



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

NCH Foster Care

**Community Placement North East
3 River Court
Brighthouse Road
Riverside Park
Middlesbrough
TS2 1RT**

Lead Inspector
Shaun Common

Announced Inspection
9th, 10th, 11th, 12th & 18th January 2006 09:30

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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Internet address	www.csci.org.uk

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 Foster Care
Address	Community Placement North East 3 River Court Brighthouse Road Riverside Park Middlesbrough TS2 1RT
Telephone number	01642 249452
Fax number	01642 241496
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	NCH
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Keith Frederick Miller
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 10th January 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care NCH, Community Placement North East is an independent Fostering Service operated by NCH. It is based in Brighthouse Road in Riverside Park in Middlesbrough and offers task centred foster care placements to young people aged between 8 and 17 years. The Fostering Service also has offices in Hull and Sheffield that are supporting its activities in these areas. The service aims to provide placements for those young people for whom the alternative may have been secure accommodation or specialist residential provisions as well as more mainstream fostering provision. The fostering service is, in addition, working with Durham County Council Social Services Department to provide a treatment foster care scheme for that authority.

SUMMARY

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

The inspectors would like to thank the children, foster carers and staff at NCH Fostering Service for helping them to find out what the service is like. Everyone was very helpful and people spent time filling in questionnaires that helped inspectors learn about NCH. Everything that was written in this report was helped by questionnaires returned by foster carers, fostered children and placing social workers before the inspection and from information supplied by the manager. Two inspectors spent four days with the fostering service and gathered lots of information for this report by:

- Talking individually with children, foster carers and staff
- Visiting foster carers homes
- Group discussion with foster carers
- Interviews with children's social workers
- Reading children's, foster carers and staff files
- Reading records
- Sending and reading questionnaires
- Reading records of the fostering panels meetings.
- Attending a training event for foster carers

A foster carer stated 'the children appear to be at the heart of this organisation. Everyone seems totally committed to their role'.

Another stated 'NCH puts the kids first'.

A placing social worker said, when asked what the most positive thing was about NCH; 'foster carers who accept children for who they are rather than their history'.

What the service does well:

Through listening to children, talking to a lot of people and looking at records, inspectors thought that children's health and education was viewed as very important and foster carers and the fostering service work hard to make sure that children get the best help and support. Foster carers' have done most training that is needed and because of this are better able to look after foster children. The fostering service is very good at finding children foster parents who are very good at looking after them and at helping them and their foster parents live together. Inspectors noticed that NCH makes sure that children's views about their care are listened to, especially around contact with family.

Foster carers told inspectors that most of the time they get very good information about the children who are coming to live with them and a very

good information file that tells them the rules and gives advice. These help them take care of children well.

Foster carers also told inspectors when they spoke to them and through questionnaires that they sent to inspectors, that they get lots of very good support from staff at the fostering service. Inspectors noticed on records that staff visit foster carers quite a lot to make sure that all is ok or to see if they can offer any help or advice.

NCH makes sure that all the checks that are needed on foster carers and staff are done so that children are kept safe.

Overall, inspectors thought that NCH and foster carers work very hard to make sure that children get the best possible care and the best chances to do well in all areas of their lives.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection, information that is needed about people at NCH that helps keep children safe is available. Staff interviewed were all aware of how to do their job well and the manager has made sure that they try to get new staff as quickly as possible when someone leaves.

The manager has made sure that where important information needs to be passed on to children's social workers that this is done quickly. NCH has also made sure that where brothers and sisters live together that they have their own personal records and files.

What they could do better:

The fostering service must ensure that foster carers receive training in first aid and in caring for children who may have been hurt. The fostering panel, which is a group of experts that help decide if foster carers are the right sort of people and have the skills they need to look after children properly, must have a foster parent or ex-foster parent as a member, as written down in the rules. The fostering service should also make sure that checks of foster carers homes have been done and are up to date in order to help keep children safe.

The fostering service needs to make sure that all foster parents have safe caring rules for their home that tell them and fostered children how they should be looked after safely.

Children's files should contain full and up-to date information, including a Personal Education Plan that helps to make sure they are cared for well.

NCH also needs to make sure that all foster carers have had a check every three years to make sure they are the right sort of people to work with children.

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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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Children's assessed health needs are met and foster carers, with the help of the Fostering Service, actively promote children's health and wellbeing.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carer agreements were available on files and required foster carers to meet children's health needs. Training was available in relation to health matters and foster carers spoken to, demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of good health care for looked after children. Examination of files in Sheffield evidenced that first aid training for foster carers was out of date. Foster care agreements were available on all files examined and set out the health needs of children as well as who has responsibility in relation to matters requiring consent.

There was evidence that foster carers had active roles in assisting and being proactive in attaining health services for children such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). Foster carers ensured that children were registered with local health services such as GP's, dentist, opticians and that children were attending regular appointments as needed or appropriate.

Foster carers spoken to throughout the inspection process stated that on the vast majority of occasions they receive full information on a young persons health needs and where it has not been received, it is usually provided very shortly after placement with the support from the Fostering Service to attain such information. 92% of carers in questionnaires said that they get enough information; only one respondent said that insufficient information had been received from the placing authority.

Matching reports that had been carried out for long-term foster placements contained health and medical information that was appropriately detailed and comprehensive. Information regarding children also contained Looked After Annual Health Assessments.

Children who talked to inspectors during the inspection process spoke positively about their health and that their needs are well catered for. Questionnaires returned by children indicated that they go to the doctors and dentists, get healthy meals and exercise.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15 & 30

NCH Fostering Service provides very well supported and mainly well-trained foster carers who safeguard children's welfare and meet children's needs very well. Thorough assessment and approval processes exist that ensure foster carers are suitable to work with children. The fostering panel is effective, provides a quality assurance function and makes good decisions about the approval of foster carers. Recruitment procedures and processes are thorough and robust and help to protect children.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service manager is experienced, qualified and all appropriate recruitment checks have been carried out and are in place. One foster carer's response to the question, what do you think are the best things about the fostering service was, 'Keith Miller – he leads the service extremely well, makes good decisions promptly and listens to the foster carers. He also takes time out for the young people. The scheme is efficient and well run'. One young person asked that the inspectors put in the report that 'Margaret's nice' relating to the manager of the sub-office in Sheffield.

One foster carer's file contained a CRB check that was over three years old. The fostering service manager stated that a new check had been completed and sent to CRB and a response was awaited.

Fostering service staff were noted to be qualified and well trained. All appropriate checks as required have been carried out thoroughly and demonstrated a robust recruitment process that helps to keep children safe.

Children visited as part of the inspection process told inspectors that they felt safe and secure in their placements and interviews with foster carers and children, as well as information held on files, confirmed that opportunities for a period of introduction to the foster carers home for children had taken place. Foster carers homes visited by inspectors were noted to be comfortable, well decorated and furnished and conducive to the care of young people. Inspectors were made very welcome by foster carers, their families and children in placement. 100% of placing social workers through questionnaires returned, considered children to be safe in placement.

Foster carers' files indicated that the preparation to foster training provided by the Fostering Service, included training on health and safety matters. The fostering service manager advised the inspectors that this training is basic, but will be extended in the coming year to include training regarding fire safety and other matters. Two foster carers' files contained health and safety checklists. One other did not have a checklist and a further file included that a review held in July 2005 advised that the Health and Safety checklist had been completed, however the copy on file was not completed or dated.

The assessment and approval process for foster carers was noted to be thorough with detailed 'Form F' (foster carer assessment) reports being available and completed. Assessments were noted to be updated annually at foster carers' reviews and are monitored through supervision visits by staff to foster carers' homes. It was noted that panel considered all foster carer reviews, which is good practice.

Matching reports were on all files and these contained clear evidence of the work the Fostering Service had undertaken to ensure that foster carers are suitable in being able to meet the needs of young people. One foster carer stated in a questionnaire in response to the question, what do you think are the best things about this fostering service; 'The care that goes into getting the match right between foster carer/child'.

Foster carers spoke very highly of the levels of support provided by the Fostering Service. In a questionnaire asking how well do you feel supported by the fostering service, 92% of foster carers responded with 'very satisfied' with the remainder stating 'quite well'. A foster carer stated in a questionnaire 'The carers are respected, valued and well supported'. It was noted that foster carers generally receive good levels of training, including child protection, however in Sheffield it was noted that although one set of experienced carers had undertaken training with another fostering agency, this was mostly out of date and that training in general was not being carried out as expected.

Foster carers files in Middlesbrough and Sheffield did not contain evidence that training relating to children who had been abused had been undertaken. The manager in Sheffield advised the inspector that as the number of approved carers was small, it had been difficult to arrange and carry out training, as they would like. The manager informed the inspector that joint training with the Hull sub-office is being considered for the near future as well as other plans in order to deliver effective training to foster carers.

The foster carers handbook provided to all foster carers by the fostering service contains very good information. This includes information about managing behaviour and permitted and prohibited sanctions, as well as in relation to bullying and absconding. There was a noted example of where a child had run away and carers were aware of the procedure to follow and did so appropriately. There were also good examples and good information regarding behaviour management. The TFC (Treatment Foster Care) scheme was noted to be particularly well structured in this respect. Overall, inspectors felt that the positive issues outlined above contributed to the 100% response of 'very well' by placing social workers to the question, how well do you think the foster carer is looking after this child.

There are safe caring policies produced and available for foster carers own homes and families. It was noted that of four foster carers files seen, one safe caring policy had not been updated and one other was not present on file.

Systems are in place in relation to evaluation of allegations and management of these and they are monitored by the fostering service manager. Carers confirmed that generally full information is provided about the child prior to placement.

Panel constitution in Middlesbrough is appropriate, as required and quorate as per the minutes examined. Panel minutes advised of training undertaken by panel members and advice members had given regarding the provider's procedures and monitoring their effectiveness as set out in Regulation 26 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. The records available demonstrated that panel performs a quality assurance function in relation to the fostering service and is thorough in its processes.

The panel in Sheffield is jointly constituted with the local authority in that area. It was noted that there was not an individual who is, or within the last two years had been, a foster parent for a fostering service independent of the two agencies constituting the panel. The fostering service manager stated that a person meeting this criteria has very recently been recruited and will join the panel in February 2006.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 & 31

Young people's educational potential is encouraged and championed by foster carers supported by the fostering service. Diversity and equality is valued.

EVIDENCE:

Training for foster carers includes diversity and equality and is set out in the foster carers handbook. Young people with specific educational needs are offered appropriate support and guidance and in the main, relevant information is available on young people's files to support this, though a Personal Education Plan was not available on one young person's file. Another file did not contain a Personal Education Plan, however recording clearly indicated that the fostering service was striving to ensure that this was completed as soon as possible. Gender, religious and cultural needs are identified in case records and these are met by foster carers who are aware of these needs.

The foster carers' handbook is a thorough document and stresses the importance of educational achievement. Foster carers' agreements set out requirements of foster carers to promote educational achievement and arrangements for doing this are set out in the placement agreement. Supervising social workers and placing social workers stated that foster carers and the fostering agency are very good at supporting young people in educational achievement. Foster carers spoke positively about their support for young people and their achievements.

A training session for foster carers joined by inspectors demonstrated foster carers speaking about examples of where they had positively supported, advocated for and worked with young people and other professionals in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.

NCH fostering service does not provide a service of short-term breaks.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

10 & 11

Contact is facilitated and positively promoted by the fostering service. The fostering service actively consults children and other significant people.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements and the outcome of contact are recorded on files. Placing social workers said that they are kept informed by the fostering team and foster carers of any issues relating to contact. Contact arrangements are set out in placement agreement and the foster carers handbook contains good information about promoting contact.

Foster carers interviewed spoke of their role in facilitating and supporting young people in relation to contact. Arrangements are made with young people's needs as a focal/central point. Children's views are considered formally by the fostering service and acted upon. Support workers, the fostering manager and supervising social workers are very involved in helping to arrange and facilitate contact in the best interests of young people. 86% of placing social workers that responded in questionnaires felt that foster carers work very well with the child's family. The remainder responded 'Fairly Well'.

Questionnaires in files produced by NCH for young people demonstrate their views are attained. Due to the geographical spread of the service NCH provides it was determined that gaining young people's views in this way as appropriate and it is supplemented by views gained directly during visits. It was also noted that young people are consulted as part of foster carers annual reviews.

Three young people returned questionnaires and all indicated that foster carers ask their opinions and views often. One young person wrote in response to this 'all the time'.

All three young people responded 'yes' to the question, have the people who run the foster service ever asked you your opinions about foster care. Young people who spoke to inspectors also stated that foster carers and the fostering service listen to their views and opinions. 50% of foster carers stated in questionnaires that staff from the fostering service had asked their opinions about the way the service is run.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

29

The fostering service has an appropriate system for foster carer payments that enables carers to meet children’s needs well.

EVIDENCE:

Allowances/payments are recorded on files and reviewed annually as appropriate. There is a policy in place relating to this. Carers confirmed that payments are made on time. None of the foster carers with whom the inspectors had discussions raised concerns about payments. Clear information is provided in the foster carer agreement about foster carer payments.

A foster carer stated in a questionnaire ‘The fees paid to carers are realistic and reflect the role carried out’.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17, 21, 22, 23 & 24

Staff are qualified, experienced and competent. There are clear and effective strategies in operation and very good levels of support are offered to foster carers. Foster carers are, in the main, appropriately trained and generally children's case records are of a good quality, providing young people with detailed histories.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers told inspectors there has been the odd occasion when they know the service has been short of staff, however they were clear to state that this had no effect on the support and quality of service provided. Assessment of carers is thorough and use of the competencies assessment is good.

Annual foster carer review reports were noted to be completed and presented to panel as required and currently panel considers every review, which is good practice. Communication between placing social workers and supervising social workers and carers is good and confirmed by all parties. Carers clearly stated to inspectors that they are treated as part of a team and work very closely with all professionals involved with the young person in order to promote the best outcomes. This 'team ethic' and approach was very strongly discernible in relation to the TFC scheme.

There is a range of training and development for carers, which they are actively involved in. There are self help groups arranged, supervision is regular (at least monthly) and carers are visited every two weeks. There are monthly or more frequent progress meetings, TFC being weekly due to the nature of the project. Good information about health and education services and support for carers to deal with these was noted to have been provided by NCH. Respite care is provided as appropriate and required and foster carers confirmed this. Foster carers told inspectors that out of hours support/advice was on the whole very good. Foster carers told inspectors that out of hours are not just reactive, but proactive in the sense that staff on call will ring carers just for a friendly chat and to ask how things are. The role of the supervising social worker is made clear to foster carers and children and there is a good understanding of this role confirmed by interviews. Eleven out of thirteen foster carers responded 'yes' in questionnaires regarding whether the fostering service staff are good at letting them know about things concerning their foster children. One foster carer wrote 'excellent'. The two remaining stated that most information comes from the placing social worker or school. 100% of placing social workers that returned questionnaires felt that they are notified about all significant events by the fostering service.

Records in place on files demonstrated that supervision between foster carers and supervising social workers is regular and of good quality. This was confirmed through interviews. There are good foster care agreements in place and there are nominated supervising social workers for foster carers.

Complaints information provided by the fostering service was noted to be clear, available and known. Children's files examined generally contained good and up to date information. One file contained a care plan provided by the placing authority that was dated pre-placement. This did not set out the current identified needs and purpose of the placement. The fostering service manager stated that this information had been requested from the placing authority.

Staff files demonstrate that the fostering service has adequate staffing, who are well trained, experienced and qualified. One foster carer stated in a questionnaire in response to whether you think staff do a good job; 'I think they do a first class job. I have observed a high degree of professionalism and an impressive level of commitment. They do not regard it as a 9-5 job'.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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	X
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	4
22	3
23	2
24	2
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	9,12, 23	17	The fostering service must ensure that foster cares receive appropriate training in first aid and in caring for children who have been abused.	01/06/06
2.	30	26	The fostering panel must have a foster parent member as set out in Regulation 26(5)(c)(ii)	28/02/06

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.	FS6	The fostering service should ensure that evidence of appropriate health and safety checks of foster carers homes are in place and up to date.
2.	FS9	Each foster carer should have in place an up to date and relevant safe caring policy.
3.	FS13FS24	Children's files should contain full and up-to-date LAC documentation, including a Personal Education Plan.
4.	FS15	The fostering service should ensure that CRB disclosures are renewed every three years.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Tees Valley Area Office

Advance

St. Mark's Court

Teesdale

Stockton-on-Tees

TS17 6QX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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