



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Acorn Fostering Services Limited

**ASRA Conference Centre
80 Burleys Way
Leicester
LE1 3BD**

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection
2nd May 2006 09:00

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
Further copies from	0870 240 7535 (telephone order line)
Copyright	This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI
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

This report is a public document. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the prior permission of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Acorn Fostering Services Limited

Address ASRA Conference Centre
80 Burleys Way
Leicester
LE1 3BD

Telephone number 0116 251 3550

Fax number 0116 251 3551

Email address info@acornfostering.com

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Acorn Fostering Services Limited

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Vacant

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. No additional conditions of registration apply.

Date of last inspection 23rd May 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Acorn Fostering Agency is an Independent Fostering Agency, registered in July 2004. The Agency premises are situated in the middle of Leicester. Currently the Registered Provider is also Acting as Manager for the Agency.

Supervising social work support is carried out by one part time social worker. Independent Social Work Assessors are employed to carry out Form F Assessments and additional supervising social work support where necessary. Acorn Fostering Agency offers a range of placements including emergency, short term, long term, respite and parent and child. Charges for placements range from £695 per week to £1126 per week depending on the age of the child and the category of placement commissioned.

At the time of the Inspection the Agency had recruited sixteen carers and were providing placements for five children and young people.

SUMMARY

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

Prior to this Inspection a range of pre Inspection documentation submitted by Acorn Fostering was fully assessed by the Inspector. During the Inspection year the Agency has received two additional visits. Outcomes from the documentation and visits, in addition to the following fieldwork Inspection have informed this report.

For the purpose of this Inspection two children and their foster carers were tracked through the close inspection of case files, home visits, and interviews and discussions with the Supervising Social Worker, Placing Social Workers where possible, and the Acting Manager. In addition to this other children's and carer case files were looked at.

Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook and other documents were made available and referred to throughout the Inspection.

Since a very limited number of questionnaires were returned, including only one from five children placed (two were not old enough to respond) these could not be considered representative, however they have been consulted and inform some of the findings.

In addition to the above, Inspectors attended the Agency's Fostering Panel, and held a group discussion with Panel members.

What the service does well:

The Agency's Fostering Panel continues to provide an important quality assurance role for the work of the Acorn Fostering. The membership of the Panel is representative of Leicester's community. The Fostering Panel Chair is experienced, child centred and knowledgeable about the fostering task. The Panel members also have good and relevant child-care experience and work well as a team.

Some good policy and procedure documents, and recording tools have been developed.

One child visited said he was very happy living with his foster family. The carers were providing a good family experience for him.

What has improved since the last inspection?

There is now a clear expectation that carers will attend for key training sessions and that such training is not optional. This expectation is made clear within the Carers Agreement and should assist in the provision of good placements.

The Agency when recruiting new carers has introduced systems to ensure at an early stage, that potential applicants are clear about the nature of the fostering task, and the placements they will be asked to provide. It is anticipated that this will improve the quality of placements provided to children, and reduce the risk of placement break down.

What they could do better:

The Agency is still not providing written evidence to indicate and account for the matching of children to individual carers and placements. Poor matching has contributed to placement breakdown. Evidence of full matching considerations, including that of children's racial cultural and religious needs should be evidenced on file in order to improve placement stability.

Although the Agency now utilises a tool at time of referral to assess the level of risk presented by children who have behaviours and needs that might impact on their welfare and the placement, there are no action plans in place where high levels of risk, or challenging behaviours have been identified. Action plans would advise carers on how to respond appropriately and consistently in high-risk situations.

The Agency is currently understaffed. If the current number of placements increases, additional Supervising Social Work support should be made available to ensure placements for children are safe and supported.

The Acting Manager has monitoring systems in place, and should forward review reports to the CSCI on a quarterly basis.

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

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Fostering Agency and Carers promote the good Health of children in placement.

EVIDENCE:

Carers visited demonstrated a good awareness of children's Health needs. Recording was good, both on daily logs and in monthly summaries. A separate log was observed to be in use for the recording of the administration of Medication. Carers visited were supporting young people to attend for therapy and appointments with specialist Health Services.

One child told the Inspector that he enjoyed the homemade meals his foster carers cooked for him, especially salad, stew and dumplings. He also walked the dogs regularly with his Foster Carers.

The Acting Manager informed the Inspectors that he was in the process of introducing a new Health Passport, and there was evidence available to support this. The Foster Carer's Handbook and Carer's Resource pack provide information and advice about health, illness, infectious diseases, diet, 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

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency is not providing evidence that placements are appropriately matched and safe, and this has impacted on the risk of placement breakdown.

EVIDENCE:

Foster homes visited provided an appropriate safe environment and carers were clear about the principles of Safe Care and Child Protection. They said that good training was provided. A Health and Safety checklist is completed at the time of assessment only, and any change of situation confirmed at time of review. The checklists were not always in evidence on carer files. There was also a lack of Safe Care policies on file. The Agency should ensure that all Carer files include Health and Safety checklists, Fire Plans and Safe Care Policies and that these are appropriately reviewed and updated for the purpose of providing a healthy and safe placement for each child.

Inspectors were concerned that on the two files tracked there was no information to evidence how the children and young people had been matched to the carers they were placed with. The lack of a written matching process

had been identified as a shortfall on the occasion of last year's Inspection. One of the placements tracked was an appropriate match and the child had settled well with the family. However with regard to the other placement, significant matching shortfalls had not been identified or addressed, and there was therefore no evidence that poor matching did not contribute to the two subsequent placement breakdowns within the Agency.

The Fostering Panel plays an active monitoring and advisory role with regard to the business of the Agency, including the provision of feedback to the Agency Decision Maker about assessments and reviews. Inspectors observed the Chair discuss with Panel Members whether to proceed with an application, where the applicants were waiting, and where there were significant gaps with regard to information in the Form F Assessment. The Panel successfully worked through these gaps with the applicants, however this took additional time. They represented their concerns to the Agency Decision Maker later. The Agency Decision Maker was observed to work well with the Fostering Panel.

The personnel file of one Panel Member was looked at and although an appropriate Criminal Record Bureau clearance was in place, no other checks/references had been obtained. Full recruitment checks as detailed in the Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations must be sought with regard to all people working for the Agency.

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, Standard 31 not Inspected.

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The education of children in placement is well supported by carers, but the Agency has not evidenced how shortfalls are addressed when providing placements for children who have racial, cultural and religious needs.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 31 was not Inspected since the Agency currently only provides short term breaks as respite facility for carers.

The Agency has a good representative group of carers available to meet the religious and cultural needs of some children and young people. Carers have also been recruited who have good experience and knowledge of work with children with Special Needs. Some of these carers however will need to gain experience in looking after children who have additional behavioural needs.

One young person tracked had been poorly matched in terms of his racial, cultural and religious needs in two placements provided by the Agency. Inspectors were concerned with regard to some of the features of the first placement where a young person was placed with carers who clearly would not provide a culturally appropriate diet. Inspectors shared concerns with regard to this with the Acting Manager. Within the second placement, the Inspectors

recognised that the carers had made a concerted effort to facilitate some of the cultural and religious shortfalls by providing an appropriate diet and facilitating visits to the mosque, and had additionally managed a challenging placement well.

Inspectors were impressed with the commitment of carers visited to promote the education of the children placed with them. Although both placements required some sort of specialist educational programmes, carers fully supported these. One set of carers encouraged reading each evening and also read stories to the child. The child told the Inspector that the family played games with him to help him 'learn and remember things'. One young person with complex learning and behavioural needs had completed a short-term GCSE, and another young person embarking on this course. Carers were seen in all instances to advocate well for children at schools, where there appeared to be little understanding of the experience of Looked After Children.

One school placement was at risk of exclusion because the young person regularly arrived late for school. This was neither the child's nor the carer's fault. The taxi provided by the child's Local Authority persistently arrived late to pick him up. The carer had tried to address this with the Placing Social Worker. Inspectors advised the Acting Manager on how to positively advocate on behalf of the young person in responding to this situation, and to provide evidence of this on file.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency and Carers supports family contact and generally consults well with children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

Carers tracked and visited were seen to actively support contact with families, and to know how to deal with the impact of difficult contact arrangements. In one situation, family relationships had improved considerably since the placement had commenced and had positively benefited the child. The child said he although liked living with his carer very much, he also and liked 'seeing his mum' who lived near. The Agency was reminded again that carers should not be left to negotiate contact arrangements with children's families, unless this has been fully planned and agreed between the Agency, Placing Social Worker and Carers and with risk Assessments drawn up where necessary.

At the time of the Inspection there were five children placed, two of these were young children, placed very recently. It was evident from the two files looked at, that Carers and Placing Social Workers routinely consulted children and that children were encouraged to attend meetings about themselves. The Agency has designed a new consultation form for children to complete at reviews, and is advised to also evidence consultation with Carer's birth children.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency operates a reliable payment system to carers and provides good written financial information to carers.

EVIDENCE:

Carer's have a clear understanding about use of payments, and have been provided with a very good document 'Fostering Allowances explained.' Carer's reported prompt receipt of payments. Carer allowances range from between £300-£500 per week.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24

Quality in this outcome area is **adequate**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency is currently understaffed, and the Management role unclear, and this could impact on support of placements, however contingencies are in place to address this.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency has in place a satisfactory Statement of Purpose but this does not reflect the current Staffing situation. The Acting Manager confirmed that this would be updated following a new member of staff taking up post next month.

There are currently sixteen approved carer families, and the Agency is continuing to recruit carers. The Acting Manager, also a Director of Acorn Fostering, has been acting as Manager and performing the full range of fostering management and support tasks, since the last Registered Manager resigned nine months ago. There is no clear management structure. One part time Supervising Social Worker post provides supervision and support to those carers who have placements. A current student placement also performs some support tasks. There is also a full time administrative worker.

It was the Inspectors' view that there were insufficient staff to sustain any more than the current number of placements. The Acting Manager informed the Inspectors that he has appointed a new full time permanent Social Worker with significant experience of fostering and child care-work, who will take up a senior post at the beginning of July. The Inspector has confirmed this position with the Social Worker, who is currently providing some Carer training for the Agency. The Acting Manager stated when asked, that he has contingencies in place in the meantime to respond to any increase in placement demand, to use Independent Social Workers.

The Acting Manager has requested an application form to be registered as the Registered Manager for the Agency.

Since the Acting Manager provides the full time out of hours Carer support system himself, he has been advised that he should review this as the Agency grows and more members of staff are appointed. The Acting Manager was asked to supply Inspectors with a financial reference from his Accountants with regard to the Acorn Fostering Services Ltd, and this was provided during the Inspection.

Carers expressed satisfaction generally about the level and nature of support they receive from the Agency, and spoke positively about training attended including the three stage Skills to Foster training. Regular support meetings are available, and there is now a stated expectation that most support groups and training will be attended. Regular supervision and support visits for Carers are well recorded. Carers visited confirmed good working relationships with both the Supervising Social Worker and with Placing Social Workers.

Records and files were generally well maintained and easily accessible. Inspectors observed during visits instances where Carers were in possession of

some important documents and correspondence, which were not on the children's files, including e.g. Education Plans or details about Contact arrangements. There were also two instances where there were no signatures for Medical Consent. It was acknowledged that although the Agency was developing Policies and Procedures (including a Policy on Recording) the impact of the staffing situation was that these could not be supported in practice.

The Acting Manager confirmed that he monitors the activity of the Agency on a regular basis, and has been advised that monitoring reports should be forwarded to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

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	2
8	1
9	2
15	2
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	3
31	X

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	X
4	X
5	X
16	2
17	2
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	3
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

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	FS15	Full recruitment checks must be sought with regard to all people working for the Agency including Fostering Panel members.
2	FS4	The Acting Manager should forward Agency monitoring reports to the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
3	FS7FS8	The Agency should give clear evidence how children have been carefully matched to carers at time of placement, giving full consideration of racial, cultural and religious needs, and identifying where additional support is needed to compensate for gaps in the match.

4	FS9FS6	The Agency should ensure that all Carer files include Health and Safety checklists, Fire Plans and Safe Care Policies and that these are appropriately reviewed and updated for the purpose of providing a healthy and safe placement for each child.
---	--------	---

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

© This report is copyright Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and may only be used in its entirety. Extracts may not be used or reproduced without the express permission of CSCI