



Champions for
Social Care
Improvement

inspection report

Fostering Services

Reach-Out Care Ltd

Innovation House
Wear Valley Business Centre
26 Longfield Road
South Church, Bp Auckland
County Durham
DL14 5XB

8th March 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Reach-Out Care Ltd

Tel No

0191 3830847

Address

4 Providence Place, Gilesgate, Durham City, DH1 2HS

Fax No

0191 3757917

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

B040000389

Name of Registered Provider

Reach-Out Care Ltd

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Mrs Maria Rosa Jones

Date of first registration

22nd October 2003

Date of latest registration certificate

22nd October 2003

Registration Conditions Apply ?

YES

Date of last inspection

04/03/03

Date of Inspection Visit		8th March 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		09:30 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Michele Hargan	076522
Name of Inspector	2	Roger Gordon	102363
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the NCSC. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

Introduction to Report and Inspection

Inspection visits

Description of Fostering Service

Part A: Summary of Inspection Findings

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from last Inspection

Statutory Requirements from this Inspection

Good Practice Recommendations from this Inspection

Part B: Inspection Methods & Findings

(National Minimum Standards For Fostering Services)

- 1. Statement of purpose**
- 2. Fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service**
- 3. Management of the fostering service**
- 4. Securing and promoting welfare**
- 5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers**
- 6. Records**
- 7. Fitness of premises**
- 8. Financial requirements**
- 9. Fostering panels**
- 10. Short-term breaks**
- 11. Family and friend carers**

Part C: Lay Assessor's Summary (where applicable)

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

D.3. Provider's agreement

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the NCSC in respect of Reach-Out Care Ltd. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the NCSC in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

This service was inspected for the first time against National Minimum Standards introduced from 1st April 2002 when a comprehensive audit was carried out at the time of the last inspection in March of last year. The purpose of this inspection was to ensure that standards previously achieved were still being maintained and to follow up on formerly identified requirements and recommendations.

Reach-Out Care has been in operation since 1999. Currently a proprietor, fulltime manager, administrator, two social workers and three support workers are in place. Further additions to the staff are in process, and a move to larger, more suitable premises is planned.

The agency actively recruits foster carers and there are systems in place so that an initial assessment at the stage of a first enquiry from prospective carers can be carried out. All applicants are required to complete the "Choosing to Foster" course, which includes many essential aspects relating to safe caring, child protection and meeting the emotional needs of children who have had experience of being "Looked After".

The agency carries out a series of visits to prospective carers in order to complete the required assessment so that the suitability of carers can be determined. When a satisfactory assessment has been completed, this document, which is referred to as a form F is shared with applicants. The agency carries out all other necessary checks including visits to referees for foster carers. Satisfactorily completed applications and other relevant details are presented to the agency fostering panel, which can approve or refuse applications. Prospective foster carers are invited to meet with the panel as part of this process.

Documentation is in place as required, which demonstrates that the agency is functioning appropriately. Liaison with all other relevant agencies takes place on an ongoing basis.

The agency has developed an effective support system for its carers, both in terms of responsiveness to crises, and through the practical input of support workers and "short-break" carers.

The agency does not make emergency placements or offer short- term foster care.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

Reach- Out Fostering Agency has grown during the year, and continues to provide a soundly based service to the young people placed with its carers. This growth has meant that the manager has been overstretched, and that a number of requirements and recommendations from the previous inspection have not been put into effect, so there continue to be shortfalls in relation to many of the standards. The agency has recognised this and has taken steps to augment both their management, and administrative staffing, within the areas where the shortfalls mainly exist. Reachout have also outgrown their current office and are anticipating a move to more suitable premises that have already been identified. With these developments, it would be expected that a much more positive inspection report will be made at the next inspection. The responsible person must ensure that all requirements are speedily addressed where there are identified deficiencies with regards to regulations. It would clearly be of significant concern if there were any further delay in progressing matters.

During the course of the inspection the registered manager and provider were informed that a complaint had been made to the NCSC and that the inspection process would also serve to enable further investigation of concerns raised by the complainant. This matter was still ongoing at the completion of the inspection.

Statement of Purpose (Standard 1)

This standard is almost met. This has been revised and a Children's guide needs to follow and be distributed.

Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service (Standards 2-3)

One standard is fully met and the other is almost met. The manager of the service is very experienced and enthusiastic about her work, and demonstrates a good standard of practice towards staff and carers, and primarily children. The manager was not complacent about the shortfalls highlighted again in the inspection. Records of recruitment have shortfalls, and the respective roles of the current manager and the new management appointment will need to be clarified and reflected in job descriptions.

Management of the fostering service (Standard 4-5)

Both standards are almost met. Systems need to be developed for monitoring the work of the agency. This is reflected in other parts of the text of this report. The day- to -day management of the agency is sound.

Securing and promoting welfare (Standards 6-14)

Within this area 7 standards are almost met and 2 are fully met. Guidance in training and in the Carer's Handbook was generally good, with a few improvements recommended. Carers appeared to be well aware of expectations of good practice from the agency, and commented that the agency is very supportive and responsive. Care is taken over matching and recommendations are made to consolidate this in improved documentation. It is also

recommended that greater emphasis be placed on anti bullying practice; also on the recording of outcomes of contact. Some improvements are suggested for healthcare records, and the monitoring of children's education.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers (Standards 15-23)

Within this area 7 standards are almost met and 2 are fully met. Generally there is good practice in respect of these areas, which is not reflected in the standard of records kept, or in some areas, like whistleblowing, in written policies and procedures. Supervision and appraisal of staff and carers needs to be more regular and formalised. Carer reviews need to be brought up to date. The development of the possibility of short break (respite) for young people with someone they know, rather than more strangers, is a very positive development.

Records (Standards 24-25)

Within this area both standards are almost met. There were shortfalls and inconsistencies in the keeping and maintaining of records. These are detailed in this report alongside a list of the arising requirements and recommendations. This was recognised by the manager and a major piece of work is envisaged to make improvements to ensure better practice in this area.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service (Standard 26)

This standard is fully met. The service has outgrown its premises and a move was planned at the time of the inspection.

Financial arrangements (Standard 27-29)

These were not evidenced at this inspection. The provider stated that the agency had a sound financial situation. The one standard that was fully assessed at this inspection within this standard was fully met.

Fostering Panel (Standard 30)

This standard is almost met. There was a need identified for the panel chair to be an experienced person and independent of Reachout.

Short Term Breaks (Standard 31)

This standard is almost met. These have been developed and need underpinning with policy and procedure documentation.

Family and Friends as Carers (Standard 32)

This area is not applicable.

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report, which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	42(1)(a)(b) (2) (3)	FS3FS3	The Registered Person must ensure that all matters as detailed within Schedule 7 are monitored and documentary evidence must be maintained to evidence this and sent to the commission on a monthly basis.	31/08/04
2	20(3)(a)(b) (d) (i)	FS2FS2	The Registered Provider must ensure that for all staff files proof of identity, and qualification must be secured and retained by the fostering agency in compliance with regulations.	31/08/04
3	3(2) (3) (4)	FS1FS1	A Children's guide must be produced and a copy provided for the Commission, along with a copy of the Statement of Purpose. Documentary evidence must be maintained which demonstrates that guides have been distributed and shared with children.	31/08/04
4	16 (1) (a)	FS13FS1 3	There must be a procedure in place for the monitoring educational attainment, attendance and progress of children.	31/08/04

Action is being taken by the National Care Standards Commission to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	NO
The appointed manager of the service must, by January 2005, attain a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management or another qualification, which matches the competencies required by NVQ level 4.		
Comments The manager was not undertaking training at the time of the inspection.		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	<u>Michele Hargan</u>	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	<u>Roger Gordon</u>	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	<u>Gavin Purdon</u>	Signature	_____
Date	_____		_____

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements and recommendations are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	5(3)(c)(i)	FS2FS2	Records of recruitment must routinely show evidence of qualifications and identity	31/07/2004
3	29(1)(2)(4)	FS23FS23	Reviews of carers must take place at least annually, and a written record be made of these.	31/07/2004
4	21(4)	FS16FS16	Records of staff supervision and appraisal must be kept, to evidence that this is taking place.	31/07/2004
5	22 Sched.2	FS25FS25	The Children's register must include the statutory provision under which they were placed, and details of the address the child went to on leaving placement.	31/07/2004
6	11	FS6FS6	<p>The responsible person must ensure that:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster carers are asked to be able to demonstrate that they have checked the adequacy of the smoke detectors regularly. • Contact is made with the Fire Officer with regard to fire prevention to seek their general views concerning the adequacy of fire precaution for foster carers. • Initial risk assessments must be in place with regard to all children. • Where necessary, smoking patterns of carers receive increased monitoring and inclusion within reviews etc. 	30/07/2004

7	31 (2) (b)	FS25FS25	The register of carers must contain dates of each review of approval.	30/07/2004
8	11 (a)	FS19FS19	The responsible person must ensure that training in child protection is provided for all relevant staff.	30/07/2004
9	6 (2) (a)	FS5FS5	The responsible person must ensure that in the absence of the registered manager deputising arrangements make provision for a person other than the responsible individual to be available.	30/07/2004

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1FS1	It is recommended that footers on all revised documentation include the date, to evidence when the revision took place, and to facilitate monitoring of this.
2	FS4FS4	It is recommended that clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance be set up.
3	FS6FS6	It remains a recommendation that an addition be made to the carers handbook to include general health and safety guidance for carers of children when in and around the home.
4	FS8FS8	It is recommended that placement agreements contain reference to the decision making around matching, and in particular to any gaps in the match that require additional resources. Also that referral documentation be revised to enhance the seeking of comprehensive information required for sound matching and to inform risk management.
6	FS9FS9	It is again recommended that written guidelines for safe caring be documented for each foster home, to be cleared by the child's social worker.
7	FS10FS10	It is recommended that a written record be routinely made of the outcome of all contact visits.
8	FS12FS12	It is recommended that basic healthcare and first aid training are included in the initial training for carers, and that a health care record be maintained on each child with the child aware of the nature and content of the record.

9	FS13FS13	It is recommended that the foster carer's role in respect a child's education should be made clear in the placement plan
10	FS18FS18	It is recommended that supervision of carers takes place regularly and records of this are maintained; also that a whistleblowing policy is written and made known to staff and carers.
11	FS19FS19	It is recommended that a more robust system for recording and monitoring staff training should be developed, along with the staff appraisal programme; also a clearer system for keeping staff apprised of changes in legislation and guidance relevant to their jobs.
12	FS22FS22	It is again recommended there be developed a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register, in line with Regulation 29 (7) to (10). Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure all social work staff use the supervision document for carers.
13	FS23FS23	It is recommended records of supervision and appraisal of carers document training needs, and a more formalised system of evaluating, identifying and providing these needs to be set up. This needs to take account of the need for both carers, where there are two, to do the training.
14	FS24FS24	It is recommended that children's records be maintained in a consistent way in accordance with the standards. This needs to be done within a framework set by a clear written policy establishing the purposes, format and contents of files, both of children and carers, systems for ensuring consistency and quality of recording, and policy on access to records.
15	FS25FS25	It is recommended that the panel chair be totally independent from Reach-Out Care.
16	FS31FS31	It is recommended policies and procedures be developed around the short- term break provision.
17	FS27FS27	The responsible person should ensure that documentary evidence is produced to demonstrate there are procedures in place in line with 27.2 of NMS.
18	FS28FS28	The responsible person should ensure that a written set of principles and standards governing its financial management be drawn up and communicated to managers and accountants.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	7
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	NO
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	NO
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	NO
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	08/03/04
Time of Inspection	9:30AM
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	60

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the NCSC assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The Statement of Purpose has been revised and updated in accordance with the Standards.

It has yet to be distributed to carers and others, along with the Children's guide, which should include a summary of it, and details of complaints processes, and the address and telephone number of the Commission.

These should be forwarded to the Commission.

It is recommended that footers on all revised documents include the date.

Documentary evidence must be maintained which demonstrates that children's guides have been distributed and shared with children.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

A new appointment had been made to supplement the management of Reach Out, but the post holder was not yet in post at the time of the inspection. This will enable the present manager to concentrate her effort on day- to- day management and practice issues, freeing her from the more strategic aspects of the management role.

These respective roles will need to be considered in the light of the legal and qualification requirements for a registered manager of an Independent Fostering Agency, and any adjustment to registration will need to be considered.

The present manager is very experienced and able in carrying out her role, but with a shortfall in administrative support due to illness, and with an increase in the workload of the agency, she has been over-stretched during the year. This has resulted in shortfalls in carrying out the work necessary to make the desired improvements indicated at the previous inspection, but the basic necessary tasks for the safe and effective running of the agency for children and their carers have been carried out to a good standard.

Carers and service users in their comments, reflect a high level of satisfaction with the service.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The provider and manager were able to demonstrate their fitness to carry on the running of the agency.

A revised policy for Recruitment and selection of staff has been produced.

Records of recruitment did not routinely show evidence of qualifications and identity. These must be updated without delay.

CRB checks will need to be renewed every three years.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The staff are in regular contact with the manager, and there is a regular weekly staff meeting. Consequently, the manager has a good grasp of what is happening within the agency. Staff are in frequent contact with children and carers. Financial procedures appear to have been maintained despite some difficulties within the administrative side of the agency's work. There are not sufficient formal methods for recording and monitoring the agency's work. This is recognised by the management. The appointment of a senior manager and a skilled administrator should address these shortfalls. Up to now, the manager has been overstretched, as the agency has developed.

Number of statutory notifications made to NCSC in last 12 months:

0

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

Number of complaints made to NCSC about the agency in the past 12 months:

1

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

0

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The feedback from service users indicates the agency is managed efficiently and effectively. A job description for the manager is in place, but will need revision in the light of the new Senior manager's job description. Staff were clear as to lines of communication, and with regard to the manager of the agency. The arrangements for deputising in the absence of the manager include referral to the registered provider. The responsible person must ensure that in the absence of the registered manager deputising arrangements make provision for a person other than the registered provider to be available.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Four sets of carers were visited as part of the inspection. They were found to be providing comfortable and nurturing homes for young people. Care is taken to match carefully when placements are made, and information is shared by agency staff, with carers. Carers are given training on health and safety matters, and there is full information on these issues in the carers' handbook. Checks were seen to have been carried out in relation to insurance and MOTs on vehicles being used transport children. A previous recommendation that an addition be made to the Carers' handbook guidance to include general health and safety guidance for carers of children when in and around the home had not yet been acted on. The responsible person must ensure foster carers are asked to be able to demonstrate that they have checked the adequacy of the smoke detectors regularly. Contact must be made with the Fire Officer with regard to fire prevention to seek their general views concerning the adequacy of fire precaution for foster carers. Initial risk assessments must be in place with regard to all children. Where necessary, smoking patterns of carers receive increased monitoring and inclusion within reviews etc.</p>		

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Discussion with carers indicated their training includes issues around valuing diversity. Children's individual needs are considered during the process of considering the making of placements. Support staff were aware of individual needs of young people relating to ethnicity and disability.</p>		

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)		
Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Practice is generally sound in relation to matching. Pre placement meetings are held; thorough discussion is held within the team around new referrals and potential carers, taking account of the relevant issues. However, foster placement agreements do not contain reference to elements of the matching process that were taken into account in decision making, nor to any gaps in the match that require additional resources. This could be important, particularly in respect of a current transracial placement, and a placement of a child with identified disabilities, and was a recommendation from the last inspection. Due importance is given to the gathering and sharing of information with staff and carers, and risk assessments are made though not consistently using routine documentation. The responsible person must ensure that risk assessments are in place on all children placed within the service. It is recommended that the referral document be revised to enhance the seeking of comprehensive information required for both matching and risk assessment.</p>		

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)		
The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>There is very frequent communication between carers and the Reach- Out staff, and the manager is available to them and to children, and keeps herself abreast of each child's situation on almost a day- to- day basis, particularly if there are "live", ongoing issues. It is likely, therefore, that changes in children's demeanour, etc. would be picked up quite quickly.</p> <p>Child Protection procedures, and those for children who go missing, are included in the Foster Carers Handbook.</p> <p>There had been no allegations of abuse of a child within a foster home. There has been no scrutiny of this, and no system in place to do this.</p> <p>The recommendation from the previous inspection, that written guidelines for safe caring be documented for each foster home, to be cleared by the child's social worker, has not yet been carried out.</p> <p>Training is carried out on Child Protection, and bullying however new staff had not received child protection training. It was not clear that bullying is given sufficient importance, particularly in terms of recording and monitoring.</p>		
Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:	100	%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

This standard is mostly met, except for the making of a written record of the outcome of contact visits.

These are usually fed back verbally to social workers and to staff of the agency.

Contact arrangements are carefully agreed in detail and with attention paid to risks; attention to costs also needs to be included.

Carers' training covers the importance of maintaining family contact where possible, and young people's views are ascertained during planning.

11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Training of carers stresses the importance of encouraging children to express and contribute their views on aspects of their care.

Young people are aware of complaints procedures, though at this point they do not have a children's guide (see Standard 1).

Support workers are an additional source of support/monitoring of how children are when they have contact with young people.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Children are registered with GP dentist and optician.

Staff and carers are aware of the need to promote children's health and ensure their needs are met.

There is information about additional support services from outside professional agencies.

Basic training is given by the agency on health matters, and First Aid training is regularly provided. Some need this updating.

It is strongly recommended that health care and first aid training be included in the initial training, along with Choosing to Care.

There needs to be a health care record maintained on each child, with the child aware of the nature and content of the record.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

This standard was almost met, and there were some improvements from the previous year. Personal Education Plans need to be on records both in the agency and in the foster home. Carers indicated that there was good support from the agency's staff when needed, in their dealings with schools.

Carers appeared to be confident in their role of ensuring young peoples' educational needs are addressed.

The Carers' role in this needs to be made clear in placement plans.

There must be a system in place with regards to monitoring children's educational attainment, attendance and progress.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

A good policy document for carers on preparation for independent living had just been produced but was still to be issued with training, to carers.

Young people moving towards independence were seen to be consulted and involved increasingly in making their own decisions.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>From the available evidence, there were no concerns regarding the staff currently employed by the agency. However there were gaps in the recruitment files.</p> <p>All the recruitment and selection documentation must evidence the matters required under the Regulation 20 (3)(d) and Schedule1 paragraphs 1 – 6.</p> <p>A recruitment policy had just been written prior to the inspection, and remains to be enacted and translated into a procedure, including the training of staff who makes appointments.</p> <p>Staff work under the supervision of the manager and social workers as appropriate.</p>		
<p>Total number of staff of the agency:</p>	7	<p>Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:</p>

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>From discussion with staff, it was evident there were clear lines of communication and responsibility.</p> <p>The organisation and the staff group are small, and a weekly meeting goes over the work of the agency, to prioritise and monitor work.</p> <p>There are no information systems as yet to enable the carrying out monitoring of more long-term trends.</p> <p>Records showed that staff have contracts of employment.</p> <p>Records of staff supervision and appraisal still need to be maintained regularly.</p> <p>A system is in place for referrals to be responded to promptly.</p> <p>Advice can be obtained from a range of sources to support the work of carers.</p> <p>Staff disciplinary, grievance, and equal opportunities policies were in place.</p> <p>Staff disciplinary procedures warn of disciplinary proceedings for failing to report an incident or suspicion of child abuse.</p>		

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)		
The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>With the anticipated addition to the management of the agency, there will be sufficient staff to run the agency effectively and efficiently; there may need to be additional administrative support.</p> <p>Past experience indicates further staff will be appointed as necessary.</p> <p>There are clearly defined expectations of carers and the agency regarding the assessment process for carers. The required competencies are documented.</p> <p>There is ongoing training for carers and for staff.</p>		

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)		
The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>As at the previous inspection, there was not a consistent written record of supervision of carers by staff. This needs to be put in place.</p> <p>A whistleblowing policy is yet to be written.</p> <p>Staff and carers were unanimous in confirming that there is good support, both professional and practical, readily forthcoming at any time of the day or night.</p> <p>Public liability and professional indemnity insurance are in place.</p> <p>There are generally sound employment practices in place for carers and staff.</p>		

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)		
There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Training provided by the agency reflects its policies.</p> <p>A more robust system for recording and monitoring staff training should be developed, along with the staff appraisal programme; also a clearer system for keeping staff apprised of changes in legislation and guidance relevant to their job including Child Protection training must be provided for staff.</p> <p>There was evidence that new staff are carefully supported and trained into the tasks required of them.</p>		

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.5)		
All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>Staff meetings are held weekly, and at other times for specific reasons. As indicated already regular recorded supervision and appraisal of staff needs to be formalised.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6)		
The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>These standards were fully met, judging by the comments of carers, staff and questionnaires from placing social workers.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)		
The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
<p>These standards are almost met. There still needs to be developed a clear policy framework, which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register. The agency supports its carers' if they should need independent support in the case of an investigation. There are systems for "short breaks" (respite care) for children with other carers if this is needed. This has been thoughtfully and carefully developed with carer involvement. Foster Care agreements were in place and maintained on carers files, and by them. Reviews of carers had not taken place at the time of the inspection, though records and staff indicated some were being worked on. These were somewhat overdue, and had not taken place due to the shortage of administrative support, and the workload priorities of the team. There was evidence of variance in practice with regards to formal supervision of carers. A format for supervision is in place and the responsible person should ensure that all social work staff use this document.</p>		

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Carers receive a sound basic training, and there is good opportunity to learn and gain support from other carers and support workers and staff.
Records of supervision and appraisal of carers should document training needs, and a more formalised system of evaluating, identifying and providing these needs to be set up. This needs to take account of the need for both carers, where there are two, to do the training.
Training concerning safe caring has been well provided.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Documentary evidence from tracking of carers and children demonstrated that relevant information is kept. There were gaps and inconsistencies between children's records, in relation to dates and in one case a lack of health and education documentation. In another case the carer had information and the agency did not.

Children's records need to be maintained in a consistent way in accordance with the standards.

It was acknowledged in discussion with the manager that a substantial piece of work was needing to be done around recording, particularly specifying recording expectations and providing training for carers. This needs to be done within a framework set by a clear written policy establishing the purposes, format and contents of files, both of children and carers. The manager informed the inspectors that information is shared with other agencies and returned to the placing authority at the end of the placement. This was generally confirmed by carers' comments.

Their comments also confirmed their commitment to encouraging reflection by children on their history.

Carers are supported in keeping records secure.

The Children's register did not include the statutory provision under which they were placed, and did not consistently have details of the address the child went to on leaving placement.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The register of carers did not contain any record of dates of reviews and this must be addressed.

There was no effective system for ensuring the consistency and quality of recording; this needs to be established.

Records are kept securely, but arrangements for who may access which records, and how, are not clearly written in policy. They need to be, in accordance with the standards.

As mentioned above a comprehensive review of the recording systems, and the procedures around them, is needed.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			16
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			X
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			12
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			3
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	340	Maximum £	400

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Whilst the premises have served adequately thus far for the service, new, more substantial and suitable premises have been identified, and it was hoped that a move would be made during the weeks following the inspection.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
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The Registered Provider stated that the agency is run well within its limits, financially, and has resources/reserves to fulfil its obligations. Other information was not forthcoming. It was not clear that the recommendation from the previous inspection was acted on to draw up a written procedure which outlines what would happen in a financial crisis in order to safeguard the welfare of children receiving services through the agency.

The responsible person should ensure that documentary evidence is produced to demonstrate there are procedures in place in line with 27.2 of NMS.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
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No information was available to indicate anything is different from the previous inspection. An agreement was made at that point, that a written set of principles and standards governing its financial management would be drawn up and communicated to managers and accountants.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The evidence indicated that carers receive their payments promptly, expectations are clear about levels of payment, and fees are regularly reviewed.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The fostering panel was not observed during this inspection.

There is no reason to believe the standards for the panel have changed since the previous inspection, when the standards were met.

The inspectors queried the independence from the Reach- Out of the panel chair, and were informed that the deputy chair was now in a position, and had gained sufficient experience to act as chair, and would be approached with a view to him taking on this role.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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These are not provided by this agency, except in the sense of providing short breaks for children already placed with carers by them.

From discussion with carers and staff this provision has developed using only one or two sets of carers, who are already well known to children or are carefully and gradually introduced on a social basis before any placement is considered. Matching and risk considerations are also taken into account. It is a useful addition to the range of support to carers.

Policies and procedures need to be developed along with the provision of this service.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	0
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Not applicable to this agency.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

A Lay Assessor did not accompany the Inspector on this occasion

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____

Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 8th March 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

The Providers Response has been received and can be viewed at the Darlington Area Office

Action taken by the NCSC in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

YES

Comments were received from the provider

YES

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

NO

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

YES

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 14th June 2004 which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all NCSC inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to NCSC offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I, Mr Robert John Ruston of Reach Out Care confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I, Mr Robert John Ruston of Reach Out Care am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.