



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Reach-Out Care Ltd

**Innovation House
Wear Valley Business Centre
26 Longfield Road
South Church, Bp Auckland
County Durham
DL14 6XB**

Lead Inspector
Stephen Graham

Announced Inspection
3rd April 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	Reach-Out Care Ltd
Address	Innovation House Wear Valley Business Centre 26 Longfield Road South Church, Bp Auckland County Durham DL14 6XB
Telephone number	01388 770850
Fax number	01388 770851
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Reach-Out Care Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Carol Ann Bargewell
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 16th November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Reach-Out Care independent fostering agency has been in operation since 1999. It is based in new office accommodation within a trading estate close to the centre of Bishop Auckland. The fostering team comprises a manager, social workers, support workers and administrative staff supporting around 20 carers. The standard weekly fee for the care of any child is currently £772.00, with variations negotiated dependent on the individual package of care to be provided by the service.

SUMMARY

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

The Inspector would like to thank the children, carers and staff at Reach Out Care for their welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered by two inspectors over a 3 day period through:

- Talking individually with children, carers and staff
- Visiting foster carers' homes
- Group discussions with staff
- Talking with the managers of the service
- Reading children's, carers and staff files
- Reading policies, procedures and records
- Children's questionnaires
- Carers questionnaires
- Children's social workers questionnaires
- Observing the fostering panel
- Talking with the Chair of the fostering panel

Previous reports had highlighted difficulties for this service, leading to additional visits from the Commission and a number of urgent requirements and recommendations subsequently being made.

Positively, previous reports had also highlighted that since the appointment of the new Fostering Manager in May 2005, the agency had begun to take urgent action to address these problems. The Inspectors reported that 'the agency is taking very seriously our concerns and they have begun to put many of the problems right to make sure that children placed with Reach-Out foster carers are safe and well cared for'.

During this visit the Inspectors found that the Agency have continued to respond positively to the previous requirements set and recommendations made. The views of children, their carers and placing social workers received during the inspection further endorsed this.

The overall judgement for this service is 'good'.

What the service does well:

During this inspection, a number of very positive comments were received from placing social workers, carers and children.

In response to the question "What's the best thing about fostering for you?" one young person stated "you get looked after", another highlighted "good food, nice clothes, happy in foster home". A third said: "being looked after by people who care for me and look after me".

One young person was happy to give their view that "Reach-Out care is a good fostering service"

One placing social worker described how the carers are "prepared to put themselves out and to adjust routines" to meet the needs of the child. Another described "The attention and support provided by the carers. Their approach is loving yet no nonsense which suits the child well". A third stated that the "Foster carers are able to provide a warm, nurturing environment for a young child to develop positively".

Nearly all of the placing social workers felt that the carers look after the children placed with them "very well indeed".

One carer stated that the best thing about Reach Out Care was the "help and support" they received from them. Overall, carers were very satisfied with the support they receive from the agency and gave examples of "transport, advice, respite, schooling and health checks".

Carers also confirmed that they receive good supervision and attend regular support and training sessions. None of the carers could identify any "worst things" about the agency, and could suggest no changes needed to improve the service.

The inspectors found that carers and agency staff effectively monitor the health needs of each child. Young people were able to provide confirmation of the help they receive from their carers in both eating healthily and enjoying regular exercise.

The carer's homes visited as part of the inspection presented a pleasant homely environment, made safe from identifiable hazards and both suitable and spacious enough for foster children to live in. One placing social worker described the carers as "safety conscious and child focused".

Positively, none of the carers who were visited or responded by questionnaire raised any concerns regarding the matching processes in place. One carer gave their view that care had been taken by the Agency with the placement and added that it could not have been a better match.

Agency educational support workers provide good direct support to children and young people. They support the social and life skills achievements of young people and engage with community groups and education to promote this.

Carers' work well with placing social workers, children and young people to ensure that appropriate contact between children, young people and their families is maintained. They are supported by the agency in achieving this.

Children and young people provided good evidence that their own social workers, supervising social workers from the agency and their foster carers seek their views. There was also evidence of their foster carers advocating for them.

The agency makes appropriate and prompt payments in accordance with its policies and procedures.

Carers described the communication between the agency and themselves as being good. Positively, Directors of the service visit foster carers to ask them directly for their views and comments on the level of support provided to them.

Positively, foster carers themselves were able to report to the inspectors that a range of training has been provided to support them in their work with children. Opportunities to undertake NVQ 3 training are also being arranged.

"Out of hours support" is provided by the agency, carers confirmed that this is always available to them. They also confirmed that the Foster carer groups meet regularly and are well structured, allowing both training and mutual support elements to take place.

Case files generally contained good recording by staff and clearly explained the history of each young person placed with the agency.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Work has continued aimed at ensuring that the assessments and checks made by the agency before it approves people to become foster carers are thorough. All of the important information about children and foster carers needed by the Fostering Panel is being provided to them, so that the Panel are able to make the right decisions about whether or not people will make good foster carers.

The agency has worked to ensure that children's social workers are informed of any worries or concerns it has about children or their carers.

It has continued to make sure that foster carers receive regular visits from staff at Reach-Out Care and that they are supervised and supported properly.

The agency and its carers have worked to ensure that they get full information about children so that they can make the right decision when placing them. Children are not placed with foster carers unless the agency feels that they can meet children's needs.

Reach-Out Care have continued to work positively to look at why placements have broken down so that they can reduce the number of times children change placements.

The Agency has used their procedures to look into the specified complaints previously received by them from the commission.

What they could do better:

Positively, none of the carers interviewed and responding by questionnaire could identify any 'worst things' about the agency. All felt that no changes were needed. However, the inspectors identified a number of areas where they felt further improvements could be made, particularly with regard to the consistent use and completion of necessary records.

The arrangements to successfully match young people with carers who can meet their needs have improved since the previous inspection, but these need to remain consistent and to be properly documented to ensure they are effective for each young person. The overall arrangements put in place by the Agency to keep each child safe need to be documented fully and consistently.

Although there was evidence that the children placed with the agency's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes both their health and their educational achievement, the Agency must ensure that all documents needed to ensure that the needs of children are being met, are in place.

Although the Agency have introduced improvements in the monitoring of carers records, these still need to be more consistently maintained and documented. Within this report, recommendations are made regarding the conditions of approval for each carer, reports to carer review meetings, records of their supervision and training, and details within their Foster Care Agreements.

Although the Agency has introduced improvements in the monitoring of case records for children, a number of examples of the required LAC documentation either being out of date or missing from the file have been highlighted to the service for their review and action.

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 outcome for this Standard is:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Reach Out Care works to ensure that the health needs of children placed with their carers are effectively monitored and promoted.

EVIDENCE:

The children's and young people files examined contained evidence that necessary consents for medical treatment have been obtained or are in the process of being obtained from their placing social workers. Files also contained good evidence that carers and agency staff monitor the overall emotional and developmental health needs of each child.

Discussion with young people and their carers confirmed that each child was registered with a local doctor and dentist. Carers gave examples of treatments arranged to the benefit of young people. In one example the carers had acted in the best interests of the child by seeking medical advice and re-assurance regarding suspected delays in the child's physical development.

The files examined contained limited evidence that the looked after children had received their statutory annual medical examinations within the last twelve months. This was highlighted to the registered provider of the service who confirmed that they would raise this with the relevant placing social workers and prompt the arrangement of outstanding examinations and ensure that files were updated with this information.

The agency provides training for carers to support them in ensuring that the dietary needs of children and young people are met through "Healthy eating". This is supplemented by the agency through the written guidance provided to carers in their carer's handbook. In discussion and through their questionnaire

responses, young people were able to provide confirmation of the help they receive from their carers in both eating healthily and enjoying regular exercise.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, and 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Managers at the service are both suitable and competent to provide it. Young people are placed with carers who provide safe homes, though recording of health and safety checks need to be more consistent. Matching arrangements have improved since the previous inspection, but need to remain consistent to ensure they are effective for each young person. There are good overall arrangements put in place by the Agency to keep children safe, but these need to be documented fully and consistently. Staff recruitment procedures are effective. The agency's panel is well comprised and is making good decisions and recommendations to the decision maker.

EVIDENCE:

The previous inspection confirmed that the recruitment processes in place at the agency were robust. This inspection re-confirmed that although no new staff had been employed the agency continues to maintain good systems to recruit staff and carers who have the qualities and experience necessary to work directly and safely with children. An examination of management, staff and carers files showed that the service takes up all of the necessary safeguarding checks including enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures. One example, within a carer's file, of the summary record of CRB clearance being un-signed was highlighted to the service provider for their

review and action. Staff files were found to contain evidence of their ongoing training and qualifications held.

Each carer's home visited as part of the inspection presented a pleasant homely environment, made safe from identifiable hazards and both suitable and spacious enough for foster children to live in. One placing social worker described the carers as "safety conscious and child focused". One carer who was visited highlighted how they had recently extended their home to create further space for the children. Carers confirmed that during their support visits agency staff regularly check the ongoing safety of their homes. Carers also confirmed that they had received Health and Safety training. This is supplemented through the additional Health and Safety guidance provided to them in their carers handbook. Carer's files contained copies of motor insurance and vehicle MOT certificates and completed Health and Safety checklists. The record of monthly supervision visits used by agency staff throughout each year includes space to record their ongoing checks on Health and Safety issues, including smoke alarm checks. However some examples from those examined were found to be incomplete.

The service has continued to work positively to address limitations to placement choice through ongoing recruitment aimed at increasing the number of available carers. Positively, none of the carers who were visited or responded by questionnaire raised any concerns regarding the matching processes in place. The carers visited commented positively on the arrangements in place to 'match' children successfully with them. They described how introductory visits had taken place with some children and how this had helped both them and the children to get to know each other better, this was also confirmed by young people. Carers also confirmed that good initial written information about the children had also been provided to them by the agency. In one example carers had asked and been able to read the previous foster carer's daily recording. One carer gave their view that care had been taken by the Agency with the placement and added that it could not have been a better match. They contrasted this with very poor matches prior to the new providers taking over the fostering service.

Although carers and children were very positive about the matching process and the practical steps taken by the agency to support this, the documentary evidence from the carers and children's files examined did not fully reflect the positive work that had been undertaken. Some files contained limited documented evidence of the matching processes, the 'matching proforma' was not available within each carers file and some of the placement agreements did not include detail of the matching elements considered and any shortfalls. It was acknowledged with one of these examples that it came from the period prior to the change in management arrangements at the agency.

Some carers did highlight problems in receiving initial written information from placing social workers about the children placed with them. In each of these

situations there was evidence that issues around lack of initial information and LAC documentation were being raised by carers and fostering staff with the social workers placing the child.

The agency is working to make sure that the arrangements to ensure "Safe Caring" of children by foster carers are effective. One carer visited was able to confirm that they had received a safe caring policy and were busy producing a new policy for their home to be discussed at their next supervision. Another confirmed that they had updated their safe caring policy and the agency has taken a copy. The Manager confirmed that all carers had received training on Safe Caring and all were in process of doing their own safe caring policies.

The documentary evidence from the carers files examined did not fully reflect the positive work undertaken and reported by the carers and manager, as none of the files contained copies of these safe caring policies.

Carers are provided with training and receive written guidance regarding child protection procedures and the safe care of children. One carer's file indicated that they had been provided with child protection training but contained no evidence to show that they had completed it.

Carers interviewed confirmed that they had received 'behaviour management' training. The agency provides carers with information about safe care and control through their foster carers handbook. Through the handbook and training, the agency makes clear that no form of corporal punishment is acceptable.

All of the young people responding by questionnaire or interviewed were clear with regard to what sanctions were allowed, gave examples of how and why they were used by their carers and with one exception, had no issues with them. The one exception where concern existed was fed back to the manager who subsequently discussed this directly with the young person and was able to satisfactorily confirm that these issues had been previously investigated and resolved. Although some children confirmed that they had 'been held' to prevent them hurting themselves, others or causing damage, none raised any concerns regarding these events.

Those placing social workers responding by questionnaire were able to confirm that the measures of control used by foster carers with the children placed had been explained to them and that they found these acceptable. All confirmed that they felt that the children they had placed were safe with their carers.

The agency has arrangements in place to ensure that any allegations of abuse are monitored, responded to and notified as required by Schedule 7 to the regulations. Clear information regarding procedures to follow in the event of any young person going missing is provided to carers through their handbook, the training provided to them has also covered this. Those carers interviewed

were also positive about the level of out of hours support provided by the agency, used to support them should such events occur.

In their discussions with inspectors children said that things were going well for them. Almost all of the children responding by questionnaire or interviewed stated that they had written information telling them how to make a complaint, over half were also aware of how to contact the Commission directly. Most, but not all placing social workers stated that they were aware of the complaints procedure provided by the service, and this was fed back to the manager of the service for review. Positively, some were able to give examples of how they had raised issues with the Agency and how these had been resolved satisfactorily. All carers were equally clear regarding how to make a complaint on behalf of the child placed with them if this were necessary.

Discussion with the Panel Chair confirmed that since the last inspection they had received additional training in their role. The chair was able to demonstrate the level of independence of the panel from the agency and gave examples of where the panel had previously challenged the service where limited information about potential carers had been provided, leading to positive improvements. Since the last inspection the panel has benefited from recruitment and increased representation in the areas of child health and social work. Written guidance is provided to panel members and a draft code of practice has been introduced. In addition ongoing training opportunities for panel members are encouraged by the service. The manager also highlighted improvements made in the administrative support made available to the panel.

Previous panel minutes were reviewed, these were clear with regard to outcomes from panel deliberations, but would benefit from the inclusion of more detail regarding individual contributions to the decision making process. Details of discussion for each carer should also be presented on separate pages to ensure confidentiality when storing within their individual files. Although previous panel minutes did not specify the terms of approval for carers, the minutes for the panel attended does now include this detail.

A meeting of the fostering panel was attended as part of the inspection. Panel members appeared comfortable in their roles and the presentation of written reports for their information was generally good. Discussion was thorough, with members able to raise and challenge any issues regarding the ongoing suitability of foster carers subject to their first annual reviews.

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 and 13. Standard 31 is not applicable to this service.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Reach Out Care through its foster carers works to provide placements, which value diversity and promote equality. Children placed with the agency's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes their educational achievement.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has worked to ensure that the equality and diversity policy developed is appropriate, made available to carers and explained to them. Information about diversity and equality is provided throughout the foster carers handbook. The agency will continue to review and further develop the policies and information provided to carers. Carers and staff are provided with training in equality and diversity. During one home visit, the foster carers were able to describe the work they have done to help the foster children placed with them not to feel different. An example of carers seeking medical advice regarding the physical growth and stature of one young person was noted, as was the work of carers with regard to the vulnerability and learning disability of another young person.

Positively, and to the benefit of the children, the agency has provided all foster carers with digital cameras to record the background and life events of each of the children they care for.

Discussion with the manager, carers, children and an examination of files confirmed that the fostering service works closely with carers to promote the educational achievement of young people cared for.

Files examined contained good information regarding the educational background of young people, their personal education plans and their ongoing educational progress. An example of the statement of special educational needs for a young person requiring update was highlighted to the carers and manager, with confirmation received that this would be raised by the agency for action.

During one home visit the foster carers described how they worked hard to get foster children into good local schools, close to their home and also described the work they had done to liaise with educational professionals. They also highlighted the personal encouragement given to the children to promote their academic achievement. An example given of their careful planning for the start by the children at a new school provided further positive evidence of this.

In response to the question 'what do you think are the most positive aspects of the foster home?' One placing social worker highlighted how the carers 'promoted the young person's independence as far as possible and encouraged their involvement in further education'.

In discussion with this same young person, they highlighted how they were being supported jointly by her carers, the agency and their own social worker in choosing a future planned placement which would allow them to continue their further education as planned. They also highlighted the support they receive from their carers through 'asking advice' and how they 'help me with my hairdressing course'.

Discussion with the Agency educational support workers provided good examples of the direct support they provide to children and young people placed. Education workers described how they work to support the social and life skills achievements of young people and engage with community groups and education to promote this.

The service does not currently provide short breaks for children living with their families, but is considering developing this area of care, particularly for children with disabilities.

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 the service. The agency actively promotes and supports contact between children and their families and friends where this is appropriate. Arrangements are in place to seek children's views about their lives and the care they receive.

EVIDENCE:

Overall, the files examined contained clear recording and good evidence of the work done by carers to support appropriate contact between children, young people and their families. However, one example of limited information on a child's summary sheet regarding details of their parents was highlighted for review. During a visit to their home, one Foster carer described how communication by a child with their mother had been supported through text messaging and phone contact as well as by the transport arrangements put in place to support face to face contact. They also described how they had welcomed the child's mother into the foster home, and how they had worked closely with her when giving the child some upsetting news. The same carers also described the high level of support regarding contact arrangements they received from their agency support worker.

Carers responding by questionnaire highlighted the variety of ways that they support contact to the benefit of children and young people in their care. Examples included:

'making sure meeting dates are kept'.

'I supervise contact between the young person and her mother every fortnight and take her to visit important family members during the holidays. I also have regular contact with her mam in between visits'. The young person's mother and father phone twice weekly, now also half-sister once a week. The young person enjoys talking to them all.'

'A Minimum x2 phone calls per week arranged with brother, visits to the young person's family home. Elder sister and brother have travelled to our home to visit the young person and had quality time out together.'

'The young person is taken to see his siblings or uses the phone'

'We are very pro-active about this matter. We have good relations with their mum who visits monthly, rings weekly, speaks on MSN daily and often sends me texts. With regard to the young person's dad – we have to initiate the contact to ensure it happens and are happy to drive distances to assist as well.'

Discussion with staff and examination of files also provided good evidence of the support provided to carers by the agency to maintain regular contact between children and their families. The carer's handbook describes the support available and stresses the importance of appropriate contact. Files also contained good evidence of clear recording by agency staff and carers regarding the outcomes for children from their contact.

Those placing social workers responding by questionnaire were each able to confirm that in their opinion the carers provided by Reach Out Care were working very well or fairly well with the families of the children placed and were managing any restrictions on contact or communication that had been agreed and put in place to protect children.

Those files examined contained written confirmation that young people had been provided with information on how to complain, the Statement Of Purpose for the service and the young person's guide to it.

Files also contained good evidence of the children's own social workers and the supervising social workers from the agency seeking their views. There was also evidence of their foster carers advocating for them. Review reports for foster carers also provided further evidence of children being asked for their views of the care they receive. Those carers visited described how they seek young people's views and advocate on behalf of the young people and their families.

Young people responding by questionnaire were able to confirm that staff at the service had asked them for their opinion about their carers and also their opinion on how the service could be made better. They also confirmed that their carers asked for their opinion either often, or sometimes. Additionally,

nearly all were able to confirm that they saw their own placing social worker either often or sometimes.

Support workers described how they assess the needs of the young people and the placement and ensure that the placement provides young people with the things they need and the activities they like. Agency support workers described how young people had been given a questionnaire asking for their views about the things they like and don't like so that the service can provide support and activities that they enjoy. This was also confirmed through discussion with the manager.

In discussion and through their questionnaire responses, foster carers said that professionals listen them to when the needs of young people were being considered. Positively, one young person described how they had been helped by their carer and the agency to make a complaint regarding the placing authority and that practice had changed for the better because of this.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. The agency makes appropriate and prompt payments in accordance with its policies and procedures.

EVIDENCE:

Policies and procedures in respect of fostering allowances and payments to carers are in place. This information is made available to carers and staff through the agency handbook. During their interviews none of the carers raised any concerns regarding their receipt of the necessary fostering allowances and the prompt payment of them by the agency.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25.

Quality in this outcome area is adequate. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to the service. Reach out Care is an effectively managed service, well regarded by its carers. It's team of social work practitioners provide good quality supervision and support to its carers'. Management systems and records in use at the service are generally robust, however further recommendations are made regarding children's and carers documentation.

EVIDENCE:

Examination of carers files confirmed that although information regarding the conditions of approval for each carer could be found within the documentation on file, the formal notices of approval were not in place. This had been highlighted in previous inspections. With one of these examples, the initial assessment of the carers had been recently reviewed and updated by the service. The Foster carers themselves said that they felt that the recent review of their Form F had confirmed that their initial assessment and the process leading to their approval had been thorough. A second file examined which did not include the notice of approval, did contain this information within the panel minutes and the foster carer agreement. These issues were fed back to the service for their review.

In discussion one carer described the communication between the agency and themselves as being good, they confirmed that they had clear information regarding their reviews, their supervision and other arrangements put in place by the agency to support them. They described the help they received from their supervising social worker and support workers provided by the agency to help them deal with health and education issues for young people.

To further supplement and monitor these arrangements the Directors of the service visit foster carers to ask for their views and comments on the level of support provided to them, directly with them.

Within one carers file it was found that although detailed reports had been provided to the annual review meeting in April 2005, the reports from the supervising social worker, the foster carer themselves and the reports of children's views did not include the date of their completion.

Although the files examined contained evidence of supervision being provided to carers by their supervising social workers, the records of this supervision did not contain sufficient detail. Most of the supervision reports examined where

not been signed by the carers themselves. Although there was evidence of issues and any actions needed being identified and recorded through supervision, there was limited written evidence of these issues having been followed through to the carer's next supervision. Although carers were generally positive about the training opportunities provided to them, records examined, contained limited written evidence of the training needs of carers being discussed in their supervision.

In discussion, Foster carers reported that they received supervision every 4 to 6 weeks and have direct contact with the manager of the service or their supervising social worker at least every two weeks. Foster carers described their supervision as being very valuable and helpful, however, they also confirmed that they do not always see their written record of supervision. One carer visited was very positive about the support they received from their supervising social worker and support workers provided by the agency. They described the level of support as high and confirmed that they were visited frequently. They felt that the support provided to foster children and the entire fostering family was good. One foster carer said: "The support is brilliant." Although the records of contact and supervision records do not make clear when visits to foster carers are unannounced, foster carers themselves were able to confirm that they are visited on an unannounced basis by both their supervising social worker and their support worker.

Although the Foster Care Agreements in use set out the overall expectations of carers clearly. It was agreed that they could be made more specific regarding the "regularity" of the supervision to be provided to the carers by the agency. It was also recommended that they should include more specific information for carers regarding their responsibilities in protecting children, managing their behaviour and dealing with any un-authorized absences as stipulated in regulations 12 and 13 to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.

Carers confirmed that "Out of hours support" is provided by the agency and is always available to them. They also confirmed that the Foster carer groups meet regularly and are well structured, allowing both training and mutual support elements to take place.

In discussion with Agency Support workers they also described the very high levels of support made available by the agency to support its placements.

Those Foster carer files examined did not include any detailed recording of the training provided, although the attendance of carers at group training events was recorded, the detail of the training provided to them was not. The records of carer supervision did not include details of any discussions or consideration of ongoing training needs. In one example, although Child Protection training had been identified as a training need, there was no subsequent record in their supervision or training record to show that this had been undertaken.

Positively, Foster carers themselves were able to report that a range of training had been provided to them. Examples given included: Child Protection, Health and Safety, Healthy Eating, Child Safety and Notifications, Behaviour Management with First Aid training reported to be in the process of being arranged. Carers also confirmed that opportunities to undertake NVQ 3 training were being provided by the Agency and were due to commence soon. One foster carer said that they wanted to expand their experience and wished to work with children with different needs. This carer was confident that training would be provided by the Agency to help her do this. In discussion, Agency Support staff confirmed that they had participated in joint training with foster carers.

Although a number of examples of the required LAC documentation within children's files being either out of date or missing from the file were highlighted to the manager for review and action. Case files generally contained good recording by staff and clearly explained the history of each young person placed with the agency. Files generally were maintained in good order with arrangements to ensure their safe storage in place.

Although the administrative records of the agency are generally maintained as required, the content of one of the carers files examined did not comply with the indicated contents sheets. In this example there was no 'matching proforma' indicating the matching process of children placed with the carers, carer supervision forms were misfiled, the basic information sheet regarding the carers was missing, as were approval and review dates and terms. In addition, the file did not contain a list of placements summary sheet.

Managers were able to confirm that the complaints received by the commission and fed back to the agency for action have been investigated using the agencies complaints procedures and are now in the process of conclusion.

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	3
30	3

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

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

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

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

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.	FS24	22	The agency must maintain a copy of LAC documentation (Placement Plans Parts 1 & 2 and Essential Information Parts 1 & 2) in respect of all children placed and should ensure that carers have a copy of the aforementioned information Previous Timescale 31/03/05	01/09/06
2.	FS17	28	Ensure that the notice of approval for each carer is maintained within their file.	01/09/06

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.	FS12	Children’s records should contain confirmation that they have received their statutory annual medical examinations.
2.	FS15	The summary records of checks undertaken on carers should be fully completed.
3.	FS8	When children are placed with carers, the

		documentation used to demonstrate that they have been appropriately matched should be maintained on file.
4.	FS9	Records of agreed 'safe caring policies' should be maintained within carer's files.
5.	FS22FS9	Records of child protection and other training provided to carers should be maintained within carer's files.
6.	FE9	Work to ensure that all social workers placing children with the agency are provided with a copy of the agency complaints procedures
7.	FS21	Reports provided to carers annual review meetings should include the date of their completion.
8.	FS22FS6	Records of carers' supervision should be sufficiently detailed and be provided to and signed by the carers themselves. They should also include written confirmation of any un-announced visits completed and health and safety checks routinely completed.
9.	FS22	Foster Care agreements should include confirmation of the regularity of their supervision and more specific information regarding their responsibilities to protect children, manage their behaviour and deal with any unauthorised absences
10.	FS25	The agency should continue to monitor carers and children's files to ensure that all necessary information is easily accessible.
11.	FS30	Panel minutes should include more detail regarding individual contributions to the decision making process. Details of discussion for each carer should also be presented on separate pages to ensure confidentiality when storing within individual files.

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