



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Community Foster Care

**Twigworth Court Business Centre
Tewkesbury Road
Twigworth
Glos
GL2 9PG**

Lead Inspector
Mr Mike Williams

Key Announced Inspection
30th January 2007 09:30 am

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Community Foster Care
Address	Twigworth Court Business Centre Tewkesbury Road Twigworth Glos GL2 9PG
Telephone number	01452 731144
Fax number	01452 731660
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Community Foster Care
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Judith Elizabeth Ashcroft
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 16th January 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

The aims and objectives of the service's written statement of purpose state that Community Foster Care is an independent foster care agency established to provide professional foster care for Looked After Children and set up as a limited company in February 1999. Community Foster Care is also a registered charity (and is therefore governed by a board of trustees) and a not-for-profits community business. Any surplus above expenditure is reinvested into the charity, to benefit Looked After Children, foster carers and to aid social and economic regeneration in the local communities it works in.

The agency's carers are mainly located in Gloucestershire, and some are now in Swindon as the agency expands into this area.

Pre-inspection information from the agency showed that at the end of 2006 they had 31 approved fostering households providing 51 approved places for children. 20 of these 51 approved places were filled, 18 vacant, and 13 non-available. Out of these 20 filled places, 15 children were in long-term care and 5 in continuing care.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out by one inspector over the course of four days. Its focus was to inspect the key standards for fostering services. In preparation for the inspection, the inspector met with the service's registered manager, received pre-inspection information from the service, and received inspection questionnaires from 8 foster children, 9 foster carers and 3 placing social workers. The inspection comprised: meetings with all of the agency's key staff and managers; visiting one child and one young person in foster care and their respective foster carers in Gloucester and Swindon (both sets of carers who had been approved since the last inspection of the service in January 2006); inspecting a number of the service's records, including the case files of the foster children and foster carers visited; and observing a new small support group and talking with its carers afterwards. (As a result of having to re-arrange the visit to a young person in foster care – who the inspector had previously met when they were placed in a children's home - the end date of the inspection was 26th February 2007.)

What the service does well:

Specifically, this inspection found that out of the 17 key standards applicable to this service, it exceeds one of them and meets 13 of them (and one was not assessed on this occasion).

When the inspector asked a number of carers and staff what the service does well, collectively they identified the following:

- Training: for foster carers and the staff, targeted at the needs of the carers so that it prepares them for the reality of the fostering experience
- Support to carers
- Availability: always contactable
- Communication with carers
- Matching: having a limited number of carers you know well helps with this
- Managed recent upheaval well: the service to carers wasn't compromised
- Recruits good new workers
- Small, person-centred company
- Communication within the social work team

In their inspection questionnaires, one carer wrote: "We think they are a very good agency, and put a lot of work into looking after children and foster carers." And one foster child said: "I have a family who looks after me and cares for me. I have a comfortable house and my own bedroom..."

What has improved since the last inspection?

Comparing the findings of this inspection with the last inspection, the following has improved: the suitability of the person managing the fostering service (because they had become the registered manager of the service) and the management and support of carers.

When the inspector asked the people above this question, collectively they identified the following:

- The number of supervisory social workers and administrative staff
- The bringing back of support groups
- Improvement in the professional standard of family support workers, leading to an improved professional relationship with carers
- Improved administrative systems/paperwork

This led one of the service's managers to conclude that the service was "on a very positive track".

What they could do better:

See report's two recommendations – relating to staying safe guidelines and telephone checks on written references – which the inspector found to be the service's only two minor shortfalls in relation to the key standards.

When the inspector asked the people above this question, collectively they identified the following:

- Timing of visits from different workers (so they don't come too close together)
- Open an office in Swindon
- Support group for children with disabilities
- Make suitable use of vacant placements
- Improve communication between the social work and administration teams
- Improve attendance at support group meetings
- Targeted recruitment of carers (to give a greater range of carers)
- Do more for Looked After Children's education and thereby meet government targets (by employing a full-time education officer)
- Be careful not to lose the sense of belonging the carers have through the service's expansion
- Provide clarity of direction/leadership (which was seen to be coming with the incoming full-time Chief Executive Officer, who has fostering expertise, a quality focus, and the enthusiasm required to carry the company forward)

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children. (NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including this visit to this service.

Young people 'Being Healthy' is achieved by the service promoting their development and health.

EVIDENCE:

The service showed the inspector a Health Record (from BAAF, the British Association for Adoption and Fostering) that they give to carers "to provide a record of all appointments etc that the child has whilst in placement with you." One carer visited had recently received this record. The significant health needs of one foster child visited – whose social worker was from a Child Health team - were being met by one of their foster carers who is a qualified and practising nurse. The other young person visited had participated in a cooking programme with one of the service's family support workers, to develop their nutritional awareness and prepare them for adulthood. 'Health' is one of the issues routinely covered in supervisory social worker visits. First Aid courses are compulsory for carers and many aspects of children's emotional health and well being are dealt with in the service's training courses, for example Beginning Where The Child Is.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including this visit to this service.

Only minor shortfalls in safe caring guidelines and checking staff references prevent young people completely 'Staying Safe'.

EVIDENCE:

Regarding the suitability of any person managing the service, the service's operations manager became the registered manager of the service in October 2006 after successfully going through the Commission's fit-person process. At the time of this inspection, the service also had an acting responsible individual – who was also the chair of the service's board of trustees and had been in this post at the time of the last inspection - and a part-time temporary chief executive officer (CEO) who started in March 2006. The roles of both responsible individual and CEO were due to be taken over by the service's new full-time CEO in March 2007.

The provision of suitable foster carers is facilitated by the service's stringent assessment and approval procedures. All children/young people placed have their own bedroom and all the service's placements, other than siblings, are now singleton placements. The accommodation arrangements in one placement tracked reflected the foster child's specific needs resulting from a disability.

Part of the service's pre-inspection information was that "Matching considerations take priority with all possible efforts made to gather relevant information and undertake introductions prior to placement." This inspection found this to be the case. In one placement tracked, the foster child had several introductions to the foster carers, and the carers saw the placing authority's matching assessment, before moving in. In the other placement tracked, although it was an emergency placement the foster child knew the carers from a week's respite care with them, who immediately received verbal and written information from the young person's previous foster carers and the service. This young person had had multiple care placements, but at the time of this inspection, five months after moving in, was very stable and happy in placement. As a result of matching, the service had several foster carers without placements, who the service organised an open day for to show them that referrals they had received were not appropriate matches for them. One worker commented that having a limited number of carers you know well helps with matching.

Regarding protecting from abuse and neglect, the service's carers training plan 2006 included compulsory training courses on managing challenging behaviour, child protection and sexual abuse, and safe caring. As part of the safe caring training, carers receive safe caring guidelines and on receiving a placement should produce a safe caring family policy with their supervising social worker. One of the fostering households tracked had not completed a family safe care policy, because their foster child could not read it. The other fostering household visited had completed a family safe care policy during their safe caring training – for their approved age range – which did not fit the young person in placement with them who was well outside of their approved age range.

The inspector examined the personnel records of two members of staff who had started working for the service since the last inspection. They included all the information required of persons seeking to work for a fostering service. With regard to written references, however, one of the two records did not contain evidence that telephone enquiries had been made to check them.

Because of the timing of this inspection – to fit in with the regulatory transfer from the Commission to Ofsted - the service's fostering panel could not be fully assessed on this occasion. However, the inspector was given the fostering panel minutes considering the approval of each of the fostering households tracked and became aware that one fostering household tracked were approved for an age group in May 2006 well below that of the young person who had been in placement with them for five months, and that the Agency's decision making was sat with an external Agency.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7 & 13. (Key standard 31 is not applicable to this service.)

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including this visit to this service.

Young people are 'Enjoying and Achieving' because the service values diversity and promotes educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The service offers a specialist training course (run by BAAF) on 'Equality and diversity'. Pre-inspection data showed that one White and Black Caribbean fostering household were fostering a White and Black Caribbean child. In one case tracked, a foster child with a disability was receiving specific services and support to help them lead as full a life as possible. However, this child's foster carers told the inspector that they did not see them as 'disabled', but as "no different" to their birth children. In the other case tracked, the young person in placement – who had had multiple care placements – commented for their carers' annual review that they "are the best carers because I have been loved, cared for and nobody has judged me."

Regarding promoting educational achievement, since August 2006 the service has employed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education qualified family support worker to undertake the role of Education Liaison Worker part-time: directly linked to carers who have foster children where there are issues with educational attendance and achievement. They maintain educational information (for example, on exclusions and personal education plans) for the service and were supporting one of the fostering households tracked. There the foster carers told the inspector that they were "passionate" about their foster child catching up with their education, to which end they were looking for a more appropriate school (which had been purpose built to enable children with disabilities to attend) for them. One of the service's supervisory social workers attended this child's education review the day the inspector visited. The foster child in the other placement tracked was participating in a package of training and employment that their carers and the service had helped put together. At the time of this inspection, the service had submitted two major funding applications to enable foster children to have IT access at home to help with school work.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10 & 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including this visit to this service.

By promoting contact and consultation, the service is helping young people make a positive contribution.

EVIDENCE:

Like education, contact is one of the standing issues covered in supervisory social worker visits and recorded in young people's case records. In one of the cases tracked, contact was arranged by the child's social worker but facilitated by their carers, who took advice from the service regarding a contact situation over Christmas 2006. It was because of their spontaneous contact with one of their parents that the inspector was unable to visit the other foster child tracked during the main days of this inspection. One foster child had complicated contact arrangements that were jointly managed by their carers and their family support worker. The service's Carers Training Plan 2006 included a compulsory course on Contact and a specialist training course on Managing contact and working with birth parents.

Regarding consultation, out of the eight surveys young people completed for this inspection, four ticked 'Always' in response to the question 'Do your carers listen to you and take notice of your opinions?' (three ticked 'Usually', one 'Sometimes'). (In addition to ticking 'Always', one of the young people commented: "because when you want to talk they listen.")

And seven ticked 'Always' in response to the question 'Do you know who to speak to if you are not happy or have a personal problem?' (one commented that they didn't know). Foster children are seen regularly by the service's workers and contribute directly to carers' annual reviews and their own statutory reviews. The child with a disability who was visited during this inspection had communication difficulties but their carers were able to ascertain their wishes and feelings regarding their care and treatment. The service has improved their communication with their carers – for example, by producing a quarterly newsletter - after the service's Carers Survey 2006 identified this as an issue.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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)

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

As neither of these standards are key standards, neither of them were inspected during this key inspection.

EVIDENCE:

Management

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)
- 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)

The Commission considers Standards 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

1, 16, 17, 21, 24 & 25 (key standard 32 is not applicable)

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including this visit to this service.

Management of the foster care service is effective, and commendable in relation to management and support of carers.

EVIDENCE:

The inspector was given a copy of the service's written statement of purpose 2006/7, and related guides for children and young people (aged up to 11 years and 11 to 18 years) who are living with foster carers.

Regarding the organisation and management of staff, the service has a social work team (including three supervisory social workers and two family support workers), an administration team (including a number of full and part time staff) and a management team (including the administration manager, the registered/operations manager – who supervises the social work staff - the acting responsible individual, and part-time temporary CEO). Each team had experienced significant staff changes shortly before and after the last inspection of the service in January 2006 (and above the registered manager the management was temporary and lacked fostering expertise). However, a small group of carers told the inspector that the service had managed this upheaval well and that the service to carers had not been compromised. There was separate management of the social work and administration teams – the former by the registered manager who had completed an introductory diploma in management - but sometimes a lack of communication between them. There also needed to be more co-ordination of visits to carers by supervisory social workers and family support workers – so that the one did not follow too closely after the other. Staff were undertaking on-going training and appropriate professional and skills development.

With their above staffing and their number of active approved fostering households, the service had more than an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff, and an adequate range of carers to meet the needs of their foster children. There was the capacity in both the social work and administration teams for staff to respond to the service's growth. One of the fostering households visited was in Swindon, an area where the service was expanding into, where they were in the process of recruiting a part-time supervisory social worker. Carers' case files inspected showed that their qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering had been assessed as part of a clearly set out assessment process (by assessors from an experienced, professionally qualified and closely supervised pool).

Management and support of carers is provided by the combination of: regular visits from supervisory social and family support workers (with the latter providing specialist input in education, and respite provision and leaving care); big and small support groups throughout the year; an annual training programme of compulsory and specialist courses (during the day and the evening); out-of-hours support; respite care; and annual reviews. Carers' case records showed that they were receiving regular visits from the service. The inspector observed the inaugural meeting of one of the small support groups – planned to be self-managing and project focussed - which was joined

by the service's carers' representative. The service keeps track of outstanding annual reviews, and when they are due to be carried out. The service's recent consultation exercise with carers showed that it was the range of support that they received from the service that they particularly highly rated. The inspector found the same in social workers' and foster carers' surveys for this inspection. For example, one carer wrote: "The agency give me the help and support I need to support the child I care for." However, the service's expansion into the Swindon area posed problems for carers there attending training in Gloucester, and although a small support group for carers of children with disabilities had been planned it had not yet started.

Where case records for children do not contain all the information needed, the service write to the child's placing social worker requesting it.

The service's administration team ensure that the service's administrative records contain all the information required, as the inspector found on examining carers', children's and staff personnel records. All of these records were securely stored.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) 3 Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) 1 Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	2
15	2
30	X

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	N/A

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	X

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	3
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	3
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	3
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? NO

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.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS9	In all foster homes, safe caring guidelines established should be cleared with the child's social worker and explained to the child placed.
2.	FS15	As part of the selection process, telephone enquiries should be made on written references obtained on staff.

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