



Champions for  
Social Care  
Improvement

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Children First Fostering Agency Ltd**

Suites 4 and 5

2nd Floor, Warren House

10 - 20 Main Road

Hockley

Essex

SS5 4QS

24th February 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**

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd.

**Tel No**

01702 208520

**Address**

Suites 4 and 5, 2nd Floor, Warren House, 10 - 20 Main Road, Hockley, Essex, SS5 4QS

**Fax No**

01702 208529

**Email Address**

children\_first@cffa.co.uk

**Registered Number of IFA**

I060000237

**Name of Registered Provider**

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd.

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

Mr Woodrow Lloyd Clachar

**Date of first registration**

2nd July 2003

**Date of latest registration certificate**

2nd July 2003

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

31.1.03

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		24th February 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		10:00 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Jacqueline Graves	107597
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		NA	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		Mr. Woody Clachar (registered manager)	

**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 National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) 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 NCSC in respect of Children First Fostering Agency Ltd. 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 NCSC 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 and proposed action plan to address findings

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.

Children First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency with limited company status.

The agency, which was established in April, 1999, aims to provide fostering placements for children and young people within the age range birth to 18 years of age.

The agency is fully committed to providing a multi-cultural service and has recruited foster carers from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The agency has specific expertise in caring for children from African and African-Caribbean backgrounds, where such things as skin care and cultural needs are a priority.

The agency assesses each child's needs against their carer's ability to meet these needs and only offer placements where an appropriate match can be made.

Long-term, short-term, bridging, emergency and parent and child placements are arranged by the agency.

Children First is centrally managed from its head office in Essex and provides local offices to support foster carers in the London and Luton areas.

At the time of the inspection, there were thirty-nine foster carers and fifty-two foster children placed.

## 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.)

All standards were inspected at this inspection and elements of each standard reviewed. Records, policies and procedures have only been sampled. At future inspections other issues may come to light when different items are sampled or different people spoken to.

The manager is well qualified and experienced and is perceived as a very 'hands-on', approachable person by carers and children. The agency aims to achieve excellence in all areas of practice and to meet, if not exceed, national minimum standards. There was evidence of staff commitment to maintaining and developing a good quality service.

Files of four foster carers and the children placed with them were examined for case tracking purposes and three families were visited. Required information was in place; where there were gaps in the information supplied by local authorities, there was evidence that the agency was trying to obtain this. Carers confirmed that the agency passes on all information it has when placing a child.

The fostering panel was observed and some panel members interviewed. It was evident that the panel works in a meticulous way to ensure they have full information on prospective foster carers. The panel are widely experienced and very professional in their role.

Agency staff were interviewed and office records sample checked. By talking to staff and examining staff records it was evident that staff are suitably qualified and experienced. Carers generally regarded the staff to be professional and effective in their support. One wrote:

*'Foster caring is the most rewarding and satisfying job in the world when it is going well. It can also be the most heartbreaking and stressful. They (their social worker) understand this and are always on hand for advice and support, make themselves available to me at all times, even nights and weekends. They have lots of experience, are fair and understand my family.'*

As part of the inspection process, Children First kindly forwarded questionnaires to placing



authority social workers, foster carers and children on the inspector's behalf. From a total response of 14 questionnaires received from placing authority social workers, 100% said they had not had to make a complaint about the agency and 100% said they considered the child safe in the placement. 79% thought the agency worked very well in partnership with the agency and 21% fairly well.

The inspector would like to thank all those who assisted with the inspection.

## **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:**

Children First Fostering Agency is not a local authority fostering service, so this is irrelevant.

## 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	
			No requirements were made	

**Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission 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.**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector**     Jacqueline Graves     **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector**     Lyn Spires     **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Locality Manager**     Gwen Buckley     **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**     \_\_\_\_\_

## 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 and recommendations 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	
1	43(1)(2) Sch.8 12(2)c	FS9	Notify the NCSC of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents.	1.5.04
2	Sch.1 20(3)(d)(i)	FS15	That written references are obtained before a person is employed and these followed-up with telephone enquiries. Positive proof of identity must be available for inspection.	1.5.04

### 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	FS1	That the children's guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate. That the guide is produced in a suitable format for younger children and, if needed, in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children.
2	FS23	It is recommended that carers attend on-going training in subjects that carers and their supervising social workers identify as useful.

\* 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	96
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• 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	NO
• 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	YES
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	24/2/04
Time of Inspection	0915
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	96

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC 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 agency has a statement of purpose, which contains all required information. The quality of written information provided to carers and placing authorities is clear and well presented. The statement of purpose is summarised in the children's guide. The complaints procedure is incorporated in this. The guide needs to include information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate.

The agency meets requirements by providing a children's guide but plans to provide a further guide, which is more suitable for younger children. The inspector agreed that the guide in its present form is more suitable for older children and/or better readers and would also recommend that, if needed, further formats be produced to meet the different needs of children.

In questionnaires sent to children over the age of eight, 92% of the response said they had received a children's guide.

The agency has developed a web site where prospective foster carers can access information and make an application on line.



## 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?	4
<p>The manager is well qualified and very experienced. Staff described him as approachable, open and supportive.</p> <p>Carers reported that the manager runs the agency in a professional way. Foster children said they feel they can contact him and will be listened to. When asked if there was anything they would like put in the report, a child responded: <i>'Yes, Woody does a lot.'</i></p> <p>The manager was observed to have a very hands-on approach, to display strong leadership and have the motivation to deliver the best possible outcomes for children placed with the agency.</p>		

### 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?	3
<p>Checks, including CRB checks and references, were undertaken by the NCSC on the registered manager and responsible individual as part of the 'fit person' process of assessment last year.</p> <p>The manager is aware of the need to update C.R.B. checks every three years.</p>		

## 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?

4

It was evident that there were clear lines of accountability between the manager, staff and carers. The agency aims to continuously improve the service it offers and to aim for excellence in all areas of its practice.

The agency provides a detailed breakdown of charges for the services it provides and for wider services such as therapy and tuition support for children out of school.

Statements of the amounts paid to foster carers are available. It is commendable practice that carers are also given a breakdown of what their allowance should cover, for example pocket money, clothing, savings for the child and so on.

The agency makes it clear that carers should 'not make financial reward their priority.' Children are given cash (or a gift via the carer) at Christmas and on their birthdays, from the agency.

A financial controller deals with all payments to staff and carers. Quarterly accounts are produced. The inspector was shown the Director's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 2003.

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

0

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.

2

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

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**

**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

The manager stated that he has a job description but this was not examined on this occasion. He does not hold a similar position in another organization.

In the event of his absence, the responsible person or another senior member of staff are able to assume responsibility.

## 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?	3
<p>All of the three foster homes visited provided healthy, nurturing environments. The homes were clean, comfortable and well furnished. Some of the children showed the inspectors their rooms; they were happy with their rooms and had personalised them.</p> <p>The agency carries out health and safety checks on the premises as part of the assessment process and subsequently each year. The inspector noticed potential safety issues at one of the premises visited and these were discussed with the manager who promptly followed this up.</p> <p>Health and safety guidance and training is provided to carers.</p>		

### 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?	3
<p>Foster carers visited were actively encouraging children to pursue hobbies and interests and to learn new things. Carers spoke of the need to enhance children's' self-esteem and confidence.</p> <p>One of the young people visited had been supplied with specialised equipment to enable them to carry out household tasks as part of their independence training.</p> <p>The agency has an equal opportunities policy which they state must be implemented throughout the organisation, and must not be a 'mere statement placed on a shelf to gather dust.'</p>		

**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**

Of the foster families visited, matching was good and steps had been taken to address any shortfalls. For example, one carer had provided an Arabic book, halal meat and had learned some Arabic words to meet the needs of a young child placed in an emergency who was a good match in all other respects apart from their birth family's language.

Other carers confirmed that they are provided with additional training, support and information to address any gaps in matching considerations. Any shortfalls are identified in files and addressed by the agency.

**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?**

**4**

It is made clear to carers through initial training, which methods of behaviour control are acceptable and which are not acceptable. The agency's Allegations and Complaints Policy, Procedures and Guidelines contains excellent advice on how to prevent allegations / complaints.

In questionnaires, 89% of carers who responded said the agency had made clear what punishments are acceptable. All placing authority social workers that responded in questionnaires said they find the agency's control practices acceptable and 100% said they considered the child to be safe in their placement.

Children described some of the punishments used when their behaviour has been a problem for other people:

*'I've been grounded.'*

*'Sent to bed early.'*

*'Sent to room.'*

*'Tidy my bedroom.'*

*'PC/PS2 taken away.'*

*'I've had my pocket money taken away from me.'*

*'No pocket money for a week.'*

*'me.'*

*'Not being able to go to Girl's Brigade.'*

Training and guidance on safe care, child protection and anti-bullying is provided. Those carers spoken to were very aware of the reasons for practising safe care and knew how to respond to a child's allegation of abuse.

The agency provides a procedure to follow should a child be absent from the foster parent's home without permission.

Information supplied by a placing authority stated that there were no past or current outstanding child protection concerns and that the agency has always responded promptly and appropriately to any allegation / incident.

<b>Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:</b>	X	%
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**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.

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
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Some carers had gone to great lengths and travelled some distance to ensure contact was facilitated, even when this caused considerable disruption. Care plans detailed contact arrangements agreed with placing authority social workers. Some unusual but positive contact arrangements were described.

Carers feed back the outcome of contact with friends / relatives and their perceived impact on the child, to the child's social worker. Supervising social workers provide support and advice for any difficulties, which may arise from contact visits.

One placing authority social worker reported being discontent with a carer's lack of commitment to supporting contact arrangements. The agency was already aware of this and was taking steps to deal with the carer concerned.

**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.

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
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Of the 13 questionnaires received from children, 100% said they had been told how they could make a complaint about how they are being looked after. Written information given to children also gives information about how to complain and how to contact the National Care Standards Commission directly. Children regard the manager of the agency to be available to talk to them.

It was noted that children had been consulted prior to reviews and their views recorded. The following questionnaire responses were received regarding consultation of children:

*Have the people who run the fostering service ever asked for your opinion about your foster carers?*

Yes 77% No 15%

*Have the people who run the fostering service ever asked you about how the service could be made better?*

Yes 15% No 77%

*Does your social worker sometimes see you on your own to ask your opinions?*

Often 46%  
Sometimes 46%  
Never 15%

**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?**

4

The agency has secured funding from placing authorities to ensure speech therapy and other specialist health services are available to children and young people.

The agency had developed an arrangement with a company providing counselling services so that if a child placed is assessed as in need of therapy, this can be set up speedily. The philosophy of the agency is to arrange therapy whenever a child needs it and not just when they are in a long-term placement, which is commendable.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, full health information is not always made available to the agency and sometimes just isn't available to the placing authority. The agency tries to obtain as much information as possible to pass to carers.

**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

The agency employs an education advisor to advocate on behalf of and support carers and children. When personal education plans have not been drawn-up by the placing authorities, the education advisor will take on this task to ensure the children's progress is not impeded.

Some carers reported using the education advisor employed by the agency to help secure places for the children and others had found school places themselves. There was evidence of carers working closely with schools to review children's progress, in one case, making arrangements for part-time attendance to help a child cope emotionally with school.

There was evidence that a broad education, other than school attendance, was encouraged and facilitated by carers. For example, by taking children to other countries to widen their understanding of the world, arranging private lessons in foreign languages, providing books and enrolling children in libraries, arranging the pursuit of hobbies such as dancing and arranging private tuition to help children catch-up to their peers in maths and English.

One carer described the local authority education department as taking a long time to find a school for a placed child.

**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 agency has devised a leaving care policy based on the Leaving Care Act 2000. The manager reports that the agency will strongly advocate against the push for young people to go into semi-independent living before they are necessarily ready.

One young person spoken to described being helped by their foster carer to acquire independent living skills, such as cooking, laundry and ironing.

It was a cause of concern that a pathway plan was not in place for this young person even though they are aged eighteen. The inspector was advised that this was because it was not clear which social services team would accept responsibility for this young person and the young person had not had an allocated social worker. The carer advised that Children First had assisted with securing health advice and treatment and other entitlements for the young person.



## 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?

2

Three staff files were sample checked during the inspection. There was evidence of enhanced CRB checks being carried out and the agency is aware of the need for these to be renewed every three years. Files contained documentary evidence of qualifications. Any gaps in employment history had been explored.

On one file, a written reference had been obtained after a person had been employed and there was no evidence that this had been followed-up with a telephone enquiry. Written references must be obtained before a person is employed and these should be followed-up with telephone enquiries. On this file also, there was no positive proof of identity, which should be kept. After the inspection, the manager advised that proof of identity was obtained and kept separately when a CRB application was made. He agreed to make this information available for inspection on staff files.

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 agency has produced guidelines for topics, which should be covered during staff supervision sessions, but the list is not exhaustive. Staff confirmed that supervision is planned and recorded.

Job profiles and contracts were evident on staff files examined. Staff and carers have a record of training.

<b>Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)</b>		
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.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	4
<p>There is a clear assessment process for carers. Form F assessments examined were of a high standard. The panel Chair commented that these are usually of a high standard and the agency will listen and respond to any advice or recommendations to further improve the process of recruiting a range of carers.</p> <p>Of a total response of 19 carers' questionnaires, 84% thought there was enough staff and 11% thought there was not enough staff in the fostering service. There was no evidence during the inspection that there were not enough staff. A comment received about the quality of staff stated:  <i>'Children First Staff have always been helpful and friendly. The link worker will give advice and guidance and support with any decisions that I need to make.'</i></p> <p>The supervising social workers are all qualified. The staff group is fairly established, with some staff working for the agency since its inception. Staff described the agency as good to work for, with encouragement to develop professionally, clear workloads, supervision and support. There is a bonus scheme to recognise and reward commitment and so encourage staff retention.</p>		

<b>Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)</b>		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>Out of hours support is available to foster carers. Those carers spoken to who have used the service felt it was invaluable. Carers also mentioned that the agency would check on them during and after stressful incidents to offer support.</p> <p>Public liability and professional indemnity insurance is provided for staff and carers.</p> <p>There is a health and safety policy for carers, children and staff.</p>		

<b>Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)</b>		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	3
<p>Initial training is based on Choosing to Foster then subsequent training is provided. Joint training is provided for carers and agency staff.</p> <p>There was evidence on staff files of induction training, probationary periods and annual appraisals, which all indicate good quality training, staff development and support. Staff spoken to were aware of recent changes in legislation, which affect their work.</p>		

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)****All staff are properly accountable and supported.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Staff are given job descriptions and access to the agency's policies and procedures. Supervision is planned and regular. Records of supervision and appraisals are kept.

Staff confirmed that they have the opportunity to attend regular staff meetings.

**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?****4**

Support for carers is detailed in the Carers' Information Booklet. Carers confirmed that 24-hours emergency contact is available and that they have at least weekly phone contact and fortnightly visits from their supervising social workers.

Assistance in dealing with relevant services such as education is provided through the education advisor employed by the agency, if required. There was evidence on files of the agency's involvement in securing medicals and other health appointments on behalf of children.

Planned respite breaks are available to foster carers each year. An annual short break is also arranged by the agency for carers and children.

The agency facilitates carer's self-help support groups, one of which the inspector was invited to attend. The carers reported finding the support from these meetings to be useful. Some carers expressed difficulties with contacting children's social workers or of children not being allocated a social worker. However, good relationships between supervising social workers and the child's social worker exist where the child's appointed social worker is well established.

The agency nominates carers who they consider to have contributed something exceptional to the service, for achievement awards. They also nominate a 'Foster Carer Of The Year.'

**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?**

4

The agency ensures that all carers are members of the Fostering Network. The inspector attended a foster carer's support group where the general opinion was that the agency treats carers in a professional manner, provides sufficient support and pays them promptly.

Independent support is offered to carers if an allegation is made against them. Records of allegations of abuse are kept and monitored. There was evidence of the agency chasing local authority child protection teams for the findings and conclusion to child protection investigations when information sharing had not occurred.

**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?**

2

Experienced, existing carers are involved in the pre-approval and induction training of prospective carers. Where two people in a household are approved as carers, both are expected to attend training.

Training on safe caring is provided for all carers. Some carers had attended carer's groups where speakers had been invited to speak, which they felt helped their professional development. Other carers described informal 'training' on a one-to-one basis with their supervising social workers when issues arose for which they required information and guidance.

It was noted on files and through discussion that some carers had not undertaken training since their initial training, although ongoing training is provided by the agency, with a programme commencing in June. It is recommended that carers attend on-going training in subjects that they and their supervising social workers identify as useful. Carers commented that they would like more ongoing courses for established carers, on subjects such as sexual abuse, behaviour management and how to deal with enuresis.

## 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

A sample of children's records was examined. Information was current and clear. All carers spoken to understood why the children they cared for were in foster care, the intended duration of the placement and the child's legal status.

It was generally agreed by carers spoken to that the agency is efficient at passing on relevant information to help children understand and come to terms with past events. Often, information from placing authorities is not forthcoming. In such cases, the agency will chase for information. Evidence of the pursuit of information was evident on files.

### 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?

4

The agency regards the confidentiality of information held on carers and children highly and upholds the Data Protection Act, 1998 regarding not divulging information to third parties.

A record of complaints and allegations was examined.

The agency has developed a new filing system of a main file and a working file for each child and for each carer. All records are stored securely.

The maximum fee recorded below is for a parent and baby placement.

**Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:**

52

**Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:**

59

**Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:**

52

**Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:**

10

**Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:**

0

**Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £**

336

**Maximum £**

520

## 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

As well as being an administrative centre for the agency, the premises are used for carer's support groups, panel meetings and for training. There is sufficient office space and secure storage areas.

As the agency is on the second floor and there is no lift, access for people using wheelchairs or with mobility problems would not be possible. However, the agency does not have any children or carers who could not access the premises at the present time.

Current employer's liability, professional indemnity, office equipment and electric office equipment insurance was seen.

## 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 financial controller advised that she deals with income tax, V.A.T. and national insurance. She described having a good relationship with the bank, which would provide overdraft facilities if a loan were needed to cover a financial emergency.

### 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

It was evident that there were clear lines of accountability between the manager, staff and carers. The agency is concerned to always improve the service it offers and to aim for excellence in all areas of its practice.

The agency provides a detailed breakdown of charges for the services it provides and for wider services such as therapy and tuition support for children out of school.

The agency makes it clear that carers should not 'make financial reward their priority.' Children are given cash (or a gift via the carer) at Christmas and on their birthdays.

A financial manager deals with all payments to staff and carers. Quarterly accounts are produced. The inspector was shown the Director's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 2003.

**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?**

4

Statements of the amounts paid to foster carers are available. It is commendable practice that carers are also given a breakdown of what their allowance should cover, for example pocket money, clothing, savings for the child and so on.

Details of expenses payable are published. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually. Carers confirmed that they are paid promptly.



## 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?

4

A fostering panel meeting was observed and the chair and vice chair interviewed. The panel scrutinised the Form F assessment, which was presented and were rigorous in asking for further information of the assessor and prospective carers. The chair and vice chair stated that the standard of Form F assessments presented to panel are invariably of a high standard.

The panel members had a broad range of expertise and include a medical specialist. One of the panel members has the experience of being placed in foster care. Another panel member is an experienced carer who has worked for a local authority.

Both the chair and vice-chair sit on other panels and find that Children First has a professional approach when following-up issues raised at panel meetings. For example, panel had identified that prospective foster carers did not fully understand all the terms used in the list of matching considerations, which they complete with an assessor; the medical advisor agreed to write a guide to assist carers.

It was the opinion of the chair that high standards in all aspects of recruiting suitable people as foster carers is maintained by the agency. For example, the panel advised the agency to obtain three satisfactory references for prospective carers instead of the two that are required and their advice was listened and responded to.

Notes were taken and records of each meeting are kept.

## 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?
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The inspector was advised that this standard is not relevant to Children First. Respite care is only provided between carers for children already being fostered.	9
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## 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?
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	9
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The inspector was advised that this standard is not relevant to Children First.

**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 24.2.04 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

1. The Inspection process

This was our second inspection and, as with the first, we found that it was conducted in a fair, courteous and professional manner.

The lead inspectors who undertook our inspection were different on each occasion. Mrs Buckley undertook the first inspection, while Mrs Graves undertook the second the second.

During the inspection, relevant issues were identified, clarification sought and responses taken into account. Where necessary, suggestions or recommendations were made.

All members of staff as well as foster carers and panel members whom the Inspectors met found her to be personable and professional and the inspection process fair.

This has made the demands of the inspection process more bearable and the Agency would like to record its gratitude to the Inspector for her sensitivity and understanding.

We undertake to act upon any recommendation and conditions contained in this report as a matter of priority.

2. The Frequency of Inspection

Whilst we have no concerns about the need for inspection of the inspection process itself, we are most concerned about the frequency of inspections.

We feel that while the regulatory function of CSCI is necessary, it should not be done in such a way and with such frequency that it becomes burdensome to agencies to the extent that it impedes the work of agencies.

The Inspection of Fostering Agencies is a long drawn out time consuming process for Agency staff and CSCI Inspectors.

It is therefore our intention to make representation to the CSCI's hierarchy on this matter.

We value the role and function of the CSCI and look forward to our continued good working relationship in future.

**Action taken by the NCSC 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 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, 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>

**Public reports**

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC 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, Mr. Woody Clachar of Children First Fostering Agency Ltd. 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**                      Mr. Woody Clachar  
**Signature**                      Provided  
**Designation**                    Director / Agency Manager  
**Date**                              11<sup>th</sup> June, 2004

**Or**

**D.3.2 I, \_\_\_\_\_ of Children First Fostering Agency Ltd. 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.