

# Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Jim Palmer
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	4 December 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**

Five Rivers Family Placement Scheme in Devon and Cornwall is an independent fostering service providing the following range of foster care services; long term or permanent care, time limited or temporary care, emergency care and parent and child care. The service is part of Five Rivers Family Placement Service, which is an national independent provider of residential childcare services, aiming to provide professional, sustained, and suitable fostering and residential placements, and other supporting services. For example, education, supervision of contact, or initial therapeutic assessments, for children and young people with needs that require a specialist service. The service is based in Exeter, with a recently opened sub-office in Truro.

### **Summary**

This was an announced key inspection of this service. The service is very well managed and focussed on achieving good outcomes for children. Feedback from placing authorities and foster carers is extremely positive. Children and young people feel well cared for in their foster home. They also feel that foster carers listen to them, give them good support with their education and planning for their future, and encourage them to lead a healthy lifestyle. The staff group is experienced and highly competent. Practice in the areas of the assessment, approval, and support of foster carers is of a high standard. This service is good and outstanding in some areas of work. Three good practice recommendations have been made.

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 previous last inspection undertaken in December 2006, the setting were asked to implement four recommendations. Since that inspection good progress has been made in implementing each of those recommendations. Three are fully met and one almost met.

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

The provision is good.

Children's health needs are well promoted by the fostering service. Initially this is by the provision of good health information to carers and through the matching considerations made when placing children with specific health needs. The agency seeks full medical information from placing social workers when considering placement options for children. Supervising social workers are pro-active to seeking pre-placement medical information, when it is not provided by placing authorities. Foster carers say they feel well supported by the agency and that they are provided with as much information as the agency has at the time of placement. Foster carers are provided with sufficient training advice and guidance to meet children's individual specific needs. All foster carers receive training in promoting healthy lifestyles, and young people are encouraged to participate in an activities programme in the summer and are encouraged to participate in a healthy eating programme. All children are registered with a doctor, dentist and regularly visit an optician. The agency has good links with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and with Looked after Child (LaC) Nurses. Foster carers say they can access specialist medical advice when necessary.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering agency has good systems in place to promote the safeguarding of children. The manager has substantial experience in working with children and young people, and is appropriately qualified and is registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). The process for recruiting and assessing prospective carers is robust and thorough, the quality of assessments are good. Each of the foster homes visited, are comfortably able to accommodate the children for whom the carers were registered. Foster Carers' homes are well maintained and provide a very good standard of accommodation. All foster homes have regular health and safety checklists, updated at each annual review. Foster carers are able to assess risks and take necessary steps to protect other members of the household. The agency carefully matches children with carers that have the relevant skills and experience to meet their needs. A risk assessment process is also considered as part of the matching process. Members of foster carer households say that they have been effectively consulted as part of the matching process. Foster carers confirm that they are provided with sufficient available information about the young person to assist in the matching process. The safety of children is promoted through policies and procedures. Prospective foster carers receive basic safeguarding awareness training and some have received post approval training, arising from supervision with their supervising social worker. Staff recruitment procedures generally meet the requirements to ensure that only people who are suitable to work with children and young people are recruited to the service. Staff do not commence employment with the service until all the required checks are fully completed. All social work staff hold recognised qualifications and are registered with the GSCC. The foster care panel was not inspected on this occasion; minutes of previous panels show the panel to be well organised and quorate on each occasion.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering agency promotes the valuing of diversity by the provision of training, both internally and externally. Foster carers receive good training to ensure that they can meet children's cultural, ethnic and special needs. Some foster carers provide placements for unaccompanied asylum seekers. The agency has been pro-active in seeking and funding additional advice, guidance and training for carers. Practice in this area is very good. The fostering service ensures that children and young people are given encouragement and support to access the type of education and school that meets their needs and achieve their academic potential. The educational attainment of young people is monitored regularly throughout the placement. The agency has a system for recognising and celebrating young people's educational attainment. The agency encourages carers to promote hobbies, interests and leisure activities for young people. Practice in this area is also very good. Foster carers say that supervising social workers are very supportive in liaising with education colleagues in securing appropriate educational facilities for young people, particularly those for whom English may not be their first language.

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

The provision is good.

Children are supported by the agency in making a positive contribution. Children's contact with families in line with the placing authority's plan for the care of the child is promoted by the

agency. All foster carers and staff spoken with are aware of the importance of contact. This is monitored in regular supervision meetings with foster carers by supervising social workers. Most children say that their opinions are 'always' listened to by their carers. Most foster carers feel that the service is 'satisfactory' at involving the children and young people that they care for in decisions about the service and their day-to-day lives. All of the children and young people said that they knew who to speak to if they were not happy or had a personal problem.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are assisted by the agency in achieving economic wellbeing. Young people are well supported by foster carers in the transition into adulthood, and are encouraged in decision making by the agency and their carers. Carers are well motivated and demonstrate both commitment and initiative in supporting young people into adulthood. Pathway or Transition Plans are not always in place on young people's files. The agency is pro-active in requesting Pathway Plans from placing authorities and requesting the allocation of a leaving care worker where this has not happened. Some people's preparation for leaving care or moving on is not always detailed and may not be planned in a manner to achieve the best outcomes for the young person. There is a system in place for foster carers to be provided with an allowance and agreed expenses to cover the cost of caring for a child or young person placed with them. Foster carers are provided with information on current levels of allowances. Foster did not report problems with the payment system.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The fostering service is well managed. Young people and carers say that they are given good information regarding the service. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed regularly. The manager and all social work staff are appropriately qualified, professionally registered and have substantial experience of family placement work. The manager and visiting manager regularly monitor the quality of the service and appropriate management action is taken to improve the quality of the service. There are clear lines of accountability and all staff have clear job descriptions, and understand individual responsibilities. Staff receive regular supervision, though not all staff have received an annual appraisal and regular training. A recommendation is made. Foster carer assessments, and foster carer review reports, are detailed, comprehensive and of a high standard. Discussions with staff and foster carers, and inspection of foster carer files, confirm that supervising social workers undertake both planned and unplanned visits to support and supervise foster carers. The level of supervision and contact with supervising social workers is highly valued by foster carers. Foster carers say they are provided with excellent support and training. Most, though not all children's case records are well maintained and information held is clear and accessible. Some young people's files did not hold all of the information required. Administrative records are held securely within the service offices. Records of complaints, allegations and notification of significant events are monitored regularly by the manager. The agency has two office locations in the south west region. One office fully meets the needs of the service. Some staff say that the other office, is in an isolated location, is unsuitable for lone working on late evenings. This office also has limited storage facilities. A recommendation is made.

## 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
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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):

- review that all office accommodation is suitable to meet the needs of the service. (NMS 26.1)
- ensure that all staff receive annual appraisals from their line manager. (NMS 20.4)
- review the number of administrative staff required by the service. (NMS 16.10; 16.11.)

## 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.**