



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

By The Bridge

**The Oast
Wrens Road
Borden
Sittingbourne
Kent
ME9 8JE**

Lead Inspector
Lucy Ansell

Announced Inspection
5th December 2005 09:30

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	By The Bridge
Address	The Oast Wrens Road Borden Sittingbourne Kent ME9 8JE
Telephone number	0845 450 9944
Fax number	01795 478493
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	By the Bridge
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr Keith Gorman
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 14 March 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

By The Bridge aims to provide:

- A wide range of the highest quality services to meet the needs of traumatised young people 'looked after' by Local authorities, in order to ensure they can access all of their human rights.
- The rigorous demonstration of value for money, in order to protect the interests of society without compromising the needs of the most vulnerable. (Taken from By The Bridge Statement of Purpose- February 2005)

There are currently seventy foster families approved by the agency. At the time of the inspection one hundred and eleven children are in placements. The office premises are located in an Oast house in the countryside outside Sittingbourne and provide a venue for training, meetings and contact visits.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection commenced on 5th December 2005 and focused on key standards, so was conducted over 3 days by two inspectors Lucy Ansell and John Walker. All key personnel were interviewed, a panel meeting and training session were observed and carers and young people were visited in their own homes.

Policies and procedures were read and a selection of staff personnel files were scrutinised. A case tracking exercise was undertaken with regards to five foster carer families and the young people placed with them, in order that the agency's assessments and continuing support of carers could be inspected, as well as the initial matching and ongoing placements of children.

Further material was gained through the receipt of questionnaires completed by placing authorities, young people and carers and the pre – inspection questionnaire, completed by the agency. Sixteen children, sixteen foster carers and thirty-two placing social workers completed pre inspection questionnaires. The outcome of these on the whole was very positive and expressed that a very good service is being provided and the children are very satisfied with the care given. Some of the comments from the placing officers that were received "very impressed with BTB, could not of found better carers any where." "Foster carers are tuned in to the childrens needs" "Excellent carers with good insight"

Throughout the inspection process the social work team, administrative and management team were very welcoming, open and receptive to the inspection process.

Five foster homes who were visited and the many foster carers spoken to who took part in the inspection are thanked for taking the time to speak to me and for the contribution that they made.

What the service does well:

This was the third inspection of By The Bridge and the evidence confirms that the agency continues to perform at a very high level. This is to the great credit of the agency's very effective senior management team. Most of the key standards that were inspected indicated that they exceeded these and they continued to look for ways to further improve their practice and ensure the organisation is also focused on being child centred to meet their needs. The organisation values the foster carers and instils in them a sense of pride and value in their worth and actively promotes they are professionals. The owner will always take carers when speaking to Local Authorities or any open evenings so they can share jointly that role of advocate for the company. The support and training offered to carers and staff is excellent and of a very high quality. One foster carer commented, " With their training you can take on almost anything."

What has improved since the last inspection?

Several good practice recommendations were made following the last inspection and these have all been addressed. To ensure that annual inspections of foster homes coincide with annual reviews and changes of circumstances, and the agencies foster carer profiles have been developed to incorporate specific elements of matching in relation to the sons and daughters of foster carers. The agency has developed written procedures to cover decision making when all members of the panel are not in agreement, and the safe care guidelines are now signed by all parties and training covers all members of the family.

The agency has also employed a full time member of staff to head up their research and development. The research aim is to reposition fostering as a valued profession, particularly in terms of status of fostering, and describe it from a carer's viewpoint.

This year the agency has had its skills development for foster parents accredited by Greenwich University at third year degree level. They are the only foster carers training in the country to have this. They also have six foster carer NVQ assessors and 22 foster carers enrolled on the NVQ 3 in care, by next year they hope to have all their foster carers trained in NVQ 3. The agency is also starting a new course for young persons and their carers to help promote independent living and they will receive accreditation for this.

What they could do better:

The agency had four good practice recommendations made, to ensure panel upholds its function of quality assurance in relation to the assessment process. The agency to ensure foster carers know there is an alternative to restraint on a child and to check the DOH guidelines. There is now a local agreement of when notifications and quarterly reports are to be received by. Their needs to be written evidence formally recorded of risk assessments of the building being completed on a regular basis.

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

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

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes for 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 the following standard(s): 12

The children placed with the agency can be confident that the foster carers positively promote their health and development, and that the agency maintains detailed and accurate health care notes which can be transferred with the child.

EVIDENCE:

Individual children's files were inspected and carers were interviewed. Evidence was seen children were registered with health care services and were being supported to attend appointments. It was noted that foster carers were completing the health sheets that the agency supplied with all visits to any health agency; any illnesses, treatment or immunisation and these are brought into the office monthly. Health is also extensively covered within the Foster Carer's Handbook, care plans and planning meetings.

A separate sheet was seen detailing consent for first aid or any required emergency treatment in foster carers files. The agency also demonstrated its commitment to promoting health and development by prompting the local authorities to access medical information prior to reviews. Childrens very specific needs are matched to carers, confirming that children's health requirements are taken into consideration when placements are made.

The agency has employed a independent health worker to monitor children's health and development, her role is to review health and development of the children on a bi-annual basis. Appropriate referrals are made to external agencies where specific health concerns are raised. Carers receive training and guidance in respect of maintaining optimum health for their young people. The agencies health care notes are portable to enable these records to move with the child.

The agency demonstrated close links with health agencies and will buy in specific therapeutic services appropriate for that child to ensure they get the best treatment.

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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

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

The children placed with the agency can be assured that the persons running and managing it are suitably qualified and experienced and will protect their best interests.

Children are protected by robust recruitment procedures for agency staff and carers.

Children can be confident that their needs will be well matched to the experience and skills of foster carers with whom they are placed.

Children are protected by the agency's robust child protection systems and procedures.

The Panel works to clear and effective protocols, and ensures that the interests of children are protected with regard to the recruitment and monitoring of foster carers.

EVIDENCE:

Both the manager and the responsible individual have an NVQ IV in Care and the manager has an MBA in business. They have lots of experience in fostering form being a foster parent to growing up in a family that fosters, also setting up one of the first independent fostering agencies in Kent.

Records were of a very good standard. In the personnel records, evidence of relevant professional qualifications was seen and CRB certificates were in place. Written references are followed up by telephone enquiries and enhanced CRB's are obtained and renewed. The agency has a system in place to ensure checks are renewed three yearly. In interviews with staff it was evident that

robust recruitment procedures were in place and the agency was safeguarding the children and young people.

Carers were visited in their own homes and all appeared clean, well – maintained and free from any obvious hazards. All children have their own bedrooms, unless siblings and wanting to share. Detailed health and safety checks are conducted during the initial assessment and annually thereafter. A clear health and safety policy is in place and carers are provided with ongoing training in first Aid, Food Hygiene and Health and Safety. The agency also checks foster carers and in their files keeps copies of car documentation when they are providing any transport.

The agency has very robust procedures in place to ensure that children are properly matched when placed carers which are overseen by the agency's referrals manager. The agency ensures that as much information about each child is obtained prior to admission and the quality control manager monitors the information obtained in order to chase up any omissions. The agency has a database which identifies those carers where placements might be made and every effort is made by the agency to ensure that each child's cultural, religious and ethnic needs are taken into account. Prior to a child being placed the referral manager checks with the proposed carers' link worker regarding the need for any training that might be required for the prospective carers should a child have needs for which particular training might be necessary. It was the view of the inspectors that the agency's practice in this area was commendable.

There was much evidence which indicated the agency offered regular training to staff and carers in protecting children from abuse and neglect. These areas are regularly addressed at staff meetings and group supervision meetings for carers. With regard to the issue of restraint, the agency has a policy that physical restraint should not be used by carers. However, during the course of the inspection the inspectors met one carer who described a situation in which he had had to use a form of restraint to control a child. Whilst the inspectors were satisfied that the actions described by the carer appeared to be appropriate it was possibly the case that the carer was placed in a vulnerable position because of the agency's position with regard to restraint. Whilst the inspectors fully appreciated the agency's rationale on this subject, it was recommended that the agency should refer to the guidance issued by the Department of Health on the use of physical restraint to ensure that its practice reflects the guidance given.

There are robust written procedures in place for recruitment and selection of staff. Overall the practices are sound and have not changed since the last inspection and the responsible personnel member is aware of the procedures and does a good job of managing the files. 71 % of the staff employed by the agency has personal life experience of fostering and this ensures understanding and good empathy. One of the foster carers said "there is

always someone knowledgeable to talk to when you ring the office who understands.” Two staff members are taking the OU social work course and have finished the first year and one staff member is taking her MA in Family Attachment.

A Panel meeting was partially observed, members of the group were spoken with and minutes of previous meetings were read. The Panel consists of a chairperson who is a member of the agency staff team and independent members including a foster carer, social workers and an individual who was fostered. The inspector observed annual reviews being conducted and a new family was presented.

Through direct observation, the inspector concluded that the collective views of the members was always fully explored and made clear at the point of the Chair confirming re-approval. However it was felt that panel did not fully uphold its function of quality assurance in relation to the assessment process. The body language of one panel member and lack of more positive strokes to encourage the foster carers was also noted to be poor.

Records of previous Panel meetings indicated that the group has been quorum and the members within this group come from a wide range of relevant backgrounds. All Panel members have been subject to CRB clearance and are on the staff register; there is now a clear procedure in place to cover decision – making, when all members are not in agreement.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13,31

The children are confident that the agency clearly values diversity among its carers and children and actively promotes their educational achievement.

The agency provides short term breaks to promote on going stability in that placement.

EVIDENCE:

The agency continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to equal opportunities and retain and recruit carers and staff from a very wide range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. This results in children and young people being placed in culturally sensitive and appropriate placements. Carers were visited and it was evident that care was taken during the matching process of those children placed with them. Young people spoken with confirmed the importance of this aspect. The agency provides training for carers, which covers valuing diversity and racial and cultural awareness, equal opportunity and dealing with discrimination.

The agency exceeded the standard for promoting educational achievement last inspection. This was not fully inspected, as it remains the same. The high priority given by the agency to meeting the educational needs of each child was evidenced by information systems, which demonstrate that all children were currently attending mainstream or special schools, The agency also promotes education through training, foster carers handbook and placement agreements. The agency also recognises any special achievements and celebrates this in their magazine.

Evidence was seen school uniform grants are provided by the agency, in order that those attending mainstream placements can immediately purchase the required clothing.

The agency is able to provide short-term breaks both for their own families and that of Local Authorities. One example given was a child in residential school and they provided weekend and holiday cover to maintain the residential placement and keep it stable. The agency has policies and procedures in place and uses the same matching criteria to meet the needs of children receiving short-term breaks. The agency also takes heed that the birth parents remain central to the influence on the child as pronounced in their vision statement.

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

The children can be confident that the agency will provide excellent support and facilities for contact arrangements.

Children and their families are assured that the agency will promote consultation with them at all times.

EVIDENCE:

Carers confirmed the importance of maintaining appropriate relationships and contacts is made explicitly clear throughout their own recruitment and induction and in all training. They confirmed that their own role is made clear as the agency provides foster parents with a handbook. The agency also gives birth parents a handbook, which clearly explains everyone's roles and answers any questions in a sensitive manner.

Such arrangements are clearly recorded on files, including any instances whereby contact with particular individuals may be restricted or not permitted for legal reasons. Outcomes and observations made during contact visits are clearly written up by the contact supervisor and passed to the child / young person's responsible social worker.

Young people confirmed they are enabled to maintain friendships and family relationships through regular telephone calls or texts, outings, letters and visits.

The agency holds a childrens forum quarterly to discuss issues to be taken to the board meeting this is made up of foster children and children from foster families. The minutes from the last meeting were seen and clearly evidenced the childrens opinions are being sought and used to influence change.

The childrens questionnaires sent back also confirmed that their views were asked for by the agency. Children's views were sought prior to statutory reviews and non-attendance at reviews was actively pursued. Children were provided with feedback following reviews in child friendly language. It was

also particularly positive to find the extent to which the birth children of carers are regularly consulted to ascertain their views about living with fostered children. Carers themselves were particularly complimentary about this particular aspect.

On all the children's questionnaires received back and the young people spoken too, were clear they knew how to raise any concerns or complaints. The childrens/ young person's guide includes details as to whom they can contact both within and 'outside' of the agency.

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):

14

The foster carers prepare and support their young people in preparation for adult independent living, and the agency has developed this aspect of their service more fully as well.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency has introduced “Get a Lifestyle” to offer young people a chance to prepare for living independently and to get a recognised award to prove they can. This consists of four components; training, a portfolio evidencing achievements, and live guidance for mentors and handbooks for mentors. The agency encouraged children to keep in touch with the agency after they had left and provided each child with a Keep in Touch card. The agency also provides a more age appropriate teenage guide.

Discussion with carers and young people indicated that local authorities are still slow to implement Pathway plans and are only doing this when referred to the 16 Plus team, and they are still lacking full involvement with the children and carers in the decision making process.

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):

16,17,20,21,24 and 32

Children can be confident that there is a sufficient number of experienced and qualified staff.

The inspection evidence indicated that the management of the agency is effective and efficient, with good monitoring systems.

Carers receive frequent support visits and clear written guidance however there is some question of the legality of foster carers supporting other carers.

The care of the children is promoted by the agencies good case and administrative records, which are comprehensive and maintained as, required.

Children can be assured that family and friends will be considered and their contribution recognised as carers.

EVIDENCE:

The agency has evidenced the management of the agency is efficient and effective by exceeding most of the standards set by their governing body the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The management structure and areas of delegation and responsibility are clearly defined, with daily staff meetings to reiterate this in case of any absences. Administrative infrastructures and systems are in place to ensure monitoring and support are available.

Evidence was seen all staff have job descriptions and contracts, high levels of supervision and consultation are provided for all of the staff. The agency has good staff retention and low levels of recruitment for staff. All staff understands the role of the children's social workers and it was clear from the placing officers questionnaires they feel they are working in partnership with the agency.

The agency are innovative and unique in their style of working and feel that traditional social work roles could be better met by foster carers (GFM) supporting other foster carers. The outcomes for the foster parents clearly evidence they appreciate the knowledge and support from people who understand what they are going through. The GFM's or group fostering mentors are closely supported by the owner of the agency and monthly for practice issues by an experienced social worker. However the inspector is of the view that the agency is again in breach of Regulation 20(7), by using foster carers who are employed to be group-fostering mentors. Following the inspection appropriate legal advice has been sought and it has gone to a national level for the quality and performance managers to make a decision.

Evidence was seen throughout the inspection that the staff were very well organised and managed. There were clear management structures and staff were managed by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications. The agency ensures that its staff and carers regularly undertake on-going training and appropriate professional and skills development. The inspectors were shown evidence of the agency's comprehensive training programme and discussion with staff and carers confirmed that the agency was totally committed to providing good quality training to all staff.

Examination of a number of staff files showed that staff had written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service and had access to all of the agency's policies and procedures.

The agency's practice with regard to the organisation and management of staff was considered to be commendable.

The evidence obtained during the course of the inspection indicated that the agency had a high number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruited a good range of carers to meet the needs of children placed with the agency. The agency was very thorough in the vetting of potential carers and tried to ensure that as far as possible those carers chosen to work for the agency were able to meet the high expectations it placed on its carers. The practice of the agency in this area was considered to be commendable.

Evidence was seen that regular supervision was being carried out and all staff are properly accountable and well supported. There was also evidence of yearly appraisals and progress made. Every morning a standing staff meeting is held to hand over information on the children/young person and so every staff member knows where every one is going to be for the day. The agency also discusses on a daily basis one standard and regulation, how they have met them and how they will go on exceeding them. The agency also holds regular staff meetings, which are for moral boosting and team building.

Discussion with carers confirmed that the agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting them. All of the carers that the inspectors met spoke very highly of the agency in terms of out-of-hours support, respite care, arrangements for training and development, information and advice. The carers also spoke very highly of the quality of communication and support they received from their support workers. The practice of the agency in this area was considered to be commendable.

The records maintained for each child and young person in foster care is of an exceptionally high quality. They clearly and succinctly detail the care provided and all required information from the placing authority and the agency, is easy to find. The basis for the current placement, intended duration, purpose and child's legal status is clearly recorded. The foster carers daily reports are all recorded electronically and sent in on a monthly basis, along with any health updates. Training is provided for all foster carers to record significant life events and also how to undertake life story work. The foster carers stated when spoken to that they received all relevant information that the agency knew, to help the child gain a level of understanding about their own life and past events.

The agency has assessed and approved relatives of existing families to provide respite care for the foster children. They most commonly use a unique model of 'foster grandparent', so for regular carers either siblings or grandparents

providing a baby-sitting role. They would have had a basis assessment and all basic statutory checks. The agency also runs specialist training for any interested extended families.

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	4

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

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

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

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

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

no

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS4	There needs to be written evidence formally recording risk assessments of the building being completed on a regular basis.
2	FS9	There is now a local agreement of when Regulation 43 notifications and quarterly reports are to be received by.
3	FS9	The agency should refer to the guidance issued by the Department of Health on the use of physical restraint to ensure that its policy and practice reflects the guidance given.
4	FS30	To ensure panel upholds its function of quality assurance in relation to the assessment process.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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