



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Foster Care Associates (North East)**

**19 Portland Terrace  
Jesmond  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
Tyne & Wear  
NE2 1QQ**

*Lead Inspector*  
**Stephen Graham**

*Key Announced Inspection*  
**25th September 2006      10:00**

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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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](http://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](http://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

<b>Name of service</b>	Foster Care Associates (North East)
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<b>Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)</b>	Foster Care Associates Limited
<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mr Matthew Richard Horton
<b>Type of registration</b>	Fostering Agencies

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      28th November 2005

## Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates (North East) is part of the national organisation Foster Care Associates. FCA (NE) provides family placements to children and young people in the North East of England. The main office is situated in Newcastle upon Tyne and there were sub-branches in Alnwick, Darlington, Seaton Burn and Middlesbrough. FCA (NE) has continued to grow since the last inspection. At the time of the inspection, FCA (NE) was offering a family placement service to 173 children and young people. The Agency offers a range of services to meet the needs of placing authorities, for example emergency, parent and child, short-term, bridging, assessment and long-term placements. FCA (NE) also specialises in offering placements to children who may challenge the service.

FCA (NE) provides a multi-disciplinary approach to working with children and young people, which amongst other things, offers opportunities for foster carers and social work staff to access therapy and educational support services. FCA (NE) also provides children and young people with access to group work and activities provided by a team of resource workers. The Agency has achieved the Investors In Children award.

Weekly fees for the care of each individual child commence at a minimum of £650.00 per week for a 'foundation' placement with a standard 'Team Parenting' placement costing £908.25. Variations to these fees are negotiated dependent on the individual package of care to be provided by the service.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspector would like to thank the children, carers and staff at Foster Care Associates for their welcome and the important part they played in the inspection. Information and evidence in this report was gathered by two inspectors over a 4 day period through:

- Talking individually with children, carers and staff.
- Visiting foster carers' homes.
- Visiting the regional sub-branches for the service.
- Group discussions with staff, children and carers.
- Talking with the managers of the service.
- Reading children's, carer's and staff files.
- Reading policies, procedures and records.
- Children's questionnaires.
- Carer's questionnaires.
- Children's social workers questionnaires.
- Observing the fostering panel.
- Talking with the Chair of the fostering panel.

Following restructuring within the agency, the service is currently being coordinated by an acting manager. They are in the process of being formally approved by the Commission. Despite this temporary arrangement, the inspectors noted throughout the course of this visit the commitment both from managers, staff and foster carers to maintain good standards, whilst working to further improve the range and quality of service provided.

Inspectors found that the service has responded positively to the previous requirements set and recommendations made. The views of children, their carers and placing social workers received during the inspection further endorsed this.

## **What the service does well:**

Previous inspections had confirmed that the overall service provided by Foster Care Associates to its carers and children placed with them was satisfactory overall with many very good aspects to it. Positively, the views of children, carers and placing social workers gathered during this visit confirmed that the service continues to be provided to a high standard, with areas of further improvement evident.

During this inspection, a number of very positive comments were received from placing social workers, carers and children. One carer stated that: "Foster Care Associates are an excellent agency – they provide a superb support package including educational therapy." A placing social worker gave their view that: "I have found the service to be exceptionally good in meeting the children's needs. The carer in particular treats the children as if they were

their own whilst respecting their origins. Her dedication to these children is wonderful." One young person stated: "I am very happy in my placement where I have lived for 4 years."

When asked: "Why do you choose to foster for this service?" carers gave many positive responses. One carer gave their view that Foster Care Associates: "made us feel part of a team. They are child centred." Another carer stated that they chose this service: "because of the challenges that fostering difficult placements bring and the support + encouragement FCA gave to us." When asked: "What does the service do to help you care for children?" carers again gave very positive responses. One carer highlighted that the agency "provide support, training and resources to help us foster. Others highlighted the: "regular visits from our support worker" that the agency "give us access to all services e.g. education, thinking space forums, regular contact and also just a phone call away from support and advice." Also that they provide "Plenty of advice, activities in the school holidays, provide resources advice, support for children in school, awards system for them, football clubs, forums for children."

Social workers placing children through the service were equally positive about its qualities. When asked 'what does the service do to promote good outcomes for children and young people' one social worker commended the "excellent support to carers" and "good liaison with other professionals." Another gave their view that the service: "provide stable placements for children with good support from carers". Others highlighted the: "Thinking Space Forums with child psychologist –well planned respite – good interagency networking", also that the service is: "well co-ordinated" and that it: "encourages children to be individuals"

Overall, children and young people were happy to confirm that they felt safe, are well cared for and that their views are listened to by their carers; staff at the agency and their social workers. Children felt that their health and educational needs are well met and that they are supported in maintaining contact with their friends and families where appropriate. They also enjoy the benefit of activities and hobbies and are involved within their communities.

Very positive descriptions were received from children explaining why they felt this was true. One young person said of their foster home: "I love staying here with (carers names) and the dogs and the goat we have lots of happy times together as a family I never ever want to leave here." Another stated: "Every one in the house is nice." With regard to health needs one young person stated: "my carer helps and advises me about everything about my health." Another young person confirmed that if they were unhappy: "I can tell my social work or my carers support work if I need to." With regard to their education, one young person stated that: "school give us certificates, FCA have an education officer called (name given) she has meetings to help me." Another young person gave their view that: "everyone is always willing and ready to help me."

Overall the inspectors found that the service creates positive outcomes for children in meeting their health needs, keeping them safe, supporting their education, contact with family and friends and involvement in the community. Importantly, inspectors also found that children feel listened to by their carers, social workers and the fostering staff.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The service has continued to work to ensure good outcomes for children and to further improve the service by ensuring that previous requirements and recommendations made are fully implemented.

Carers were asked to comment on whether they felt that since the previous inspection the service was better, worse or not changed. Very positively, of those responding, one third felt that the service was better, with others feeling it had not changed, only two carers felt that the service was worse the individual reasons for this were fed back to the manager for their review.

Positively, when asked the same question, the majority of placing social workers felt that the service was unchanged with some describing the service as being better. No one felt that the service provided by FCA was worse.

As recommended at the previous inspection, recruitment records in respect of the manager and staff of the service have been reviewed and improved to ensure that all of the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is obtained.

## **What they could do better:**

The views of children and carers interviewed or responding by questionnaire during the inspection did not highlight any major common areas in need of improvement. When asked: "what could the service do better" one carer gave their view that "support good – but always room for improvement in any organisation." Some individual ideas regarding possible changes included: 'respite carers for children should remain the same so that children know who they are going to.' Other individual responses included 'improve communication'; 'better information sharing' and 'more support for children excluded from school'. One carer felt that although FCA was a national organisation there should be a north east regional 'emergency duty team' so that staff providing it have better local knowledge of carers and children. These individual suggestions were fed back to the manager to be considered by the agency.

One young person who responded by questionnaire and who was also interviewed during the inspection took the opportunity to highlight that they were very happy in their placement and did not feel like a 'looked after child' their request for improvement was that the Commission "stop sending me those forms." (Referring to their inspection questionnaire). Another young person commented very positively on the 'memory box' given to her by the



agency, however her request for improvement was that “you need more (boxes) when you have a lot of memories.”

Placing social workers again were very positive about the service when asked for their view on what it could do better. One stated regarding the question that it was “N/A, very impressed with the service.” Another referred to their own previous communication difficulties with the agency but stated positively that they now enjoyed “honest dialogue and communication”. Another took the opportunity to state: “I am overall impressed by the quality of the service provided.” Another said: “ FCA are providing a safe nurturing placement.” Overall, placing social workers responding to our questionnaire rated the service as at least satisfactory, with a significant number rating it as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ in all areas.

The inspectors, however, identified some areas where they felt further improvements could be made. These are in summary:

Although safe care agreements were in place within those carer files examined, some of these did not include the dates of their completion or the signatures of those involved in agreeing them. It was recommended that the addition of signatures and dates of completion would provide better evidence that these are being reviewed and updated at regular intervals

As extensive delays exist between carer review meetings and the presentation of the reports of these meetings to the fostering panel. The arrangements by which these reports are presented should be reviewed to ensure that this is done in a timelier manner.

The panel chair should introduce a formal ‘declaration of interest’ for panel members to further ensure that they withdraw from discussion and decision-making if they have any personal involvement in the reports presented.

During panel meetings the chair, panel members and the legal advisor would benefit from having direct access to all previous panel minutes as well as the fostering standards and regulations to assist them in their decision-making.

To supplement training information held within individual files, the introduction of a training spreadsheet would allow the service to better monitor individual attendance of carers at required training, whilst also providing the opportunity for better forward planning of the overall schedule.

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.

# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## **The intended outcome for this Standard is:**

- 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 the outcome for Standard:**

12.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Foster Care Associates works to ensure that the health needs of children placed with their carers are effectively promoted and monitored.

## **EVIDENCE:**

One young person, whilst confirming that they usually receive support and advice about being healthy, stated: "(my carer) tells me what's healthy food and what is good to do". Another described how their foster carers: "want me to brush my teeth and get some exercise and get fitter". Another young person stated that: "(my carers) don't let us sit around all day. They say go out it's a lovely day". Another confirmed that they receive support with their health needs because: "we go to the dentist."

The overall response received from young people was very positive regarding the support received from their carers and the service in meeting their health needs. Of the children and young people responding all were able to report that they had received help in meeting their own health needs. Over three quarters of those responding stated that they 'always' get support in meeting these needs, with others describing this as 'usually' or 'sometimes' provided.

The overall response from carers was that the support provided was either excellent or good. Only three carers described this support as poor, with two of those making it clear that the agency offered support to them, but that they felt this was not needed. The other individual comment was fed back to the manager for their review. Carers gave a number of good examples of the support received from the service in meeting the children's health needs. One highlighted that the agency do this: "by promoting healthy lifestyle attitudes with both us and the children especially through courses and seminars."

Another stated that: "They (the agency) check we have filled in 'health passports' and we regularly do dental and optical check up's." Another highlighted that: "Supervision notes are taken fortnightly these areas discussed and maintained (Doctor yearly medical and three monthly check up's at dentist)." Positively, a number of carers referred to the 'health passport' document used by the service to ensure that carers are fully aware of each child's health background and current health needs. One confirmed that: "All children have health passports so carers know the child's history regarding appointments GP dentist etc." Another stated that: "The children have health passports which must be kept up to date. Supervising social worker checks regular on visits."

The manager themselves highlighted how the agency had revised the Foster Carer Handbook, to update the health and lifestyle policies included within it. The agency continues to work with placing social workers to ensure that health records and medical information received when children are placed is accurate and that children benefit from their statutory 'Looked after Children' annual medical examination.

Examination of children's care files and discussion with carers themselves provided lots of evidence that carers receive a full description of the health needs of the children they care for, are supported in ensuring that children are registered with doctors and dentists and that appropriate consents for any medical treatment required are provided. Carers are also supported to access necessary training in health, hygiene and first aid. The agency also highlighted their plan to provide a first aid course for children, resulting from requests made by those young people involved in the 'Children's Forum' organised and supported by the agency.

Very positive evidence was also received from social workers placing children through the service. None of those responding raising any concerns regarding the support provided to children by the agency and their carers to ensure that their health needs are met. Positively, statistics provided by the service confirmed that 80% of children had benefited from attending their statutory annual medical review, with liaison with placing social workers and health professionals continuing to ensure that all children placed benefit from this.

# 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, 15 and 30 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 and 30

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. The manager of the service is both suitable and competent to provide it. Young people are placed with carers who provide safe homes. Arrangements to match young people with carers are generally effective. The overall arrangements put in place by the service keep children safe, are documented fully and consistently with any concerns responded to promptly. Although some recommendations are made regarding panel processes and procedures, the fostering panel overall is well comprised and is making good decisions and recommendations to the agency decision maker.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The acting manager was able to confirm that those members of staff in the fostering service, (who are required to be CRB checked), every foster carer, and all adult members of the households of foster carers, have had their required checks completed.

Discussion with carers, staff, observation during home visits and an examination of carer files provided good evidence that the service works to ensure that carers provide an environment to children which is free from hazards and routinely checked to ensure that it remains safe and suitable for the care of children. Health and safety checklists are in use and were available

within carers' files. Those carers involved directly in the inspection through visits to their homes were both happy to be interviewed and were welcoming to the inspectors.

To ensure that children are cared for safely, full information is required from placing social workers to allow the fostering service to 'match' children successfully and inform carers of children's ongoing care needs. When asked how they would rate the information they received about the child before they were placed, positive responses were received from almost all carers, two thirds described this as either 'good' or 'excellent' with almost a further third describing it as 'adequate.' Two individual carers described this as inadequate. Of those, one did not provide any details as to why they felt that this was the case, whilst the second stated: "This was because the children were placed very quickly. Our FCA social worker made every possible effort, on our behalf, to get information". With regard to information received, one carer stated that "this varies from (each) LA (Local Authority), sometimes the children are straight from their homes so we do not find out about their backgrounds, only the reason for being placed." Another commented with regard to fostering supervising social workers that: "FCA try to pass on as much information as possible, depending on the information they have been given."

Other comments received reinforced the skills of the agency in ensuring good matching of children to carers and good information sharing. One carer described how they: "met child before placement and made a portfolio of our family – so he could read about us and see photographs before he met us. The child thought that was great and enjoyed having the information." Another described how "We received good knowledge of the children's background and the difficulties which the children have etc. All our questions were answered without hesitation."

Positively, carers provided a good indication of the planning and sharing of information taking place when children are moved to new placements. When asked "How good is the fostering service at supporting you in maintaining placements, so that children only move in a planned way?" two thirds of carers described this as 'excellent' with nearly one third describing this as 'good.' Only one respondent described this support as poor, but provided no details of why they felt that this was the case. One carer confirmed positively that: "we have only had two children move on (siblings), everything was planned including closure." Another described how the: "young person went into a children's home which was planned. SW (social worker) and myself went to unit with child". Another carer commented positively that: "I have noticed that everything is done not to cause the children to much distress when moving."

Carers responded very positively when asked "How good is the service at ensuring that you can meet the needs of the children and young people placed with you?" with well over three quarters of those responding describing this support as either 'excellent' or 'good.' In describing the support received one

carer stated: "Information is normally detailed enough to establish needs of children at a very early stage." Another described how: "They (the agency) support us with individual children as all of the children placed with us have different needs and abilities." Another described how: "Advice, support and training have helped me support and care for the children and meet their individual needs." One carer simply stated: "we have an excellent supervising social worker who is always available."

Examination of care files and direct discussions with carers themselves highlighted some very good examples of good quality information being provided leading to appropriate matches of children to carers. Written placement agreements for children were seen to be completed in detail and to include necessary matching information. However, one example of a form F matching document being present in the young person's but not held within the carers file was highlighted for review with the manager. Another carers file was highlighted to the manager as their supervision record contained only limited written evidence of the ongoing development by the carer of the skills they needed to match them with the child placed.

Positive evidence of the quality of care provided through the good matching of children with carers was also received through children's questionnaire responses. When asked the question: "Do you feel well cared for where you live now?" nearly all the children were able to respond 'always', with only one 'negative' response received (from an otherwise positive questionnaire) which was fed back to the manager for their review. Very positive descriptions were received from children explaining why they felt this was true. One stated: "Because they (the carers) can always tell when I am upset and they make me feel better." Another said: "Because (my carers) family loves me. Family gives me happy thought's keeps my mind off my own family. (My carer) Keeps her eye on me helps me not to hurt myself." A third young person stated: "I love staying in this house with my new foster carers they really care for us I don't want to leave ever and never."

Through their questionnaires placing social workers also responded very positively regarding the choices of placement made available by the fostering service and it's contribution to good matching of carers to children.

Positively, the number of emergency placements of children with carers was lower than those that were planned. Again, good evidence of the quality of matching of children with carers was indicated by the relatively low number of un-planned endings of placements for the service in the 12 months prior to this inspection.

To ensure that children and young children are protected from abuse and neglect, it is necessary to provide carers with training in both recognising and responding to any such events as they occur. Examination of the current carer training programme for the service confirmed that initial and refresher training

in child protection, safe caring and anti-bullying are regularly provided by the service. The acting manager also highlighted the recent provision of compulsory safeguarding training for all staff members, which focused on the national 'Every Child Matters' safeguarding agenda.

Safe care agreements were in place within those carer files examined. Some of those agreements that were in place did not include the dates of their completion or the signatures of those involved in agreeing them. Although carers spoken to were able to confirm verbally that safe care agreements were being reviewed and updated at regular intervals, it was recommended that the addition of signatures and dates of completion would provide better evidence of this.

The service has an appropriate system in place to collect and monitor any allegations of abuse received. Examination of monitoring records provided good evidence of this being closely monitored by the manager of the service.

Positively, from the questionnaire responses received and direct discussion with children themselves nearly all were able to confirm that they are not bullied. Some concerns regarding possible instances of bullying at school or in the community were received and were fed back to the manager for their review with each young person, their carers and supporting social work staff.

The service is staffed by experienced and well-qualified social workers. Those interviewed were positive regarding access to ongoing training, and the direct support and supervision provided to them by their managers. The previous inspection had highlighted that not all of the information required by Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 was present within staff files. During this inspection a selection of files from more recently appointed staff were reviewed, the more recent of these contained good evidence that required checks on staff had been completed, including confirmation of the months of previous employment and verbal confirmation of references received were obtained through follow up telephone calls to the referees themselves.

Some less recent files contained only partial written evidence of both telephone checks on references received and specific months of employment being provided in applications for employment, although this had occurred prior to the completion of the previous inspection this was highlighted to and acknowledged by the senior management team.

Files contained confirmation that Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are completed for each staff member, however examination of one carers file (whose approval had been completed in 2004) highlighted that although the CRB check had been obtained and approval completed for the partner of this carer, a young person had been placed with the couple prior to the receipt of the second approval. In discussion with the carer, they confirmed that this had occurred but also highlighted that their partner had taken full



responsibility for the care of the child themselves in the short period prior to the completed CRB check being received. Discussion of this with managers at the service and examples of more recent approvals completed provided good evidence that the agency does not place children with newly approved carers until all statutory checks have been completed and confirmed.

Examination of foster carers' files provided good evidence of the quality of initial carer assessments undertaken by the fostering service and presented to the fostering panel. Files examined also provided good evidence of the scrutiny of these assessments undertaken by panel members during their meetings.

During the meeting of the fostering panel attended by the inspector, panel members appeared comfortable in their roles. As previously highlighted, the presentation of written assessments to panel was generally good, however the quality of annual review reports presented to panel varied. The service itself had recently reviewed and amended the administrative processes through which review reports are compiled and presented to panel and it was acknowledged that these should be further reviewed to ensure that these are effective. With some examples, it was noted that the timescale from the review itself to the review report being presented to panel for their scrutiny was excessive. Panel members themselves noted and highlighted this during their meeting. Previous examination of a selection of carer files had highlighted gaps of up to 6 months between review meetings and reports reaching panel. From those examples presented to the panel attended gaps of three to four months were noted.

Throughout the panel meeting, discussion was thorough, with members able to raise and challenge any issues regarding the ongoing suitability of foster carers subject to initial assessment or their annual reviews. During subsequent discussion with the Chair of the panel it was agreed that a formal 'declaration of interest' should be introduced to further ensure that panel members withdraw from discussion and decision-making if they have any personal involvement in the reports presented. It was also agreed that during panel meetings the chair, panel members and the legal advisor would benefit from direct access to all previous panel minutes as well as the fostering standards and regulations to assist them in their decision-making.

# 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 and 13. 31 n/a

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Foster Care Associates through its foster carers works to provide placements, which value diversity and promote equality. Children placed with the agency's carers are provided with good support, which actively promotes their educational achievement.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The service works to provide carers that value issues of equality and diversity in the provision of care to children placed with them. Positively, when carers were asked: "How well does the fostering service address issues of equality and diversity such as culture, ethnicity and disability?" nearly all carers who responded described this as either 'excellent' or 'good.' One carer stated positively, "FCA promote an equal opportunity environment, throughout the whole organisation." Another highlighted that "throughout my Form F process culture, ethnicity and disability were covered on numerous occasions."

With regard to access to activities in the community, carers were also positive regarding the support received from the service. When asked to 'describe how well the fostering service helps you in supporting the children you care for undertake activities in the community,' all of those responding again described this as either 'excellent', 'good', or at least adequate. One carer highlighted that: "FCA are able to access all types of activities in both regional and outreach areas providing young people with a host of activities e.g. rock

climbing, canoeing etc.” Another carer stated that the: “summer holiday programme is very good.”

Carers were also asked: “How well does the service enable you to provide an environment for a child to prosper”. Again the overall response was very positive, with all carers describing this as either ‘excellent’ or ‘good’. One carer highlighted that: “the resource team are excellent and more than willing to get the children involved as much as possible and will assist if needed with transport.”

The acting manager highlighted the forthcoming ‘Young People’s Achievement’ Ceremony, this is aimed at recognising and celebrating the personal achievements of individual children, with awards to be presented to those involved.

With regards to how the fostering service and carers promote educational attainment, children and young people were asked directly about the level of support they received. Positively the vast majority of those who responded were able to confirm that that they ‘always’ get the help and support they need. None of the responses received indicated that they did not receive support. One young person stated that: “school give us certificates. FCA have an education officer called (name given), she has meetings to help me.” Another described how: “(my carers) tell me how well I am doing in school.” A third stated that: “everyone is always willing and ready to help me.”

Carers were also positive about the support and advice received with regards to the education of children placed with them. Nearly all of those responding described this as ‘excellent’ or ‘good.’ One carer highlighted how the: “child’s academic achievement is recognised, certificates + voucher awarded.” Another carer highlighted that: “a great deal of teamwork has been done to ensure the child’s educational needs. This has been for me made easier by the attitude and support of all concerned.”

Care files examined during the inspection along with discussion with carers, children and placing social workers also provided positive evidence of the good educational support being provided to children. Files contained good evidence of personal education plans and statement of special educational needs being requested and shared with carers. Positively, although the actual number of children was small, statistics provided by the service confirmed that of those children leaving the care of the fostering service over the last 12 months 100% of them have been awarded at least one GCSE or GNVQ.

# **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 and 11

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Foster Care Associates actively promote and support contact between children and their families and friends where this is appropriate. Arrangements are in place to seek children's views about their lives and the care they receive.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The overall response of carers when asked about the quality of children's networks with family and friends was 'excellent', 'good' or 'adequate'. Only three carers described the child's network with family as inadequate, in doing this they also described the individual problems existing in contact with family, which are subject to ongoing review and assessment.

Positive statements were received from carers regarding the importance of contact and the work undertaken to support this. One carer highlighted how they: "encourage (the child) to stay in touch with siblings as much as possible, currently 2 times a week as we live close by." Another stated: "My child has a very good social worker who is regularly checking on family contact." A third highlighted how: "Children are supported a lot in (maintaining) links with family, both physically and emotionally.

Overall, the files examined contained clear recording and good evidence of the work done by carers to support appropriate contact between children, young people and their families. Interviews with carers and children during home visits also provided positive examples of contact being supported and promoted. However, one example of a contact between child and family being

terminated early as the child had soiled, with no change of clothing available was noted and fed back to the manager for their review.

Positively, through their questionnaire responses and through direct discussion with inspectors all young people responding were able to confirm that they did know who to speak to if they were un-happy or had a personal problem. Unfortunately, three of these same young people were un-clear when asked 'Do you know how to make a complaint?' their details were provided to the manager for clarification with those young people themselves.

The overall response from children and young people when asked: "Does your social worker listen to you and take notice of your opinions?" was very positive, nearly all described this as being 'always' or 'usually' true. One young person said of their social worker that: "she's kind, helpful she's important to me. Helps when anything is wrong with me about my family." Another young person described the support from their social worker as follows: "because she can sort out my problem and would listen to what I say and answer them." Another young person stated that "whene I asker (my social worker) to ask my mam and dad she rite it down on her not pad."

With regard to overall consultation, young people gave a number of very positive examples. With regard to carers asking their opinions young people responded very positively, with nearly all stating that this 'always' happens. Only one young person stated that this 'never' happened, their details were provided to the manager for their review. One young person gave a positive example of how they are listened to by stating: "if I am stuck I ask them and they help". Another stated that: "they listen to what I want to do and where I want to go". A third stated that their carers: "would listen to what I have to say so they can answer what I said and sort out my problems".

When carers were asked. 'How would you rate the fostering service at involving the children and young people that you care for in decisions about their day to day lives,' nearly all who responded described this as either 'excellent' or 'good' with a small number describing this as 'adequate'. One commented that: "the child is constantly involved", another stated that: "in the experience I have had FCA have always been totally honest with the children making them aware of outcomes and choices." Another carer gave their view that the FCA network "provides the young person with ample information on how to make their voices heard re. Children's rights officers etc. also opportunities to speak with foster carers and social worker."

Carers were also very positive about how the service involves children in how it (the service) is run with the vast majority described this as 'good' or 'excellent'. One carer highlighted how: "the young people within the fostering service are provided with regular young people's forum's. Through the post young people are sent information informing them of their rights etc." Another described how pro-active FCA are in consulting with children, they described

the service as: "Always sending information and running schemes and clubs to help children express their views."

During the inspection a visit was arranged to a meeting of the children's consultation group. This was well attended, with the children and young people attending enthusiastically involved in discussing and planning the arrangements for them to attend the national FCA Young People's Conference.

# 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)

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

29

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Foster Care Associates actively promote the rights of young people and work to ensure that the support they need in their preparation for adulthood is provided. The service ensures that appropriate and prompt payments are made to carers in accordance with its policies and procedures.

## EVIDENCE:

Although the means by which the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood is not a key standard and was not fully assessed on this occasion, it was noted that one of the themes for this year's national FCA Young People's Conference was the support available to young people in helping them to prepare for adulthood. During the inspection attendance at a foster carers group and the young person's group provided very positive evidence of the work being undertaken by key staff within FCA to both raise awareness and co-ordinate the support available to carers and young people in this area. Positively, speakers invited to the carers group included staff from outside organisations with key experience in this area of work. FCA staff who themselves had similar experience provided carers with good quality information regarding their responsibilities and the rights of children to receive support in this area.

Policies and procedures in respect of fostering allowances and payments to carers are in place. This information is made available to carers and staff through the foster carers handbook. Carers raised no concerns regarding their receipt of the necessary fostering allowances and the prompt payment of them by the agency.

# 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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

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

2, 17, 19, 21 and 24. (32 N/A)

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgment has been made from evidence gathered both during and before the visit to this service. Foster Care Associates is an effectively managed service. Its team of social work practitioners provide good quality supervision and support to its carers. Management systems and records in use at the service are generally robust and are completed with good detail.



## **EVIDENCE:**

Following restructuring within the agency, the service is currently being coordinated by an acting manager who is currently in the process of being formally approved by the commission.

The service has appropriate policies and procedures in place for the recruitment and assessment of carers. Files examined provided good evidence of the quality of the assessments undertaken with potential carers and the good panel processes in place to review these. Files contained clear notices of approval.

When asked to describe, 'how well the fostering service supports you in caring for the children you look after?' carers were very positive in their questionnaire responses. The majority described the support received as 'excellent' with others describing it as 'good'. One carer stated that: "if help is needed or just a moan o the phone they are always there to help or listen". Another described the "2 weekly visits, telephone calls and I know they would visit more often if I felt it necessary." Other comments received included: "regular visits from supervising social worker, training opportunities, access to special resources e.g. 'thinking space forum" and "we have had very good experiences with our service providing excellent support through – from managers – support workers."

Carers benefit from access to regular support group meetings with guest speakers and training events included. One of these events was attended as part of the inspection visit, this was very well attended with the quality of training presentations and information sharing provided to a good standard.

Examination of records of supervision within carer files and discussion with carers during a number of home visits confirmed that they receive regular supervision from their own social workers.

The skills of carers in caring with the children placed with them are subject to annual review, however, as previously highlighted some delays have occurred in the presentation of review reports promptly to the panel for their consideration. The acting manager highlighted the ongoing work of the agency aimed at continuing to ensure that review reports provide good evidence of the views of children themselves regarding the quality of care that they receive from their carers.

Evidence of the commitment of carers to training was available through the numbers that have either completed or are about to participate in National Vocational Qualification Training (NVQ). Information provided by the service confirmed that in 1 in 6 fostering households a carer is qualified to this level with a new intake of carers recently identified and about to commence their training. Through discussion with carers and examination of their files some examples of training completed but not recorded were identified and fed back to the manager for their review. It was agreed that to supplement information held within individual files, the introduction of a training spreadsheet would allow the service to better monitor individual attendance of carers at required training, whilst also providing the opportunity for better forward planning of the overall schedule.

During case tracking a number of children's files were examined. The quality of the information held within and overall presentation of information was generally good. However, some isolated examples of Looked after Children (LAC) documentation containing only minimal detail or requiring update were highlighted to the manager for their review. Local Authority documentation overall were well integrated into the agencies own care records, the quality of recording within the agencies own care records was seen to be of a high standard.

# 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>
<b>12</b>	3

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

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>7</b>	3
<b>13</b>	4
<b>31</b>	X

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	3

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	X
<b>2</b>	3
<b>4</b>	X
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	X
<b>17</b>	4
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	3
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	3
<b>22</b>	X
<b>23</b>	X
<b>24</b>	3
<b>25</b>	X
<b>26</b>	X
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	X

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

## 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.	FS9	To further ensure that safe care agreements are reviewed at regular intervals should include the dates of their completion and the signatures of those involved in agreeing them.
2.	FS21	The arrangements to present foster carer review reports to the fostering panel should be reviewed to ensure that this is done in a more timely manner.
3.	FS30	To further ensure that panel members withdraw from discussion and decision-making if they have any personal involvement in the reports presented; the chair of the fostering panel should introduce a formal 'declaration of interest'.
4.	FS30	During fostering panel meetings the chair, panel members and the legal advisor would benefit from direct access to all previous panel minutes as well as the fostering standards and regulations to assist them in their decision-making.

5.	FS23	A training 'spreadsheet' should be introduced to allow the service to better monitor individual attendance of carers at required training, whilst also providing the opportunity for better forward planning of the overall training schedule.
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