



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Pathway Care (Midlands) Ltd**

**7 The Courtyard  
Buntsford Gate  
Buntsford Drive  
Bromsgrove  
B60 3DJ**

*Lead Inspector*  
Jacqueline Dunster

*Announced Inspection*  
9th January 2006      10:00

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](http://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](http://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

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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Pathway Care Ltd
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Jacqueline Patricia Edwards
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies
<b>Category(ies) of registration, with number of places</b>	

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      7th March 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Pathway Care is an independent fostering agency, established in 1996 as a limited company. The company has four regional offices in Cardiff, Carmarthen, Bristol and Bromsgrove. The Cardiff office retains senior management, finance and human resources functions.

Pathway Care (Midlands) Ltd (hereafter, Pathway Care) was first registered in February 2004 and is based in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire.

Pathway Care's statement of purpose states that it specialises in the placement of difficult to place children, sibling groups, mother and baby assessments, planned and emergency placements, assessment, short term, bridging and long term placements. It undertakes recruitment, assessment, support and training of carers.

At present Pathway Care supports 33 fostering households with 50 children and young people in placement.

# SUMMARY

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

The agency's policies and procedures were examined during the inspection. The registered manager completed a self-assessment form and a pre-inspection questionnaire. Questionnaires were returned from 9 fostering households, 13 from children in placement and 10 from social workers responsible for children placed with the agency. Responses were received from 5 local authorities within which carers reside.

Four fostering households were visited with the carers and children in placement being interviewed. Discussions were held with a large group of carers, the fostering social work team, the registered manager, the Director for Quality Assurance, the reviewing officer and the human resources manager.

An interagency meeting and training to carers and staff was observed.

Panel was observed and the chair of panel interviewed.

The inspection focussed on the assessment of key standards, standards where requirements were made in the last inspection and standards where the minimum had not been met in the previous inspection. Standards relating to the training of staff, premises and finances were fully met at the last inspection and have not been directly assessed during the current inspection.

## **What the service does well:**

Pathway Care has a strong, effective manager in post who has inspired motivation and commitment in staff and carers alike. She has provided a sound platform for continued development of the agency.

Effective monitoring and evaluation processes have been developed to provide regular assessment of the agency's state and to guide policy and procedural developments.

The agency places a high priority on consultation with children, young people and carers' birth children.

Reviews and assessments are of a high quality.

Safe caring policies have been developed in a way which makes them purposeful and relevant.

Foster Carers report that they are provided with a very good level of support and supervision from committed social workers.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The quality of management of the social work task has significantly improved. It offers support, supervision and direction. This has benefited the carers.

The functioning of the fostering panel, particularly in relation to its quality assurance role, has improved.

Policies and procedures are being constantly reviewed to better reflect the demands of regulation. This is particularly the case with a revised child protection policy.

Recruitment practices have been developed.

The Foster Care and Foster Placement Agreements are now fully compliant with fostering regulations.

The agency has worked hard to meet the demands of the action plan arising from the last inspection, indicating a positive attitude to regulation and inspection.

## **What they could do better:**

Carers should hold a written health record for each child in their care and should be clear about the arrangements for medical consent.

Full risk assessments should be carried out in response to specific need. They should also be integrated with the matching and safe caring processes.

There should be more explicit, written information on how gaps in matching are to be addressed within the placement.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

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# 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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:**

### **12**

Pathway Care understands the importance of meeting the health and development needs of children. Outcomes for children have been positive.

Ensuring that carers hold a written health record for each child and are fully aware of arrangements for medical consents could further enhance them.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The health needs of children form part of the matching process and are detailed in the Foster Placement Agreement.

The Foster Carers' Handbook contains detailed information on managing the health needs of children and young people. It particularly emphasizes the responsibility of the carer to act as an advocate for children in relation to health services. Case tracking and discussions with carers indicated that they are very aware of this role and have used it to the benefit of children who have been placed with them. They have worked hard to secure medical and therapeutic services.

Carers undertake training in a number of health related areas. Specific training is provided to carers dealing with complex medical needs. This is done in collaboration with other health professionals.

The health needs of children are addressed through supervision. At present carers do not hold a separate, written health record for each child. Carers and the manager agreed that such a record would facilitate clarity on health interventions. It is recommended that Pathway Care develop the use of this record.

Carers demonstrated confusion about the extent of the consent they can give to medical treatment. The manager has agreed that this topic will be revisited through training and supervision.

## 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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

#### **3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30**

Pathway Care actively safeguards the welfare of children. Policies and procedures reflect the need to protect from neglect and abuse.

The agency is managed and staffed by suitable persons and provides carers who are suitable to work with children and young people. The agency should ensure that former employers are asked why employment ended where it involved work with children or vulnerable adults.

Children are consistently matched to carers who can meet their specific needs. The documentary matching process should demonstrate more clearly how gaps in matching are being addressed.

The fostering panel is effective and efficient. It has members with a suitable range of skills and experience to carry out its task. It has carried out business while inquorate on a number of occasions. The panel actively fulfils a quality assurance role.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Pathway Care carries out the required checks into the suitability of staff. CRB checks are undertaken and telephone verification of references sought. Comprehensive personnel records are maintained on members of staff. Recruitment policies and practices have been developed to ensure that the best possible staff are employed and the process is transparent. All staff are suitably qualified and the agency has engaged a number of experienced staff over the last year. Staff interviewed had a clear understanding of the fostering task, appropriate knowledge and skills. Those undertaking assessments are specifically trained and advised in this task. The human resources manager has agreed to seek information from referees as to why a person left employment where it involved work with children or vulnerable adults.

Foster homes were comfortable and welcoming. They were child friendly and offered space and privacy. Annual, unannounced visits and health and safety checks are undertaken. Children and young people were observed to be at ease with the carers. Medication and hazardous materials were locked away. Carers undertake health and safety training.

A placing officer stated that "the foster carers are excellent and have managed the children's needs and situation tremendously well". This was a typical view of the work which the carers are carrying out with children placed.

Where possible, the agency provides planned placements with introductions. There is documentary evidence of the efforts the agency makes to ensure that full information is acquired from children's social workers. The persistence of the manager has ensured Pathway Care is becoming increasingly successful in requiring local authorities meet their obligations when placing children.

Case tracking demonstrated that carers' knowledge and skills are developed to help them to meet the needs of children with specific medical or identity needs which will not automatically be met within the placement. The agency is advised that the matching document should more explicitly demonstrate how gaps in matching are to be met. Case tracking evidenced the efforts which were made to meet the wishes of a young black woman regarding her placement needs.

The Midlands branch of Pathway Care has now adopted a good risk assessment model to be used at matching and in response to specific risk arising during a placement. This should be employed to further enhance the capacity of carers to meet specific needs of children.

Pathway Care has developed clear and comprehensive policies and procedures on child protection and safe caring. Both staff and carers were able to

demonstrate knowledge of, and commitment to, these processes. They understand how to deal with allegations, complaints and absconding.

We were able to directly observe action taken to protect children following a serious allegation. The child protection policies were followed and the staff took a calm and measured approach to dealing with the need to safeguard children.

Pathway Care has developed good practice in relation to safe caring. Each household has its own safe care policy. This is individualised for each placement in collaboration with all members of the household and with the approval of the child's social worker. Foster carers were able to discuss how the plans would be developed and actions which were taken when new risks emerged. A young person in placement was able to discuss her involvement in the safe care policy for the home.

Carers receive appropriate training in protecting children and young people and have good guidance on dealing with bullying. One carer visited had been very active in protecting a young person from bullying at school.

Pathway Care operates a joint fostering panel with Warwickshire County Council. Observation of the fostering panel and discussions with the chair demonstrate that it is able to require that the standard of assessments and reviews is sufficiently high. The panel considers all annual reviews and those following disruptions and allegations. The chair produces an annual report which evaluates the functions of the panel and the quality of work presented to it by the agency.

The panel includes members with skills and knowledge in fostering, child health and education. Pathway Care's medical adviser provides advice to panel. The chair of panel is experienced and knowledgeable. He exercised strong leadership and understanding of the stressful nature of panel for applicants.

On a number of occasions the panel has made decisions while inquorate due to some uncertainty about how to deal with the absence of a social work representative from Warwickshire County Council. The chair has agreed that business must not be conducted while the panel is inquorate and has sought advice to ensure this.

Perusal of completed assessments indicates that the standard of this work is of a good quality. The competency-based reviews are of a very high standard. The panel has oversight of all reviews.

# 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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

### **7 and 13**

Pathway Care demonstrates a positive attitude to diversity, particularly in relation to culture.

Educational achievement is valued and supported by the fostering agency.

The agency needs to ensure that carers are clearly guided by policy on their responsibilities for providing purposeful activity for children excluded from school.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Supervising social workers indicated that on a number of occasions carers had undertaken research to augment their understanding of the cultural needs of children. Training is provided to carers on cultural diversity. Supervising social workers actively work to enhance their own ability to meet the demands of cultural diversity.

Where possible children and young people are placed in same race placements. A young person's expressed desire for this was met by the agency.

There has been an increase in the number of black carers supported by Pathway Care.

The agency ensures that carers have the equipment and resources to meet the needs of disabled children. Carers are provided with specific training to help them meet the needs of children with disability and learning needs.

Children and young people who were case-tracked are involved in many and varied hobbies and activities. This was equally the case for a young person with learning disability.

All children and young people are in education. The agency maintains a database of educational progress. Children's achievements are acknowledged in the agency newsletter.

There was considerable evidence of carers advocating for children at schools. Their work is supported through supervision. The agency intends to develop the role of an educational adviser in the future which should further enhance efforts to ensure young people meet their educational potential.

The carers' handbook is currently undergoing extensive review. It is intended that it contains advice on carers' responsibilities for children and young people when they are excluded from school. It is recommended that it do so. The agency is able to provide support to carers and children for excluded children through the employment of fostering outreach workers.

# **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 at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

### **10 and 11**

Contact is seen as a priority by carers and staff.

The fostering service has developed very good consultative practices. The registered manager and the Director for Quality Assurance have placed a high regard on listening to the views of children.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Records indicate that contact is facilitated and promoted by carers. In some cases an enormous burden has been placed on carers in terms of time and effort but contact has been supported and maintained. The foster placement agreement details the arrangements for contact. Carers are supported in this task in supervision. Their assessment of contact is reported to the children's social workers to inform wider care planning.

Pathway Care carries out regular consultative exercises. It has responded to issues raised by young people and children through questionnaires and discussion. For example, young people will be developing their own newsletter. The agency has begun to establish a group for children who foster. The children's guide is being completely reviewed in consultation with children and young people and is an example of good practice in consultation with user groups.

Questionnaires from carers indicated a good degree of satisfaction with agency consultation.



# 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)

**The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

**14 and 19**

The agency's carers take an active role in preparing young people for adulthood.

The agency's payments to carers are transparent, accurate and timely.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers and young people outlined the ways in which they undertake development of life skills for independence. The manager is responding to the larger numbers of older young people placed with the agency by developing groups and programmes on living independently and safely. She understands that there will be an increasing need to equip carers with the skills and responsibilities to meet these needs.

Foster carers raised no concerns about the financial processes of the agency.

# 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 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

**1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 and 25**

The agency has a clear, recently reviewed, comprehensive statement of purpose in place. It communicates the ethos and function of the organisation.

People with appropriate skills and experience manage Pathway Care effectively and efficiently. The progress of the agency in the last year is, in large part, due to the manager's effective leadership.

The agency performs strongly in monitoring and controlling the activities of the service and performance quality.

Pathway Care performs well across standards addressing staff competence, accountability and employer competence.

The agency meets minimum standards in providing clearly outlined services, support and training to carers.

Generally records are well managed and audited. There are a few areas which can be further improved to meet all the details of the fostering regulations.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency's statement of purpose meets all the demands of National Minimum Standards. It clearly outlines the purposes and motivation of the organisation. The Children's Guide is being developed in consultation with young people and children. The agency has developed a good complaints policy which is also provided in a user-friendly form for children and young people.

Pathway Care was without a manager at the last inspection. They have since appointed a registered manager who has the skills and experience necessary to lead and motivate the social work team. Foster carers, staff and senior managers have all expressed faith in the manager and the view that the improvements in the agency have in large part been due to the stability which the manager has introduced. During the inspection the manager was observed to offer strong leadership during a very difficult child protection concern. Staff are clear about lines of accountability in the manager's absence. A principal officer has been appointed who will deputise for the manager in their absence.

Staff and administration are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective fostering service.

There are clear systems in place for monitoring and controlling the fostering agency. Reports are completed and regular meetings take place between the manager and the Director for Quality Assurance. These processes have resulted in the identification of areas for change and development, the implementation of new practices and evaluation of the changes. Full records are kept of Schedule 7 and 8 events and the appropriate notifications issued.

An increasingly diverse range of carers is being recruited to the agency reflecting the success of targeted recruitment. The agency operates a presumption in favour of same race placements which is made easier by the increasing availability of carers from diverse backgrounds.

There have been a number of new appointments to the staff team over the last year. Staff are well qualified and experienced in children and families and fostering work. One local authority commented "contact with the link worker has been very good...the link worker is approachable, ..responds quickly to requests for information, attends relevant meetings and contributes well to these".

The standard of assessments is good. The chair of panel indicated that he had observed continued improvement in the quality of assessment presented to the panel. Carers interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the manner in which the assessment process was carried out.

Training programmes for staff are audited and evaluated by the agency. The training programme was seen to reflect the identified needs of the team and of individual staff. Staff are supervised and appraised regularly and expressed positive attitudes to these processes. Likewise staff felt the team meetings are responsive to their needs.

The statement of purpose clearly sets out the agency's strategy for working with carers. The agency employs a reviewing officer. All annual reviews are presented to panel, exceeding the demands of regulations. The reviews were of a very high standard - relevant and comprehensive. Carers expressed satisfaction about the supervision provided by their supervising social workers. It is regular and supported by a good proforma for supervision. The manager has purposeful oversight of all records of carer supervision.

Carers are provided with a good range of needs-led, audited and evaluated training. Training was observed to be of a good standard and provided in a non-discriminatory manner during the inspection. Staff and carers attended this training together.

Evidence was seen of some good life story work being undertaken by carers with children in placement. There is comprehensive policy and guidance on the role of the carer in this task. The agency provides each child and young person with a pack to enable them to keep their own life story materials.

There are a number of minor changes which need to be made regarding children's case records. The agency needs to clarify the purpose, format and content of files in order to establish the information which should be held on the children's files. Records of actions and contacts in respect of children should be entered on the children's files to ensure the integrity and transferability of information relating to children placed.

Copies of the daily recordings written by carers about children should be given to the child's social worker at the conclusion of the placement. The register of children placed should include their address after placement to fully comply

with regulations. The record of placements with carers must be complete and accurate.

It was observed that some carers are encouraging young people to access their records and to read the recordings which they maintain. This is an example of good practice and is encouraged by the agency. Carers' records were observed to be of a good standard.

# 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>
<b>12</b>	3

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

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>14</b>	3
<b>29</b>	3

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

## 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
1	FS30	25(1)	The fostering panel must not conduct business while it is inquorate.	07/04/06
2	FS24	22, Sch 2(1)(e)	The children's register must include the child's address on leaving placement.	30/04/06
3	FS24	30(3)(a)	The records of placements with carers must be complete and accurate.	30/04/06

## 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	FS12	Foster carers should be clear about arrangements for medical consent for each placement.
2	FS12	Foster carers should be provided with and maintain a written health record for each placement.
3	FS8	Risk assessments should be carried out and integrated with matching and safe caring processes.
4	FS13	The foster carers' handbook should outline the expectations of foster carers in relation to children who are not in education.

5	FS24	A written policy should be drawn up which establishes the purpose, format and contents of files.
6	FS25	Information relating to interventions regarding children should be detailed on the child's file.



## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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