



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

NCH Devon Family Based Short Break Service

**The Old Vicarage
First Floor Offices
Vicarage Street
Barnstaple
Devon**

Lead Inspector
Romana Young

Announced Inspection
31 October - 22 November 2005 10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	NCH Devon Family Based Short Break Service
Address	The Old Vicarage First Floor Offices Vicarage Street Barnstaple Devon
Telephone number	01271 373275
Fax number	01271 322889
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	NCH South West Region
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Elizabeth Anne Reid Smith
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection First inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Family Breaks NCH Devon fostering service is an independent fostering agency providing a short term and respite foster care service to children and young people with special needs, aged 0 to 18 years, who live in Devon. The service is operated and managed by the registered charity, NCH, under contract to Devon County Council Social Services Directorate. The service began operating on 1 April 2005, when it took over responsibility for an existing respite foster care service previously contracted to another service provider. The majority of the staff and foster carers elected to transfer to the new service.

The service operates from a first floor office base, close to the town centre of Barnstaple. It employs six full-time and three part-time staff, which includes the project manager, qualified social work and nursing staff, placement support staff and administrative staff.

The service currently has 35 registered respite foster carers, all of whom live in Devon, except two, who live in the neighbouring counties of Wiltshire and Cornwall. Three foster carers are approved to provide short-term foster care also. The service is currently providing a respite care service to 74 children and young people, aged 0 to 18 years who have a range of special needs, which include complex medical needs and physical, sensory or learning difficulties, and is actively recruiting for additional foster carers to meet the needs of a further 25 children and young people.

SUMMARY

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

This service has been operating for just over six months and this is the first inspection of the service since it was registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection in March 2005. One inspector undertook this inspection over the course of eight days, between 31 October and 22 November 2005, inclusive.

The inspector undertook a tour of the fostering service office and interviewed fostering service staff there, including the registered manager, a qualified social worker, two care coordinators and administrative staff. The inspector observed a staff meeting at the fostering service office, which was attended by the acting Responsible Individual for NCH.

The inspector visited three foster homes and spoke with the foster carers there and had telephone contact with another foster carer. The inspector also spoke, over the telephone, with parents of two of the children and young people who have respite placements in two of the foster homes visited. Unsuccessful attempts were made to undertake telephone contact with parents of three other children and young people who have respite placements in these foster homes. The inspector also attended a foster panel meeting, interviewed the panel chairperson and read the minutes of the previous three foster panel meetings.

Three foster carer files, three children's files and four staff files were inspected, along with other documentation, which included the pre-inspection questionnaire and manager's self-assessment form, the statement of purpose and the children's guide, the required registers of foster carers and children placed, and the required records of people working for the fostering service, complaints, allegations and accidents.

26 placing officers' and 14 foster carers' survey questionnaires were returned and one letter from a parent was received. These responses were analysed and used to inform the judgements made in this inspection report. The young person's survey questionnaire was not used at this inspection, as it is not a suitable communication tool for the children and young people who use this service.

The inspector wishes to thank the fostering service staff, foster carers and parents for their cooperation and assistance with this inspection.

What the service does well:

Overall, there has been a generally smooth transition of the provision of the contracted respite care service, from the previous service provider, to this new service provider, although the process has not been without stress and significant adjustment for all involved.

The enthusiasm and dedication of all staff and foster carers, particularly in their drive to ensure a high quality of service for the service users, and, also, in their commitment to the service, are commendable. Foster carers are child-focussed and committed to providing a safe, caring and enjoyable experience for the children and young people whilst they are in their care.

Placing officers feel that the service successfully provides a family based environment for children and young people who require a respite care service, which allows them to engage in a range of suitable activities and social interactions that they enjoy, and which meets their individual needs. They feel that the service works well in partnership with the placing authority and that foster carers look after the children and young people very well and, also, work very well with the child's family.

Parents are very positive about the service and the quality of care their child receives. They feel that the foster carers communicate with them well and have the skills and experience to meet their child's needs. They feel that the service provided by the foster carers is safe and reliable.

Foster carers, generally, feel well supported by the service.

Staff have opportunities for continuing professional development and there is a clear management structure in place to support the work of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This is the first inspection of this service.

What they could do better:

Most placing officers (care managers) did not feel that there was anything that the service should change in its provision of care for children and young people but one commented that communication about the dates of future respite arrangements needed to be improved to ensure that suitable transport arrangements could be made.

In the placing officer survey, a few care managers commented that they had not visited the foster home, or had not had any direct contact with the foster carer. The service should ensure that placing officers (care managers) are correctly undertaking their statutory duties.

The recent successful launch event at Crealy Park in Exeter was an excellent means of publicising the work of the service and the need for more foster carers. This, with other recruitment measures, has created a swell of interest, which will require careful management. Recruitment of additional suitable carers to meet identified unmet need, and improve choice in matching, is, rightly, a high priority for the service, at this time. Close monitoring of the situation needs to continue to ensure that sufficient resources are in place to

deal with the recruitment and assessment of new carers needed to meet the demands for the service.

Recruitment procedures for foster carers need to be altered to include a check with the regulatory body for childminding and day care providers (Ofsted) to ensure that all the required information has been obtained. A requirement has been made regarding this.

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

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

There are very good systems in place to ensure that information about children and young people's health needs is obtained and shared with carers and that suitable health care provision is being provided.

EVIDENCE:

Inspection of foster carer files evidence that foster carers had undertaken first aid course specifically relating to first aid with children.

Inspection of foster care and children's files, and discussions with carers and staff, evidenced that foster carers are given specific training with regard to complex medical and health needs of children they are matched with and that their competency to manage of specific medical procedures is assessed.

Discussions with carers and responses in the foster carer survey showed that, generally, carers feel that they are provided with good information about the health needs of children placed with them, although, in a few instances, where the child's profile has been completed by a parent, information has not always been as detailed as they would have liked.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

3, 6, 8, 9 and 15

The service operates good systems to ensure that children and young people are well matched with carers, being cared for safely and their welfare safeguarded. Recruitment procedures, generally, meet the requirements to ensure that only people who are suitable to work with children and young people are recruited to the service but a check with the regulatory body for the regulation of childminders and day care providers (Ofsted) is required to ensure that all the required information about prospective foster carers and members of their households is being obtained.

EVIDENCE:

The foster homes visited were warm, homely, comfortable, well furnished and maintained to a very good standard. Bedrooms used for children's respite visits were comfortable and suitably furnished.

The carers were very positive about their role as respite carers, knowledgeable about the needs of the children they provide care for, and keen to provide a safe, home-from-home, high quality service to the children and young people using the service.

In the placing officers' questionnaire survey, care managers commented very positively on the friendliness and warmth shown by foster carers, their child-focussed attitude, and their commitment to providing the children and young

people in their care with a fun and enjoyable experience whilst they are away from home. All the care managers who responded to the questionnaire survey agreed that the foster carers look after the children very well, and in line with the placement agreement and the overall care plan for the child. All agreed that they considered the children and young people to be safe in their placements. Reasons for this included the risk assessment process undertaken to ensure the child's safety in placement, the training given to foster carers with regard to individual specific needs and the carers' understanding of the child's needs and vulnerabilities.

Parents spoken to were very happy with the service provided and said that their child was happy in their placement.

Discussions with care coordinators responsible for collating information about the child's needs and liaising with the child, their family, the care manager and foster carers, and inspection of children's and foster carers' files, evidenced the careful assessment of need, matching and placement planning processes undertaken.

Checks on foster files showed that written foster placements agreements were in place. The service is piloting a "safer care plan" template for foster carers to use to help them formulate their own safe care "family policy". It is intended that carers would update this policy at least annually as part of the foster carer review process.

Discussion with staff and foster carers, responses in the foster carer questionnaire survey and checks on staff files confirmed that staff and carers undertake training in child protection issues and procedures.

The fostering panel observed was quorate, well organised and conducted in a business like way. The panel was chaired by an independent person, experienced in chairing fostering panels and in undertaking assessments of foster carers. Material was sent out to panel members in advance and the panel members were well prepared and focussed on relevant issues.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

7, 13 and 31

Good communication and working in partnership with the child's family are strengths of the service.

EVIDENCE:

The service operates the NCH Equality and Diversity policy statement – a copy of which is included in the new foster carer handbook.

The registered manager stated that the service seeks to recruit as diverse a range of carers who can meet the special needs of the children and young people using the service, as possible, and that all carers undertake training in equality and diversity issues (particularly in relation to disability) and anti-discriminatory practice.

Children's needs in terms of ethnicity, religious observance and cultural and linguistic background are considered in the matching and placement planning processes.

Training for carers in Makaton, to improve their skills in communicating with children and young people who use non-verbal methods of communication, has been arranged. Team meeting discussion evidenced that basic Makaton training organised by the service is open to family members as well as carers. Some carers have already undergone this training or are skilled in other methods of non-verbal communication, such as BSL. The registered manager told the inspector that one of the social workers has now been given a lead role in developing, within the service, methods of communicating with children

and young people with little or no verbal communication, to try to improve inclusion and children's and young people's "voice" within the service .

Recent training on diversity had been arranged and feedback at the staff team meeting was that this had been "excellent".

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

10 and 11

Good communication between the service, parents and the child's care manager, and good placement planning processes, ensure that individual needs are identified well. Some measures to ascertain the children's and young people's views about their care are in place but the service is aware that more needs to be done to ensure that children and young people who use non-verbal methods of communication are assisted to express their views about the service they receive and it is looking at ways that this can be achieved.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people using the service are, generally, living at home with their families and how contact between them and their family, while they are at the respite placement, is to be managed, is discussed and agreed with the child's parent(s) during the placement planning process. Where a child or young person is not living at home, foster carers would be expected, as part of the placement agreement, to comply with any contact arrangements set out in the care plan produced by the placing authority.

Discussions with staff and foster carers showed that, where possible, the service tries to involve children and young people in the planning and reviewing processes. However, the service does acknowledge that consultation on their views about the service they receive, with children and young people who use non-verbal methods of communication, is a challenge the service has not yet satisfactorily tackled. One of the social workers is taking the lead on looking at ways in which the service can improve on consultation with all children and young people using the service.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

29

Generally, the system of payments to foster carers works well.

EVIDENCE:

Discussions with foster carers evidenced that the system of payments is working well.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

1, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

The management systems for the service are sound and well implemented. Staff and foster carers are well managed and supported and records are appropriately maintained.

Differing formats for providing information to, and consultation with children and young people, which meet their varying communication needs, need further development.

EVIDENCE:

The service has recently produced an informative children's guide, with text and pictures that make it accessible and attractive to young people. However, differing formats of this guide should be produced to match the communication needs of the service users. The manager of the service stated that the guide would be circulated to children and young people using the service.

The statement of purpose was reviewed and amended in October 2005, to include up-to-date information about the service in terms of numbers of foster carers and children placed and other information.

There have been no changes to the premises since registration. The fire safety officer visited the premises in April 2005. The inspector discussed his report with the registered manager and the office administrator and was informed that all matters detailed in this report had been addressed and that the NCH health and safety survey had been completed. The fire safety officer visited to premises again during the course of the inspection.

The registered manager of the service is a qualified social worker with previous experience of managing this type of service and other community and residential social care services. The service receives support from the national NCH organisation in relation to finances and financial processes, general health and safety responsibilities, IT services, HR and staff recruitment procedures and core training for staff. NCH employs a fostering advisor who assists the manager in keeping up-to-date with changes in legislation and practice issues, as well as ensuring that she has information about conferences and training opportunities for continuing professional development. The manager is also a member of the NCH fostering sub-group where representatives of all NCH fostering services meet twice yearly to keep up-to-date with current practice and quality assurance issues. The registered manager's line manager, the NCH project development manager based in the NCH regional office in Bristol, provides her with professional support and monthly one-to-one supervision and deputises in her absence.

The inspector discussed with the registered manager the systems in place for monitoring the costs and budgets of the service and service performance and quality assurance.

The service currently has the full-time equivalent of 2.3 social worker posts (1 full-time and two part-time social workers). This is not sufficient to adequately supervise and support the 35 foster carers the service has currently registered, and support the expansion in numbers of foster carers needed to meet the demand for the service, particularly over such a widespread geographical area. The service is currently employing a locum social worker on a temporary basis

to assist with the workload. However, qualified social work input in the team will be increased by over 40% when the seconded member of the staff team, who has almost completed their professional social work training, can be deployed as a qualified social worker. The service also employs two full-time, experienced and knowledgeable care coordinators who collate information about children's individual needs for the matching and placement planning processes, liaise with the children and young people using the service and their families and local authority care manager, and assist the social workers with the assessment and training of new foster carers and the review process for registered foster carers.

The manager told the inspector that all staff, except the one who has recently rejoined the team, have undergone an NCH appraisal. Evidence of the appraisal process was seen on the staff files checked. Staff confirmed to the inspector that they receive regular one-to-one supervision from the manager of the service. Supervision records were seen on the staff files checked. Regular team meetings, at which minutes are taken, are held. Staff confirmed to the inspector that they have been given an NCH staff handbook, which contains copies of policies and procedures.

Discussions with foster carers and responses to the foster carer questionnaire survey showed that, generally, carers feel well supported by the service and listened to. Discussions with staff and carers, and inspection of foster carer files, confirmed that supervising social workers are undertaking unannounced visits to foster homes as well as planned visits to support and supervise foster carers.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

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

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	3
15	1
30	3

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? NA

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS15	27	The fostering service must ensure that all the information about prospective foster carers and other members of their household and family, required under Schedule 3 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, is obtained, including the outcome of any request or application made for registration for childminding, or day care, including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval.	30/11/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS1	The fostering service should ensure that the children’s guide is produced in different formats to meet the differing communication needs of the children and young people using the service.

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