

Family Breaks N C H

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC064273
Inspection date	14 January 2008
Inspector	Jim Palmer
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Unit B1 Fishleigh Court Fishleigh Road Roundswell Business Park Barnstaple Devon EX31 3UD
Telephone number	01271 373275
Email	anne.smith@nch.org.uk
Registered person	National Children's Home South West
Registered manager	Elizabeth Anne Smith
Responsible individual	Jon Brown
Date of last inspection	22 January 2007

© Crown copyright 2008

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

NCH Devon Family Based Short Break Service is an independent fostering service providing a short term and respite foster care service to children and young people with special needs, aged under 18 years, who live in Devon. The service is operated and managed by the registered charity, NCH, under contract to Devon County Council Social Services. At the time of the inspection the service had 41 approved fostering households, providing a short breaks service to 67 children and young people who have a range of special needs, including complex medical needs, and physical, sensory, or learning difficulties. The service has an office base in Barnstaple. It has recently introduced a domiciliary care project, aimed at providing day care support as an addition to the fostering service already provided. The agency is currently seeking advice from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), as to whether this is service required to be registered with the CSCI or not.

Summary

The agency continues to provide a high quality service, for children and young people with specific needs. The service is well managed and carers, staff and managers are committed to providing a high level of service. Practice in the areas of the assessment, approval, and support of foster carers is of a high standard. Feedback from parents and placing social workers is very positive. Parents feel the foster carers provide an enjoyable family based experience for their child and, at the same time, are helping them improve and develop their social and independence skills. Communication between carers and parents is particularly good. Children's care managers feel the service provides dedicated, well trained and supported carers, to meet the needs of the children they look after. They feel that the service communicates well with them, and takes care to find good matches between the child and their family and the foster carer. Foster carers said that the service is good at ensuring that they are provided with all necessary and relevant information about the child's needs so that they can care for them properly. No actions were made at this inspection. Five 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 last inspection there was one action and no good practice recommendations. Since that time, the foster care panel has received training in the function of the panel. The role of panel has been clarified and the numbers of panel members have been increased. Minutes of the last three panels were examined and the panel has now been quorate on each occasion that it has met. The action from the previous inspection is now completed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The medical needs of children and young people are well met and the service ensures that essential information about children and young people's health needs is obtained and shared with the foster carers. Foster carers report that they are well trained and supported in order to meet the particular health needs of the children and young people they provide care for. Most foster carers confirmed that they had sufficient medical information to enable them to meet the needs of the child at the time the placement was made. Some carers reported that if not,

this was made available shortly after placement. Any missing information is chased up in a timely manner by the organisation. A full time paediatric nurse undertakes a nursing assessment for any child with a nursing need, and is available to give advice and for consultation with both foster carers and their supervising social workers. Links with other health professionals are promoted by the paediatric nurse and this is highly valued by the carers. Regular health appointments and developments are monitored through regular reviews and supervision of carers. Carers work closely with the parents of children to ensure successful health outcomes. Foster carers were well aware of their individual responsibilities in promoting the health needs of children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is evidence that the service operates very good systems to ensure that children and young people are well matched with foster carers, are being cared for safely, and their welfare safeguarded. The manager holds a recognised social work qualification and a relevant management qualification. She is also registered with the General Social Care Council. All appropriate pre-employment checks have been made, and records of evidence are held by the agency. All qualified social work staff are registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC). Some staff say they are receiving insufficient training to retain their registration with the GSCC. Foster carers undergo a robust assessment, and pre-approval training programme. Each of the foster homes visited were comfortably able to accommodate the children for whom the carers were registered. Each of the homes visited were well maintained and provided a very good standard of accommodation. Children's bedrooms were well equipped and adapted to meet the individual needs of children. All foster homes had a recent health and safety checklist, which is updated at each annual review. Children are carefully matched with families that have the relevant skills and experience to meet their needs. Members of foster carer households say that they have been effectively consulted as part of the matching process. Most foster carers confirm that they are provided with all available information about the young person to assist in the matching process. The safety of children is promoted through policies and procedures. All staff and carers require regular updates in safeguarding training. Some staff say that the quality and effectiveness of the safeguarding training is insufficient for the task. Five staff files were looked at, some of the files have gaps in the information required to be held. A recommendation is made. Minutes of panels held since the last inspection show that the panel has been quorate on each occasion.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Diversity is promoted by the agency, through the provision of a written policy and training for staff and carers. Foster carers visited demonstrated considerable skill in meeting the specific individual needs of children. Some foster carers say that they would benefit from specific training in working with children with communication difficulties. The educational needs of children are promoted by the agency, though as this is a short break, children's parents retain the primary responsibility for promoting the child's educational attainment. Some carers do liaise closely with parents regarding children's education. Good communication, and working in partnership with the child's family are strengths of the service.

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 is promoted by the agency. All foster carers and staff spoken with are aware of the importance of contact. This is emphasised in the pre-approval training programme, and monitored in regular supervision meetings with foster carers by family placement managers. Good communication between the service, parents, and the child's care manager, and good placement planning processes, ensure that individual needs are well identified and met. This is a strength of the service. Some measures to ascertain the children and young people's views about their care are in place, but the service is aware that more needs to be done to ensure that children and young people who use non-verbal methods of communication are assisted to express their views about the service they receive, and it is continuing to look at ways that this can be achieved.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are generally assisted in achieving economic wellbeing. Carers work closely with parents in promoting the independence and social skills of the young people. Young people are well supported by foster carers in the transition into adulthood, and are encouraged where possible, 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. Most carers report the payments system works well and few report any difficulties, those who do experience a difficulty said that the issue is usually resolved satisfactorily in a timely manner. Some difficulties did occur during December; these are now resolved. 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 for respite care. Foster carers are provided with information on current levels of allowances.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The short breaks service is well managed. Parents, the placing authority and carers say that they are given adequate information regarding the service. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed regularly and accurately describes the service provided. The managers and all social work staff are appropriately qualified, professionally registered and have substantial experience of family placement work. The manager of the service is now supported by a deputy manager. The service manager is a member of the National Children's Homes' (NCH) Fostering Sub-group that keeps up to date with national trends and patterns. The service is well monitored by senior managers who visit on a regular basis and report on complaints, allegations and recordings. The manager and visiting manager also undertake regular audits of the quality of the service. The service is also regularly subject to contract monitoring by the local authority; a contract monitoring report is produced by the managers. There are clear management structures in place. Staff and carers say that they know who to contact and who is responsible for different areas of the service. Regular supervision and annual appraisal is available to staff and carers. Staff feel well supported but some say they have not felt fully consulted regarding a number of recent changes to policy and the way in which services are being delivered and supported. Foster Carers report being clear about how they can contact the organisation both within and outside of usual office

hours. This is seen by carers as a strength of a smaller agency; all report being able to access the manager if necessary. Each foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker. In addition placements are supported by care co-ordinators, who work directly with and liaise between children, parents and carers. The paediatric nurse provides medical advice/guidance and training for foster carers. Support groups are held twice yearly. Foster carers say they are very well supported by the agency and by their supervising social workers. Some unannounced visits to carers are not taking place at least annually. Foster carers' annual reviews are mostly being completed within 12 months of the previous annual review. Adequate administrative support is now in place, however, some staff expressed that admin systems are still in an early stage of development, and there had been a period when admin support was insufficient. Children's case files are well organised, and up to date. All the information required to be held was found on the files checked. One carer's file front sheet was in need of updating and showed that the first annual review and presentation to panel did not take place within statutory timescales. Administrative records are held securely within the service office. Records of complaints, allegations and notification of significant events are monitored regularly. The new management systems for the service are sound and becoming well implemented. Foster carers' training needs are very well met and recorded. There is new a information back-up system being linked to the company computer network.

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):

- review the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding training for both carers and staff.(NMS 9.2)
- ensure that all staff files hold all of the information required under schedule 1 of the foster care regulations. (NMS 15.4)
- provide foster carers with training in communicating with children with specific communication needs. (NMS 7.4)
- ensure that all foster carers receive at least one unannounced visit within a 12 month period.(NMS 22.6)
- ensure that all staff recruitment information held on file is made available for inspection. (NMS 15.1)

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.