

# Five Rivers Child Care Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC036261
<b>Inspection date</b>	17/11/2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Jennifer Reed
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	03/07/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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 Service is an independent fostering agency which operates across England and in Ireland. This inspection is of the Family Placement Service based in Salisbury, which has a sub-office in Tadley, providing placements located in the south coast and southern central counties. The Salisbury branch has its offices within the Farrington Centre School, Salisbury, which is a Five Rivers educational provision located adjacent to the organisation's head office.

The service provides placements for children and young people with varying needs, including children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, parent and child placements and sibling placements. Carers are recruited to provide permanency, long term, short term and respite care for children and young people. The service does not provide short-term breaks.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection of the service which focused on the key national minimum standards and regulations and checked the progress of the service in meeting the action and recommendations made at the previous inspection undertaken in July 2007. Staff, the panel chairperson, carers and young people in placement participated in the inspection process. The inspection took place at the service's main office base; the sub-office at Tadley was not visited at this inspection and records kept at this location were not inspected.

This is a satisfactory service which has many good features and shows promising prospects for improvement. Young people make good progress and are kept safe in stable placements. Their health and welfare is promoted and they receive good support and access to educational provision. Carers benefit from regular support and good training opportunities to help them effectively fulfil their role. The service has established policies and procedures in place which underpin sound care practices. Recruitment and selection processes are robust.

There have been substantial changes and restructuring within the organisation since the last inspection and these processes have impacted on the management and development of this service. Shortfalls in monitoring, record keeping, the operation of the panel and in the quality of some aspects of the agency's work have been identified by current senior managers and the panel chairperson, and although plans are in place for improvement, not all of these matters have yet been fully addressed. The sub-office remains a distinct service and management functions and accountabilities are confusing. Furthermore, the three recommendations made at the

previous inspection have not been fully implemented. Nevertheless, outcomes for young people in placement have not been adversely affected by the restructuring and staffing changes and young people and carers report that they are very satisfied with the agency's services and operation.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The service has satisfactorily responded to the action made which asked the agency to make an improvement to recruitment and selection processes. The service now requires referees to identify the applicant's reason for leaving their previous employment. This ensures that where a person has previously worked in a position where their duties involved work with children or vulnerable adults, sufficient information is gained to judge the applicant's suitability.

Three recommendations were made in relation to: developing more detailed risk assessment processes; ensuring that the records kept of significant events, for example complaints records, clearly identify the investigation process and outcome; and recording full details of children's placements on carers' files. These recommendations have not been fully implemented and two actions have been made within this report to address two of these outstanding matters. A recommendation has not been made in relation to further improvement of risk assessment processes, as there is sufficient evidence to show that the new manager has commenced work on this aspect of practice.

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

The provision is good.

Young people's health is promoted by the service. Young people in placement say that they are given good advice and support about how to keep healthy. Carers have a good understanding of how they can encourage young people to develop a healthy lifestyle and they provide young people with good support when they are unwell or in hospital. Looked after children's nurses are involved with monitoring the health of some young people in placement.

Each young person is registered with local primary health care services and carers accompany them to medical appointments as appropriate, to ensure young people receive the treatment that they may need. The organisation employs a psychotherapist who works with some young people in placement. The fostering service provides carers with full details of young people's health needs prior to placement, if such information is available to the service. Persons with parental responsibility provide signed medical consent for any first aid or emergency treatment that young people in foster care may require.

Emergency first aid training is undertaken by all carers, and any accidents or injuries are recorded and reported to the fostering service; the information is reviewed to ensure that young people's welfare is safeguarded. Carers complete courses in relevant health areas, for example, health and safety, mental health and sexual

health matters, to assist them in supporting young people's health needs. Specialist health services provide carers with additional support and advice on how best to address the specific health issues of particular young people in foster care. For example, the children with disabilities service and health services provide carers with information and guidance on how to best care for the complex health needs of individual young people placed with them.

Carers keep clear records of any medication given to young people in their care and this information is transferred to young people's files, providing a record of their health history and contributing health information to statutory reviews. The agency's social workers monitor how well young people's health needs are met during every support visit; however, their visit notes do not always contain sufficiently detailed information regarding this aspect of care. The manager demonstrates commitment to developing robust monitoring and reporting processes to identify the health outcomes of young people placed, which will inform future development within the service.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

The service has recently been restructured and there have been significant changes made to the senior management of the Five Rivers organisation and the management of this service. The service is currently run by persons with appropriate qualifications and experience in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people. The organisation's head of practice is the responsible individual for this fostering service and he is based at the organisation's head office, adjacent to the agency. A manager has been recently appointed to lead the fostering service and he is in the process of registering with Ofsted. The manager has substantial experience of working within children's services settings.

The fostering service demonstrates a good level of expertise in identifying appropriate placements and has established, well considered processes to match young people and placements. These processes have been less robust when placing some young people in emergency situations. Carers are consulted about possible placements and young people say they are very satisfied with the care and support they receive. Many young people have remained in placement for a number of years, providing them with stability and security. Placing authorities are consulted about any changes made within placements to ensure that young people's needs continue to be well met. Foster placement agreements are in place for young people which clarify how carers are expected to meet the needs of each young person and annual reviews of carers are carried out to assure the quality of placements are sustained. The review reports are presented to the panel for their consideration, within an agreed timeframe; however, not all annual reviews are completed within each 12 month period and the quality of the written review information is variable. Furthermore, occasional unannounced visits to carers do not always take place at least once each year. This is the minimum level expected to ensure that the fostering service has a sound view of how each placement operates on a daily basis and

contributes to safeguarding young people's welfare.

Young people benefit from placements that provide comfortable and pleasant family homes; young people judge their placement environment as being good. To make sure that young people are safeguarded, annual health and safety checks are carried out on each carer's household as part of the annual review process. Furthermore, an initial check is made as part of each carer's approval processes. Carers undertake training in health and safety matters to contribute to the provision of safe placements for young people.

The organisation's safeguarding policy is very comprehensive and provides staff and carers with detailed child protection and safeguarding guidance, including information about e-safety. Staff and carers complete a good range of safeguarding training which is delivered at different levels to individuals in response to their personal learning needs. Safeguarding training is mandatory for all carers and is updated annually. Carers receive regular and frequent supervision which contributes to safeguarding young people in placement. Any incident or concern is promptly addressed and the service works within the procedures of the Local Safeguarding Children Board to protect young people in placement. Moreover, any emerging registration or terms of approval issues are taken to the panel for review of suitability. The recently developed placement stability policy and procedures are excellent and will contribute to the well-being and safety of young people in placement by helping to minimise risk. Any unauthorised absences from placements are recorded and closely monitored, to identify any emerging patterns or issues and contribute to protecting young people at risk of harm. There have been a low number of unauthorised absences from placements over the past year.

Staff help carers to formulate safe caring guidelines for their family and for each individual young person placed. Risk assessments are also completed for each young person to help keep them safe from harm. The newly appointed manager has identified that the quality of current risk assessments would benefit from improvement and has plan in place to introduce a new format for assessing and minimising risk, with the aim of further improving outcomes for young people. Good progress is being made to further improve this aspect of practice and a further recommendation has not been made in this respect. Nevertheless, young people report that they feel safe in their placements and report that they are not bullied. The service has clear policies and procedures in place to identify and respond to any arising bullying issues; carers are clear that bullying and discrimination is not tolerated within their households. Carers receive training in managing challenging behaviour and in the use of restraint techniques. The organisation has been carefully considering the different training programmes and strategies employed in behaviour management and has recently identified a new approach to use within the service. Carers receive annual training to help them respond appropriately and effectively to difficult situations, helping them to keep themselves and young people safe.

Young people in placement say they know how to make a complaint and they are able to identify someone to talk to if they have a problem. The reviewing systems ensure that both carers and young people have ample opportunity to express their

opinions about the placement and identify any concerns that they may have.

The service has established recruitment and selection procedures to ensure all appropriate checks are made for new employees; the system in place protects young people. Criminal Records Bureau checks are updated every three years to make sure that carers remain suitable persons to care for young people.

The organisation operates a monthly fostering panel for this service and the organisation's Isle of Wight placement service. The panel membership does not include an employee of the agency who is concerned in the management of the agency or, alternatively, another person who has experience in the provision of a fostering service. The panel assesses and reviews the quality of the assessment process for carers and monitors the range and type of carers in comparison to the needs of the young people placed. The carer's first annual review is brought to panel, and thereafter, at three yearly intervals, providing a mechanism to oversee the quality of placement provision for young people. At the time of inspection, there was no system in place for the panel to receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews. Furthermore, although there is a quality assistance function undertaken by the panel, it is not clear within the agency how the panel's assessment of the quality of reviews leads to improvements in practice.

Vigilant administrative systems ensure all matters are brought to panel within the required timescales and panel members receive relevant information in good time to ensure that the panel operates effectively; however, minutes of panel meetings lack sufficient detail. The panel chairperson is suitably qualified and experienced and provides strong leadership and guidance to panel members. Clear recommendations are made by the panel to the agency decision maker. Panel members are Criminal Record Bureau checked and have expertise in relevant areas to contribute to decisions that will affect the well-being of young people in placement. The service only invites a sufficient number of panel members to sit on each panel to attain quoracy. Although such arrangements meet requirements, they consequently limit access to the knowledge and expertise held by each individual panel member, which may be required in important decision making that impacts upon the lives of young people. Limited training opportunities are offered to panel members to help them deliver a good service that safeguards young people.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes diversity and equality issues and raises awareness of these issues within the agency's policies, procedures and training programme. For example, the prospective carers training and the carers' workshop programme addresses discrimination and equal opportunities issues. The service encourages diversity in applications from prospective carers and welcomes responses from a wide spectrum of the community.

Young people in placement receive individualised services to meet their assessed



needs and careful consideration is given to providing the most suitable environment for young people to live in. One young person said, 'I get good help to do things.' Carers are aware of some young people's vulnerability and encourage and support young people to take part in community activities; this helps young people to develop their social skills and increase their self-esteem. Some young people benefit from the individualised support they receive from the service's family support workers.

Young people are given sufficient opportunities to attain their full potential by the agency's support and encouragement which enables their participation at school. School attendance is good and only one young person has been excluded in the last year. Young people say that they generally enjoy their education. All young people in placement have identified schooling arrangements and regularly attend their educational provision; many young people attend mainstream schools. Carers are involved in the preparation and implementation of young people's personal education plans and demonstrate a strong commitment in supporting young people's education. Carers contribute to placement reviews and advocate in young people's best interests by raising issues, such as time-tabling and access to educational resources. Young people moving into adulthood benefit from the service's encouragement and support which helps them to pursue further education opportunities whilst they remain in stable placements.

Carers encourage young people to take part in a range of recreational and sporting activities, promoting well-being, individuality and raising self-esteem. Carers support young people to form and sustain friendships both at school and within the community, which helps them to integrate with their peers and take part in age appropriate leisure pursuits. The service also provides social occasions, for example, the Christmas party, where young people in placement can meet together to celebrate this seasonal event.

The fostering service does not provide short-break placements.

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

The provision is good.

Carers undertake training to help them understand the importance of young people maintaining appropriate contact with their friends and family. For example, the service provides attachment training to help carers understand young people's issues and this helps carers to provide good support to young people in relation to their contact arrangements. The service ensures that placement planning identifies clear contact arrangements and frequency is clarified within each young person's placement agreement. The fostering service supports carers to manage difficult contact arrangements by organising appropriate venues and providing support from supervising workers or family support workers as necessary, to keep everyone safe. Regular supervision with carers provides a forum to discuss the needs and benefits of contact for young people and an opportunity for carers to talk about the impact of contact and consider the management of future arrangements. Young people are

consulted about contact arrangements within planning meetings and are able to express their views about this. The service ensures that contact arrangements put in place are adhered to; young people report that contact arrangements usually work well.

Young people say that their carers listen to them and they have daily opportunities to say how they feel about things. For example, issues concerning contact arrangements, involvement in sporting activities and arrangements for leisure have been raised by young people in placement and their views and requests have been given due consideration by the service. As part of the annual review process for carers, the service asks young people to tell them their opinions about their placement. Young people are supported by their carers to say what they think about their placement plans and effectively participate in their statutory review meetings. The manager of the service plans to send out questionnaires more frequently to gain further information on young people's thoughts about pocket money, savings, holidays, group activities and workshops, to enable increased monitoring of the service's contribution to good outcomes for young people.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Carers help young people to develop their independent living skills, as is appropriate to their age and ability. The carers' handbook provides advice and guidance to carers about how they can prepare young people for independence and support them as they move towards adulthood. Preparing young people for moving on and placement endings is also covered in the fostering preparation course. The service has devised a skills workbook for independent living which carers help young people to complete.

Supervising social workers understand pathway planning processes and the service ensures that young people in placement are actively involved in decision making and the implementation of their pathway plans. The service is pro-active in ensuring that local authorities draw up pathway plans for eligible young people. Carers demonstrate their commitment to continuing to support young people as they move towards adulthood.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Carers have a good understanding of young people's individual needs and young people make progress in placement. Young people are encouraged to take part in community activities and establish local friendships. Carers support young people to fulfil their own wishes and respond sensitively to differing perspectives and views.

The restructuring of the service has impacted on the management arrangements and the development of the fostering service over recent months. Shortfalls in

monitoring, record keeping and in the quality of some aspects of the agency's work have been identified by current senior managers and although plans are in place for improvement, not all of these matters have yet been fully addressed. For example, not all annual reviews have been carried out within timescales, insufficient placement information is held on carers' files, and some carers do not provide written summaries to the service about young people's progress in placement. Furthermore, although there is evidence that a complaint made has been investigated, there is no record of the action taken in response to the complaint, and the outcome of the investigation is not noted in the complaint monitoring file kept by the service. This shortfall was raised at the 2007 inspection.

The sub-office remains a distinct service and management functions and accountabilities are confusing. Currently, the lines of delegation and supervision between the two offices within the service are unclear, and the separate management and recording systems operated by each office do not provide an easily accessible or coherent overview of service delivery. This makes effective monitoring of the whole service difficult, given that the sub-office is a considerable distance away from the main office location.

Staff have worked hard to ensure that placements of young people have not been compromised by the recent restructuring and staffing changes. Staff are committed to providing a high quality service and demonstrate a good understanding of young people's needs and the fostering support role. There is a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers to ensure young people receive a good standard of care. The carers' evaluation of the service over the past 12 months is either that it has improved, or that it has not changed; no carers report that the service has worsened. Carers comment that they have always been well supported by management and the team of supervising social workers. Carers appreciate the very good levels of support provided to them, which helps them to look after young people well. Support mechanisms include regular and frequent supervision, support group meetings and respite arrangements for particularly demanding placements or agreed holiday periods. In addition, the family support workers provide a valued service by supporting young people's and carers' various needs in placement. Immediate support is also available to carers from the fostering service's on-call system; carers report that this service works extremely well.

Prospective carer assessments are completed to a good standard and evidence each applicant's competencies in caring for young people. Satisfactory systems and training programmes are in place to ensure that suitable persons are employed by the service to provide placements for young people. All assessments are reviewed by the panel which makes its recommendations to the agency's decision maker. The service has only recruited a small number of new carers in the past year. Systems are in place to record and monitor placements made outside of each carer's registration terms. One exemption is recorded; however, although the paperwork had been sent, it had not been signed by the local authority to show their agreement to this placement and ensure these particular young people were safeguarded.

The agency's Statement of Purpose does not accurately reflect the current operation

of the service, nor does it include all of the issues highlighted within the standard. The document is not service specific and it reflects the service provision in place in 2006. The service is aware of these matters and there are plans for a new Statement of Purpose to be written; however, this new document was not available at the time of this inspection. The service has two current formats for children's guides; one for children under six years of age and the second for older children. The latter document has sections which are unclearly written and plain English is not used throughout the guide. At present, there are no formatted guides for young people with communication difficulties. The children's guides are also currently being re-written but are yet to be finalised and made available to young people in placement.

A learning and development team has recently been established and there is a strong emphasis on practice development within the organisation. Carers value the training opportunities offered to them; they can access a wide range of good quality in-house workshops provided within the service or training provided by external providers. A good number of carers have achieved their National Vocational Qualification level 3 award and the service is arranging for carers to commence training at diploma level within the new Qualification Credit Framework training programme. The workshop programme for 2010 covers a range of topics; however, the scheduled session on working with young people with disabilities did not take place and carers have not received any recent training in this area of work. Carers say that most training is scheduled to take place during day-time hours and this limits the opportunities for working partners to take part in the training programme.

Staff working within the service receive regular supervision and are able to take up in-house and external training opportunities. For example, staff have completed training for assessing prospective carers and benefited from the support of the agency to undertake a social work qualification course. Staff are encouraged to identify their individual training needs through the service's supervision and appraisal process. The service shows a strong commitment to supporting the continuing professional development of its staff, for example, arrangements are currently being made to set up of a foundation level degree course; however, a clear training and development plan for staff is not in place.

Young people's case files held at the main office are well ordered and securely stored. They provide a history of young people's placements, although in some instances, carers have not submitted monthly summaries to provide detailed information about events occurring in young people's lives. Files for carers contain all relevant information and documentation is generally completed to a good standard.

## **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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002

and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
1	revise the Statement of Purpose and children's guide (Regulation 4 (a))	31/01/2011
21	ensure that reviews take place at intervals of not more than a year (Regulation 29 (2))	31/01/2011
21	maintain accurate records of all exemptions made by the local authority (The Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 Section 63(12))	31/01/2011
22	ensure that a written record of any complaint or representation, includes the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 18(5))	31/01/2011
24	maintain a record of each placement with the foster parent on their file, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of termination (Regulation 30(3)(a))	31/01/2011
30	ensure that the fostering panel includes an employee of the agency who is concerned in the management of the agency or, where that is not reasonably practicable, another person who has experience in the provision of a fostering service. (Regulation 24(3)(b)(i))	31/01/2011

## Recommendations

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

- review the roles for managers and staff to ensure that there are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance. In particular, review lines of communication and accountability between the manager, staff and carers in relation to the operation of the service's sub-office (National Minimum Standard 4)
- ensure there are unannounced visits to foster carers, at least one each year (National Minimum Standard 22.6)
- provide individual programmes of training to staff which reflect the tasks assigned to them; in particular, minute taking (National Minimum Standard 19.3)
- ensure that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care; in particular, working with children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties (National Minimum Standard 23.1)
- ensure that all training fits within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers, for example, by including convenient times (National Minimum Standard 23.2)
- ensure that up-to-date, comprehensive case records are maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care

provided and contributes to an understanding of his/her life events; in particular, obtain written information from all foster carers about each child or young person's daily life events and progress (National Minimum Standard 24.1)

- design and implement systems to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and take remedial action when necessary (National Minimum Standard 25.3)
- ensure foster panels receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews (National Minimum Standard 30.6).