



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Community Foster Care

**Twigworth Court
Twigworth
Glos
GL2 9PG**

Lead Inspector
Diana Waters

Announced Inspection
16th January 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 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	Community Foster Care
Address	Twigworth Court Twigworth Glos GL2 9PG
Telephone number	01452 541483
Fax number	01452 550104
Email address	mail@communityfostercare.co.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Community Foster Care
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Miss Suzanna Jacoby
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 9th March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Community Foster Care is a Fostering Agency set up in February 1999 with the express purpose of enabling children and young people to remain in communities similar to their own.

Community Foster Care is committed to social and economic integration in disadvantaged areas of Gloucestershire.

Community Foster Care was set up as a company, is a Registered Charity and not for profit community business.

Community Foster Care has experienced some changes within the senior team, as detailed in the report, during the last year.

The current social work qualified Operations Manager and one supervisory social worker has been in post since 2003. Two additional supervisory social workers have been appointed from Jan 2006. Three experienced fostering link workers continue to support the carers. The senior management team consist of the operations manager, the services manager and the management accountant. The office support team include an administration officer and assistant.

Since the inspection, Community Foster Care has undergone a restructure. The agency have appointed a new fixed term chief executive, and confirmed the appointment of the responsible individual, the operations manager is now applying to be the registered manager for the service. Additionally the service manager and one fostering link worker have left the agency.

Seconded staff are brought in, as appropriate, for Foster Care Assessments, to support carers and young people and to train carers.

The 24-hour on call system is accessed via a mobile telephone and the task is shared between the 3 link workers and the social work staff. The link workers on call are backed up by one of the qualified social workers.

All of the agency carers are located in Gloucestershire.

In Jan 2006, Community Foster Care had 31 sets of approved carers, with 28 young people in placement, which include at least 5 sets of siblings, 17 young people had been in placement for 4 years or more, and some of these children had been in placement for more than 5 years.

There were 11 sets of carers without placements.

4 sets of carers were completing their initial training and were due to undergo assessment

Children in placement were from 9 placing authorities.

Carers have both localised support groups and a centralised location for regular training; they also regularly meet for social events.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over 3 days in the agency by one inspector. The inspector spoke to carers and young people at their foster homes, the inspector attended a well-attended carers training /support group. Interviews were conducted with: The social work manager, finance manager, services manager, the 2 new social workers and the 3 link workers. Questionnaires were sent to 17 placing officers, with 9 returned. 31 foster carers with 13 returned and 22 young people with 11 returned. The inspection focused on the commission's key standards

What the service does well:

Young people were matched well with carers and introductions were carefully made for the individual children, with well-recorded plans and review of the plan.

Young people in education were supported well.

Financial matters, including payment to carers is dealt with to the satisfaction of carers and assistance with tax is appreciated.

A rolling programme of training is established with compulsory and specialist training courses planned for a year ahead with day and evening availability.

The agency has a policy not to place under 5's with carers who smoke. Carers report they are supported well, with the on call service praised for its availability, advice given and practical support.

The agency facilitates and supervises contact for young people and their families, often using family link workers known to the young people.

The agency regularly monitor information held on files and pursue placing authorities for missing information.

What has improved since the last inspection?

New children's guides have been improved and are child friendly, although information about overnight stays need amending.

What they could do better:

Safe care policies are in place for some foster families, but need to be specific to the child in placement and shared with placing social workers. Written risk assessments could be improved.

The recruitment of the interim chief executive/ manager in September 2005 provided no supporting checks.

During the period of social work staff absence, supervision sessions were not held regularly, this was remedied by the time of the inspection with the return of the two social work staff and the successful recruitment of 2 experienced social workers

Carers recording could be more detailed and should include positive and routine recording as young people may wish to access their files and find balanced recording that reflects their experiences in foster care.

Specialized training in caring for young people with disabilities needs further development.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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

The fostering service promotes the health and development of children. Carers ensure that childrens daily health needs are met.

EVIDENCE:

Children are registered with local doctors and dentists and carers ensure routine health appointments are made where necessary. Carers record significant and routine health issues.

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

The agency ensures that children are protected.

EVIDENCE:

The Registered responsible individual left the agency in November 2005. At the time of inspection, a replacement had been nominated and an interview was scheduled for Jan 2006. One reference was outstanding. This appointment process will need to be inspected fully at the next inspection.

The Registered Manager, who is also the chief executive, had been on sick leave from August 2005 and was not expected to return until the end of January 2006. An interim chief executive/ manager was appointed by the agency from Sept 2005 and remained until November 2005; although this appointee held previous senior management positions in several local authorities, there were no records of any checks by the agency.

The inspector was informed during the inspection that the social work manager would commence management training in Feb 2006 and is seeking registration by C.S.C.I. This will enable the existing registered manager, on her return to work, to concentrate as chief executive on the strategic business plan and commissioning strategies.

The assessment and approval procedures for all foster carers are stringent; the foster care panel challenge any areas of concern before recommending approval.

Wherever possible, children placed are given their own bedrooms; the only exceptions are same gender siblings, with prior approval from placing social workers.

Carers visited have been welcoming and proactive in facilitating children to interact with the inspector.

One case tracked was a "text book" case of excellent matching, preparation for admission and introductions to a long term foster home, the placing authority, fostering agency and carers are commended for their attention to detail and their consideration of the young persons needs, wishes and feelings. This example is one of the best examples of matching and good practise seen by the inspector. Another case tracked also had good matching components with opportunity to visit the foster home prior to admission. The agency should continue to ensure that the good practise seen in matching and preparation for placements, be maintained for all young people placed. The agency should make these expectations clear to placing authorities

In most cases the agency does ensure they carefully match young people and carers; on occasions this can cause frustrations for carers waiting for placements and the right match; clear communication to carers is essential during these times.

Placing authorities vary in their responses to repeated requests from the agency to provide full information on children referred or placed. The agency should continue to promote good practise, ensuring wherever possible that information is obtained before placement and continue to insist placing authorities comply. The agency should continue to document these requests, escalating the request until the full information is provided

Safe caring is included in training both prior to approval and post approval, and the agency consider it is a compulsory course for all carers. Written risk assessments remain outstanding and individual safe care policies are needed for all foster families, with the contents cleared with the placing social worker and explained appropriately to the placed child.

There have been significant staff absences during this last year. The Registered Manager, Social work manager, and supervising social worker have all had periods of sickness between July05-Nov05; in addition to normal leave entitlement. However, the carers have stated they continued to feel supported. The experienced link workers continued to provide the front line service to carers in a professional, friendly and efficient way; they are regarded as invaluable by the agency, and carers value their support.

The agency ensures that staff are fully vetted before appointment, there is clear attention to detail, and the only recommendation made is that gaps in C.V.'s are fully recorded for the whole career history of all workers. This was remedied during the inspection for one newly appointed member of staff.

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

Carers and agency staff help young people to fulfil their potential.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has recruited a range of carers, including those who care for children with profound difficulties. Community Foster Care have a clear emphasis on recruiting carers from and placing children in local communities; a where this has happened children have successfully maintained their local links. At the time of this inspection the agency were recruiting in a nearby county in selected neighbourhood project areas. Specialist equality and diversity training is provided as a one day specialist training course.

All young people in the agency at the time of inspection were in education/college; several young people had statements of educational needs and were receiving appropriate help. Carers are proactive with schools, ensured regular attendance and provided support with children's' homework. Several young people confirmed that, one young person said " I'm encouraged to go to school and praised for good work and homework, help is readily available from carers if there are homework problems." One case tracked found the local school were exceptional in the support provided by learning support workers; facilitating the carer and supporting the young person to regularly attend school they dealt sensitively and appropriately with the young persons concerns.

Standard 31 Is not applicable to this agency.

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

The service promotes contact arrangements and consultation for the young people.

EVIDENCE:

Contact was promoted in the cases tracked, evidence was given by young people and placing social workers that the agency have a proactive approach where appropriate with carers facilitating and welcoming family members to remain in meaningful contact. Link workers were able to supervise contact in age/stage appropriate venues for individual children. Out of 9 placing social workers questionnaires returned, 4 consider the carers work "very well" 1 consider carers work "average" and 4 have no contact with the child's family.

Children are able to comment on their care at their own reviews and they are also consulted in preparation for the carers' reviews. Link workers frequently see and specifically ask young people about their placement experience. 11 young people returned questionnaires and one quotes, "I think foster care is great and without my carer I would never be the person I am now."

The agency must continue to notify the commission with out delay of Schedule 8 notifications. There was one complaint where the commission was notified late, although appropriate action was taken and this case was well documented.

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

Carers are paid an agreed allowance as specified.

EVIDENCE:

There have been no concerns raised about payments to carers. The written documentation is clear and unambiguous. In addition the management accountant assists carers with tax returns and advises on the amount of tax likely to be collected, enabling carers to save appropriately.

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

Community Foster Care generally provides carers with high levels of professional and practical support.

EVIDENCE:

At the time of the inspection the agency had an adequate number of qualified and experienced staff, however during the last year, as already detailed, the agency have experienced extended social worker absences.

The management team attempted to address these absences by providing cover with social workers already known to and previously vetted by, Community Foster Care. One worker already known to many of the carers provided an on call service and another was able at short notice to provide supervision. The link workers continued to provide the regular support that was necessary to carers and their families. Carers confirm they continued to feel well supported.

At the time of inspection, the social work manager and supervising social worker were back at work. The agency had also appointed 2 additional experienced supervising social workers, 1 part time and 1 full time, who had commenced employment.

Social work staff absences have impacted on the service as a whole and during this time supervision of carers and staff was reduced, whilst tracking young people and carers this has not appeared to have a significant serious long term impact, as carers confirmed they continued to receive support from the agency link workers as usual and on call was covered satisfactorily.

Regular supervision, and support previous to these absences will have helped establish carers' stability and the social worker shortage has now been resolved. Temporary agreement from the management team to limit placements were indicative of Community Foster Care's willingness to work in cooperation with CSCI, although carers may have benefited from a more open approach.

The annual reviews of foster carers were on target, returning where appropriate to the next foster care Panel, with no more than a six-week time lapse. Communication between placing social workers and the agency are in some cases excellent and the partnership arrangements work well, in others placing social workers are not meeting their statutory responsibilities.

Files in general are well organised with clear access to each section, although some gaps still exist on files, the agency monitor the situation and persistently remind the placing authorities of their omissions. Where placing officers are not providing the relevant information these requests should be escalated. Placing authorities must be held accountable for any lack of information. In some cases all the relevant paperwork was in place prior to admission and all aspects of the young persons needs had been addressed

Supervision and link worker visits are monitored, they are recorded well and carers retain their own copy.

Carers continue to record daily and significant events in diaries, care should be taken to include positive and routine events, as young people may wish to access files and find a balanced record of their time in placement. A new recording system was introduced to carers during the inspection.

Life story work is promoted and introduction packs for young people include disposable cameras.

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	2
6	3
8	4
9	3
15	3
30	X

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	4
11	3

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	2
4	X
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	3
22	X
23	X
24	3
25	X
26	X
27	X
28	X
32	X

No

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS3	7	The agency must retain records of checks on all appointed managers as specified in schedule 1	31/01/06
2	FS2	5	The registered provider must be satisfactorily replaced	31/05/06
3	FS2	6	The social work manager should commence appropriate management training and complete the application for registered manager with CSCI	31/05/06

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	FS9	In all foster homes, safe care guidelines established for each foster home should be cleared with the child's social workers and explained to the child placed.
2	FS22	Supervision of carers and staff should be provided as stated in the statement of purpose, at all times, and with

		particular attention paid to social worker absences.
3	FS23	The fostering service should continue to provide post approval training for carers, particularly specialist training for those caring for children with disabilities.
4	FS25	The fostering service should continue to persist in accessing all relevant information from placing authorities and continue to record both verbal and written requests. Carers recording should include both positive and routine recording that contributes to an understanding of young peoples experiences in foster care.

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