

# inspection report

## Fostering Services

### **Foster Care Associates - East Anglia**

Sorrell House, Claydon Business Park

Gipping Road

Great Blakenham

Ipswich

Suffolk

IP6 0NL

21 July 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)**

NO

**Name of Agency**

Foster Care Associates - East Anglia

**Tel No**

01527 556480

**Address**

Sorrell House, Claydon Business Park, Gipping Road,  
Great Blakenham, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP6 0NL

**Fax No**

01527 556490

**Email Address**

Eleanor.vanner@thefca.co.uk

**Registered Number of IFA**

**Name of Registered Provider**

Foster Care Associates Ltd

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

N/A

**Date of first registration**

**Date of latest registration certificate**

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

NO

**Date of last inspection**

00/00/00

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		21 July 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		19.30	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Bridget Forrest	075526
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	David Welch	
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		N/A	
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>		N/A	
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>		N/A	

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## INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

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

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

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

The report will show the following:

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

Foster Care Associates is a nationwide fostering Agency with over 40 offices in the country. The Prospectus states that *"It was founded in 1994 by a group of Midland Foster Carers and Social Workers who knew that by working closely in partnership, with readily available support, they could offer positive experiences to a whole range of children"*.

Since then, the Agency has grown and developed and there have been some changes in area boundaries and arrangements. The Commission for Social Care Inspection had received an Application for registration in respect of a new East Anglia branch of Foster Care Associates, intended to provide a service in the Norfolk and Suffolk areas. A main office base was being developed in new premises in Claydon near Ipswich, and this was linked with a smaller 'sub' office base, already operating in Long Stratton Norfolk, under a recently formed East Midlands region of Foster Care Associates.

At the time of writing this Report, the Application for registration of the new East Anglia region was being actively processed by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. As part of that registration process, the office at Long Stratton was inspected, as was the developing service at Claydon, which, once registered, will become the main branch office for the East Anglia region.

The arrangements provided foster care for children referred for emergency, assessment, bridging, short and long term placements. At the time of the inspection, a total of twenty-six approved Foster Carer households based in Norfolk and Suffolk were providing foster care to a total of twenty-four placements.

## 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.)

This report was the first by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in respect of the East Anglia branch of Foster Care Associates,. The inspection was undertaken as part of the requirement to establish fitness of the Agency for registration.

The service was inspected against thirty of the thirty-two National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. Very positively, the Agency was assessed as achieving compliance (scoring 3) against a total of twenty-three Standards, and was commended (scoring 4) in respect of a further four Standards.

### Statement of Purpose (Standard 1):

The Agency had a corporate Statement of Purpose which had been updated. In addition, a more local Statement of Purpose had been compiled, to reflect the work of the offices based in Claydon and Long Stratton. Information for children being fostered had been produced in user-friendly formats which both younger children, and young persons could relate to. This included ready access to facts that children experiencing being fostered needed to know.

### Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service (Standards 2 & 3):

Both Standards were assessed. The Agency was well established nationally with clear lines of management responsibility and accountability. This was mirrored in the local arrangements for the East Anglia region. A requirement was made in respect of Standard 3, that all references for employees would be followed up by telephone, to establish their absolute authenticity.

### Management of the Fostering Service (Standards 4 & 5):

Both Standards were assessed as being met. The activities and performance of the Agency was being monitored and controlled. Staff working for the Agency had Job Descriptions which fitted with their roles and responsibilities. There was very positive feedback from persons who completed Questionnaires about the effective way in which the Agency was being managed and run.

### Securing and Promoting Welfare (Standards 6 – 14):

All 9 Standards in this Section were assessed. The Agency had sound practices for recruiting Foster Carers and arrangements for their ongoing support, supervision, and review. A Placements Manager took responsibility for gathering information about possible new referrals with regard to finding the best 'match'. A requirement was made for the Agency to ensure that terms of approval were not overlooked, and that any variations to approvals were routinely referred back to Fostering Panel. Foster Carers were provided with a wealth of information and training about protecting children from all forms of abuse. The Agency was commended for its positive approach and involvement in contact between fostered children and their families, as well as for having an inclusive approach to involving fostered children and the Agency. Dedicated staff were employed to provide activities out of school term time. Health care needs were understood and provided for, and a recent development was the introduction of a Health Passport for all children being fostered. A



commendation was given to the way in which the Agency supported children with their educational requirements, including securing placements, working with colleagues in Education, and ensuring that Foster Carers were involved in parents evenings and other school events. With regard to young persons who were reaching adult-hood, the Agency recognised the potential to develop this part of the service further. There were guidelines for Foster Carers about how to support young persons who would be moving on, in practical and emotional ways.

### **Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15 – 23):**

Each of the 9 Standards in this Section were assessed. A requirement was made for proof of identity of staff to be checked and retained at the Agency's offices. The division of tasks between the two offices in the East Anglia region was understood. Although the Claydon office was not yet fully operational, the model for the two offices to work together made the lines of responsibility and accountability clear, with Claydon to have the primary role. Management staff were clear about their responsibilities. Feedback from persons who completed Questionnaires was very positive in terms of how people felt well supported, 24 hours of the day, seven days of the week. There was a rigorous assessment process for potential Foster Carers based on the BAAF Form F, and assessments were complex, involving a wide range of activity, interviews, and checking and verifying of credentials and information, as well as potential Foster Carers being prepared to attend Core Training as part of that assessment process. The Agency was able to produce Certificates of Insurance, as well as policies that demonstrated sound, fair and competent ways of working. The Agency was promoting training for its own staff and for Foster Carers, including NVQ at Level 3. Staff were supervised and supported, and annually appraised. There were regular team meetings and these were minuted. Foster Carers had opportunities to attend Support Meetings on a regular basis, to share ideas, difficulties, and to meet with Agency staff. Responses to Questionnaires confirmed that Foster Carers were very satisfied with the support given by the Agency - in terms of worker support, in terms of policies and procedures, and in terms of a 24 hour a day service which included call out visits to their homes. The Agency was commended for its strategy and commitment to working with and supporting Foster Carers across the region. The Agency expected that Foster Carers would receive training and that training undertaken some time ago, would be reviewed. A recommendation was made that where there were two Foster Carers sharing the fostering task jointly, both should attend training.

### **Records (Standards 24 – 26):**

All 3 Standards in this Section were assessed and found to be met. Records examined during the course of the inspection were well maintained, kept confidentially, and clear and straightforward to follow. A recommendation was made for Foster Carers training to include basic report writing skills, as not all Foster Carers were confident in that respect. Also for Foster Carers to be provided with information about what to do with records and information, once a child was no longer placed with them. Although the two offices were different in location, layout and design, both provided accommodation suited to purpose. The Claydon office, newly developed and more 'open plan' provided child friendly spaces and a warmer and more conducive atmosphere, whereas the Long Stratton premises were a little more austere.

### **Financial Requirements (Standards 27 – 29):**

All three Standards were assessed and found to be met. There was a separate business side to the Agency, directed by a central finance section. This part of the Agency dealt with payroll tasks, and systems. Foster Carers unanimously reported being paid on time, and

that payments they received were correct.

**Fostering Panels (Standard 30):**

This Standard was not assessed. Until the East Anglia branch of the Agency is registered by the Commission for Social Care Inspection, no Fostering Panel will be set up or operational.

**Short Term Breaks (Standard 31):**

This Standard was assessed and found to be met. The Agency had a policy for providing three weeks of respite care to each foster carer household, each year. One couple who had worked for the Agency for some time, had taken on the role of Respite Carers, and respite care was available on a timetabled basis.

**Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32):**

This Standard was not assessed as it did not apply.

## **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:**

N/A

## 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	
			N/A	

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

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

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

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
None		
<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>		

<b>Lead Inspector</b>	<b>Bridget Forrest</b>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Second Inspector</b>	<b>David Welch</b>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Locality Manager</b>	<b>Jayne Stevens</b>	<b>Signature</b>	_____
<b>Date</b>	_____		

## STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

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

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	5,20 & Schedule 1	FS15FS3	The Agency must verify by telephone, all references received, to establish absolute authenticity.	31.10.04
2	26	FS8	The Agency must ensure that in every situation where a proposed placement with Foster Carers would be outside of those Foster Carers existing terms and conditions of approval, this is firstly referred to the Fostering Panel and a record of that decision is maintained.	31.10.04
3	Schedule 1	FS15	The Agency must ensure that all elements of Schedule 1 of the Regulations are met and that evidence is retained at the Agency with regard to proof of identity, and proof of qualification. This is required in respect of all personnel, including those employed to work at the Agency, Foster Carers, and Fostering Panel members.	31.10.04

### 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
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1	FS23	It was recommended that where two adults in one household are approved as joint Foster Carers, both successfully complete all relevant training in respect of the fostering role.
2	FS24	It was recommended that the Agency provided Foster Carers with training and support in respect of their duties and responsibilities to write and make regular recordings pertaining to the fostered children in their care.
3	FS25	It was recommended that the Agency's guidelines for Foster Carers about keeping records and confidentiality were expanded to give clear guidance about what happens to written information, once a fostered child leaves the placement.

\* 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	8
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	NO
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	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	NO
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	21/07/04
Time of Inspection	19.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	52



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

The scale ranges from:

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

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

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

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

## Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

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

### Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

There was a Corporate Statement of Purpose and Prospectus, which had recently been updated. These documents provided the full range of information required to meet the requirements of Standard 1, and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

In addition to these documents, the local Agency had produced an Appendix to this information, which provided details of the East Anglia management structure; facts and figures about numbers of foster carers and placements; and how this branch of the Agency recruited and supported Foster Carers and children in placement with them.

In terms of information for fostered children, the Agency had developed a File of Facts – a colourful guide designed for children aged 8 plus, which welcomed children to the Agency, and included information about what they could expect in terms of their rights and responsibilities, health, education, contact, bullying, child protection, as well as giving information about how they would be supported with pocket money and clothing, about how to make a complaint, and information about keeping safe.

For younger children, the Agency had developed a separate Guide for children and young people, which included a short story “A teddy bear goes into care”, illustrating how a child had to leave the family home to live in a foster home. This Guide included illustrations, and provided answers to simple questions, as well as giving reassurances that children living in foster care would be looked after and supported.

These documents were routinely provided to fostered children within the first four weeks of placement. The Inspectors acknowledged that it was not always appropriate for the full range of information to be given on day one, and that children needed a chance to settle in and adjust, and have things explained to them at the most appropriate time in this initial period.

## Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

**Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)**

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

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

Foster Care Associates is a national independent fostering agency, registered as a private limited company with a Board of Directors.

The Statement of Purpose provided as part of the Application for Registration included the status and constitution of the company, and the management structure. The Chief Executive of the organisation had been registered as the Responsible Individual by the former regulatory body (National Care Standards Commission).

The Inspector established that each of the two offices based in the East Anglia Region had a Team Manager, responsible for the day to day management and support arrangements, with over-arching direction and management support provided by one of Foster Care Associates Directors, Eleanor Vanner, who was based at the Claydon site.

The inspection clarified that all staff working within the two Agency offices were appropriately managed and supervised. Both Team Managers had relevant Social Work Qualifications, as did the Supervising Social Workers employed by the Agency to directly support the Foster Carers and children placed.

The Director and Team Manager for the Claydon office were both enrolled to do a P.G.C. in Management, followed by a Diploma and Degree. They had enrolled at Suffolk College (Ipswich) and were due to start in September 2004, and their aim was to have attained this Degree by 2007. The Inspectors felt this demonstrated a very real commitment by the Agency, and also by those members of staff to continuing management and development of the Agency.

At all levels within the organisation, there were Manager's meetings, both locally and nationally. Staff employed by the Agency were actively encouraged to contribute towards the continuing development of the Agency and its policy and practice.

**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?****2**

The Human Resources Department of Foster Care Associates took responsibility for ensuring that the Agency complied with all necessary employment regulations. This included ensuring that Criminal Records Bureau disclosures, references and other checks were taken up and regularly updated for all employed staff. From a sample of Agency staff recruitment files, evidence was provided in this respect.

During an examination of personnel files, the Inspectors noted that written references received were not routinely being subsequently verified by telephone, to establish absolute authenticity. This was brought to the attention of the Director, and the Office manager, who confirmed that this would be addressed in all future appointments. A requirement was made in that respect. Since the inspection, the Agency has confirmed that "*procedures have been revised to include the need for verification of references, and this is undertaken by the office*

*Manager”.*

## Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

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

### Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

3

There were many levels within the Organisation with responsibility for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service, and ensuring quality performance. These in terms of supervision and support to Agency staff and Foster Carers at a local level, to the role and function of the Quality Assurance section of Foster Care Associates, whose role is to ensure the Agency is complying with Regulations, Standards, and reviewing and updating policy and procedures. This section of the Agency received statistical information about the Agency's activities and undertook the lead monitoring function.

Staff interviewed during the course of this inspection were clear about lines of management responsibility and accountability.

The Suffolk area of the Commission for Social Care Inspection had been kept advised of matters of notification, including two unrelated issues which resulted in child protection referrals in respect of two Foster Carer households to which the statistics below refer.

Responses from five Placing Authorities who completed a Questionnaire confirmed that the Agency notified them about all significant events affecting the child.

#### Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI 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.

2

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

2

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

0

#### Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

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

The staff working in the East Anglia region were provided with written Job Descriptions which defined their spans of control, their areas of responsibility and accountability, as well as specific tasks that fell within their remit.

The Inspectors asked about arrangements for management cover 'out of hours' and information was provided in that regard. Feedback from Agency staff interviewed, from visits to Foster Carers, and from responses to Placing Authority Questionnaires, confirmed that the service was being well managed, and effectively run.

**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**

Foster Care Associates working practices, from recruitment and assessment through to supervision and annual reviewed, ensured that the arrangements in Foster Carer households were safe, healthy, and nurturing.

The training which prospective Foster Carers had to undertake as part of their initial assessment process, included child protection, and safe caring, and the Agency had produced policies and procedures in the Foster Carers Handbook in respect of missing children, bullying, and managing behaviour. As part of the initial assessment a health and safety audit was carried out at the Foster Carers home, which included identifying any risks and actions to be taken in that regard. When there were pets in the household, a questionnaire was completed in that regard. These assessments were revisited as part of the annual review.

After approval, there were, at minimum, monthly visits by Supervising Social Workers, to the Foster Carers home.

Risk assessments were also undertaken in respect of Activities arranged by the Agency, to support children during holiday periods.

During this inspection, a total of seven households were visited, and the Inspectors were invited into these homes, including into bedrooms occupied by fostered children. Whilst this accommodation varied in type, style, presentation and facilities, there were no specific concerns about health or safety aspects from any of those visits undertaken. In one situation, the Inspector noted that window restrictors had been fitted to a bedroom above ground floor level. In another situation, an alarm had been fitted to a foster child's bedroom door – and the reasons for this were explained to the Inspector who was satisfied with the

thinking and agreements reached by interested parties in this regard. In another household, a health and safety assessment had been carried out in respect of the garden pond.

**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**

The Prospectus included the statement that *“Each Foster Care Agency has a Placement Manager who will take full details of your requirements and if possible provide an appropriate match ... and select the most suitable foster carers to meet the needs of the child...”*

Foster Care Associates had produced a number of policy documents that reflected the commitment to providing appropriate placements for children, taking into account issues of race, culture, religion, language, disability, gender and sexuality. The Foster Carers Handbook contained a section dealing with placement policy in relation to meeting the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic needs of children and young people. This included a Statement *“FCA believes that the assessed needs of a child/young person should be paramount in all placement decisions. The needs of a child/young person in relation to racial origin, culture, religion and language will be thoroughly detailed and fully taken into account by FCA when receiving placement requests from local authorities. FCA’s response will always be to try and identify a suitable match in terms of a foster family whose racial and cultural origin, religion and language is the same as that of the child/young person or where as many of these placement considerations as possible can be met”*.

This inspection established that a diverse range of Foster Carers had been approved to provide foster care within a range of different racial and ethnic origins and cultures. Consideration was also given to what would be available in terms of local appropriate community resources to meet children’s needs, when the matching process was being considered.

Training for Foster Carers, both during the assessment and post approval stages, included input in relation to diversity, promoting equality, and helping children and young people combat discrimination.

**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?****2**

The Agency employed a Placements Manager who took up post five months ago. Her role was primarily an administrative one, in collating the initial information from referrals received into a 'Placement Request Profile', and passing this information onto a Supervising Social Worker, to consider what would be the best 'match'. The Placements Manager would look at the availability of Foster Carers in terms of whether or not they had a vacancy; in terms of their approval range; in terms of the type and length of placement; and in terms of ethnic origin. She told the Inspectors that the main focus of this part of the Agency's activity would, following registration, be focused from the main office, in Claydon.

In the event that a referral could not be suitably matched, the Inspectors were told that no placement would be made.

With regard to ensuring that Foster Carers received placements only within the terms of their approval, the Inspectors were told by Supervising Social Workers that, if a situation arose where it was felt that Foster Carers would be a suitable match for a particular referral but their approval did not extend to say, the age range or gender of the referred child, then the Supervising Social Worker would make an approach to the Panel Chair, with a view to seeking agreement to placement. This would then be subsequently referred to Panel for approval and ongoing review. The Inspectors noted that in some cases, files examined did not provide evidence of the process described above. A requirement was made in that regard. Since the inspection the Agency has confirmed that *"Consideration is being given to wider age range approvals in the first instance, with an emphasis to be placed on specific matching considerations. In emergency situations, the Foster Panel will be consulted at the first available opportunity following agreement by the Fostering Panel Chair and Agency decision-maker. A record will be kept on the file of the Foster Carers"*.

There was a section in the Foster Carers Handbook dealing with Referral, Matching, and Placements Process.

The Placements Managers met approximately quarterly, to discuss practice issues associated with their roles and responsibilities. This forum was also used to identify any training or self-development issues.



**Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)**

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

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

The Foster Carers Handbook outlined Core Competencies for Foster Carers. These included *“the promotion of healthy emotional, physical and sexual development, as well as health and emotional achievement”*.

Each Foster Carer was provided with a detailed Child Protection policy and procedures, as part of the Foster Carers Handbook. Training on child protection was provided to every potential Foster Carer, mandatorily as part of the preparation work during the assessment process, and also in subsequent years, as part of the Agency’s annual training programme. There was a clear expectation that Foster Carers would continue to attend child protection training after approval, to ensure they were updated on policy, practice and developments.

Interviews with Foster Carers during this inspection confirmed they were knowledgeable about child protection, and they were clear about who they needed to report to, in the event of a concern or a disclosure about or from a child in their care.

Carers were also expected to draw up their own Safe Caring Policy within their household, to demonstrate that issues associated with privacy, sexuality, confidentiality, were thought through, and that any ground rules made in that respect would be consistently applied.

The Foster Carers Handbook made specific reference to bullying, and to managing behaviour. There was also a section on use of the Sanctions, including sanctions which were not permissible as they would restrict personal liberty - for example corporal punishment, deprivation of food or drink, wearing of inappropriate clothing, or restriction or refusal of visits or communication (unless this was part of an agreed plan). With regard to the use of computers mobile phones or the Internet, the Handbook stipulated the precautions that Foster Carers would need to take to address any potential dangers. Foster Carers who were interviewed during the course of the inspection were mindful of these issues, and the Inspectors were assured that they had a sound awareness in the arena of child protection, and were operating in ways that assured best safe working practices in that regard.

The Suffolk Area of the Commission for Social Care Inspection had been kept fully informed of child protection matters that had arisen, together with any resulting outcomes.

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

X

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

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

Contact arrangements were discussed fully during the assessment of new Foster Carers process, albeit in general terms. The Foster Carers Handbook contained comprehensive guidance about Contact with Family and Friends, and contact was addressed in regular supervision sessions between the Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker.

Foster Carers who were interviewed understood the complexities and importance of contact, and their role in supporting and facilitating this. Children who spoke with the Inspectors also confirmed the contact arrangements with members of their family.

Files examined during the course of the inspection contained clear guidance about contact, and the arrangements that existed which were laid down by the Placing Authority. Whilst Foster Carers might not always agree with the contact arrangements, it was clear from discussion that they understood it's purpose and context, and did everything required of them to ensure it was facilitated. Foster Carers were particularly mindful of the need to ensure that fostered children were fully supported following their return to the foster home, as contact visits could raise anxieties for the children, and a period of adjustment following their return to the foster home.

Placing Authorities who completed a Questionnaire commented favourably on the Agency's management of contact and communications matters, including any restrictions on contact. Similarly Placing Authorities commented positively on how closely Foster Carers worked with the child's family.

Both the Long Stratton and Claydon offices had a suitable space where contact with families could be facilitated. At the new office in Claydon there was a ground floor with comfortable soft furnishings and a relaxed and calming atmosphere.

One Foster Carer interviewed spoke about the arrangements for "letter box contact only", and the circumstances surrounding this was borne out when the Inspector examined files and information about that particular placement. Another Foster explained that contact was arranged in a neutral situation, that did not directly involve the Foster Carers or the child's family home. In that situation, contact was arranged and facilitated between the Supervising Social Worker, and the Placing Authority. In another situation the child being fostered visited a sibling, living in another foster placement nearby. This contact was facilitated by the Foster Carers, on a fortnightly basis, and was said to be working well.

Foster Carers who completed a Questionnaire commented on their role in supporting children with contact as follows:

*"Ensure that arranged contacts are adhered to. Reminders for special days. Always polite and courteous to parents".*

*"Telephone contact, letter writing, sending photos, sticking to visits".*

*"By facilitating and encouraging any contact that has been agreed during planning meetings or reviews".*

*"Allowing foster child to phone mother or sister, taking foster child to contact, having sister to spend the afternoon with us".*

*"Letter box contact, exchange of letters and presents throughout the year, with birth mother and siblings".*

*"We are advocates for our foster children in ensuring that they are able to keep in touch if that is what they want to do".*

*"The children's social worker gives us all the times and dates when the children are to see their parents. A taxi is arranged to take them. Parents phone once a week. We help the children to get ready, on the days that they go".*

*"£10 mobile phone voucher per month. Unlimited use of housephone to other housephones".*

*"Arranging travel warrants or driving to London every six weeks or so.*

*" Welcoming brother to stay for occasional weekends".*

*"We allow regular telephone/letter contact and always facilitate meetings between child and family".*

*"We always remember family birthdays and get children to send cards".*

*"Encourage visitation when allowed. Contact by phone. Invite relatives to visit if plausible"*

*"Have had friends and sibling staying over".*

*"Contact four times a year - this is supervised".*

Based on evidence that was gathered from the Agency, and from Foster Carers, and foster children, the Agency was commended on the way in which contact was given high priority and facilitated.

#### **Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)**

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

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

#### **Standard met?**

**4**

All of the children being fostered had been placed by Local Authorities. As such, they had opportunities to represent their views through the Looked After Children (LAC) system, which included regular reviews of their placement and care.

Foster children who completed a Questionnaire to inform the inspection process commented positively about how their views were sought and listened to. In answer to the question Do your foster carers ask you for your opinions and ideas? these children commented that they were often asked for their views.

The Foster Carers Handbook provided guidance about listening and responding to the views of children/young people and their families, and this talked about the Agency working in a climate of openness in their work with children and families, and working in partnership with families. Foster Carers were expected to consult children's parents about medical and dental treatments, choices of school, lifestyle, changes in care plans, and choices of work or further education. The guidance also told Foster Carers that they must inform parents about injury, illness or accident, about allegations of abuse, about progress at School, or any other significant incidents. Foster Carers who were interviewed during the course of the inspection had clear understanding about the need to keep families informed. Examples were given of the Agency's own Supervising Social Workers working closely with the families of children fostered.

The Agency provided regular Activities during the school holidays, and this also seen as another opportunity for children/young people to come together, to share ideas and views, and to talk about common and shared experiences. At least one activity per week had been arranged for the longer summer holidays, and some of the foster children who were visited during the inspection had been on a trip to the circus in Great Yarmouth, supported by

Agency staff.

Placing Authorities who completed a Questionnaire also commented that the Agency worked well with families.

At the new offices in Claydon, a Foster Child who was artistically gifted, had been asked to do a design for a graffiti wall, to be included in the ground floor area, which had been set up as a children and foster carer area, with soft play, activities, bright and cheerful colour schemes, with a strong child / young person centred feel to that part of the office space. Based on evidence from the Agency, and from Foster Carers and Placing Authorities, the Agency was commended for the mechanisms in place for consulting with children and their families.

#### **Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)**

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

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

#### **Standard met?**

**3**

A more recent development within the Agency was a Health Passport, designed to accompany children during their time in placement, and when they moved on. The Passport contained personal information, guidance notes for Foster Carers, and details of medication. Also important health information and information about where to access doctor/medical records. The Passport also included a health log or diary, designed to record any health problems accidents or injuries. There was also a section for recording trips to the dentist, significant accidents, injuries or illnesses, and historical medical problems. Given that children can, for a number of reasons, be moved from one placement to another, this was seen as a positive way of keeping an up to date record of all medical and health issues.

Section 5 of the Foster Carers Handbook includes detailed guidelines about health and personal development and the responsibilities of Foster Carers. The responsibilities are divided into four key areas – healthy diet and lifestyle; providing information about health; ensuring access to medical care, assessment and treatment; and providing health needs information for care plans and reviews.

There was an expectation that Foster Carers would keep daily records, as well as providing weekly and monthly summaries on each child in their care, and this included reference to health care needs. There was also a monthly summary on each child's progress and this information was shared with the Placing Authority. This meant that information about health care needs were being recorded and collated on a regular basis. Children interviewed during the visits to Foster Carers told the Inspectors that they were helped with doctors and dentists appointments, and with any other medical issues.

**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?****4**

The Foster Carers Handbook made the statement that *“Education is the single most important indicator of children’s life chances”*. The Agency employs Education Liaison Officers (ELO’s) whose role is to support Foster Carers and the children placed with them with any issues associated with the education of each child. Although this region of Foster Care Associates did not yet have it’s own ELO, it had used the services of ELO’s from other regions to support educational placements, and it was intended to recruit an ELO as soon as possible.

The Inspectors were provided with examples where ELO’s had been instrumental in securing educational placements and supporting children in attending school, working with school personnel, and with Foster Carers in that respect.

The Pre Inspection Questionnaire completed by the Agency to inform the inspection process also commented that *“The ELO is a qualified teacher with a good knowledge of the education system and the additional issues that children looked after may have to face. The role of the ELO is to help give fostering families and the social work team a specialist service, advocating on behalf of children placed to ensure that they have the appropriate school or educational service, accompanying carers to school meetings such as statement reviews or planning meetings, assisting in appeals for admission where necessary and giving carers advice and ideas about how to assist the learning of their child”*.

Visits to Foster Care households included discussion about the educational arrangements for the children placed. The Inspectors found that Foster Carers were very involved with educational support – attending parents meetings at the School, helping children with homework, and liaising with school personnel about the welfare and achievements of the children in their care. In one household visited, the two children travelled a long distance to continue their education in Norwich. The journeys were made by taxi, and the Foster Carers were sensitive to the fact that these children had a long day, and were tired when they returned to the foster home at the end of school. Another child visited had just returned home, at the end of the last day at the current school, and would be moving to another school in September 2004. The child was proud to show the Inspector a new school uniform, which had been purchased ready for the start of the new school year. Foster Carers interviewed were knowledgeable about children’s progress and attainments at school, as well as about issues or concerns which they were supporting.

Children who completed a Questionnaire made the following comments about being helped with school or college work:

*“I am helped with school and homework, and given a set time for homework”.*

*“They help me to do neat hand writing”.*

*“Help with spelling words, and with reading from school books”.*

*“Helps me with homework”.*

In the event that a child was excluded from school, the ELO would liaise with the foster carers and the social work team to seek an alternative educational arrangement that would meet the needs of that child, alongside ensuring that the foster care placement was able to continue. The Pre Inspection Questionnaire also provided an example of a situation where a

child had no education provision for a few weeks – the ELO was actively involved and in the meantime the Resource Workers within the Agency provided 3 days a week mixed educational and social activities to support the child and the foster carers. This was evidenced in a response to a Foster Carers Questionnaire which said that *“Children not in School are taken out by Resource Workers 2 – 3 mornings or afternoons each week”*.

Based on the above, the Agency was commended for the priority given to ensuring that children's educational needs were met and supported.

#### **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 Pre Inspection Questionnaire stated that the Agency *“works closely with local authorities in undertaking independent living skills assessments of young people and formulating pathway plans, although on a less formal level planning and discussions take place at a much earlier age. ELO's are involved in advising further or higher education courses. Through working on the assessments and pathway plans, foster carers will have a written plan as to what is expected of them and if they require any specialist advice or support, the Agency will source this for them.”*

The Director/Manager of the Agency had also identified that the arrangements for supporting young persons with moving on / leaving care could be further developed. In the Self Assessment compiled as part of pre-inspection information, the comment was made that *“Foster Care Associates does not have its own system for preparation of young people leaving care”*. This was discussed with the Director/Manager during an interview. She explained that the comment referred to the fact that it was hoped that more formal arrangements could be developed, whereby Supervising Social Workers could continue to support foster children once they had left their placement. In order to take this piece of work forward, a working party had been set up to develop this area of the service.

One of the foster carer households visited as part of this inspection included a child in their teens. As such this young person was starting on the route towards independent living and would, in time, be moving on. The young person's school placement included sessions at a local college, where a placement in engineering had been secured. This was described as a very positive development, which the young person enjoyed.

A section of the Foster Carers Handbook provided guidelines on preparing young people for adult living / leaving care. These outlined the Agency's clear expectations that foster carers will provide incremental support towards children reaching adulthood, including helping young people to develop practical skills such as managing money, looking for work, cooking and domestic routines, as well as developing and managing family and social relationships. The guidance suggests that three key targets must be worked towards in preparing young people for moving on. These targets are 1. Enabling young people to build and maintain relationships with others. 2. Enabling young people to develop their self-esteem, and 3. Practical and financial skills and knowledge.

Consideration of issues associated with moving on would also be made during any matching process, particular for placements of older children.

During visits to foster carer households, the Inspectors heard that it was also the foster Foster Care Associates - East Anglia

carers own children (some of whom were grown up, some of whom still lived at home, and some of whom had left home but frequently visited), also provided positive role modelling for the foster children.

The File of Facts for older children contained a section on Leaving Care. This explained that leaving care “*should be a time to look forward to, with excitement*”. It also explained that the Local Authority had a duty to keep in touch until the young person was at least 21 years of age, and must help with cash, in kind, and with personal support. It explained the purpose of the Pathway Plan that would have been made in the foster care placement before a young person moved on, and also talked about financial support and benefits.

## 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

The Pre Inspection Questionnaire confirmed that “*Vacancies are advertised both externally and internally with applications invited over a 2/3 week period. The short-listing process is based upon equal opportunities framework, matching short-listing criteria with job specifications, personal specifications, then referring to application form information. Interviews are conducted with set questions and model answers and interview panels consist ideally of a mixed gender/sex/race/experience mix. Successful applicants references are followed up by letter and telephone and CRB checks are carried out before a post can be taken up. Identity is confirmed at interview by asking each applicant to bring in the relevant information. Medical forms and checks are also undertaken. When Agency staff are used, a current CRB check is required, as well as references, which are followed up by telephone - the main difference is that a medical check is not required.*

With regard to volunteers and students, the Agency confirmed that on occasions when adult children of fostering families expressed an interest in helping with activities, a Criminal Records Bureau check would be required, as well as some preparation. In the event that the Agency had students on placement, these students would be expected to provide a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau disclosure before placement. Before the placement started, there would be a meeting between the college, student, and practice teacher, setting out aims, objectives, and expectations. This then translated into a student ‘placement agreement’.

A sample of the Agency's own staff personnel files were examined during the course of this inspection. The process used to recruit staff was clearly evidenced, and the files were in good order.

Two requirements were made in respect of the following:

The Agency's checklist did not include a system for the subsequent verification of written references, and this must be addressed. Since the inspection the Agency has responded on this issue (see Standard 3 above).

The Agency must ensure that all elements of Schedule 1 of the Regulations were met, and that the Agency retained evidence of proof of identity i.e. photographs, passports, birth certificates, and that copies were retained on file, for inspection purposes. These elements of the Standard and Regulations must be applied in respect of Agency employed staff, Foster Carers, and all members of the Fostering Panel. Since the inspection the Agency has responded that *"The Agency will not process any CRB checks without copies of identity being taken for file purposes, as well as being visually checked by the countersignatory. This process will apply to all new personnel. The Agency will also undertake an audit of files in order to begin the process of compliance fully"*.

<b>Total number of staff of the agency:</b>	14	<b>Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:</b>	1
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#### **Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)**

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

<b>Key Findings and Evidence</b>	<b>Standard met?</b>	<b>3</b>
<p>The new East Anglia branch of the Agency is headed by a Director/Manager based in the new Claydon office, who was line managed by one of the Agency's Executive Directors.</p> <p>Each of the two offices, situated in Claydon and Long Stratton, had it's own Team Manager, who were responsible for support and supervision of the Supervising Social Workers employed by the Agency.</p> <p>A more recently created position was that of Office Manager, based at Claydon, with management responsibilities for the offices, and for administration, including oversight and supervision of the Administrator based at Long Stratton.</p> <p>In addition, the Agency employed a Resource Manager and team of two Resource Workers, responsible for provision of resources to support placements with Foster Carers. The role and responsibilities of the Placements Manager have already been referred to, see Standard 8 above.</p> <p>As part of this inspection, interviews were held with each member of staff holding management responsibilities, and these interviews confirmed staff had clearly defined roles and responsibilities, lines of accountability, and were provided with support and supervision, which mirrored the Agency's expectations of their own roles in respect of the staff they were responsible for supervising and supporting.</p> <p>Feedback from Foster Carers via the Questionnaires included the following comments about the organisation and management of the Agency:</p>		



*"I am very satisfied – in person I know my support team well and they are very helpful and caring in supporting me".*

*"There is always someone available at the end of a phone if I need something".*

*"I have only been working for the Agency a short while but I feel very pleased with the amount of support and help they have provided".*

*"Always somebody to phone".*

*"We never feel we are going it alone".*

*"Regular visits from Social Worker and Placement Officer. Regular contact with Therapist".*

*"Help with cover 'baby sitting' for occasional special event. Loan of minibus for transport of larger numbers of children and friends".*

*"Back up with disputes with Social Services".*

*"We have developed a very good relationship with our Supervising Social Worker".*

*"We have all the information we need plus relevant telephone numbers to use for support, if need be".*

*"the Agency gives a lot of time in putting in Supervising Social workers on a weekly basis and the Agency is always at the other end of telephone when needed".*

*"The Agency puts 110% effort into helping and support".*

*"A Social Worker visits monthly to discuss placements and any problems encountered".*

*"Someone is always on call 24/7. If we need to speak to someone face to face we can".*

*"Respite is always offered".*

*"Whenever I need help I always get it – no question".*

#### **Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)**

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

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

#### **Standard met?**

**3**

The Agency provided a foster care service in two counties within East Anglia, namely Norfolk and Suffolk. It was intended that the two office bases, in Claydon and Long Stratton, would work closely together in assessing, recruiting, supervising and supporting a range of Foster Carers to meet the needs of children and young people requiring placement. Because the Claydon office was not yet registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, and because the arrangements at the Long Stratton office had previously come under the East Midlands Region of Foster Care Associates, the arrangements for assessing and recruiting new Foster Carers were somewhat in transition, as all assessments were being dealt with by Fostering Panels based in other regions of Foster Care Associates. Once the registration of Foster Care Associates (East Anglia) was approved, the Claydon and Long Stratton offices would be operating jointly, including processes for assessment, recruitment and retention of Foster Carers, with primary responsibility for oversight lying at the branch office base in Claydon.

The Inspectors found from scrutiny of recruitment files, and from interviews with staff employed by the Agency, that the service provided good quality staff, who were suitably qualified, experienced, and committed to support the work of the Agency, and the fostering task.

Foster Carers were required to go through a rigorous assessment process based on BAAF Form F, which took several months to complete, and required them to evidence not only their commitment to the fostering task, but also their skills, experience, as well as willingness to receive training.

Foster Carers were provided, as part of their Handbook, with details of the nine Standards of Practice that the Agency expected of them. These nine Standards, based on National Minimum Standards associated with protection, safety, positive care, consultation, health and development, education, contact, preparing young people for adulthood, and confidentiality of information and records, formed the basis for best working practices by foster carers employed by the Agency.

Recruitment of new Foster Carers was an ongoing process within the Agency, with a number of Assessments currently being undertaken. The Inspectors were provided with evidence that the Agency only placed children referred where they established a good 'match' and that the Agency was proactive in dealing with issues of poor performance, including discontinuation of employment of Foster Carers no longer suited to the fostering task.

#### **Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

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

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Staff directly employed by the Agency had Contracts of employment, Job Descriptions, and were satisfied with their terms and conditions of employment.

Comments have already been included (see Standard 16 above) about Foster Carers positive perceptions about the support they receive.

The Agency provided a twenty four hour a day, seven day a week service, which included an on call telephone line, and if necessary, visiting support. During the interviews with Foster Carers, the Inspectors were told that the Agency was supporting them well in this regard.

The Agency also provided support through its Resource Worker staff, through its Therapists, and through the operation of a respite scheme, which provided three weeks respite from the fostering task, and in respect of which one set of Foster Carers were providing a 'dedicated' respite service in that regard.

As part of the Inspection, the Agency provided details of Insurance Certificates which related to motor fleet vehicles; group personal accident; office insurance; computer insurance; Directors and Officers policy; Professional Indemnity; and Public and Employer's Liability.

Other policies that demonstrated that the Agency operated in a sound, fair and competent way included Health and Safety, Whistle-blowing, Child Protection, Safe Caring, Allegations and Complaints, Equal Opportunities, and Representations against Refusal of Approval.

During this inspection, Fire Risk Assessments were carried out at both sites, and provided to the Inspectors. These assessments were undertaken by the Health and Safety Manager of Foster Care Associates, who visited both sites. The office Manager based at Claydon had ongoing responsibility for liaising with the Landlords of both properties, in terms of repairs maintenance and other premises issues. This member of staff was also a qualified first aider, having attended a three day St Johns course.

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

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

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

One of the two Team Managers, based at the Long Stratton office, had the task of putting together the training programme for the year. A copy of this programme was provided to the Inspectors. Training was also discussed with this Team Manager during an interview. The Pre Inspection Questionnaire confirmed that *“Training has been based at our Long Stratton office, but in order to be more accessible to our Suffolk foster carers, we will have a programme for the Suffolk office in the new year (2005). In the meantime, Suffolk carers continue to be invited to training arranged via the South East region of the Agency, based in Colchester”*.

For persons being recruited as new Foster Carers, the Agency expected that they would, as part of the assessment process, undertake the core Introductory Assessment Course, which although based on ‘Choosing to Foster’ training material, had been customised to include material developed by the Agency. The Inspectors asked Foster Carers who were interviewed whether or not they had received this training, and they confirmed having attended.

With regard to ongoing training and development, both for Agency employed staff and for Foster Carers, the Inspectors were provided with evidence that training was given a high profile and priority, and was regularly discussed during supervision. Foster Carers who were visited provided the Inspectors with details of courses they had attended both during the assessment process, and since being approved to foster with the Agency. These included child protection and safe caring; promoting contact; health development – promoting and safeguarding; care and control; communication and consultation; first aid; and food hygiene. The Agency issued Certificates for all training attended and completed.

Training was discussed with Foster Carers during supervisions, and also as part of the Annual Review. In the event that a training need was identified, there was an expectation that Foster Carers would make a commitment to undertaking this training. Persistent refusal to attend training could result in a decision not to re-approve.

The Agency was promoting NVQ level 3 for Foster Carers, and this was being done by the primary carer in one of the Foster Carer households visited during the inspection.

The Agency also promoted and facilitated joint training between Agency staff and Foster Carers. The benefits from this were understood by all parties – it provided an opportunity for a joint training forum; for good working relationships between Agency staff and Foster Carers; and for issues about the fostering task to be explored in depth by those providing the direct service, and those supervising the arrangements. Some of newly recruited Supervising Social Workers had recently been involved in the delivery of training to Foster Carers.

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

Every member of staff working for the Agency had a detailed Job Description which outlined their roles and responsibilities, and lines of accountability.

Staff were found to be receiving supervision on a regular basis, and there was a supervision agreement framework and a format for written recording, dating and signing of supervision notes, by both parties.

The Agency also provided annual staff appraisals.

There were regular team meetings taking place in both offices, with recorded Minutes for any staff who were unable to attend. There were additional forums for management staff to meet, including Resource Manager Meetings, Office Manager meetings, Team Manager meetings, at local, regional, and national levels.

As far as Foster Carers were concerned, there were monthly support meetings held, usually at the Long Stratton office. With the opening of the Claydon office, meetings would also be scheduled for that venue. The Agency realised that for Foster Carers living in more remote parts of either county, a visit to either Long Stratton or Claydon might not be feasible, because of the long travelling distances and time commitment. This is something that the Agency intended to address, in the longer term, including a possible alternative siting for the Norfolk based office.

**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**

The Foster Carers Handbook provided very comprehensive information about how the Agency was committed to, and supportive of, Foster Carers in its employ. Arrangements for contact, support, supervision and house visits were clearly laid down, and the Inspectors found these were actually happening in practice. Each of the seven Foster Carer households visited as part of the inspection confirmed that support from the Agency was very good. Comments taken from Foster Carers Questionnaires about support have been incorporated into this Report, see Standard 16 above.

The Foster Carers Handbook was being regularly updated and reviewed. In its current format, it could be added to, and Foster Carers told the Inspectors that amended versions and additional contents were sent out to them, on a regular basis.

The arrangements for supporting Foster Carers out of hours have already been referred to earlier in this Report (see Standard 18 above). Again Foster Carers commented on being well supported, day and night, and that there was always someone available to talk to, or, if necessary, to visit them at their home.

The fact that the Agency had Resource staff was also appreciated, and Foster Carers who might have otherwise struggled with the fact that children were not in School, felt that the Agency provided excellent support. Also, during holidays, when a range of activities were arranged at various venues in the two countries, on a regular basis. A number of placements were also supported by the Therapy service provided by the Agency, which included a full time Therapist based in the Long Stratton office.

A response to a Foster Carers Questionnaire commented positively that *“Three times a year there is a Carers forum at Head Office. Carers from all Agencies take concerns and these are discussed. This is an excellent service and child matters are sorted out”*.

The Agency was commended for its strategy and commitment to working with and supporting carers within the region.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)****The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Every Foster Carer household had a named allocated Supervising Social Worker, who was available at the end of a phone, and who made regular contact. Supervisions, which included a visit to the foster carer household, were taking place at least monthly, and being recorded. In practice, Agency Supervising Social Workers were in very regular contact with Foster Carers, making a number of telephone calls during a two week period. All contacts were being logged and retained on Agency files.

Records of supervisions, signed by all parties, were found on files, and covered the important aspects of the fostering task.

Specialist support was also provided (see Standard 21 above) in respect of resource workers, therapy services, and educational liaison.

The Agency operated a respite scheme, which provided each foster carer household with three weeks paid respite care.

Details about how to make or deal with a complaint were contained in the Foster Carers Handbook, and Foster Carers who were visited as part of the inspection knew what to do if they wanted to make a complaint, or wanted to pass on a complaint or concern raised by a child living in their care. The Foster Carers Handbook also contained information about how the Agency would respond to allegations and complaints against Foster Carers, and how Foster Carers would also be supported in those situations. During the course of the inspection, the Inspectors were aware of two matters of complaint which were being investigated, and in respect of which the Commission for Social Care Inspection had been kept fully informed.

All new Foster Carers were reviewed in the first twelve months of their approval. Foster Care Agreements provided clear guidance on the reviewing process and the fact that all reviews were presented to Fostering Panel for re-approval.

### Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.9)

**The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.**

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The training programme provided was comprehensive. The Foster Care Agreement stipulated that *“Training is integral to help foster carers become better at the work they do by improving knowledge... enabling foster carers to consider the effects of discrimination and how equality of opportunity is promoted... ensuring that foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm”*. In effect, when Foster Carers signed their Foster Care Agreement, they were signing up to participating in foster carer training events, some of which were core training and therefore mandatory.

Questionnaires completed by Foster Carers to inform the inspection provided information about training courses that had been attended. A Foster Carer who had been approved for a year, commented that *“Most of the core training had been received, with the rest planned during the year 2004”*. The same Questionnaires also provided evidence that Foster Carers were able to attend training of a more specific nature, such as sexual abuse; drug and solvent misuse, working with disabled children, working with mental health difficulties, self-harm and suicide.

In addition to the in-house training programme arranged by local management, Foster Carers were being encouraged to undertake NVQ level 3 – Caring for Children and Young People Award. The Agency employed a NVQ National Coordinator with a role to ensure or develop locally based programmes of training for these Foster Carers.

With regard to whether or not both members of the Foster Care household attended training, the Foster Carer Agreement stipulated that *“For some specific post-approval training e.g. child protection, both partners will be expected to attend, even if this means attending the relevant courses separately. With other post-approval training it is accepted that, because of child care and/or work commitments, it may not always be possible for both partners to attend, although joint attendance will always be encouraged”*. In the light of Criteria 23.4 of this Standard, the Agency should reconsider this position, to ensure that where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both successfully complete all training. A

recommendation was made in this regard. Since the inspection, the Agency has confirmed that *“The Agency is continually reviewing its training provision to try to fulfil the needs of all foster cares. The Agency will continue to consider different timings, provision of child care, and funding for external courses as a means of ensuring the best possible attendance.*

## 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**

The Agency had policy guidance on record keeping. This clearly outlined the requirements and expectations of all staff including Agency staff, and Foster Carers. The Inspectors examined a number of files during the course of the inspection, including the personnel files of employed Agency staff, Foster Carer files, and files of children being fostered.

In respect of Foster Carers and children fostered, the files were held in a lever arch format, and sub divided into sections, which enabled easier retrieval of information. Recording that had been done by Supervising Social Workers was seen to be factual and relevant, and included, in the majority of cases, dates, signatures, and follow up where required.

The Agency's Placements Manager completed the Initial Enquiry Referrral form, and gathered as much information at this stage as was possible.

With regard to the Agency receiving Looked After Children (LAC) paperwork files examined provided examples where this had not been received. Whilst the onus for providing this information clearly lay at the Placing Authority's door, the Inspectors recommended that the Agency could be more proactive in this respect, including the sending out of a standard letter requesting information that had not been provided. A recommendation was made in that regard. Since the inspection the Agency has confirmed that *“A standard letter has been formatted to send out when seeking information from local authorities”*.

With regard to information to be compiled and kept by the Foster Carer, the Handbook provided guidance about keeping records and confidentiality, as well as guidance about Life Story Work. Foster Carers were expected to keep a daily log, and weekly/fortnightly/monthly summaries about the child/ren in their care. Some Foster Carers told the Inspectors that they found this quite onerous. Although they understood the reasons why written records

were important in terms of evidence of best practice, and in terms of health, welfare, and safe caring, not all Foster Carers were confident about their ability to write or record, and some gave this part of the fostering task higher priority than others. The Inspectors felt this should be addressed as part of the Agency's training programme in order that Foster Carers could be supported to meet the Agency's own standards and requirements. A recommendation was made in that regard. Since the inspection, the Agency has confirmed that *"Training regarding recording will be scheduled during 2005. This will include the storage and disposal of information once a child has moved on from the family."*

#### **Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

**The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.**

#### **Key Findings and Evidence**

#### **Standard met?**

**3**

The Agency provided a wide range of policies procedures and written guidelines, both within the Foster Carers Handbook, and for staff employed by the Agency in various roles.

Each of the two offices maintained separate records for carers and children (see Standard 24 above). Files were appropriately stored in lockable cupboards, and all confidential information was therefore secure.

At the new open plan office in Claydon, there was a policy on desks being left completely clear at the end of the working day, to ensure that there was no unauthorised access to confidential information.

Foster Carer Agreements contain a clause about confidentiality of information.

With regard to information about children who have moved on from a foster care placement, not all Foster Carers were clear about the Agency's expectations about where that information should go. This was discussed with the Director/Manager, as it was felt that the section in the Foster Carers Handbook 'Keeping Records and Confidentiality' did not provide clear guidelines in that regard. A recommendation was made for this to be addressed, see also Standard 24 above.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			29
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			44
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			15
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:			2
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	350.00	Maximum £	700.00

### **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

The two offices at Long Stratton and Claydon were very different in appearance and facilities. Both were visited during this inspection, and arrangements for security, health and safety, access, and facilities were inspected, and were found to be in order. Information that was kept on computer was appropriately pass-worded, restricting access to authorised users. In some cases access was to 'read' only, with no facility to amend or change information already on the system. A frustration expressed by staff at Long Stratton was the lack of computer terminals, and the fact that staff could not always gain access to a computer when they wanted to. Computers were being used on a 'shared' basis, and it was felt that this had a negative effect on how quickly Supervising Social Workers records were inputted onto the system.

Standard 18 earlier in this Report refers to the oversight of the office arrangements, and the fact that fire and health and safety risk assessments had been done on both premises.

There was sufficient space in both buildings for the safe-keeping and security of information, and for Agency staff to have a 'workspace' to make telephone calls and write reports. At the Long Stratton property some of the rooms which might have been used by foster carers or children coming to the building for meetings, were located on the first floor, but there was no lift or access to persons with any significant disability, above ground floor level.

At Claydon, the ground floor of the premises had been designed as a children and foster carers area, and the first floor was designed for Agency employed staff only.

There was a sharp contrast in the overall appearance of these two offices. Long Stratton was an older Victorian-type building, with limited car-parking and access, and little scope for improving or altering the interior. By contrast, the Claydon office, part of a new business park development, was bright, modern, with a large open plan area upstairs, and with flexible space and facilities for families and children, and ample car-parking for visitors.

The Agency had involved children in developments at the offices, including being asked to produce art work to be displayed.

## 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 business side of the Agency was being directed by a Central Finance Section, headed by a Director of Finance. This part of the Agency was responsible for all of the Agency payroll tasks, and systems.

Details of payments to Foster Carers were compiled locally and transferred onto the Central Finance Section, for payments to be made.

**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**

As part of the Application for Registration, the Commission for Social Care Inspection received a copy of the Directors Report and Financial Statements for the previous financial year. These Accounts had been audited by a Registered Auditor with a firm of Accountants, and noted the Agency to be in a profitable position.

**Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)**

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

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

Foster Carers were paid fortnightly, directly into Bank Accounts. If there were additional expenses to be reimbursed, these could be claimed every two weeks. The Foster Carers Handbook provided very explicit details about payments. The information stipulated what the foster carers allowance did and did not cover. Foster Carers spoken with during the inspection were clear about how the money was made up, and what it was to be used for. None of the Foster Carers or the children placed with them raised any issues with the Inspectors about allowances or monies requested. Payments were made on time, and were accurate. Details of minimum and maximum fees are outlined in Standard 25 above.

**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?**

**0**

This Standard was not assessed, as this branch of Foster Care Associates was not yet fully operational. Subject to registration with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, the Agency intended to set up its own Panel to cover Norfolk and Suffolk, and had already begun the process of recruiting members in line with the requirements of Standard 30 and Regulations 24 – 26 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The Agency was reminded, as part of this inspection, that each Panel members must have been the subject of satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure at Enhanced Level (see Standard 15 above). In addition, the Agency's attention is drawn to the fact that the Fostering Regulations clearly stipulate that the Panel membership should include either the Responsible Individual or a Director of the Agency.

## **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?**

**3**

Foster Care Associates was found to be committed to its own policy of providing three weeks respite care – to give Foster Carers a break from the fostering task. A set of Foster Carers who had worked for the Agency for sometime had taken on this role, and there were arrangements within the Agency for administering this scheme, to ensure that Foster Carers had opportunities for time off.

The details of the scheme were clearly laid out in the Foster Carers Handbook, which provided three pages of questions and answers about the scheme.

Foster Carers told the Inspectors that they appreciated the opportunity to take a break. Foster Care Associates also provided residential / activity/short breaks for Foster Carers, organised via the Resource Worker team.

## 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?	9
Foster Care Associates was not involved in providing assessments or support for family care placements. Relatives and friends of carers who wanted to provide respite breaks for carers were fully assessed using the BAAF Form F process, and their application, like any other Foster Carers, would be submitted to Fostering Panel for approval.		

**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 27<sup>th</sup> July 2004 – 9<sup>th</sup> August 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

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

YES

**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 11<sup>th</sup> October 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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

**Public reports**

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

### D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

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

**D.3.1 I \_\_\_\_\_ of Foster Care Associates confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.**

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**D.3.2 I, \_\_\_\_\_ of Foster Care Associates**  
**am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate**  
**representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above**  
**date(s) for the following reasons:**

--

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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



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