

# inspection report

# **FOSTERING SERVICE**

**London Borough of Hounslow Fostering Service** 

Fostering Team, Hounslow Social Services Civic Centre Lampton Road, Hounslow, Middlesex TW3 4DN

Lead Inspector
Paula Eaton

Announced 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>,17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> August 2005

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
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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 <a href="https://www.dh.gov.uk">www.dh.gov.uk</a> or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: <a href="https://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop">www.tso.co.uk/bookshop</a>

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 London Borough of Hounslow Fostering Service

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Centre, Lampton Road, Hounslow, Middlesex,

TW3 4DN

**Telephone number** 0208 583 3442

Fax number

**Email address** 

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)

London Borough of Hounslow

Name of registered manager (if applicable)

Mr Thomas O'Neill

**Type of registration** Local Authority Fostering Service

No. of places registered (if applicable)

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

## SERVICE INFORMATION

## **Conditions of registration:**

None

**Date of last inspection** 8/11/04

## **Brief Description of the Service:**

The London Borough of Hounslow's Fostering Service is located in an open plan office in the civic centre. The service provides short-term placements and respite care. Long term fostering and kinship care is dealt with by the Permanency Team as this is felt to be more appropriate. The of short term placements varies and could be up to several years. There is a Service Manager, Family Placements Manager, Team Manager, Assistant Team Manager and Placements Service Manager who form the management team for the service. The service has a Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator and assistant and a Carers Consultation Co-ordinator and also a Education Support Workers position but this post was vacant at the time of the inspection. There are eight Supervising Social Worker posts, one of which was vacant at the tiem of the inspection and two Recruitment Social Worker positions. The Fostering Service also have an administrative team who provide vital support.

## **SUMMARY**

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

This inspection took place over four days and formed the annual statutory inspection for this service. The first three days were spent at the offices of the fostering service examining administrative records and interviewing staff. The fourth day was spent visiting foster carers and the children placed with them at their homes. In addition questionnaires were sent out to twenty-five foster carers and twenty-five looked after children. Only twenty per cent of these were returned, however those that were returned were positive about the fostering service and the support provided. Questionnaires were also sent out to placing authorities, however, none of these were completed or returned.

## What the service does well:

The service provides excellent support for its foster carers and is continually evolving and developing new initiatives to improve the service.

The service has a committed and motivated staff team that support each other and are lead by an effective and approachable management team.

The self-development of foster carers and staff is encouraged and supported.

## What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the service has started meeting with the 'Futures' (Leaving Care) Team on a regular basis to share information and exchange ideas to ensure the service is meeting the needs of children preparing to leave care.

The service has also introduced a male carers group to provide specific support for male carers

The service has also purchased approximately £3000 of books to form a library resource for staff and foster carers.

## What they could do better:

Case records could be more closely monitored to ensure information is up to date and in order.

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

The report of this inspection is available from <a href="mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk">enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk</a> or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12

The service is proactive in ensuring the health needs of young people are well met with evidence of appropriate healthcare arrangements being in place.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

The young peoples files indicated that information is obtained on the details of their healthcare needs prior to a placement being made.

The Foster Carers Handbook clearly outlines the foster carers responsibilities with regard to healthcare to ensure the health care needs of the children placed with them are met. It also provides advice and general information about specific health issues such as dealing with head lice, sunburn and general hygiene. Foster carers are expected to assist children in attending their annual medical examination and in ensuring that children attend their routine medical/health care appointments as and when required. One of the foster carers visited was able to demonstrate how she had worked jointly with healthcare professionals to ensure that the child placed with her had the correct immunisations and to seek advice regarding nutrition.

The fostering service also provides an information package for foster carers including literature about local health services and health issues affecting children. Information regarding illnesses affecting specific ethnic groups is also included such as leaflets on sickle cell anaemia.

The Carer's Consultation Co-ordinator is available to advise and work with carers and children regarding behavioural and emotional difficulties within the family setting. When being interviewed the Carer's Consultation Co-ordinator said that she was hoping to expand this part of the service and was promoting this aspect of the service with locality teams to ensure that families in need were supported.

Therapeutic services are provided locally if required for any children placed and foster carers are given practical support with transport etc to ensure children are able to attend appointments. Evidence of this was seen in one of the children's case files viewed.

The fostering service also provides first aid training and a course entitled 'Health Needs of Looked After Children' for foster carers.

## **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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3, 6, 8, 9 and 15

The service has adequate numbers of appropriately trained and experienced staff. The service matches children to carers of the same ethnic, cultural or religious background where possible and ensures that any gaps in the matching process are addressed. There are adequate systems in place to ensure that children are protected from abuse and neglect.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

The recruitment records are maintained in one of the Human Resources departments in the civic centre. The recruitment files viewed had all the appropriate checks completed, however it was evident that for employees moving post but remaining within the London Borough of Hounslow that references were not always sought for the new post. Regular training is provided for staff and some joint training involving foster carers is provided. The members of staff interviewed said that they were supported in their professional development and that regular training was provided including some external training. The Social Workers interviewed demonstrated that they were experienced in and knowledgeable about the issues affecting looked after children.

All of the foster carer homes visited provided safe, comfortable and homely environments for children. The foster carers were all committed to providing a healthy and nurturing environment for the children placed with them. Foster carers were observed interacting with the children in their care and it was

evident that the children were happy and well looked after. The children spoken to said that they were happy with their foster carers and felt able to talk to them. Two of the children visited were really excited to introduce the family's new Guinea Pig to the Inspector and were going off to the local park with one of the foster carers grown up children.

There were no health and safety issues noted at the foster families homes visited. Comprehensive information and guidance on health and safety issues is provided to foster carers in the Foster Carers Handbook and all foster carers spoken to said that they had an up to date copy of this. It was also evident that annual health and safety checks were taking place at the foster carers homes.

The fostering service strives to match looked after children with carers who have the same cultural, racial or religious backgrounds. However, due to the numbers of foster carers from different ethnic groups and the cultural diversity within the local community this is not always possible. In one case file viewed it was documented that the birth family of the foster child had requested that their child be placed with a foster carer that shared the same religion as them. An appropriate match on these grounds had been made. Where trans racial placements are made the service ensures that foster carers are given additional support to enable them to meet the needs of the children placed with them. For example, the white foster carers of two young children of mixed heritage who were spoken to were able to demonstrate how they manage the skin and hair care of these two young children and confirmed that they had attended two training sessions provided by the foster service called 'Practical Skills for Looking After Black and Ethnic Minority Children' and 'Working with Black and Ethnic Minority Children'. This was supported by the case files and training records viewed. Children are matched with carers who have the experience and skills to meet their needs and are supported to address any difficult issues that may arise.

The Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator interviewed during the inspection was able to demonstrate how the fostering service was trying to address any gaps in the numbers of foster carers from specific minority groups. The Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator had established contacts with local community groups and arranged for the service to have a presence at various events aimed at particular ethnic minority groups to promote the service and provide information on fostering.

Foster carers are required to attend mandatory training on Child Protection issues and there are very clear comprehensive guidelines provided in the Foster Carers Handbook regarding different forms of abuse and the steps carers should take if they suspect abuse has taken place, including how to report and record any concerns. There are also clear guidelines on how to deal with bullying. The foster carers who were spoken to were aware of the procedures they should follow to protect the children in their care and

appropriate records were being maintained by the foster carers. The Foster Carers Agreement includes a statement regarding the non-acceptance of corporal punishment and this is signed by all foster carers prior to any children being placed with them.

## **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 - we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 7, 13 and 31

The fostering service values diversity and strives to meet the diverse needs of the looked after children it cares for in the local community. The educational provision for the children placed is good. The short-term break service provided for parents ensures that parents remain the main carers for the child where appropriate.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

The fostering service has appropriate equal opportunities policies and procedures in place. The Foster Carers Handbook also contains an equal opportunities statement and information regarding the need to make placements that match a child's cultural, religious and linguistic background where possible. As mentioned earlier steps are taken to ensure that foster carers are able to meet the needs of children where trans racial placements are made including providing appropriate training. The service has also established links with two African/Caribbean hairdressers in the local area where foster carers can get discounts. Foster carers are also supported to apply for the relevant benefits if caring for a child who is disabled.

As mentioned earlier the Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator has made contact with various differing minority groups to ensure that the service targets all areas of the London Borough of Hounslow's diverse community when recruiting new foster carers and promoting the fostering service. The foster carers spoken to were able to demonstrate how they would support children dealing with discrimination and help them to develop their sense of identity and learn about their cultural background.

The educational needs of children are discussed and assessed prior to a placement being made and form part of the placement agreement. The foster carers visited were aware of their responsibilities and were preparing the children in their care for returning to school in September. The families visited had space for children to study and the carers could demonstrate how they have supported children with their school life by staying in contact with school, encouraging attendance and supporting them with their homework. It was noted in one foster carers file that there had been some difficulties regarding the carer not taking time off from work when the child she was caring for was off school unwell but this issue had been addressed with the carer and the matter had been resolved.

Policies and procedures are in place regarding the provision of short-term breaks. The fostering service has a list of respite/short-term break carers who are used when birth parents need a break lasting a few days or weeks to prevent family breakdown. The parents remain in control of the health and educational needs of their children when they are placed with a foster family and the foster placement agreement contains clear information about who will be responsible for what aspects of the child's care. Foster carers are also able to use the respite care service for when they are unable to care for the child placed with them or to give them a break if the child they are caring for has complex needs that make caring for them very difficult.

## **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 – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10 and 11

Contact arrangements are made clear and foster carers are supported to ensure that appropriate contact is maintained between children and their families. The service consults children, young people and foster carers in various different ways to ensure that their views are heard.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

Arrangements for contact are made when a child is placed and any restrictions are clearly stated in the foster placement agreement. The foster carers spoken to were able to describe how they manage the contact arrangements for the children placed in their care. One carer in particular had made a great deal of effort to ensure the child in her care met with her Mother even though there had been great inconsistencies with the level of co-operation from the child's Mother. The carer said that her Supervising Social Worker had supported her with these difficulties.

Foster carers are given clear guidelines about managing contact and recording and reporting any changes in a child's behaviour prior to or after contact. The recordings viewed confirmed that foster carers were following these guidelines and supporting children to remain in contact with important individuals in their lives. Foster carers also confirmed that they were supported financially if they needed to transport a child to and from contact sessions.

The Supervising Social Workers and foster carers spoken to were able to describe situations where the views of looked after children had been listened to. The fostering service had recently put together a DVD called 'You are not Alone' with some looked after children and this had been distributed to all looked after children over the age of ten.

Children are provided with age appropriate questionnaires before their reviews take place to allow them to voice their views about the care they receive and also are provided with information regarding reporting concerns or complaints. They are also provided with information regarding independent advocacy services for children and young people.

All of the foster carers spoken to felt well supported by their Supervising Social Worker and also felt able to approach the management team in the fostering service if necessary. The fostering service also has a Carers Consultation Coordinator who is available to provide support to foster families and there is a sons and daughters group providing fun activities for the birth children of foster carers and giving them an opportunity to express their views regarding fostering. One family visited during the inspection said that they found this support very helpful and the children spoken to said that they enjoyed the activities that took place and showed the Inspector some artwork they had completed at one of these groups. Foster carers also have a support group that is held once a month and a newsletter is distributed periodically regarding the service and forthcoming events.

# **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 - we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 29

Foster carers are paid a sufficient allowance to ensure they are able to meet the needs of the children placed with them.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

Detailed information regarding the foster carers allowance is provided in the Foster Carers Handbook including information regarding how the allowance should be used and what additional support is available. The foster carers spoken to were clear about how the allowance should be used and said that they received their payments promptly. Foster carers save money for each child placed with them. The London Borough of Hounslow regularly reviews the foster carers allowance.

## **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 cares 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 standard(s) 5, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24 and 25

The service has an effective and efficient management team and adequate numbers of experienced and qualified staff. Foster carers are supported by their Supervising Social Workers and the service as a whole to ensure they are able to meet the needs of the children placed with them. The records maintained by the fostering service were generally in order and up to date with minor improvements needed.

#### **EVIDENCE:**

The manager of the fostering service has a clear and comprehensive job description and there are very clear lines of accountability within the service. There is a very experienced and knowledgeable Assistant Team Manager who deputises in the absence of the Team Manager.

The service has adequate numbers of staff employed that are appropriately trained and knowledgeable about the needs of foster carers and looked after children. The service has access to locum workers if there are staff shortages but there were very few locum workers being used at the time of this inspection. The staff spoken to all said that they felt well supported by the management team and felt that the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager had an 'open door' policy so that they were able to seek guidance and support at all times. The only issue voiced by all members of staff interviewed was the current duty system being used. At the time of the inspection Social Workers were on the rota for duty for a whole week at a time. Although they understood the need for some consistency with dealing with duty cases over a period of time they felt that a week of duty prevented them from supporting the foster carers on their caseloads and made caseloads difficult to manage. This was discussed with the Team Manager who was aware of the issues staff faced and said that ways of resolving these difficulties were being looked into.

The staff interviewed felt that their caseloads were generally manageable and that they were given adequate supervision to enable them to discuss any difficulties they were facing. Monthly team meetings were also taking place and the minutes viewed showed that these meetings were being used to pass on information to staff, to discuss any issues arising and to discuss the development of the service.

As discussed earlier the fostering service has a varied and proactive approach to recruiting new foster carers and promoting the fostering service. The Recruitment and Training Co-ordinator interviewed appeared very motivated and committed and was able to describe various ways in which the service was attempting to recruit new carers and also future plans for developing the service further.

There is a comprehensive assessment process for new carers and potential foster carers are given advice and support during each stage of this process. This process covers all competencies expected of a potential foster carer.

The service provides an out of hours service for foster carers up to 11pm each night and then there is an emergency duty team available. The foster carers spoken to said that they had found the out of hours service helpful especially when a young person had absconded. All of the foster carers spoken to said that their Supervising Social Worker visited them regularly and this was

supported by the records viewed. However, some of the records of visits to foster carers had not been signed or dated in one of the files viewed and in another a review report stated that a foster carer had been visited fortnightly for some time but this was not supported by the visit records viewed.

There is an annual training programme for foster carers that is drawn up following consultation with foster carers and Supervising Social Workers. The service also offers financial support for foster carers wishing to complete NVQ level 3 training. The foster carers spoken to said that they are well supported by their Supervising Social Workers and the Carers Consultation Co-ordinator when interviewed was able to demonstrate how she supports foster families especially those dealing with difficult behaviours. Foster carers have annual reviews the first and third of which are presented to the Foster Panel. Also as mentioned earlier there is a carers support group that meets monthly and a sons and daughters group for the birth children of foster carers. Foster carers can also receive discounts at local stores such as WHSmith and the Early Learning Centre and receive passes for leisure centres in the local area.

The foster carers spoken to were aware of the records they were expected to keep and the records viewed were well maintained. One of the birth children of a family visited showed the Inspector a memory book that had been put together for a child that had been staying with the family and was able to describe the occasions that were recorded. The files maintained by the fostering service were generally well maintained, however as mentioned earlier some records had not been signed. It was also noted in one child's records that there was conflicting information regarding the child's allergies. In one document viewed it stated that the child had no allergies, in another document it stated the child was allergic to some forms of chocolate and in a third it stated that she was allergic to chocolate and nuts.

A selection of administrative records were examined during the inspection. Most records were up to date and in order. The children's register that was provided for the purposes of the inspection did not include all of the information listed in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. This was discussed with the Service Manager and Team Manager who explained that all of the information required was available on the database used and that the appropriate fields would need to be chosen to ensure the register contains all of the required information.

## **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.

(Commendable) (No Shortfalls) 4 Standard Exceeded **3** Standard Met 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		
Standard No	Score	
12	3	

STAYING SAFE		
Standard No	Score	
3	2	
6	3	
8	3	
9	3	
15	3	
30	X	

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING		
Standard No	Score	
7	3	
13	3	
31	3	

MAKING A POSITIVE		
CONTRIBUTION		
Standard No	Score	
10	3	
11	3	

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC		
WELLBEING		
Standard No	Score	
14	X	
29	3	

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

## 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.	3	Schedule 1 (3)	Two references must be obtained for all staff recruited to a new post including staff already employed by the London Borough of Hounslow.	1/12/05
2.	25	Schedule 2 (1)	The register of children placed with the service must include all of the information as outlined in Schedule 2 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002	1/01/06

#### **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	Good Practice Recommendations
	Standard	
1.	20	The duty system should be reviewed to explore ways of improving the system so that it impacts less on the
		workloads of Social Workers.
2.	24	Information in children's case files should be more closely monitored to ensure the records maintained are up to date and that information is clear.

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