

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Acorn Fostering Services Limited

**ASRA Conference Centre
80 Burleys Way
Leicester
LE1 3BD**

Lead Inspector
Trisha
Gibbs

Statutory Announced Inspection
Monday, 23 May 2005

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- 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	Acorn Fostering Services Limited
Address	ASRA Conference Centre 80 Burleys Way Leicester LE1 3BD
Telephone number	0116 251 3550
Fax number	0116 251 3551
Email address	info@acornfostering.com
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Mr Anupam Srivastava
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Susan Mcdowelll
Type of registration	IFA
No. of places registered (if applicable)	N/A
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	N/A

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

NONE

Date of last inspection This is the first Inspection of the Agency

Brief Description of the Service:

Acorn Fostering Agency is a new Independent Fostering Agency and was registered in July 2004. The Agency premises are situated in the middle of Leicester. Currently the work of the Agency is carried out by the Registered Provider and Registered Manager with administrative support. Independent Social Work Assessors are employed to carry out Form F Assessments.

Acorn Fostering offers a range of placements including emergency, short term, long term, respite and parent and child. At the time of the Inspection the Agency had recruited ten carers and were providing placements for two young people.

SUMMARY

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

This Inspection took 80 hours in total.

For the purpose of the Inspection, four foster carers, and one child placed with one of the four carers, were systematically tracked through the close inspection of case files, home visits, and discussion with the Managers. This provided the evidence for each Standard. Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook and other documents were also inspected.

In addition to the above, Inspectors attended a carer support group meeting and Fostering Panel.

What the service does well:

- The Agency demonstrated a commitment to supporting new foster carers, who were all 'very happy' with the support they have received since being approved. They have recently been provided with a good resource pack in addition to the Carer's Handbook.
- The Agency has a strong Fostering Panel that receives applications and reviews, and evaluates the work of the Agency. The Panel plays a key role as the service develops. The Fostering Panel Chair is experienced and child centred, and Panel members work well as a team.
- Good administrative systems and documentation have been developed to ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken for new carers and staff.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- This is the first Inspection of a Fostering Service registered in July 2004. The Agency has recruited ten carers and developed a training programme for carers. Training has also been provided for Independent Assessors.

What they could do better:

- The Agency should provide the Fostering Panel with good supporting evidence when applying for change of carer Approval Status. Carer's Approval Status should not be changed simply because there is a shortage of placements, not least when some new carers have yet to have a child placed with them.
- The Agency should ensure that evidence is available to indicate how children are matched with individual carers and placements.
- No Placement Agreements were seen on file for the three children placed to date, and the Agency must ensure that these are in place for all placements made.
- The Agency should develop the use of the Risk Assessment process, especially at the time of referral e.g. when placing children who have behaviours and needs that might impact on the welfare of the child and the placement.
- The Agency should introduce a system for carers to maintain a separate Health record for children and young people in placement.
- The Agency should develop policies on roles and responsibilities of students within the service. Currently, supervised student placements provide some of the support offered to carers. A number of recommendations have been made regarding the signing and dating of Safe Care policies, the production of guidelines on recording, the use of standard formats for carer supervision, the clarification of school uniform costs and support available to carers when children do not attend school.
- The Fostering Panel minutes should more clearly reflect discussions between Panel members and indicate how issues are resolved. The Agency's Panel document should detail how a decision will be reached when the Panel is not in agreement.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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Scoring of Standards

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 12

The Fostering Agency promotes the health of children but needs to improve on the recording of health information.

EVIDENCE:

- The Foster Carer's Handbook and Carer's Resource pack, provides full information and advice about health, illness, infectious diseases, diet, exercise and other health related matters.
- The file of the one young person in placement contained no Referral or Placement Agreement detailing his health needs. There were elements of the young persons health needs, and those of a young person placed during the Inspection, that should have been risk assessed at the time of placement and were not.
- Carers visited had registered children with local health services promptly. Currently the Agency does not have a policy for carers maintaining a separate health record for children and should introduce this. There is no separate section dedicated to Health within young people's files.
- Carers visited had worked hard with a young person to control a smoking habit.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9,15,30

The Agency has developed good systems for completing statutory checks on staff and carers. Placement systems at this present time however do not ensure good matches for all children.

EVIDENCE:

- Recruitment procedures and Independent Assessor files evidence systematic checks for staff working for the Agency. Social work staff files could not be inspected since to date none have been appointed.
- Carers have received initial training and information on Safe Care and Child Protection, and confirmed this when visited. However Safe Care policies on file were not signed and dated, or drawn up in respect of individual placements.
- The Carer's Handbook and Resource pack contain good strategies and ideas for managing difficult behaviours.
- The Agency does not have a matching policy, and no matching checklist was seen on files. The Agency referral form (none seen on file) did not contain evidence of consideration of matching or risk assessment.

- No Placement Agreements were seen in respect of the child in placement, a child previously placed, and a child placed during the Inspection.
- One young person had experienced three placement breakdowns during six months with the Agency, the last being during the Inspection. While there were several contributory reasons for this, documentation should have been available evidencing that the Agency had given appropriate consideration to the matching of this child to each placement.
- One carer visited confirmed that she had been given no written information about the child placed with her a week previously, although the child had been with the Agency for several months.
- Form F assessments and Fostering Panel minutes were looked at. Fostering Panel minutes were not always clear about potentially important details, referring to 'concerns' or 'issues' but not indicating what these were.
- At the Fostering Panel attended by an Inspector, a change of Approval Status was being sought on the four sets of carers attending for their first review, to potentially accommodate the needs of referrals being made to the Agency. (Some carers were yet to have their first placement) The Panel appropriately advised that they would not consider this without being provided with supporting evidence, and deferred a decision on the matter until this was made available.
- On one Fostering Form F it was evident from details about the house and household, and subsequent Approval Status, that there was potential for children placed to share a bedroom, and the Agency is reminded that under these circumstances a risk assessment should take place.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 13

Systems at this time do not cater for the educational achievement of children who do not have a school placement.

EVIDENCE:

- The Agency has appointed carers who can provide placements for children with specific ethnic, religious and cultural needs, but lack of placements to date makes it not possible to assess Standard 7.
- Although the Agency provides respite breaks to carers, it was not possible to assess Standard 31 at the time of Inspection due to the absence of placements.
- There is information available to carers for supporting children in education, but no resources available to support children who do not have a school placement.
- Carers visited were supporting a young person who was experiencing difficulty in maintaining a school placement. The potential exclusion of this young person was impacting seriously on placement stability. Although the Agency and the carers worked hard to liaise with educational professionals, and to support the carers, there are no clear policy guidelines detailing a strategy or resource that would be available, in the event of the young person not having a school placement.

- Carers who provided respite to other carers, for a young person excluded from school discovered that they were working with different expectations re how they should occupy the young person during school hours.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 10

Agency documentation positively promotes carers facilitating contact, but a lack of written confirmation about contact arrangements can leave carers vulnerable.

EVIDENCE:

- The Carer Handbook gives appropriate emphasis to the importance of contact between children in placement and their families, where appropriate. In one case tracked for Inspection purposes, the young person's family had visited them, on more than one occasion, in the carer's home. Although the placing social worker had verbally confirmed with the carer that there were no concerns about this happening, the Agency should have ensured a risk assessment was undertaken by the placing social worker prior to contact taking place. (Standard 10.6) Contact arrangements should also have been detailed in the Placement Agreement (none on file) and preferably maintained on a separate sheet for easy reference, within the file.
- The Agency has booklets and questionnaires in place inviting children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings, but it has not been possible to inspect Standard 11 on this occasion because of the lack of placements.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 29

The Agency operates a reliable payment system to carers and provides good written financial information to carers.

EVIDENCE:

- No young people moving into adulthood were in placement at the time of the Inspection therefore Standard 14 was not inspected.
- Carers sign a clearly written separate financial agreement, both this and the Carer's Handbook detail how costs and allowances should be allocated to meet young people's personal, social and leisure needs. Carer's confirmed that payments were prompt.
- During the Inspection one carer indicated a lack of clarity about whether carers or the Local Authority should bear the cost of school uniforms. The Agency has been recommended to clarify this with carers and Local Authorities within the Placement Agreement.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s)
1,2,4,17,18,22,23,24,25,26,27**

The Agency should continue to develop solid systems to support good placements for children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

- Acorn Fostering Agency is still becoming established and has experienced some difficulty in obtaining placements. Good publicity material is available, in addition to a web site, detailing the Agency's aims and objectives.
- The Registered Provider is carrying out some aspects of Schedule 7 monitoring through a software management information programme, however has yet to develop a system to ensure that all areas of Schedule 7 are being monitored.
- Currently both Provider and Manager are carrying out a range of management tasks, some overlapping, in the absence of a staff team. As the Agency develops and new staff are appointed they should clarify their respective roles and responsibilities.
- The Agency has full personnel policies and procedures in place in addition to Confidentiality and Access to Information documents.
- The Agency does not have a written policy for staff and carers detailing expectations with regard to recording (Standard 24.2) and the Carer's Handbook would benefit from more guidelines on carer recording under the section 'Foster Carer's Diary'.
- Detailed Foster Care Agreement documents were in place and appropriately signed by all parties, however this Agreement must include all of the specifications outlined in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations.
- A foster carer support group is held regularly and was attended by Inspectors. Carers' files indicated that although they receive frequent and appropriate supportive visits from the Provider and the Manager, and a student social worker, formal supervision sessions have yet to be implemented. A pro forma for recording supervision would promote consistency.
- Training opportunities have been made available to carers. Carers said how useful these have been to date. Although carers sign in their Foster carer Agreement that they will attend for training, Inspectors observed that there is not an expectation that carers must attend for key training and, given the lack of experience of the new carer group, have recommended that this expectation should be made more clear to carers.
- The premises in which the Fostering Service is based, provides good office space for workers and a large meeting room for training, support groups, and the Fostering Panel. Records are securely maintained and IT systems protected through passwords.

- Financial Statements and Budget printouts were provided to Inspectors.
- The Registered Provider was requested to provide Inspectors with a letter from the Agency's bank, confirming continuing financial viability.

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	2

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	1
9	2
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	X
13	2
31	X

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	2
11	X

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

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

N/A

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	4	42	Schedule 7 monitoring must be undertaken.	31/07/05
2.	8	34 (3)	A Placement Agreement must be in place for all children placed with the Agency.	31/07/05
3.	22	28 (5)(b)	Foster Carer Agreements must include the matters laid out in Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations.	30/09/05
4.				
5.				
6.				

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.	1	The Statement of Purpose should include the date of review.
2.	4	The respective roles of Registered Provider and Registered Manager should be clarified.
3.	8	The Agency's policy and referral form should include evidence of matching consideration and risk assessment.
4.	9	Safe Caring policies should be signed, dated, and reviewed at the time of each new placement.

5.	12	Seperate Health Records for children (12.4) should be maintained and Local Authorities pursued for essential Health Information where this has not been provided.
6.	13	Carers and Local Authorities (e.g. within Placement Agreement) should be clear about who is responsible for school costs.
7.	13	Guidance should be available to carers on resources available to them, when children are without an educational placement.
8.	15	A policy should be in place about the use of students, and should include their roles and responsibilities.
9.	22	The supervision of carers should be evidenced through the use of a supervision format.
10.	23	A minimal level of carer attendance for core training should be agreed.
11.	23	Policy guidelines on recording (25.7) should be drawn up.
12.	24	The front sheet in childrens files, should contain information about their family composition and legal status.
13.	30	The Fostering Panel information document, should detail how decisions will be made when the Panel is not in agreement.(30.2)
14.	30	Panel minutes should reflect more accurately the content of discussions and evidence reasons for ultimate recommendations.
15.		
16.		
17.		

Commission for Social Care Inspection

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way, Grove Park
Enderby
Leicester
LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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