



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Northamptonshire County Council Fostering  
Service**

**Northamptonshire Children and Young People's  
Service**

**Oxford House**

**West Villa Road**

**Wellingborough**

**Northamptonshire**

**NN8 4JR**

*Lead Inspector*

Sharon Treadwell

*Announced Inspection*

16th November 2006

09:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

## Reader Information

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Diane Camm
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

None

**Date of last inspection** 24/11/2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

The Northamptonshire County Council Fostering Service is an integral element of the Northamptonshire Children and Young People Service and the Service Manager for Fostering, Adoption and Permanence is Mrs. Jan Slater. Day to day management of the Fostering Service is delegated to a Team Manager, Mrs. Diane Camm.

The service offers a wide range of fostering placements: Long Term, Short Term, Therapeutic, Kinship, Supported Lodgings and Emergency. Six fostering teams are based across four office bases and each team is lead by a Principal Social Worker, with nominated lead responsibility for stated areas of fostering service provision.

The Authority additionally provides a Family Link Scheme and a Remand Fostering Scheme, which are separately managed. The Family Link Scheme is part of the Inclusion Service and provides flexible short breaks for children who have physical and/or learning disabilities and/or sensory impairment. Day to day management of the Remand Fostering Service has been transferred this year to the Youth Offending Service.

Data supplied at the time of this inspection stated that, at March 31<sup>st</sup> 2006 the Fostering Service was supporting 229 fostering households with 274 young people in placement.

The Family Link Scheme was supporting 88 fostering households with 112 young people in placement.

The data additionally details that 86 young people are placed with Independent Fostering Providers and five with other Local authorities.

# SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by two inspectors, Sharon Treadwell and Trisha Gibbs, over five days. A pre-inspection visit was made to the service on August 31st 2006.

Inspectors were based at Norborough House for the duration of this inspection.

For the purposes of this inspection seven young people and the four foster carers (two mainstream (one long and one short term), one Therapeutic, one Kinship Care) with whom these young people were placed were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers, placing social workers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone.

An additional carer file was examined and an additional carer was contacted by telephone as a result of discussions with carers and information supplied in questionnaires.

During the inspection discussions were also held with the Service Manager, the Fostering Team Manager, the Principal Social Workers, the Placement Services Commissioner and the Team Manager of the Centre for Health.

A written submission was received from the joint Heads of the Virtual School and a telephone discussion was held with the person providing independent advice and mediation to foster carers, who spoke of Northamptonshire as 'a very open Authority'. She described her independent support and advice service to foster carers as 'well advertised and strongly promoted'.

A Fostering Panel was observed at John Dryden house on November 15<sup>th</sup> and the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor (also the Business Development Manager) were interviewed. The inspectors additionally examined panel minutes relating to three previous panels.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 10 foster carers, 23 placing Social Workers and 9 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report.

Prior to the inspection the Team Managers with responsibility for both mainstream fostering services and for the Short Breaks Service, provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about service operation.

No requirements have been identified during this inspection but 4 recommendations have been made.

## **What the service does well:**

Young people in foster care have access to an excellent range of health advice and support through the Centre for Health Team.

This Team also provides good support, advice and training to foster carers.

The service provides a good range of training opportunities for carers. One placing social worker commented: 'The fostering service are giving the carer good additional training and support to meet s's needs'.

Carers generally feel well supported by the service: 'they are always on the end of the phone to sort things out that I'm not sure about'; 'I feel we are well supported by the fostering service by being able to talk, ask advice or just moan when we need to'.

Young people consulted during this inspection were all very happy with the care they received: 'C and G bring me up as one of their own and we all think that's best'; 'She takes care of us all really well'. One young person asked in a questionnaire what he or she wanted to tell us about fostering gave us this

answer:  .

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

There have been changes to the management structure of the fostering service creating clearer lines of accountability. Inspectors noted better clarity in relation to roles and responsibilities, a strong 'team spirit' and a dedication to achieving consistency of practice.

The operating time of the Duty Desk has been extended from half days to full days providing carers with a point of contact if they are unable to speak with their link worker.

The Fostering service has developed its own personnel records. Files include a comprehensive checklist detailing fully the information legally required in respect of staff employed by the service and strong efforts are being made to obtain necessary information retrospectively.

The previous inspection identified a number of shortfalls in respect of the Fostering Panel. A robust review of the operation of the Panel has been undertaken and a range of excellent documentation has been developed. A second panel has also been appointed. Panel Minutes are completed to a commendable standard. Files retained in relation to panel members contain signed agreements and clear details of their roles and responsibilities.

Records retained by the fostering service in relation to carers and young people have been greatly improved. Pro-forma recording of carer supervision, a comprehensive carer annual review format, the introduction of Placement

Planning Meetings for all young people placed and separate file records for young people in placement make it significantly easier to track young people's progress and the development of carers' skills.

A signed Placement Agreement is now in place in respect of all placements.

The pro-forma recording now undertaken by carers is specifically linked to the five Every Child Matters outcomes and therefore it is easy to identify how the specific needs of young people, relating to health and education, are being met.

Northamptonshire County council has recently introduced a Heritage Planning Framework, which comprises a comprehensive assessment, planning and monitoring tool, which should ensure that services delivered to young people will be based on their racial, cultural and ethnic heritage.

The Fostering Service has developed a range of pro-forma for obtaining the views of fostered children and carers' children in relation to the carer's annual review to ensure that young people's views on fostering are regularly obtained.

Changes are being made to the fee structure and allowances paid to foster carers. These changes are not yet fully implemented but the indication is that they will give carers greater flexibility in addressing the specific individual needs of young people.

## **What they could do better:**

Whilst wishing to reflect the good work undertaken within the fostering service in setting up its own internal system to monitor records retained in relation to staff, there is still insufficient evidence that current central recruitment practices fully ensure the safety of young people. A working party is currently operating with the Local Authority's HR Department on developing safer recruitment strategies.

Safe Care policies viewed during this inspection were household not child specific and, as such do not consider the risks posed by the specific behaviours of the young people in placement, for example drug or alcohol abuse or self harming tendencies.

The fostering service should evidence robust oversight of trainee social workers involved in the completion of assessments or in supervising carers.

The Fostering Service should give full consideration to the potentially high level of support needed by newly approved carers.

Support services for kinship carers need to be reviewed and developed.



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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csi.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csi.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

### 12.

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

The fostering service ensures that the health needs of young people are clearly identified and pro-actively addressed.

## EVIDENCE:

The Fostering Service is commended on the development of more robust recording systems to evidence the prioritisation of young people's health needs.

The service has further strengthened its partnership working with the Centre for Health Team, which has effective links with local health care providers. This has been especially helpful in obtaining dental care for young people.

The Team Manager of the Centre for Health told inspectors of improvements in links with the fostering service during the last year with increased involvement in carer training, regular attendance at fostering team meetings and involvement in the development of a commendable range of pro-forma recording tools for carers.

Carers are now provided with an individual health record for each young person in placement, in the form of a very good booklet, which is updated during the placement and moves with the young person. Carer recording requirements have been reviewed and carers are required to complete a monthly summary in respect of each young person in placement, which has a specific section relating to health. This monthly summary is forwarded to the young person's placing social worker.

Foster carers have been provided with good pro-forma recording sheets on which they are required to record any medication issued to young people during their placement. These improved recording systems will provide young people, in the future, with a full record of health interventions.

Good evidence was noted, in relation to the young people tracked, of carers supporting them to access appropriate treatment from doctors, dentists and opticians. One young person was regularly visiting an orthodontist for specialist dental treatment and others had received input from psychiatric and psychological practitioners.

Placement planning meetings were recorded on all the files tracked and the agenda for these included full consideration of the young person's health needs.

The placements of young people placed within the Therapeutic Fostering Scheme are subject to monthly reviews, which include specific consideration of any health issues.

During the last year Centre for Health staff have worked closely with a Clinical Psychologist, based with CAMHS on mental health care services for young people in foster care. Together they have provided a four-day training programme to carers on 'Psychology'. The inspectors visited a group of carers undertaking this training and they valued it highly in terms of improving their understanding of young people's presenting behaviours.

In a questionnaire response one placing social worker noted 'Because of the sexual abuse X had suffered I did not feel that the carers had the knowledge to understand issues or behaviours relating to this'. The questionnaire goes on to detail the additional training and support provided by the fostering service to address this shortfall.

The Team Manager for the Centre for Health additionally informed inspectors of improved systems for referral of young people to CAMHS for direct work, where necessary, with the appointment to CAMHS of two Children's Psychiatric Nurses, one for the North of the County and one for the South.

Centre for Health staff also undertake short term direct work with carers and young people in placement around specific behavioural issues and some excellent examples of positive interventions were given to the inspectors.

Centre for Health staff are actively involved in the provision of carer training covering a range of areas: Emergency first aid; sexual health for carers of adolescents; eating disorders/disordered eating (including information on nutrition); caring for challenging adolescents and psychology. The team are also involved in the core training programme for carers, providing information on the poor health outcomes for Looked After Children and how they can improve these.

In their questionnaire responses young people spoke positively about how their foster carers ensured that they remained in good health: 'My foster carer gives me healthy food, I get lots of exercise and at school they like us to eat healthily'; 'My foster carer gives me a very balanced diet'; 'I need to be big and strong and healthy'.



## Staying Safe

### The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

**3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30.**

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

Procedures have been strengthened to promote young peoples safety and welfare and to match them to appropriate placements. Work is in process to develop safer staff recruitment strategies.

### EVIDENCE:

There have been some changes to the organisational structure of the fostering service since the previous inspection involving the loss of both a Team Manager post and a Principal Social Worker post (see Management section). The management team remain appropriately qualified and experienced. Principal Social Workers have greater management responsibilities and are being provided with appropriate management training.

During the previous inspection the Fostering Service was unable to evidence that it 'employs people suitable to work with children and to safeguard and promote their welfare' because of the serious shortfalls in personnel records. The service has taken positive interim steps to address these shortfalls by establishing its own personnel records system (additional to those held by the Human Resources (HR) Department) and the Service Manager detailed that

she was a member of a working party currently working with the Local Authority's HR Department on developing safer recruitment strategies.

The personnel records developed by the Fostering Service include a comprehensive checklist detailing fully the information legally required in respect of staff employed by the service. Clear attempts have been made to obtain all these documents retrospectively in relation to all current employees but these have not always been successful. As a result some gaps remain in personnel records, for example references obtained at the point of appointment and original application forms, which cannot now be traced. Some inappropriate practices were still noted in terms of staff recruitment, for example, in the case of an appointment made in August this year, only one reference was on file and letters requesting references for this candidate were dispatched on the same date as the offer letter. No telephone checks on references are currently evidenced.

Whilst wishing to reflect the good work undertaken within the fostering service in setting up its own internal system to monitor records retained in relation to staff, there is still insufficient evidence that current recruitment practices fully ensure the safety of young people.

In August 2005 a Placement Management Service was set up to deal with referrals for placements of Looked After Children. The service is the central element of Northamptonshire's aim to improve placement stability for Looked After Children and is now, as confirmed by the Placement Services Commissioner, seen as the single point of referral for placement. During the last year the placement planning strategy has been better embedded in fostering service practice. Records of Placement Planning Meetings, which incorporate a signed Placement Agreement, were seen on all files tracked during the inspection. The pro-forma record is comprehensive and it addresses the young person's identified needs under each of the five Every Child Matters headings as well as the proposals for contact arrangements. In addition to supporting the safeguarding and welfare of young people this document positively supports the matching process. Fostering Service managers confirmed that the completion of placement plans/agreements was being monitored and that they were largely held either pre-placement wherever possible, or within 72 hours. The action plan devised from the meeting is shared with the young person's independent Reviewing Officer in order that issues can be tracked through the Looked After Children (LAC) review system as well as by the fostering service.

Young people spoken to during the inspection, and in their questionnaire responses, confirmed that they felt safe and well cared for: 'It is a safe environment with nice and caring people'; 'I don't ever worry, I just feel happy'.

Two young people consulted, who clearly had feelings of great antagonism towards Social Services generally and made some very negative comments,

still spoke very positively about the care provided by their foster carer and her attempts to keep them safe. At a recent review one of these young people commented 'M has always been there for me. She turns up at police stations and courts if I am in trouble. If it wasn't for her I'd probably be in a young offenders unit by now, if it wasn't for the respect I have for her. She has stopped me committing a lot of crimes. If I wanted to be in a family this would be my ideal'.

Fostering service managers confirmed that all fostering households should have a 'safe care policy', although one household visited did not have one in place and the Team Manager agreed to address this. Carers are additionally provided with a copy of the Fostering Network's guidance on 'Safer Caring'. Safe Care policies viewed during this inspection were household not child specific and, as such do not consider the risks posed by the specific behaviours of the young people in placement, for example drug or alcohol abuse or self harming tendencies (evidenced in one placement tracked). The requirement for such consideration is partially met by the use of a good matching pro-forma and partially by placement planning meeting discussions but these identify areas of concern and not control measures and the service has been recommended to incorporate consideration of specific risks into the 'safe care' policy. Such a risk assessment should also detail any consideration of risk associated with bedroom sharing.

A matching matrix is used to evidence consideration of a foster carer's skills in relation to a young person's identified needs. This provides good evidence of matching considerations, particularly when used in conjunction with other tools detailed above, however the inspectors have suggested the inclusion of a separate column to identify any shortfalls in the match and how these will be addressed.

One carer commented: 'Matching the needs of young people is always looked at and discussed before placing a child with us and whether we can meet his or her needs alongside the needs of the children already in placement'. The inspectors however could find no evidence, on the files tracked, of consultation with young people already in placement or their placing social workers, before another young person was placed. Social workers spoken to said that they were rarely consulted when this happened: 'This placement approached breakdown when another young person was introduced into the home without the social worker's knowledge'.

One placing social worker did however comment that within the last year 'there is much better matching in terms of planned placement moves'.

The inspectors' discussions with staff and carers and their examination of records confirmed that the Fostering Service had worked hard to develop recording systems to better evidence appropriate matching and the prioritisation of young people's safety and welfare.



The previous inspection identified a number of shortfalls in respect of the Fostering Panel. One requirement and three recommendations were made relating to Panel constitution and operational procedures.

A robust review has been undertaken and a range of excellent documentation has been developed. There are clear operational guidelines, a sound induction process for panel members, job descriptions for all members clarifying roles and responsibilities and an annual appraisal system. A personnel file is now retained in respect of each panel member, which includes a signed agreement covering confidentiality and evidence of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance.

Since the previous inspection the Fostering Service has appointed a second panel and panels are now referred to as Panel A and Panel B. Panel B was observed during this inspection and was noted to be appropriately constituted and to function well. A new Independent Chair has recently been appointed to Panel A, and the Panel Advisor informed the inspector of plans for the two Panel Chairs to meet quarterly. A new Agency Decision Maker has also recently been appointed and the inspectors have suggested that he should be included in these quarterly meetings.

The Panel Chair confirmed that the Panel received updates on the operation of the Fostering Service and that it exercised its quality assurance function through the Panel Advisor, who regularly attends Fostering Management team meetings. The inspector has suggested that Panel Chairs produce an annual written report to the service to better demonstrate the quality assurance function.

Panel Minutes are completed to a commendable standard and include a summary of the identified strengths and weaknesses of each application (as raised by Panel members) and a record of the reasons for the Panel's recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

**7, 13, 31.**

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

The Fostering Service supports its carers well in their active encouragement of children to achieve their full potential

## **EVIDENCE:**

Northamptonshire County council has recently introduced a Heritage Planning Framework and explicit within it is that all black and minority ethnic Looked after Children will have a Heritage Plan by 2007. The planning framework was supplied to the inspectors during this inspection and comprises a comprehensive assessment, planning and monitoring tool, which should ensure that services delivered to young people will be based on their racial, cultural and ethnic heritage.

Placement Planning Meetings and the matching pro-forma specifically address young people's needs in relation to culture, race and ethnicity. The Fostering Service has a recognised shortfall in terms of carers from black or minority ethnic groups and many young people are therefore inappropriately matched from this point of view. The Fostering Service is pro-actively endeavouring to recruit carers from these groups but has also clarified a list of priority areas of support to facilitate carers in meeting young people's specific needs in terms of

promoting access to appropriate community groups and funding necessary resources (books, clothing, self-care products).

Heritage planning is currently a priority for young people who are not appropriately matched with carers.

The Fostering Service operates a support group specifically for black carers.

Equality and Diversity training is mandatory for carers and comprehensive training packages have been developed for carers and staff. There is a high concentration within this training around race, culture and ethnicity and the service is reminded to ensure that other aspects of inequality around disability and gender are not overlooked.

In April 2005 the local authority established a 'Virtual School'. A written update on the work of the Virtual School was received prior to this inspection. The team is actively involved in providing carer training and has opened up the training provided to designated teachers for Looked After Children for carers to attend.

The Team collects statistical information relating to the attendance and achievement of young people in foster care and works with foster carers around specific educational difficulties being experienced by a child, for example school transfers.

Carers spoke positively of the support provided to help young people achieve their full potential: 'The young people placed are given every opportunity to excel in their education, even the ones that refuse to do so. Something is always put in place that they agree to even if they later refuse to do it'; 'Top priority is to achieve in education'.

Young people also made very positive comments about the support they received from their carers: 'I moved to a really nice school and my foster family help me with my reading and homework'; 'They make me go to school and go to my PEPS meetings'; 'M told me I should really go for education and get good grades'.

Informal Help Online sessions are held at local libraries for foster carers to learn about the best homework help websites.

All young people tracked had Personal Education Plans and, where appropriate, Statements of Special Educational Needs and copies of these were on file.

Developments in the carer review format and great improvements in carer recording of young people's placements now ensure that educational progress is well reflected. It was noted that the records relating to most of the young people tracked during this inspection evidenced that they had made considerable progress educationally during their placement. Carers additionally retain records detailing young people's involvement in leisure activities and

these were noted to be many and varied with one young person being an active member of both a rugby team and a football team.

A Family Link service is provided as part of the Inclusion Service. This element of service provision was not inspected on this occasion but full written information was provided to the inspectors regarding the staffing and organisation of this service. The service has a dedicated staff team, which the Team Manager says, has adapted its procedures around the Every Child Matters five outcomes. Written information details that application and approval processes have been reviewed and updated during the last year with a new applicant's information pack, an updated Carers' Handbook and improved monitoring and support systems.

A user satisfaction survey has been carried out by telephone indicating a high level of satisfaction from carers and parents with the service provided.

An Advocacy worker is linked with the Disabled Children's Service and supports young people accessing the Family Link Service.

All Family Link Service staff are trained assessors in manual handling and work closely with carers to ensure that safe and appropriate equipment is provided to meet young people's very individual needs.

# **Making a Positive Contribution**

## **The intended outcomes for these Standards are:**

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

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

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

**10, 11.**

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

Young people feel able to express their views and feel listened to. They are happy with the arrangements for contact with family and friends.

## **EVIDENCE:**

All young people voicing an opinion were happy with arrangements for contact with family and friends. In the case of young people tracked during this inspection contact was appropriately managed and was supported and encouraged by carers. Carers' monthly summary reports include a section to record any contacts and to detail any impact the contact has on the young person.

In relation to one of the young people tracked some concerns had emerged about the different wishes of a group of siblings in relation to contact frequency. The Fostering Service had been commendably pro-active in involving the Family Group Conference Service, operated by National Children's Home, to consult independently with the young people concerned and their carers to achieve a solution.

The Fostering Service is commended on the development of a range of pro-forma for obtaining the views of fostered children and carers' children in relation to the carer's annual review. At the time of the previous inspection young people were only consulted in relation to their own Looked After

Children review and it was identified as important that their views on their foster placement were regularly obtained.

The Panel clearly value these contributions and the inspectors noted that some of the young people tracked had made some very positive statements on these forms.

The service also obtains young people's written views when a placement ends and these comments are included with the carer's subsequent annual review. Fostering Service Managers detailed the use, with very young children and their carers, of a CD-ROM tool, which enables children to interactively communicate their wishes and feelings. No evidence was seen of this as no very young children were tracked during this inspection.

Young people commented positively on their ability to voice their opinions and have them listened to: 'I am only eight years old but they talk to me about the plans for me and let me be in on the meetings for some of the time'; 'She (placing social worker) sees me on my own because I might have something important to say and we can talk about it'; 'they (foster carers) listen to me and value what I say'.

Carers commented: 'My foster child is involved in her reviews and her placing social worker sees her regularly and spends time alone with her to discuss any issues'; 'I am pleased to see that children have now been involved in carers' reviews'.

The Service Manager said that there was a 'positive and collaborative working relationship' with the Children's Rights Service and the Children's Rights Officer provides a training session for foster carers detailing her role with young people. A range of activities and events is organised by the Children's Rights service and fostered children are encouraged to participate.

One young person said: 'I know my rights and if I don't I can talk to Y and G (foster carers)'.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

### 29.

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

Significant changes are being made to the fee structure and allowances paid to foster carers. These changes are not yet fully implemented but the indication is that they will encourage carers to better address the specific individual needs of young people.

## EVIDENCE:

Standard 14 was not fully inspected on this occasion although some elements of financial preparation for leaving care have been noted under the inspector's consideration of carer allowances.

The Fostering Service has fully reviewed carer allowances during the last year and the Service Manager and the Business Development Manager presented a report to the Senior Management Team in October 2006.

There has already been consultation with carers regarding the proposed new scheme and one of the inspectors met with a group of carers who have been involved in a 'Focus Group' looking at 'Skills level payments' and the development of carer portfolios to evidence skills and abilities.

By December this year all carers have been requested to complete a portfolio of evidence of skills with their Link Worker. This is necessary if they are to be paid on the new skills level scheme. Portfolios will be assessed by a panel to determine the level of carer competence.

The new payment scheme involves the allowance being split into two elements, maintenance covering the costs of the young person living in the household and 'PLECS' (Personal, Leisure, Education, Clothing and Savings elements).

Within the new system carers are required to retain written records of how this 'PLECS' element is used. This record will move with the young person if there is a placement change.

At the time of this inspection carers' feelings about the new scheme are mixed. The fostering Service plans to hold carers' meetings in all geographical areas this month to fully explain implementation of the scheme.

Some carers commented about issues considered 'unfair' within the scheme and these have been passed anonymously to the Team and Service Manager for their consideration.

Although one carer commented in a questionnaire: 'When the new skills level comes into effect, even though I have some of the most difficult to place young people, I will be about £100 a week worse off', Fostering Service Managers assured inspectors that no carers who have completed their portfolio, would suffer financially with the implementation of the new scheme.

The Service Manager and the Business Development Officer have met with Team Managers from Child Care Operational Teams to explain the new system in order that placing social workers have a full understanding and there are plans to develop guidance for young people on the 'PLECS' element of the allowance with the intention that, as part of preparation for independence, they should be progressively involved in decisions around the proportional allocation of this money. An integral element of the scheme is that all young people in care in excess of six months should have a savings account.

It will be important for the Fostering Service to undertake a review of the new scheme with both carers and young people to assess its impact.

Currently, from their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, clothing and personal allowance is paid directly to young people. Under the new scheme this will cease and payments will be made to the carer who will be required to evidence working with the young person to develop effective budgeting skills.

There is a proposal to 'ring fence' some carers, for example those specifically equipped to provide placements to young people with disabilities or of specific ethnic origin or with complex behavioural problems. This 'ring fencing' would include retainer payments to hold placements and prevent them being used for young people with other needs.

Fostering Service Managers confirmed that payments are currently, and will continue to be, in line with Fostering Network recommended rates.

The Supported Lodgings Scheme is operated in partnership with Leaving Care. The Fostering Service is reminded of the need to ensure that finance arrangements relating to carers and young people in this group are not



overlooked since a questionnaire from one carer, received subsequent to the inspection states: 'Our one child at university has had an uphill battle with the leaving care team to get advice and support despite the fact that she has a disability. She went six weeks into uni term without receiving the correct monies. We are not being paid a retainer or for weekends, reading weeks etc, only for the Xmas, Easter and summer holidays'.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

**The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

**1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25, 32.**

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

The Fostering Service has undergone a management re structure, which has brought about a clearer focus on staff roles and responsibilities and clarified lines of accountability. Recording practices are greatly improved.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose Clearly details the new management structure and the aims and objectives of service provision and includes a full summary of the processes and procedures for foster carer assessment, approval and support.

The Young People's Guide to Foster Care in Northamptonshire has good content with clear information about placement planning, making a complaint, right to advocacy and the roles and responsibilities of social workers and foster carers. The inspectors have suggested however that this should be produced in a more 'child friendly' format.

The previous inspection report was critical of the complexity of the management structure of the fostering service and reflected foster carers' citation of communication and inconsistency as a major difficulty.

The service is commended on work undertaken during the last year to address these issues and has been judged to exceed the standard relating to 'Organisation and Management of staff' in recognition of the very significant progress made. The flow chart included in the Statement of Purpose now demonstrates clear lines of accountability.

One Team Manager now oversees the main elements of service provision and there has been greater devolution of management responsibility to the Principal Social Workers. Five of the six Principal Social Workers were interviewed during this inspection and the inspectors were impressed with their growth as a team and the development of a strong 'Team Identity'.

Management training is being provided to better equip them for the developments in their role. A clear commitment was noted, both from them and from Service Management, and indeed from the Panel to ensure continued development of consistency across all elements of fostering service provision (including Short Breaks and Remand).

The progress evidenced is particularly commendable in that the Fostering Service has lost four posts: 1 Team Manager, 1 Principal social worker, 1 Fostering Support worker and 1 Placement Co-ordinator, during the last year and restructuring has caused uncertainties for staff.

The Service Manager confirmed ongoing liaison with Team Managers from the Child Care Operations Teams to improve communications with them and one placing social worker commented: 'Communication with the service is always excellent'. Another placing social worker said of the Fostering Team: 'Basically my experience of the service, as a case accountable social worker, is that they do a very good job with minimal resources'.

Some foster carers remained critical of placing social workers: 'In some cases support from children's social workers is erratic and promises are not kept-this

affects them and makes our job harder'; 'The placing social workers do not know the child well and the child does not trust them. Twice this has resulted in a sudden, unplanned change of placement'.

Others however spoke of very positive support from all parties: 'My link worker visits monthly and has telephone contact in between, as does the child's social worker. They address any issues that arise and always respond positively to any requests made on behalf of the children'; 'I have had various problems and obstacles since becoming a carer and have had the best support and advice from all around to help me achieve the sometimes impossible'.

Staff spoken to during the inspection spoke of good formal and informal support systems, regular supervision and appraisal and generally good access to training. The inspectors did however note that access to external training has been temporarily suspended for financial reasons and would remind the Fostering Service of the potential impact of this on skill development.

Since the previous inspection the service has developed a comprehensive procedure for dealing with new applications. This system is managed and overseen by a Principal Social Worker and full written guidance has been prepared detailing how the Training and Recruitment Team will manage a foster carer application from the point of initial enquiry to commencement of Preparation training.

Since the previous inspection the service has reviewed the carer annual review process and has developed a commendable format for recording annual reviews. The format is far more comprehensive and clearly time consuming for Link Workers to complete but it now comprises a good indicator of the carer's progress through a fostering year. Full detail is included of training undertaken, of updating of necessary checks and of knowledge and skills acquired.

The Fostering Service has developed a good range of training opportunities for carers and includes a good range of core and mandatory training. The training programme content and carer attendance are regularly reviewed. Programmes offered include: Child Development; Alternative Therapies; Contact; Children's Rights; Separation and Loss; Nutrition and Eating Disorders and Safety in the Home.

Some carers commented that 'you always see the same old faces at the training' and the service is reminded of the primary responsibility of link workers to encourage carer attendance at training. Some carers indicated that child-care was often a problem in terms of attending training and the service should encourage link workers to discuss this with individual carers.

Carers generally spoke of good support from their link worker, which they felt also helped to promote stability of placements: 'If a carer was struggling with a difficult placement the fostering service would explore moving the child before it came to breaking point thus avoiding an emergency move. However their

aim would be to offer good support and practical advice first, in the hope of maintaining the placement if possible’.

The service has introduced a Supervision Agreement, signed between the carer and her link worker, detailing the agreed supervision frequency and a pro-forma record of supervision is now completed at each session and signed by both parties. There is a standard agenda for supervision meetings.

During the inspection the inspectors spoke with two carers only recently approved and managing their first placements, both of whom felt somewhat isolated and not well supported. Additionally a kinship carer’s file evidenced a drift of some years with inappropriate supervision and support prior to the transfer of the case to the dedicated kinship team earlier this year. The Fostering Service should ensure that the supervision arrangements identified fully meet the support needs of the carer.

The Foster Carers’ Handbook has been reviewed and updated and the hours of operation of the Fostering Duty desk have been increased significantly from half days to full days providing a contact point for carers unable to contact their own link worker, which was a major criticism of carers at the time of the previous inspection.

Form F assessments examined during this inspection were generally completed to a good standard although some inconsistencies were noted such as the number and nature of references sought and the reference (or not) to carer competencies. Fostering Service Management are aware of these inconsistencies and they are being clearly pointed out by the Panel. Work is being undertaken by Principal Social Workers to address this and no recommendation has therefore been made.

During attendance at the panel the inspector noted that one assessment had been completed by a trainee social worker supervised by a qualified social worker. The trainee presented the assessment, which was fairly complex, to the Panel. This was considered inappropriate by the inspector. Additionally another trainee social worker was supervising one of the carers tracked with no evidence that she was ever accompanied by a qualified worker. Regulations clarify that unqualified workers are not able to complete assessments or supervise carers and the fostering service should evidence robust oversight by a qualified worker.

*Although Standard 22 has not been inspected on this occasion a recommendation relating to the use of unqualified workers has been reiterated within this report in a slightly amended form.*

Fostering Service records in relation to carers and young people are much improved since the previous inspection. A number of good pro-forma recording tools have brought greater standardisation and consistency to files retained by the service and carer recording has been greatly enhanced with the

introduction of a file record in respect of each young person placed, which includes the requirement for carers to complete a monthly summary, a copy of which is sent to the placing social worker. Carers have been provided with recording training. The carers visited during this inspection were retaining these records well.

Within the recent management restructure there has been a change to the Principal social Worker with allocated responsibility for kinship placements. There has also been an increase of one full time post to the kinship team but the benefits of this have not yet been realised since there are currently two vacant posts in that team.

The Principal Social Worker with kinship responsibility was spoken to during the inspection and she is currently working on the development of robust practice guidelines relating to the assessment, approval and support of kinship carers. The team are currently piloting the Family Rights Group assessment format with new kinship applicants and are liaising with the Grandparents Association to obtain materials for consideration and consultation. The team is also liaising closely with Child Care Operations colleagues about family and friends fostering arrangements. All current arrangements are being reviewed to assess whether support provided currently is appropriate.

Written information supplied by the Service Manager and discussions with staff during this inspection evidence a clear recognition that there are currently shortfalls in the kinship provision. There has been an increase in applications from family and friends carers (20 of the 73 households approved in the 12 months up to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2006) and a good awareness of the developmental needs of this element of service provision was evidenced during this inspection. Accordingly, although the service has been judged not to fully meet this standard currently, no recommendation has been made.

# SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	4

<b>STAYING SAFE</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>3</b>	3
<b>6</b>	3
<b>8</b>	3
<b>9</b>	2
<b>15</b>	2
<b>30</b>	4

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

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

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

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

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS22	Regulations clarify that unqualified workers are not able to complete assessments or supervise carers and the fostering service should evidence robust oversight of trainee social workers completing these tasks, by a qualified social worker.
2.	FS21	The Fostering Service should ensure that the supervision arrangements identified fully meet the support needs of the carer. Particular consideration should be given to the potentially high level of support needed by newly approved carers and the very specific needs of kinship carers
3.	FS9	Specific risks associated with the placement of a young person in a particular household should be clearly identified and carefully considered. This should include evidenced consultation with young people already in that placement and their placing social workers. Bedroom sharing should be included in assessment of risk.



4.	FS15	Records relating to staff recruitment should fully evidence that all information required by law has been obtained and that all necessary checks have been undertaken prior to the making of an appointment.
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