



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care Associates (North East)

**19 Portland Terrace
Jesmond
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne & Wear
NE2 1QQ**

Lead Inspector
Dennis Bradley

Announced Inspection

28th November 2005 to 27th January 2006

10:00

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Foster Care Associates (North East)

Address 19 Portland Terrace
Jesmond
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne & Wear
NE2 1QQ

Telephone number 0191 212 6900

Fax number 0191 212 6904

Email address matthew.horton@thefca.co.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Foster Care Associates Limited

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Matthew Richard Horton

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

No. of places registered (if applicable) 1

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th December 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates (North East) is part of the national organisation Foster Care Associates. FCA (NE) provides family placements to children and young people in the North East of England. The main office is situated in Newcastle upon Tyne and there were sub-branches in Alnwick, Darlington and Seaton Burn. At the time of the inspection a fourth sub-branch was being opened in Middlesbrough. FCA (NE) has continued to grow since the last inspection. At the time of the inspection, FCA (NE) was offering a family placement service to 171 children and young people. The Agency offers a range of services to meet the needs of placing authorities, for example emergency, parent and child, short-term, bridging, assessment and long-term placements. FCA (NE) also specialises in offering placements to children who may challenge the service.

FCA (NE) provides a multi-disciplinary approach to working with children and young people, which amongst other things, offers opportunities for foster carers and social work staff to access therapy and educational support services. FCA (NE) also provides children and young people with access to group work and activities provided by a team of resource workers. The Agency has achieved the Investors In Children award.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was announced, and was the fourth full inspection of the Service. The inspectors visited and spoke with carers and young people and members of staff and the Registered Manager were interviewed. A sample of records was examined. Questionnaires were also issued to foster carers and children.

What the service does well:

The management of FCA(NE) was efficient and effective. The Agency provides suitably qualified and experienced members of staff to supervise and support the carers and young people.

The Agency and carers actively promoted the health and development of children. Foster carers valued the work of the Therapy Team in sustaining placements.

The Fostering Panel carried out its role thoroughly and effectively and in doing so safeguarded the welfare of children placed with the Agency.

Education was actively promoted and children and young people were supported to develop and achieve. The work of the Education Team was highly valued by carers who recognised its importance in contributing to the stability of placements. The Resource Team provided a range of activities for children and young people.

The Agency and its carers promoted and supported appropriate contact between the young people and their families. Children and young people were provided with a range of opportunities to give their views and opinions about the Service and issues that might affect their daily lives and future.

There was a clear strategy for supporting carers and this contributed to maintaining the placements of children. Most carers said that they were well supported by the Agency.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The Agency had taken action to obtain exemptions from local authorities where foster carers provided placements for more than 3 children.

Arrangements were in place for Criminal Records Bureau checks on people working for the Agency to be renewed every 3 years.

Foster Placement Agreements included more information about the elements of matching that had been considered when placements were arranged.

Decisions about appropriate placements of children were taken by a qualified social worker. Education Liaison Officers were also more involved in matching children to carers who were capable of meeting their needs.

There had been an improvement in the Agency obtaining relevant information about the health care history and needs of children placed with carers. The

introduction of Health Passports for children has improved how their health care needs are recorded and monitored.

What they could do better:

Although there had been some improvement in the arrangements for carrying out checks on new staff they were not fully adequate.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcome for standard 12.

The Agency and foster carers worked to promote the health and development of the children placed with them.

EVIDENCE:

FCA(NE) had well-**established** links with the local health services and, in particular, good links with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health services. There was evidence that a higher priority had been given to obtaining information about young peoples' health care needs and history. Some carers said they still had difficulty getting relevant information from placing authority social workers. Some of the children's records maintained by the Agency did not contain any health care information. This information was in the records held by the carers.

Foster carers were clear about their role in helping to promote the health of children in their care. Foster carers make sure that children are registered with a doctor and dentist and they make arrangements for any specialist health visits that may be needed. They kept 'Health Passports' for each child in their care. These contained details of the child's health care needs and any appointments and treatments. Carers said that they found the Health Passports useful, although some were unclear as to whether they should given to carers who provided respite care.

Training in health and hygiene issues, as well as first aid, was available to foster carers. The 'core curriculum' for approved carers included a two-day course 'Promoting and Safeguarding the Health and Development of Children and Young People'. More specific training was also available for example on substance misuse/drug awareness.

Foster carers and staff said they valued the work done by the Agency's therapy service. One carer described how the involvement of a therapist had

given them an insight into a child's behaviour. Work had been done to inform carers, social workers and other agencies about the therapy service. The Therapy Team also provided training to carers. This included a session on 'Understanding The Traumatized Child'.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at outcomes for standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 & 30.

The Agency was staffed with suitably qualified and experienced staff. There had been some improvement in the arrangements for carrying out checks on new staff. But they were not fully adequate in ensuring that the welfare of children is safeguarded.

The standard of accommodation in the foster carer homes visited was satisfactory and the provision of a safe, healthy environment for children was actively promoted by the Agency.

The Agency tried hard to ensure that children were matched with carers who were capable of meeting their needs.

Systems and procedures were in place to protect young people and minimize the risk of abuse and neglect. But on one occasion some staff had not taken appropriate action to implement these procedures.

The Fostering Panel carried out its role in relation to the approval of foster carers effectively and efficiently and in doing so safeguarded the welfare of children in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

Arrangements were in place to renew Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on all staff and carers every 3 years. A sample of 6 staff files (including one self employed person working for the Agency) was checked. Records had been kept of checks and references that had been obtained and their outcomes. All of the staff had had a CRB check and copies of their qualifications were on file. Most files also contained a recent photograph of the person.

Since the last inspection arrangements were in place for telephone enquiries to be made to follow up both references. But in 1 file there was no evidence that either reference had been followed up and in another only 1 had been. For 2 staff there was no recorded evidence that verification had been sought as to why their previous positions working with children/vulnerable adults had ended. The application form for 1 of these staff only detailed their previous employment history in years. This makes identifying any gaps in employment, and obtaining a satisfactory written explanation of them, more difficult. However, there was evidence that the Agency had taken steps to address this matter.

Foster carers homes are inspected as part of their initial assessment and at each annual review. A health and safety checklist is completed and this includes a vehicle check and an insurance and MOT check. FCA(NE) expects that each foster child will be allocated their own bedroom accommodation, unless there are agreed reasons for not doing so. No problems were noted regarding the standard of accommodation in those foster carer homes that were visited.

Foster carers were provided with written guidance and basic training regarding health and safety and post approval training included a two-day health and safety course.

Staff described how they tried hard to ensure that children and young people were carefully matched with foster carers who were capable of meeting their needs. This was evidenced in the records of the matching process as well as in discussions with staff and carers. Since the last inspection arrangements had been put in place to ensure that supervising social workers, or their managers, were always involved in this process. Foster carers confirmed that they were consulted and provided with relevant information throughout the matching process. It was evident that where practicable, planned introductions were arranged between the child to be placed and the foster carer.

Training for foster carers covered child protection issues and safe caring. Foster carers were required to prepare a safe caring policy for their own household. They received written guidance on dealing with bullying behaviour and training was also available. Records of incidents when children went missing indicated that carers followed the Agency's guidance concerning such incidents. An external consultant provided child protection training to staff.

The Carers Handbook clearly states that the use of corporal punishment is not acceptable. Foster carers confirmed that the Agency had made clear to them what punishments were acceptable. Carers said that the sanction mostly used was withdrawal of activities. Staff and foster carers were expected to attend training in behaviour management. Carers described how the Agency's policy was that carer should not use physical restraint on young people. The

placement agreement meeting is used to agree behaviour management strategies for each young person. The methods used are reviewed in each carer's regular supervision sessions.

The Agency's senior management team informed the inspector of one incident where prompt action to safeguard children had not been taken by staff who were informed of an allegation made by one child about another. The senior management team carried out an investigation into this matter and prepared an action plan aimed at preventing this happening again.

Fostering panel members were observed giving thorough and informed consideration to the foster carer assessments and annual reviews presented to the Panel. Reports were made available to panel members within the specified timescales. Panel members were observed to be well prepared and a structured decision making process was evident.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

Suitable arrangements were in place to ensure that foster carers and staff were aware of the need to value diversity. This meant that the specific needs of children were considered when arranging and providing placements to children.

Education was actively promoted by the Agency and children and young people were supported to develop and achieve.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency had a 'Valuing Diversity' Policy and an Equal Opportunities Policy. Prospective foster carers' attitudes to issues of diversity are covered as part of their assessment. Preparatory training for carers covered the principles of valuing diversity and this was also included in the core post-approval training programme.

The Agency had provided support to one carer, to help them meet the religious, cultural and ethnic needs of two young people placed with them. This included the provision of an interpreter. This carer already had previous relevant experience and could rely on support from their own network of friends and contacts.

Those children and young people spoken to, confirmed that their foster carers encouraged and supported them to pursue their interests and hobbies. This was also evident during the visits to foster carers' homes. One young person said it was his ambition to play football for the England team! The Agency also organised a range of activities and outings for young people.

Of the 135 children and young people placed with FCA(NE) who were of compulsory school age, 134 (99%) had established school placements. 5 young people placed with the Agency were not of compulsory school age. 3 of these were engaged in further education.

Staff and foster carers recognised the importance of establishing and supporting appropriate educational placements for children and how this contributed to stable foster placements. The Agency's Education Team, which was highly valued by foster carers, consisted of Education Liaison Officers (ELOS) and Education Support Workers. The team was responsible for supporting children to meet their educational needs. Additional support was available from the Resource Team when needed.

The ELOs primary responsibility was to find and maintain appropriate education provision for each young person placed with the Agency. They also provided training, information and advice to foster carers. The ELOs were involved in the decision-making when placements with the agency were being planned, especially if the child had special educational needs. They also recently provided some training to the Placements Team to give them an overview of the educational provision in each local authority covered by the Agency.

The Education Support Workers were involved in providing planned and targeted support in school, where children were experiencing difficulties, in order to maintain the placement. They also provided outreach support with an educational component to 2 young people who were not at school. The Education Team also provided booster classes for young people who have been identified as underachieving, as well as study support for young people preparing for GCSE exams. Some young people received payments to encourage and reward school attendance.

The Agency only had one child who was placed by a local authority for regular periods of shared care. Relevant policies and procedures were in place.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcomes for standards 10 & 11.

Contact arrangements were clear and planned and the Agency and its carers promoted appropriate contact between the young people and their families.

The Agency had a good range of arrangements in place to ensure that children and young people were consulted about the Service and issues that might affect their daily lives and future.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence that, where appropriate, Agency staff and foster carers encouraged and supported children and young people to maintain family contacts and friendships. Foster carers received written guidance and training covering how they should support children to maintain and develop their family contacts. The Agency provides venues for contact to take place as well as staff to provide supervised contact where necessary. Contact arrangements were identified in assessments and documentation provided to carers and these were discussed and made clear at the time of placement. Foster carers interviewed confirmed that they were clear about the contact arrangements for the children and young people placed with them.

The arrangements for ensuring that children and young people were consulted about the service provided by the Agency and about their daily life and future included:

* Providing foster carers with written guidance and training about what the Agency expects in respect of listening and responding to children;

* Children's Forums in each area covered by the Agency and a 'We Foster 2' group for the children of foster carers;

- * The organisation of a range of activities for children that provides a more informal opportunity for children to raise any issues or concerns with staff. The Resource Team regularly consults children regarding the work they do and the activities that are organised. (The Manager of this team meets regularly with the Participation Officer of one local authority to pool resources in relation to consulting with children and young people.);
- * Asking older children their views about their placement when foster carers' annual reviews are carried out;
- * Inviting a group of young people to meet with Fostering Panel members to look at how foster carers are recruited and how the Panel carries out its work;
- * Supporting a group of young people to attend a national FCA Young People's Conference in October 2005.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcome for standard 29.

Suitable arrangements were in place to ensure that payments to foster carers were clearly explained, paid promptly and at the agreed time.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency provides foster carers with written guidance covering fostering allowances, payments and expenses. They also get an annual summary of fees and allowances. Foster carers confirmed that payments were made promptly.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

We looked at the outcomes for standards 17, 21 & 24.

Management of FCA(NE) was efficient and effective. The Agency had suitable arrangements in place to recruit a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children and young people. There were also suitable arrangements in place to ensure that there is an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff employed by the Agency.

There was a clear strategy in place for working with, and supporting carers and this was implemented. This meant that carers felt supported by the Agency and this contributed to maintaining the placements of children.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency had 129 foster families who provided a range of placements that included: short and long term placements as well as parent and child placements. There were specific targets for the recruitment of new foster carers particularly carers for older children. The Recruitment Team was also targeting recruitment in areas where demand for placements was highest in order where possible, to keep children within their own locality. There were clear procedures in place regarding the assessment of foster carers and the Fostering Panel was thorough in monitoring the quality of these assessments. Staff said that there were suitable arrangements in place to monitor staffing levels and workloads. Additional staff had been recruited as the Agency grew and workloads increased. Staff had also been employed on a sessional basis when needed. Arrangements were in place to encourage the retention of salaried staff and foster carers.

Supervising social workers and carers were clear about the role of the supervising social worker. Annual reviews of carers' approvals were being carried out. Only the first review is automatically referred to the Panel. Subsequent review reports are referred only if there is a need to do so. The foster carer, supervising social worker, placing authority social worker and young person being fostered are asked to complete a form requesting their views about the placement. The Agency was concerned at the relatively low response rate from some placing authority social workers.

Arrangements were in place to provide foster carers with up to 3 weeks respite care a year. Some carers said that the respite placements were arranged at short notice. This meant that introductory visits sometimes could not take place and caused some anxiety for carers and children. The Agency was trying to recruit more retained respite carers to address this matter.

Foster carer support groups were held regularly in each of the Agency's sub-offices. Most carers said that they were satisfied with the support they received from the Agency. However, some said that the Resource Team was overstretched and that some of the resource workers did not appear to understand the need to provide suitable activities for children and young people who were not attending school. The Director said that arrangements were being made to provide resource workers with additional training.

Case records were in place for each child and these were stored securely. Foster carer training included a session on recording and post approval training

included the course 'Helping the Child Make Sense of Their Past'. The Agency's Standards of Practice required carers to keep information on children placed with them confidential and secure. There was evidence that this expectation was being complied with. The Agency was being more active in trying to ensure that the relevant information was obtained from each child's placing authority.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion

"N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

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

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	4

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

Yes

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS15	5, 7 & 20	<p>The Registered person must take action to ensure that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references and that;2. Where a person has previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, so far as reasonably practicable verification of the reason why the employment or position ended is obtained;3. A record of the outcome of the above checks is maintained and included in the person's personnel file.	07/03/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS15	Schedule 1 to the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 stipulates that the information required in respect of persons seeking to carry on, manage or work for the purposes of a fostering service should include a full employment history, and a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in a person's employment. In order to comply with this, the employment histories of applicants for positions within the Agency should specify the month, as well as the year, in which periods of employment began and ended.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Cramlington Area Office

Northumbria House

Manor Walks

Cramlington

Northumberland

NE23 6UR

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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