and Finance Officer. The service has employed a new foster carer Recruitment Officer who was interviewed and whose remit was discussed as part of this inspection. A good return on 'Have you say about NCH - South West Fostering Project' questionnaires sent out prior to this inspection assisted in gathering opinions on how vital

stakeholders view the care and support given by the agency. The visit included the observation of a panel meeting. The inspection of the NCH - South West Fostering Project took a total of three days. Because of the strong administrative and personnel links an additional one day visit of NCH - North Somerset Professional Carers was conducted following on straight after the South West Fostering Project's. However, findings of this visit are compiled in a separate report.

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 the availability of a clinical psychologist/clinical psychology surgery as additional support for foster carers. This includes opportunity for additional telephone consultation. A free counselling and independent support service for all carers has been introduced since the last inspection. The general availability of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) type training at level 3 has increased. This is now being offered for foster carers across the agency. Although in the early stages of implementation, recording for foster carers and social workers is now based on the 'five outcome areas' of 'Every Child Matters'. Foster carers are given information about the arrangements for giving consent to the child's medical or dental examination or treatment. Written evidence of medical consent can now be found on all children's and young people's and carer's files. The service now obtains verification of the reason why employment ended where a person has previously worked in a position where duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, so far as reasonable practicable.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

All children and young people are registered with a GP, dentist and optician. Appointments are well monitored and attendance is excellent. The statutory reviewing process for Looked After Children (LAC) is fully supported by the agency and related documents are monitored and updated within the expected timeframes to ensure health needs are being met. Systems to retrieve vital information from past placements via the placement authorities are robust and rigorous. The agency is expert at providing health services available in the local area and networking with a great variety of agencies providing health related support is excellent. This includes Community Nurses, Occupational Therapist services and additional support by a Clinical Psychologist. Other support includes the regular advice by Dieticians and professional support with sex education. Essential medical information is contained in an 'All About Me' pro-forma on every child's and young person's file. Information is collated prior to placement and clear procedures are in place for gathering all health related details of children and young people throughout the continuation of the placement. Foster carers are provided with the best available and most comprehensive medical information before a placement starts. Information is constantly updated. Foster carers can demonstrate that the health information has been fully absorbed and understood and is leading to positive outcomes for the children and young people. This is also due to the rigorous and excellent support and supervision provided by the agencies social workers. All carers are very experienced at following and implementing medical plans planned and agreed with other professionals. Protocols to deal with medical information are clearly understood by all carers. Clear policies regarding medication are known and their implementation is clearly followed. Emotional needs of children and young people are listed in excellent detail and include reference to a range of psychological needs if so identified. Each carer is provided with appropriate training to ensure that they have the skills to carry out and follow complex

medical and psychological advice where this becomes necessary. Training provided includes First Aid, Health and Safety in the home and topics relating to the developmental well-being and protection of children and young people. Courses on emotional health, attachment, drug and alcohol awareness, promotion of resilience and impact of trauma on children are all part of the NCH foster carer training curriculum. Children and young people are regularly provided with additional and valuable therapy services. Close and longstanding links with a local organisation 'Catchpoint' have proven positive and outcomes are praised by external professionals, foster carers and support social workers.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

NCH South West Fostering Service is proactive at protecting children from all forms of harm and abuse, with good and an overall thorough application of systems, policies and practice. The fostering service benefits from two experienced managers. Both the service manager as well as the fostering team manager have many years of experience in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people as part of family placement social work. Equally, all social work staff have considerable experience and are suitable and qualified, with clear knowledge and understanding of how to ensure the best possible safeguarding outcomes for children and young people. The service has thorough and robust recruitment, assessment and approval procedures in place for all staff and carers. All social work staff have been recruited and vetted applying these strict procedures. Staff files contain certificates of qualification, references, evidence of interview, and all other necessary checks including Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The information is excellently organised. The agency takes proactive quality assurance measures to ensure the children and young people are cared for in warm, nurturing environments. NCH South West Fostering benefits from a group of very experienced and longstanding foster carers where children have safe, healthy and nurturing environments. A thorough and frequent system of monitoring and support ensures comfortable accommodation, adequately furnished, well maintained and looked after. Environmental monitoring, including Health and Safety, is part of the majority of visits by supervising social workers. In all cases children are accommodated in single rooms and privacy arrangements form part of a 'Safer Care Plan'. The fostering service carries out matching considerations for children effectively, which has resulted in the children being in very stable placements. The service is able to provide many examples of carefully placed children and young people with foster carers who are capable of meeting the specific assessed needs of the individual. Local authorities are provided with a thorough assessment for any foster carers considered for matching against a referral. Placement decisions consider the young person's assessed racial, religious and cultural needs. Where practicable the agency applies a phased introduction where matching and induction visits have taken place for the young people before placement. Children's and young people's views are heard before each placement and before moving in. Written foster care agreements are in place containing specific reference to elements of matching. The Foster Carer Handbook has recently been updated. It contains child protection and other safeguarding policies and procedures. All carers have a 'Safer Care Plan' and a specific Risk Assessment reflecting the specific safeguarding needs of the children and young people in their care. The quality and value of these documents varies with some examples suffering from poor execution. However, good levels of support and supervision ensure that carers are aware of their specific duties and responsibilities in this outcome area. This ensures that knowledge of safe care planning amongst carers is good. Risk assessments for each individual child and young person are also in place. Again, the quality of execution of this central document ranges from excellent to poor. However, validation of all

relating documentation shows that carers know all potential risk factors. Training for foster carers includes safe caring skills and managing behaviour. The Foster Carer Handbook includes a clear written policy on the use of physical restraint and when it may be applied. Foster carers know about de-escalation of conflict and a substantial number are familiar with the appropriate use of physical restraint through 'Team Teach' training. The agency wants to improve further the training in Non Violent Crisis Intervention strategies and techniques. The fostering assessment panel has sufficient expertise and experience to carry out its functions, ensuring that good quality decisions are made to safeguard the welfare of children. All members of the panel are able to evidence considerable in depth knowledge of the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The independently chaired panel of NCH South West Fostering Service is held monthly in their Bristol office. This panel also carries out good quality assurance functions relating to the North Somerset Professional Carers project. There are clear policies and procedures which guide panel practice. The personnel files relating to panel members demonstrate the suitability of members. They include CRB, CV, references and photographic identification. The agency panel has a medical adviser who checks all medicals on applicants and provides an opinion on suitability. It also includes members with expertise in education and child health and the panel includes a member with a service user perspective. The panel chair ensures that quality assurance is achieved through a combination of feedback forms on the quality of assessments and the collective responsibility of the panel to monitor issues and annual review reports.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

NCH employs a Recruitment Officer who is expected to ensure that a diverse range of carers from different groups of the community are recruited. The agency's Equality and Diversity policy is actively implemented and promotes carers to understand, respect and celebrate children's and young people's backgrounds. Carers as well as Social Workers understand the Equality and Diversity policy and are dedicated to its values. When matching children and young people with carers the agency employs a stringent assessment process of identifying the physical, emotional and social needs in the light of ethnicity, disability, and cultural background. Equality and Diversity training is considered priority training for Social Workers as well as foster carers. In isolated cases the agency has struggled to support foster carers when educational placements break down. The fostering service has yet to make clear its expectations or arrangements for providing structured occupation during school hours for those children who are not in school and subsequently the exact procedures and systems of support still need clarification. This is particularly important for carers of young people who have been excluded from school for some considerable length of time. However, in most cases foster carers who have to support children and young people who have been excluded from school are able to maintain such situations receiving satisfactory levels of additional help. Often structured activities are offered and in place if any child or young person is not in school. The agency provides a high level of support to ensure children and young people receive an appropriate education. All foster carer homes provide good educational resources and a dedicated space for homework. This includes all necessary educational materials and computers. The children's and young people's files contain a section for education. Personal Education Plans are in place detailing how educational needs are being met. All carers and Social Workers are well briefed about children and young people's educational past. Personal Education Plans and Looked After Children review minutes contain relevant information relating to their educational needs and progress.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

The agency maintains good systems to ensure that contact arrangements are always supported and implemented. Carers and Social Workers staff fully promote contact with birth families, friends and relatives and all possible support is in place to enable children and young people in seeing family and friends. Staff and carers have a full understanding of how maintaining contact is fundamental to their well-being. Managers of the service are fully aware of their legal responsibility and prioritize contact in many practical ways such as by providing transport. Risk assessments undertaken by supporting Social Workers also detail possible hindrances and problems with contact. Recording tools are in place obliging and encouraging carers to record outcomes of contact arrangements, including the views of the children and young people themselves. Children's and young people's opinions are sought through the system of LAC reviews, which supervising social workers attend. The form devised for supervision visits by the supervising social worker to the carers includes the views of the child in placement. Recording of this is excellent. A number of platforms are in place to ensure that children and young people are provided with opportunities to talk about any concerns. The agency's Children's Guide clearly sets these out and explains the consultation services to be provided and how the child and/or young person can complain. Additional references are made to ensure children and young people know that they can ask for more advice and information if needed and that they are entitled to additional advocacy if they want to complain. NCH South West run a children's group four times a year which is also a forum for getting feedback about what children and young people think about their placement.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The agency promotes services which help young people to develop skills and competence necessary for adult living. In doing so it ensures that Pathway Plans are in place for all young people aged 15 and above and effective pathway planning is encouraged throughout the service. Carers are involved in individual pathway planning in consultation with local authority placement Social Workers through the LAC reviewing system. Good monitoring is in place to enable these plans to contain valuable opinions. Information about young people's ambitions and progress is collected and recorded throughout their placement. Carers are trained to enable young people to develop independence skills. This is regularly discussed in supervisions with Social Workers and good training is provided on independence to include all legislation relating to leaving care. Requirements of what is expected of foster carers is clearly defined in the foster carer's handbook. All available guidance aims to promote self reliance and living skills. There are clear policies that detail allowances paid to carers. This forms part of the foster carer agreement. Good information about the allowance and expenses is contained within the Foster Carers' Handbook. An insurance policy is in place.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose is kept up to date (September 2007) and accurate. It includes all the information required by Regulation. The Statement of Purpose is available to professionals, carers, and parents if they request it. A copy is supplied together with the Foster Carer's handbook. The Children's Guide includes a user-friendly version of the Statement of Purpose.



It has been developed continually provides children and young people with all details required in National Minimum Standard (NMS) 1.5. The Service Manager has a number of professional qualifications including a BA Honours degree Sociology, Masters Degree in Social Work and a Postgraduate Certificate in Management and Organisational Learning. The Service Manager has held senior and managerial posts in local Social Services. The Fostering Team Manager also has a social work qualification and has worked for Local Authority childcare and family placement teams in previous posts. All Social Workers working for the team comply with the level of qualification required by NMS 2.2 and have relevant background experience in childcare practice, family placement and fostering issues. The job description of the manager and social work staff reflect their duties and responsibilities. Line management structures, deputising and supervisory roles are clearly laid out and ensure that the service is well organised and managed effectively. An effective system is in place to distribute core tasks to all social workers and roles via delegation and 'lead' roles. Workload management is good. Social workers praise their management team for good support and excellent supervisory back up. A system of annual appraisal is in place. Training and development needs are monitored and regularly appraised. Carers benefit from a well established frequency of regular supervisions. Social workers maintain regular contact with the carers with a high frequency of supervisory visits. This includes unannounced visits ensuring understood levels of quality control. Clear strategies are in place for working with and supporting carers. However, additional strategies to maintain high levels of communication between agency and carers in the time between two placements need formalizing. Appropriate and well designed foster care agreements are provided. Out of hours support for carer's is excellent with highly regarded levels of practical support in place for all foster carers. The agency is committed to ensuring that adequate respite arrangements are available for carers. Dedicated records systems about allegations of abuse are in place. The agency deals with allegations in a expert manner. Systems of investigation and reporting are transparent and include all Stakeholders. Information about complaints and representations are kept. Pre-approval training is available for all prospective carers. The service is committed to involving all members of the carers' household in a comprehensive training package. Carers have a range of training opportunities and their learning needs are discussed at reviews and in supervision. Effective systems and robust internal monitoring for management to identify and address the needs of carers in terms of their training are in place. Case records held for the children are comprehensive. However, the quality of file keeping is varied with some files kept in an only satisfactory condition. An audit of the filing and record keeping systems is in place and will be ongoing. Information kept in foster homes is clearly defined and foster carers benefit from clear policies with regards to recording. Carers have significant training in record keeping. However, recent expectations to record all child related information in the 'five outcomes' format of Every Child Matters has left some carers with an additional need for further training. All carers understand the high expectations in terms of information sharing with the agency. Records kept in foster homes are kept in dedicated secure cabinets. The Bristol office has appropriate security arrangements and suitable facilities for the purpose of the agency. The office keeps records in excellent order and securely locked. It provides a well equipped base for all staff with adequate IT systems.

## 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
9	ensure that safe caring guidelines are in place for each foster home and that recording is of the best possible quality.	1 November 2007

### Recommendations

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

- offer additional training to foster carers to promote better recording of the five outcomes in 'Every Child Matters'.
- review timeframes regarding the allocation and matching of children and young people to foster carers waiting for children to be placed with them.
- clarify procedures ensuring that foster carers know of all available support should an educational placement brake down.

## 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.**