

inspection report

Fostering Services

NCH - South West Fostering Project

Weir House

93 Whitby Road

St Phillips

Bristol

BS4 4AR

Announced Inspection

22nd to 25th November 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

NCH - South West Fostering Project

Tel No

020 7704 7000

Address

Weir House, 93 Whitby Road, St Phillips, Bristol, BS4 4AR

Fax No

0117 3005365

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

D050000657

Name of Registered Provider

NCH

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mrs Joyce Mary Jenkin

Date of first registration

28th January 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

28th January 2003

Registration Conditions Apply?

YES

Date of last inspection

16/06/03

Date of Inspection Visit		22 nd to 25 th November 2004		ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am		
Name of Inspector	1	Wilfried Maxfield	146484	
Name of Inspector	2			
Name of Inspector	3			
Name of Inspector	4			
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.				
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)				
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Jo Jenkin		

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of NCH - South West Fostering Project. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

NCH has more than 10 Foster Care projects across the country. Foster Care NCH South West is based in the east of Bristol City. The offices are located in a commercial area and the project has its own spacious suite of offices.

The agency is highly skilled and expert in providing specialist permanency fostering. Carers on this scheme are paid a professional fee on a self-employed basis. 8 of 12 long-term carers have been recruited as part of this project, including two respite carers. All of these placements are able to support a wide range of needs including emotionally and behaviourally difficult children and young people as well as those with learning difficulties and mental health care requirements.

Currently Foster Care NCH South West has 14 approved foster carers who cumulatively provide 24 placements.

There were two further fostering applications and assessments in process at the time of this inspection.

Services offered by the agency include:

- Recruitment, preparation and assessment of foster carers.
- Preparation and assessment of carers on behalf of Local Authorities where required.
- Regular supervision of foster carers.
- 24 hour out of hour's duty cover.
- Respite care
- Training for carers.
- Support group for carers.
- Direct work with children/young people when required.
- Identification of resources to meet the needs of children/young people in placement.
- Advocacy on behalf of children/young people.
- Work with relevant services to meet the needs of children/young people in placement**.
- The project is also registered as an adoption agency and carries out a full range of adoption work.

**Recently the project has also developed a service of fostering for young people at the Cotswold Community in Wiltshire. This is a therapeutic Community run by NCH, which provides 52-week care and education for severely emotionally disturbed boys aged 9 to 16 years. Plans include the provision of holiday fostering to give consistent care for up to 12 weeks of the year.

At the time of this inspection a new service was about to become active. The Deputy Manager had just commenced his new post managing a new contract for North Somerset Social Services providing short breaks with professional carers for disabled children and young people.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns).

Brief Introduction

This was NCH – South West Fostering Project's third inspection under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. Because all three inspections were conducted in the space of the last 24 months (22/11/02, 16/06/03) a great number of findings have been pointed out before. Subsequently, in an effort to avoid duplication this report points to earlier reports on a number of occasions. It is therefore advisable that this inspection report is read in conjunction with the two previous ones.

This report also echoes several of the positive findings of the previous reports and underlines many of the comments made by an earlier inspector highlighting very commendable practice in a number of areas. Some of the most positive findings include:

1. The agencies focus on Carers and Children's needs is excellent.
2. Project workers knowledge and insight in individual cases is excellent.
3. The team is to be commended for its level of motivation and the 'positive spirit' amongst members of staff and management.
4. The overall management of the agency and the individual support by its leadership are very highly regarded by the staff team.
5. Professional focus and understanding of wider fostering issues, including reflective practice is excellent.
6. The service is very highly regarded amongst foster carers who praised the very high levels of support.
7. Annual appraisals systems for staff and their implementation are of the highest professional quality.

As in the previous inspection report dated 16/06/03 also this inspection found that Foster care NCH South West is currently compliant with all the National Minimum Standards and Fostering regulations. No 'Requirements' needed to be made. A number of ' Good Practice Recommendations' are included in the relevant section of this report.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

The Fostering Service's Statement of Purpose is a comprehensive and clearly written document. It contains all the elements required in NMS 1.4.

The children's guide is a well-constructed booklet containing all the relevant information in an age appropriate format.

An alternative Children's Guide in different designs for a variety of needs and levels of understanding is being developed after young people suggested this in feedback from questionnaires.

Fitness to Provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

The Project Manager, her Deputy and all Social Workers working for the team easily comply with the level of qualification required by NMS 2.2 and have relevant background experience in childcare practice and fostering issues.

The inspector was impressed with the range and depth of experience of the managers and Social Workers and their expertise in managing this service.

Management of the fostering service (Standards 4-5)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

Procedures to monitor and control the activities of the service are robust and sound. The inspector was impressed with the transparent and efficient management systems in use.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

9 of 9 standards assessed were met

The agency takes exceptional care to ensure safe, healthy and nurturing placements. The service actively promotes and attempts to serve a wide range of different sections of the community. Placement decisions are made after great care is taken over the matching process. The considerable time taken over some matching processes can result in foster carers not filling their available places in an agreeable timeframe.

The agencies 'safe caring protocol' is excellent. A number of well-designed procedures ensure family contact is maintained and promoted. All young people in placement at the time of inspection were in full-time education.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers (Standards 15-23)

9 of 9 standards assessed were met

The agency employs a knowledgeable and experienced staff group who collectively have many years experience in family placement social work. The service is exceptionally well managed delivering a child centred fostering service. Employment practises are of a high standard. Staff feel well supported with supervision and appraisal systems being excellent. Additional training support is recommended for members of staff without sufficient ITC skills. Carers also feel well supported. Some additional training in record keeping is recommended.

Records (Standards 24-25)

2 of 2 standards assessed were met

The inspectors found records for staff, young people and foster carers well audited and easy to access and to navigate. There is a clear policy on access and secure storing of records but there is no guidance for staff to follow when taking records from one location to another.

Fitness of premises for use as fostering services (Standard 26)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

The premises have been subject to recent refurbishment and decoration and have a modern, well-maintained appearance.

Financial Requirements (Standards 27-29)

3 of 3 standards assessed were met

There are written procedures for financial arrangements, which provide control and supervision of financial affairs and powers.

The organisation monitors the financial status of each project on a monthly basis to ensure they are working within budget.

Comments from foster carers showed that fees were paid on time, and that they considered the fees to adequately cover their costs. There is presently a range of fees paid due to the various schemes presently in action by the project.

Fostering panels (Standard 30)

1 of 1 standard assessed were met

The NCH Fostering Project has an established panel and membership was found to be in line with the requirements of Regulation 24 of the Fostering Service Regulations.

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

0 of 0 standard assessed were met

The project does not provide short-term breaks.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

0 of 0 standard assessed were met

The project does not have family and friends carers.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Wilfried Maxfield	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	Michael Miles	Signature	_____
Date	24th February 2005		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	8.3, 11.5	Matches are achieved by information sharing. Regular consultation and feedback on the developing timeframe of the process needs to be given to prospective carers (anxiously waiting) more regularly.
2	16.9, 16.10	Additional training support is recommended for members of staff without sufficient ITC skills.
3	23.5, 24.6	Some additional training in record keeping for carers is recommended.
4	25.4	Confidential records are stored securely at all times. A policy for transporting confidential records from one location to another is recommended.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	5
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	YES
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	NO
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	22/11/04
Time of Inspection	9:30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	45.0

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Fostering Service's Statement of Purpose is a comprehensive and clearly written document. It contains all the elements required in NMS 1.4.

An updated version is included in the Foster Carer Handbook and in the NCH Procedures Manual. Staff are regularly consulted on and issued with updates - this is good practise. Statement was last revised in March 2004 to include a more up to date staff list and to inform about new service developments. A description of the new contract for North Somerset Social Services providing short breaks is currently being included in this documentation.

The Children's Guide includes a user-friendly version of the Statement of Purpose. It has been developed further since the last inspection and provides children and young people with all details required in NMS 1.5. An alternative Children's Guide in different formats for a variety of needs and levels of understanding is being developed after young people suggested this in feedback from questionnaires.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The Project Manager is Jo Jenkin; her qualifications include BA Honours degree Sociology, Masters Degree in Social Work and CQSW, Postgraduate Certificate in Management and Organisational Learning, Family therapy in Context. She has held senior and managerial posts in local Social Services between 1978 and 1998 when she left to join NCH. Jo Jenkin's experience covers a range of social services including childcare, child protection and family placement. She is currently completing NCH required core training for managers.

The Deputy Project Manager is Mary Jones. She holds a CQSW and PTA and has worked for Local Authority child-care teams in previous posts.

All Social Workers working for the team easily comply with the level of qualification required by NMS 2.2 and have relevant background experience in childcare practise and fostering issues.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

The inspector was impressed with the range and depth of experience of the managers and Social Workers and their expertise in managing this service. This is a stable workforce, which is committed to the aims and objectives of the fostering service.

Record keeping is of a very high quality and regular audits ensure all personal files are meeting Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Police checks are carried out every 3 years and records are kept about telephone enquiries to follow up references.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

This standard was particularly well audited during the last inspection. All findings are echoed in this report:

- 5 members of staff were interviewed. Duties and responsibilities of this group were those described in their job description.
- The two managers manage accountability for all duties and casework via supervisions. Records showed these to be at frequent intervals and of good quality. Lines of communication encompass managers, staff and carers.
- A number of team tools are used to focus on practise issues. These include monthly team meetings, which include all members of staff. Separate meetings for Social Work staff focus on casework. Minutes of both meetings are kept.
- There are written procedures for controlling the activities of the fostering service.
- There are written administrative and financial procedures in place.
- Information provided to purchasers is in line with NMS 4.4.
- A requirement of declaration of conflict of interest was found to be written in both staff contracts and foster carers agreements.

NCH has its own Quality Assurance unit. Staff commented positively on recent inspections of this service.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The manager has a clear written job description setting out the duties and responsibilities of the post. The inspector found that the job description reflected the tasks undertaken and responsibilities expected of her.

The present structure includes a deputy manager. This enables her to delegate managerial tasks such as supervision of social work staff. The deputy is in charge when the manager is absent.

There are also clear arrangements should both managers be absent. These arrangements include the deputy director who has an active and ongoing involvement with the South West branch.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

This report is consistent with findings in the two previous reports with regards to the excellent quality of foster care homes. Please refer to these reports to assess all details of the exceptional care the agency takes to ensure safe, healthy and nurturing placements.

One vital ingredient to ensure exceptional quality of care is to be found in the fact that NCH Foster Care recruitment strategy targets individuals with childcare experience, in social care, education and nursing.

Homes randomly visited at this inspection were also of a very good standard. Risk assessments for the sharing of rooms were seen the majority of which were carried out by family placement social workers.

Carers training covers health and safety issues. Health and safety issues are included in the initial assessment of potential foster carers.

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

NCH's Equality and Diversity policy is part of the Statement of Purpose and can also be found in the Foster Carers Handbook.

The service develops and promotes a diverse workforce with staff commenting positively on the effects of this policy serving different sections of the community.

NCH South West actively seeks black, Asian and mixed parentage carers. A same race placement policy is in place. There is ample evidence that issues of diversity and equality as well as strategies to enhance children's and young people's confidence and feeling of self worth are promoted throughout the service. The agency strives to match the ethnic needs of any child placed with a foster carer. Links with the child's ethnic origins are maintained wherever possible and placements in a multi-racial area are supported if deemed an assessed need.

Equality and diversity issues are addressed in support sessions with social workers as well as in the comprehensive preparation and ongoing training package.

One Social Worker on the team has a lead role for recruiting black, Asian and mixed parentage carers and was interviewed as part of this inspection. She reported on recent foster carer recruitment events, which focused on the need for more carers from a mix of

backgrounds. These events were high profile and sponsored by a major energy provider. Results in numbers recruited were encouraging but not nearly sufficient to satisfy need.

There are several disabled children in placement and evidence was found in the matching and placement process to suggest that the agency has strong links with disability living advisors, who give advice and guidance on physical needs. The agency has developed strong links with the National Autistic Society and the local CAMS team.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The following findings were supported in both of the previous as well as and during this inspection:

- It is evident from written information and discussion with those involved with placements that the matching process, preparation and introduction demonstrate a high standard of practice.
- The agency uses the fostering network competency based assessment format. Considerable time is spent gathering information and matching the needs of children with carers.
- A variety of introductory meetings are used, with carers travelling to meet the child, staying for short visits or securing accommodation to stay overnight and see the child the next day.
- Carers make 'family books' with pictures of their home and family members for children to see.
- Children then visit the foster home for planned introductory visits, before a final decision to make the placement is made.
- Both NCH and the Local Authority making the placement have written placement agreements, these were found on the Children's files and contained information on how needs will be met.

The inspector discussed matching criteria with foster carer's from an Afro-Caribbean background who were recently matched to siblings from the Black- African community and who were about to start their placement. A similar discussion was conducted with white foster carers who, over many years have fostered children and young people from a variety of backgrounds. Both groups of carers stressed 2 points more than any other:

1. The agency takes great care when matching. Information sharing is excellent involving all professionals, child and birth family and prospective carers.
2. Criteria to match racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs are applied sensitively and yet, also in a stringent manner.
3. The matching process can "take ages", sometimes many months, leaving available placements empty and foster carers without their main source of income for long periods. This is causing some considerable frustration also because carers feel they are not regularly consulted and involved when not actively engaged in a placement.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The Foster Carers Handbook contains the agency policy and procedures and outlook on safe caring. A separate booklet is part of this handbook including a 'protocol' to establish a safer care environment.

The protocol describes best practise including many of the principles that need to inform managers and staff when creating an organisational culture that promotes safe care. There was good evidence that all staff are aware of the protocol and working with it. Although only a small pamphlet the inspector recommends it highly for the continuing use in training.

The foster carers training programme includes training for children who have been abused and protecting children from abuse. Foster carers' files showed record of attendance, and carers interviewed were able to describe their approach to safe care in their homes.

The project has a written code of conduct on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline. This has been adapted from the written guidance provided for NCH residential care staff.

A safe care plan is agreed and recorded for every child on placement and regularly reviewed. The foster carers handbook contains written guidance for safe care, guidelines for managing behaviour and recognising significant harm and referral procedure, these are also topics covered in the core-training programme.

The agency has a written procedure for managing allegations and system in place to collate and evaluate allegations. There have been no such incidents to report at this inspection.

There is a written procedure in the handbook for reporting children missing from the foster home.

All the above systems are regularly scrutinised by the registered provider including all systems in place to collate allegations of abuse in foster care.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

0**%****Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Findings were positive and included:

- Preparation training includes guidance on the promotion of contact.
- Contact issues are monitored by social workers during supervision sessions.
- LAC forms are used to specify individual contact arrangements for each child. The agency is particularly vigilant in ensuring that interagency planning meetings and reviews agree and review contact arrangement.
- The foster carers handbook promotes contact and gives guidance on reporting and concerns.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Talking to social workers and carers about consultation issues the inspector was reassured that the fostering service provides enough opportunity for children to express their views. This includes the use of the LAC reviewing system. A review booklet is used by the agency to document children's views and wishes and filled in by the young people before each review.

It is good practise to include children's feedback into foster carers annual reviews. This practise is part of the services procedures.

The children's guide to services includes a section, which clearly states that the child's views and wishes are important. The guide informs children and young people of people they can talk to, call or write to, it also includes a pre-paid card they can complete and post. NCH encourages the use of independent adults and advocates and the Children's Guide also includes the contact details of 'Voice of the Child in Care'.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Tracking children's LAC review files showed that health issues were well recorded and discussed with foster carers. Foster Carers keep records of children's health. This was also well documented in the children's files inspected.

It is part of the foster carers duties to register children with a Doctor, Dentist and for any further health checks needed.

Health care needs of children are obtained prior to placement with the team insisting on having all information ready for the carer from the outset.

'Health care' features highly on foster carers training. This includes training in first aid.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

NCH has introduced a new foster care database, 'Softbox', which will record basic educational attainment. The project and carers need to have the children's progress records as evidence of attainments in this area.

At the time of the inspection all the children in placement were in full-time education.

The agency recruitment policy requires one carer to be at home full-time to support children who are out of school. The foster carer agreement highlights the carer's tasks in terms of education and stresses the importance of procedures in relation to school-day responsibilities.

The foster cares handbook also contains comprehensive sections on 'Changing Schools', 'Preparation for leaving School' and 'Education for young People with Special Needs' and on the 'Statementing Process'.

The Project Manager confirmed that links to the LEA and ECLA are positive and well maintained.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The written procedure for 'Preparation for Leaving Care' was scrutinised as part of this inspection. It provides guidance for this process and specifies roles and responsibilities for the conduct and co-ordination of the various stages of the leaving care assessment and pathway planning process. Up to date information on Local Authorities duty and responsibilities to provide assessment for Pathway Plans and timescales to be adhered to is also part of the Policies and Procedures Manual.

The Foster Carers Handbook outlines good practise essential in leaving care and specifies how to achieve this by:

- Involving the young person fully in all planning and decision-making.
- Treat young people as active partners in the care process.
- Help to develop skills in independence, responsibility and decision-making.
- Help to inform the young persons self esteem and identity.

There was good evidence from interviews with foster carers that these basic principles were well known and applied. Foster carers and support social workers construct a leaving care preparation plan to ensure young people leave care with appropriate support, housing and employment/education.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

NCH has appropriate written procedures for recruitment and checking prospective members of staff. All managerial staff that engage in the selection and interviewing process are trained to do so.

All the social work staff in the team are professionally qualified and the majority are highly experienced. Social work staff undertaking the assessment of foster carers are qualified and the team collectively have many years experience in this process. The social work staff that undertake foster carers assessments have all undertaken the BAAF course for competency-based assessment.

This inspection confirms the findings of the previous one in which the inspectors stated, that ... "This is a knowledgeable and experienced staff group who collectively have many years experience in family placement social work". Information gathered at interview and from foster carers indicates that the staff have a good knowledge of agencies involved with children in placement and have built up working networks, which are used positively.

The project manager informed the inspector that plans to employ a psychologist, or similar, for the service were at an advanced stage.

Total number of staff of the agency:

13

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The following core findings confirm that this is a service exceptionally well managed delivering a child centred fostering service:

- There is a clear written management structure showing lines of accountability.
- The project manager and deputy have collectively many years experience in family placement and managerial role.
- Management delegation is clear to all members of staff interviewed.
- There are tasks delegated to social workers such as, lead role for training, lead role for recruitment.
- Workloads are limited, with social work staff mainly having a mixture of cases between fostering and adoption.
- The database held on computer provides a system for prompting reviews and managing assessments.
- The manager and deputy share the supervision of social workers; this is undertaken on a 2-3 week basis with written record of discussion.
- Social workers are subject to an annual appraisal, which is completed by themselves and their supervisor. These were found on individual's personnel files, they identified good practice, training and development needs.
- Social work staff are able to access training via in-house provision or external. The NCH has linked with the Hadley Centre at Bristol University; therefore staff have access to workshops and current research material.
- A record of carers training was found, recorded on their files, with annual reviews identifying training needs. Carers response by interview and questionnaire, indicate a commitment to attending training, and comments show that their views and training needs are sought by the agency.

All staff have sufficient access to a P.C. and other office equipment. A few members of the social work team have not yet achieved full proficiency in the use of IT and therefore rely heavily on the administration team for support. This is a well-known problem within the agency with some training for these members of staff being provided already. In spite of this the inspector felt that additional support needed to be ongoing and feels that the agency needs further external support to be able to continue to offer training to those staff who are in need of IT training.

The agency has three part-time administrators who provide clerical support; staff interviewed stated that they felt the support was very good. The administrative staff interviewed described their roles, tasks allocated to them are appropriate and in line with their position.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The majority of staff employed have worked for the NCH fostering service for a number of years and are committed to its ethos and policies. Next to training, supervision and general terms and conditions staff mentioned wanting to work for the principles and ethos of the charity as the main reason for their continuing commitment and loyalty.

The inspection found the service to be fully compliant with NMS 17.6 and 17.7.

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****4**

Project Managers and Social Work staff comply with NCH Recruitment and Selection Standards and Code of Practice for named categories of staff; the Fostering Services regulations 2002 and the NCH Equality and Diversity policy. All policy papers were scrutinized as part of this inspection and found to be of the highest professional standards. The staff interviewed confirmed that the employment practices of NCH were of an exceptionally high standard.

Out of hours support was described by the sample of carers visited during this inspection as being excellent.

There are health and safety policies in place for staff and carers.

The inspectors saw the insurance certificate for the agency. A whistle blowing policy is in place and is known to the staff team.

The manager and deputy provide supervision for all social workers. The inspector was particularly impressed with the content and quality of supervision and annual appraisals documents.

Six monthly audit of foster carers files to monitor the recording and activities of the service form an integral part of the agencies procedures.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

All staff interviewed felt that the service was providing them with every opportunity for training. Social workers described a great variety of training options available to them both on external as well as in-house training courses.

The annual appraisal identifies training and development. Staff spoke highly of this and other team support tools.

Social workers and foster carers often attend external training events together, mainly supplied by BAAF.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Discussions with the staff and scrutiny of the supervision records confirmed that staff receive monthly supervision plus extra support as needed. Supervision is planned in advance and recorded and records of this were seen. As highlighted in all the previous inspection reports staff spoke positively of the organisation and in particular their manager and deputy, whose support and supervision they valued.

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)

The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Feed back from the group of approved carers visited during this inspection was positive about levels of contact and support.

NCH South West will follow clear procedural guidelines operated nationally including strategies to support carer's provisions through supervising social workers, telephone contact, support groups and 24-hour emergency support.

Procedural guidelines are available in the Foster Carers Handbook and fully encompass all the details recommended in NMS 21.2.

Supervision visits for carers are recorded and a checklist defines issues to be discussed. Supervising social workers (will) have a limited caseload to ensure maximum support and input for carers.

Agreements and support strategies for carers include an annual training plan. Foster carers meet in small groups. The fostering panel considers an Annual Review of the carers prepared and conducted by the Project Manager.

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)

The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The Foster Care Agreement sets out the supervision process. Discussions with the foster carers and evidence on their files confirmed that each carer is well supervised by a qualified social worker. Guidelines for carers are to be found in Section 4, 'Working as part of a team' in the Foster Carer Handbook. This chapter comprises ample guidance on policies, procedures and legal information as required by NMS 22.5.

The Handbook also contains procedures for dealing with complaints and representations; the project provides monthly returns to headquarters of complaints and representations. There were no recorded complaints at this inspection.

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures 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.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

As pointed out in previous standards the agency aims to recruit experienced/qualified carers, and several current carers have social work qualification, teaching, and childcare experience.

In general feedback from carers indicates that they are satisfied with the training provided and are able to access other external training. Some foster carers indicated that record keeping procedures are in need of some clarification and, ultimately, of some additional training input. The project manager confirmed that future annual training scheduling needs to prioritise this issue.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is 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 her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a written policy for case recording, which establishes the purpose, format and contents of files. Foster carers files were seen and found to contain information required.• Separate files are maintained for children in placement. Children's files contained written evidence of matching, introductions and placement agreements. Essential information and care plans are recorded in the LAC format.• The agency provides financial help for carers to purchase secure storage for information.• Foster Carers encourage the children and young people to understand their individual history. For this reason life story records and work are maintained. Carers spoken to are sensitive to the need for children to maintain birth family contact, and support children in providing photos and other records of their progress for parents and siblings.• All files are audited on a six monthly basis by either the manager or deputy, and 'signed' as accurate and up to date at supervision with each social worker. | | |
|---|--|--|

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13) The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.			
Key Findings and Evidence		Standard met?	3
<p>There was a secure and private record for each child and foster carer. Staff files are held at held at the organisations regional headquarters and were made available for this inspection. Inspectors found the system for both sets of records very well audited and easy to access and to navigate.</p> <p>Separate administrative records are kept for all files as prescribed in NMS 25.2.</p> <p>NMS 25.4 asks the agency to ensure that records are stored securely at all times. While there is a clear policy on access there is no guidance for staff to follow when taking records from one location to another. This is happening on many occasions and the project manager was mindful of the possible risks that staff are taking in those instances. It is therefore recommended that the agency assesses security issues and clarify procedures relating to staff moving foster carers and children files between locations.</p>			
Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			15
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			5
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			2
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			4
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			2
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	0.00	Maximum £	381.50

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

See also previous report for standards 26, 27, 28, 29.

The premises used as offices for the foster service are located on the second floor of a shared office building. The building is purpose built for commercial office occupation and agency offices are accessed either by stairs or passenger lift. The premises have been subject to recent refurbishment and decoration and have a modern, well-maintained appearance.

The accommodation provides private office space for the manager and deputy, an open plan office area for social work staff and a further separate office for the administrative staff.

There is a large conference room, which provides space for meetings and training events and a small kitchen area off the open plan office with comfortable seating.

The storage facilities for records are secure and the office has an intruder alarm.

The premises have appropriate furnishings and office equipment.

The contents of the offices are insured to provide prompt replacement of items lost or damaged.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The NCH is a Registered Charity. National and regional budgets and accounts were presented to the commission as part of the required pre-registration and inspection information.

For the Fostering Project, the Manager compiles a budget each year for the coming financial year. This year's budget was seen as part of the inspection and was found to contain forecasts for income and projected costs.

The finance officer at headquarters agrees the proposed budget and adjustments are made for depreciation etc before the regional Director reaches agreement.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There are written procedures for financial arrangements, which provide control and supervision of financial affairs and powers.

The organisation monitors the financial status of each project on a monthly basis to ensure they are working within budget.

The organisations accounts are audited annually, both regionally and nationally.

The agency publishes its charges for each of the services it provides. The details are also included in contracts for services issued to purchasers.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The regional management in consultation with the project manager, reviews fostering allowances annually. Each carer receives information about the allowance and expenses payable in their Foster Carers Handbook and it is detailed in each child's Foster Care Agreement.

Comments from foster carers showed that fees were paid on time, and that they considered the fees to adequately cover their costs. There is presently a range of fees paid due to the various schemes presently in action by the project.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The NCH Fostering Project has an established panel and membership was found to be in line with the requirements of Regulation 24 of the Fostering Service Regulations.

Initially the inspector raised some concern over the balance of 'independent' to 'employed' members of the panel with the project manager. After receiving written details about the current composition of the panel these concerns have been dispelled and it can be confirmed that the panel fully complies with Regulation 24 (2, 3).

File records for each member of the panel were inspected and found to comply with 30.3.

The panel meets quarterly. There are currently plans to increase meetings to every two months in order to meet the increased panel workload.

The panel meeting held in November 2004 was attended as part of this inspection. Observation of panel discussion of annual reviews and approvals showed that members had considerable knowledge of the entire fostering process. The Inspectors noted that the panel was thorough in their approach to approval of foster carers. The discussions confirmed that each of the members had a sound understanding of the arising issues. The chair of the panel was able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the cases discussed. All members of the panel confirmed understanding of the fostering task and the needs of children looked after.

The panel checked that all the required references and checks had been completed for prospective carers and asked pertinent questions of assessing social workers and prospective carers.

The panel benefits from the insight brought by members who have been looked after and a current foster carer.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
The project does not provide short-term breaks.		

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
The project does not have family and friends carers.		

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 22nd November to 25th November 2004 of inspection NCH South West Fostering Project and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Thank you for a copy of the draft report for the above project.

In response we can say that there are no factual inaccuracies.

The team were very pleased to receive such a positive and fair report on the project which recognises and reflects the work done by the team over the past year. They found the inspection itself very helpful. Attached is an action plan to address the recommendations contained in the report. *(Held on file at the CSCI Bristol North Office and will be made available upon reasonable request)*

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

YES

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

NO

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 24th February 2005, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of NCH South West Fostering Project confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of NCH South West Fostering Project
am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate
representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above
date(s) for the following reasons:

--	--

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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