

inspection report

Fostering Services

Foster Care Associates Solent

21 Cumberland Place

Southampton

Hants

SO15 2BB

10th January 2005

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

Foster Care Associates Solent

Tel No

01527 556480

Address

21 Cumberland Place, Southampton, Hants, SO15 2BB

Fax No

01527 556490

Email Address

Registered Number of IFA

H550002031

Name of Registered Provider

Foster Care Associates Limited

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Frank Ward

Date of first registration

26th July 2004

Date of latest registration certificate

31st March 2004

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

23/02/04

Date of Inspection Visit		10th January 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Lynda Mosling	074953
Name of Inspector	2	David Coulter	
Name of Inspector	3	Valerie Khan	
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.		NA	
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)		NA	
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection		Mr Frank Ward	

Introduction to Report and Inspection

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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)

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

Part D: Provider's Response

D.1. Provider's comments

D.2. Action Plan

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) 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 CSCI in respect of Foster Care Associates Solent. 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 CSCI 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.
<p>Foster Care Associates – Solent Region, is a registered independent fostering agency providing foster placements for young people placed by local authorities. Foster Care Associates is a limited company with over 50 offices across the U.K. The Solent region employs 56 staff and currently has 118 foster placements in the region. The region includes area offices in Poole, Dorset, Ryde, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Hampshire and Worthing, West Sussex.</p> <p>Foster Care Associates mission statement states: 'Foster Care Associates is a national organisation providing high quality family placements to children and young people at a local level. We want to provide the opportunity for those children 'looked after' to achieve their full potential to live fulfilling lives in the community'.</p>

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.)

The inspection was undertaken by a total of three inspectors over a period of 5 fieldwork days. All of the area offices were visited as part of the inspection. Inspectors spoke with managers, a range of staff members, including all team managers, carers and young people. Visits were made to foster homes across the region. In addition questionnaires to carers and young people were used.

There was evidence of committed and enthusiastic staff and carers. The Agency experience difficulties in getting information and appropriate action from the placing authorities, some of which are situated many miles away from the foster placements.

Carers reported feeling supported by The Agency, although some expressed some concerns about the growing size of The Agency, believing this to have a detrimental effect on the support given.

Statement of Purpose, Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service, Management of the Fostering Service.

5 standards were assessed. 4 were met and 1 was exceeded.

There is a thorough, attractively produced statement of purpose and 'File of facts' for young people. The manager has the relevant experience and qualifications to manage the fostering service, and is supported in this through The Agency's line management processes.

Securing and Promoting welfare.

9 standards were assessed. 7 were met and 2 were exceeded.

There are risk assessments and health and safety checks attached to the foster carer assessments. These are updated regularly. The Agency attempts to recruit a range of carers and is informed by the referrals made to The Agency during the year. Matching of carers to young people is seen as vital and where there are no appropriate placements available The Agency does not accept the referral. Carers receive training in recognising abuse and keeping themselves and the young people safe. Young people's opinions are sought on a frequent basis, but it is recommended that some independent advocacy service is made readily available to young people.

Education needs are particularly well considered with the help of the education liaison officers. Young people's health needs are recorded and met via local services. There is a new project being set up to help young people move into independence.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.

9 standards were assessed. 5 were met and 4 were exceeded.

Staff skills and qualifications were well matched to their role. There is clear accountability throughout the agency. Staff numbers are relatively high and there are sufficient to meet the needs of the service. There are good internal promotion opportunities. The employee guide covers all the necessary policies and procedures. There are excellent training opportunities for staff. The staff receive regular supervision and feel generally supported by management.

Carers have a number of support options and have access to a full training calendar.

Records.

2 standards were assessed and both were met.

There are clear recording systems and the records seen by the inspectors met the standards. Social workers generally felt well supported by the administration system.

Fitness of Premises.

1 standard was assessed and was met.

There are 4 separate area offices within the region and each one has different facilities. All of the offices have appropriate space and facilities, although Poole and Southampton are actively looking at other options.

Financial Processes.

3 standards were assessed and all were met.

The financial processes are appropriately audited and available for scrutiny. The service is expanding and looking for areas of business. Carers reported that their allowances are paid on time.

Panel.

1 standard was assessed and was met.

The Panel was observed and made appropriate decisions based on thorough assessment procedures. The membership of the Panel include a foster carer, a respite carer and an ex-fostered young person.

Short breaks/Family and Friends.

Neither of these standards were applicable.

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

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

NO

NO

NO

[illegible]

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

YES

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	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection 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	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	Lynda Mosling	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	David Coulter	Signature	_____
Locality Manager	_____	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 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	

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.	FS11	Recommend that the agency consider ways of enabling young people to quickly access local independent advocacy as required.
2.	FS24	Recommend that regular audits of files are undertaken by team managers to ensure records meet the standards
3.	FS25	Recommend that the agency considers the provision of more computers for social workers use to enable records to be kept up to date.

* 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	9
Survey of placing authorities	NO
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
• 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	YES
• 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	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	10/01/05
Time of Inspection	10:00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	58

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI 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?

4

The statement of purpose is thorough and covers all of the necessary areas. It appears to accurately describe the services provided. The information is easy to read, very informative and attractively produced. In addition there is good information for young people including a 'File of Facts' that provides useful telephone numbers, rights and responsibilities, education, therapy etc. The information has sections regarding expectations of foster carers, the punishments that can be given, review processes etc.

Young people spoken to by the inspectors said that they are kept well informed by the agency, one said 'I get about three letters a week telling me about stuff'. The questionnaires completed by the young people confirmed that they knew how to complain, but none had actually done so.

The information provided in the statement of purpose, and the information for young people/ children exceeds the standards.

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

The manager has the relevant experience and qualifications to manage the service. His qualifications include: BA Honours in Sociology/Public Media, CQSW – Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work, Diploma in Practice Teaching and Approved Social Worker under the Mental Health Act 1983. He has worked in the children's social care field since 1984, and with Fostering since 1994. All personnel spoken to were of the opinion that the manager offered support. They said his approach was 'laid back', and that he is a clear leader with high expectations. Good communication between the manager and staff was observed by the inspectors at a team 'get together'. It was clear that there was openness, trust and good humour shared by all. The Agency has staff with a range of skills, including financial management and organise the work to make the best use of individuals' skills.

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?

3

The manager has completed a fit person process with the Commission (up-dated CRB awaited). All references were positive about his suitability as a manager. Certificates of qualifications were seen during this process. The Agency uses the same thorough process of recruitment for its managers as it does for the staff. Records of all checks were available on the personnel files. The agency has a policy of renewing CRB checks 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?

3

There is a dedicated quality assurance section within The Association responsible for collecting information and communicating it to staff. Bulletins are produced and distributed to staff on a regular basis. A copy was made available to the inspectors. The recent copy includes the aim of the bulletin and covers updates on policies, procedures, inspection outcomes, updates on government initiatives, new regulations etc. Quality assurance audits are undertaken on all areas by The Association (Solent audit planned 15-16th March 2005). Information regarding the cost of each service is available from the business manager. Payments to carers, audited accounts etc are all available to interested parties. The staff, managers and carers are expected to declare any areas of possible conflict of interest.

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

6

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.

1

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.

X

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

0

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

12

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

0

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?****3**

The manager has a job description and is clear about his role. The manager is also the Regional Director for The Association, covering the Solent area. There are clear lines of delegation and accountability and all staff spoken to were aware of these. Solent region have a deputy director who is responsible for the manager's tasks in his absence.

The inspectors were informed of a re-organisation in 2004 that re-defined some tasks. This, and the growing size of the organisation, has led to more delegation of specialised tasks and a clearer management role. Whilst this appears to be working well, the inspectors were made aware of the difficulty some staff, and carers, have had adapting to the changes.

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?

4

The region have a recruitment officer for carers. Advertising for carers is arranged by the PR section having been made aware of the needs for carers in the area. The local placement officers note the gaps in the service (they presently need carers for sibling groups) and plan recruitment strategies accordingly. The inspectors visited a range of foster carers and fostered young people and found the homes to be comfortable, warm and well maintained. The young people in each placement had their own rooms and carers were aware of the need to provide privacy and safety for all children/young people in the home. Risk assessments were thorough and copies were provided to the Panel at the point of approval. Any further risks are assessed throughout the placement and reviewed at the annual reviews. Carers told the inspectors that the link workers were keen to ensure the safety of the carers own children and would not pressurise them into taking inappropriate placements. Carers appreciated this and cited it as an example of the care and consideration taken by the agency. The efforts made to ensure the health and safety of children placed, including references on pets from veterinary experts, exceed the standards.

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

The Association have a good record of recruiting carers, but have the same difficulty as other fostering services to provide enough carers to match all the needs presented. The recruitment promotes the requirement to recognise the child's needs in terms of gender, culture, religion, disability etc. Where matching is not too close a fit the carers are given advice and expected to provide the child with ways of exploring their heritage. The inspectors met with carers who had attempted to do this with a child from a complex background. There were many examples of the way children's self esteem and confidence had grown during placement as a result of the child being valued for him/herself. Attention to the child's interests played a large part in this process.

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?****3**

The Agency will only accept a referral from a local authority if they believe they have carers who could potentially be a match for the child. The placement officers in the region have recently been joined by a social worker to try and ensure the best match of children and carers. The initial match is suggested by this process, but the link workers often take the discussion forward and help the carers decide whether to agree a particular placement. Information about the child from the referring local authority can be sparse and despite the best efforts of The Agency, placements are sometimes made that are not the best match. Care plans are always requested, but sometimes not available. Written agreements contain reference to specific tasks and aims of the placement. These are reviewed at the first placement meeting. Some placements are made as an emergency using the best available information. Others are made after a period of introduction that takes the young persons' views into consideration. The inspectors saw a booklet, produced by the foster carers, including photos and introductions to the family, home and surroundings that can be used with young people prior to the placement.

The work offered by the placing authority varies greatly. Inspectors were told that some social workers from placing agencies know the children well and provide information and support to the placement. At the other end of the spectrum are those that come along to children's reviews having never met the child and having no views about the best interests of the child. This is particularly worrying when decisions about the future of the placement are made at the review. Link workers for The Agency attempt to involve the social workers, but have a varying degree of success.

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?****3**

Training for staff and carers include child protection. It is covered in preparation training and the carers visited by the inspectors appeared to be aware of the issues and of their own vulnerability. A male carer, who is also the main carer, explained his attempts to keep himself safe from allegations when a contact arrangement included a young girl who needed to use the toilet. He had ensured appropriate arrangements were made. Some of the staff/managers of The Agency have worked in child protection teams and felt The Agency keep the safety of children central. There is a thorough, safe, caring agreement on each file, including information about family rules i.e. who can go into which bedroom, rules about nakedness. The response to questionnaires from both carers and young people show that they are aware of the punishments allowed. No young person raised issues of concern regarding punishments. There is a missing persons protocol that is published in the foster carers handbook. The current training programme for the Solent area for carers and staff include courses such as: safer caring, child protection – staff, child protection – carers, working with children who have been sexually abused and substance abuse.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

X

%

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?****3**

The Agency ensures, through preparation training for carers, that contact with relatives and friends is an expectation of the caring task. The carers' handbook sets out the legal background and the standards relating to contact. All the carers spoken to were aware of the issues regarding contact and were encouraging of it. However, some young people are placed so far away from their family and friends that maintaining contact is a difficulty. The placing local authority has the responsibility to make decisions relating to contact, but often need a lot of prompting to do so. The arrangements for contact are set out in the placement agreement. The inspectors saw young people who were in regular contact with their siblings, but not their parents (despite efforts to encourage parents to co-operate), young people who had decided for themselves that they want no contact, and others where they would like contact but the decision of The Local Authority and/or courts have ruled this out. In all situations the young people and the carers appeared to be fully aware of the reasoning behind the decisions. Friends and contact with them is much less likely because of the distances involved. Carers attempt to deal with this loss and to make efforts to help the young people make new friends in the carer's community. There are guidelines in the foster carer handbook covering the support available to carers, the difficulties to be aware of and how to manage disruptive behaviour. Many of the young people in their questionnaire responses cited not being with their families as 'the worst thing about fostering'.

Standard 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**

The Agency has a policy on consulting children and young people and their families that is published in the carers' handbook and in information for the child. It starts by stating 'FCA will create a climate of openness in their work with children and young people and work in partnership with their families'. The Agency has established a network of children's forums to give young people/children a voice and influence on the fostering service. The young people spoken to confirmed that they feel consulted by The Agency and mentioned that this was a great improvement on their previous (mostly local authority fostering service) experience. The carer handbook gives advice on what to consult with parents on, but acknowledges that it depends on the decisions of the placing local authorities and the legal status of the child. This reliance on the decisions of the local authority led to the inspectors having concerns about advocacy for young people who do not have associations with anyone independent from The Agency or the local authority. Information was shared with inspectors that illustrated the need for independent advocates. This was particularly regarding the future placements of young people who may have settled really well in a FCA placement, but are removed from it by the placing authority. The decision sometimes appears to have little to do with the best interests, or the wishes of the young person. Although the inspectors heard of strenuous efforts being made by The Agency to raise the issues, their position, as The Agency being paid for the placement, leaves them vulnerable. It is recommended that The Agency consider ways of enabling young people to quickly access local independent advocacy where required. The lack of complaints made by young people may be an indication of satisfaction with the services, but could also demonstrate the young persons' feeling of powerlessness within the system. The file of facts for young

people does list the contact numbers of a number of organisations set up for young people to call including: Childline for young people in care, Who Cares? NSPCC and the Children's Rights Director.

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?

3

If young people are unable to keep their own GP they are registered with a local GP by the carers. Placement decisions take into account the young persons' health needs, including the need for specialist services. Foster carers are provided with health information at the time of placement and the child's medical card. Information for young people includes their rights with regard to medical examinations. The 'File of facts' includes information about drugs, sexual health and alcohol. Young people who completed the questionnaires indicated that they are provided with a healthy diet. The Agency employs therapists to work as part of the team. They undertake an assessment of the child's therapy needs and focus on providing advice on strategies to manage day-to-day difficulties. The therapists have been recruited with appropriate experience and qualifications and are seen as part of the support team. They attend the team parenting meetings, which are held to discuss individual children and aim to clarify the responsibilities and tasks of everyone involved with the child.

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?

4

One of the strengths of the FCA fostering service is the employment of education liaison officers. In discussion with one of the regional officers the inspectors were told that the education liaison officer's major role is to improve the educational options for young people fostered through the agency. They work with local schools to come up with strategies to return young people to mainstream schooling. They will sometimes provide practical support to the schools i.e. providing additional staffing. Where young people are not able to be re-integrated to school the officers can work with them on computer-linked programmes that make the most of their interests. The Agency also employs resource workers to provide activities for young people who are out of school. The Agency are well aware of the additional stress placed on foster carers when children are out of school so aim to provide additional support. The inspectors were impressed by the enthusiasm of the officers and the imaginative strategies employed to provide as much education as possible to the young people. The inspectors were told of an awards ceremony which was set up to celebrate the achievements of the young people fostered through FCA. Young people, staff and carers all enjoyed the event, which made the press. The educational arrangements exceed the standards.

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?****3**

The Agency ensures that young people who are placed until they leave care are given help to gain the skills to live independently. The inspectors spoke with a team manager who is involved in setting up a project 'Solent Care', the aim of which is to provide high quality, affordable accommodation to young people who are moving towards independence. The Agency is working in partnership with other local agencies to provide support and/or practical help. The plan to move into independence will be taken alongside other professionals and in conjunction with the young person's pathway plan.

The Solent Care package will include accommodation, furnishings and bedding, 10 hours of support per week and an independent living skills programme.

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?

4

The inspectors examined a sample of staff files. They showed that appropriate recruitment processes had been used to ensure people suitable to work with children had been appointed. The inspectors were impressed by the match of skills and qualifications with the jobs people were appointed to. The specialist workers had relevant experiences and qualifications and all of the staff spoken to hold the welfare of children central to their tasks. Everyone involved in the recruitment process demonstrated a good understanding of the need for appropriate checks. The files had checklists to ensure references were obtained and the records were clear and thorough. Copies of qualifications are kept on file along with application forms, interview notes etc. Job descriptions, terms and conditions of employment and acceptance letters were all appropriately filed.

All staff that undertake assessments of foster carers are qualified to do so. Many assessments are undertaken by self-employed, fee-attracting social workers. These are recruited in the same way as other staff, with the necessary references being required. All staff spoken to felt well placed in their jobs and displayed commitment and enthusiasm for their work. They felt valued and part of a team.

Total number of staff of the agency(Solent region)

56

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

X

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?

3

The Agency has clear lines of accountability and staff confirmed that they feel well supported and managed. Workloads are low (in comparison to local authority support workers) but take account of the amount of work specifically relating to the child. Staff are busy, but able to work effectively with the carers and children. Staff are involved in assessments of foster carers, but The Agency also has fee-attracting social workers to complete Form F assessments. This helps to ensure a steady stream of applications of carers to Panel. Training is provided for carers and staff. The 2005 training programme includes 58 training days – with topics repeated to enable carers and staff to choose the most appropriate time to attend. Some carers who have been with the service a long time commented that they

would like more advanced training, and a wider range of topics. However, they also acknowledged that The Agency were supportive if they came up with training suggestions themselves.

The administration levels appear appropriate with some people covering different offices if the need arises. The administrative staff spoken to showed commitment and enthusiasm and felt their skills were well used by The Agency.

All staff have job descriptions, written contracts etc. Individual files contained records of probationary periods, appraisals, copies of letters as well as the recruitment details.

Each employee has an employee guide, produced as a booklet with clear information covering leave entitlement, family friendly policies, company benefits, company standards etc.

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

The Agency employs 56 staff members in the Solent region and provides sufficient staff cover to meet the needs of the carers and children. There are many opportunities for staff to gain internal promotion and this can lead to some disruption with staff moving on. The inspectors were told of problems within the Poole area regarding staffing shortages. These could not have been foreseen and have now been dealt with. It has however, left that office with much work to do to re-build the confidence of staff and carers.

The recruitment of carers is an on-going process with the region taking account of the gaps in the service. The Agency is looking to recruit carers who can care for young people with sexualised behaviour, and placements for sibling groups. Whilst there is always a need to recruit more carers The Agency will not take referrals of young people they cannot match with carers, they therefore have sufficient carers to meet the needs of the accepted referrals. The inspectors read a number of foster carer assessments and observed the approval process. The assessments are thorough, use the BAAF Form F which covers all the necessary areas. In addition a portfolio of additional information, such as certificates of training, financial information, competencies, feedback from trainers etc. is provided to the Panel.

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?

3

The employee guide covers all the policies necessary, including: whistle blowing, equal opportunities, declaration of interest, grievance policy, harassment, bullying etc. The majority of the staff were complimentary about the employment practices of The Agency and felt they had made a positive choice to work for them. Some felt there had been recent developments that were questionable. When this was discussed with the manager it became clear to the inspectors that there had been some difficulties relating to a senior member of staff that had caused upset, particularly amongst some of the longer serving staff. This had led to some divided loyalties and a number of staff leaving The Agency. The inspectors appreciated the honesty of the manager in explaining the issues and felt that The Agency had dealt with the matter thoroughly and had taken the appropriate action. There were some people still a little bruised by the developments but those who chose to stay had

reaffirmed their commitment to The Agency.
 Staff generally felt The Agency were generous to the employees, providing mobile telephones, cars, good holidays, private health insurance and good working conditions. There has very recently been an issue raised about the non-payment of increments to staff in the next financial year. This is likely to be taken up by staff representatives through the appropriate channels.

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?

4

There is an annual training programme that offers courses to staff and carers. In addition individuals can identify training needs which The Agency will do their best to cover. Many of the carers have gained the NVQ 3. The questionnaires completed by the carers stated that they felt the preparation training was of a good quality. The staff annual appraisal identifies training needs and the action to be taken to meet these. Changes in legislation is highlighted in the QA bulletin, with useful website addresses provided. It is an expectation that staff will keep up to date with developments in their particular discipline. Joint training with carers and staff is provided and the annual carers conference is attended by staff and carers. Training is promoted by The Agency who support staff in terms of time and expenses. The training arrangements exceed the standards.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)

All staff are properly accountable and supported.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Supervision is seen as very important throughout The Agency and is provided by line managers who are generally well regarded. Supervision notes are kept and staff have the opportunity to bring things to the agenda. Staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities. The Agency has clear lines of accountability but is also flexible and trusting so is supportive of staff asking colleagues and other managers for advice and support as required. Staff meetings and regional meetings are held on a regular basis. The Agency staff have clear area and regional identities as well as a corporate pride in The Agency. This balance has been achieved by the sensitive work of the managers across the region. Staff take responsibility for their work and are clear that they are accountable to the service users as well as The Agency. The Agency is clear that it has high standards for the staff and the delivery of service and will challenge any practice that does not meet those standards.

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**

There are clear statements about the support carers can expect from The Agency. These are detailed in the foster carers' handbook. The majority of the carers spoken to agreed that these standards are generally met. There are some difficulties when staff leave or move on and one carer said she was disappointed at the number of changes of support worker she had experienced. The role of the support worker is wider than in many other fostering services as they do become closely involved with the young people, particularly if the placing local authority social worker is not supportive. This leads to the support workers having greater knowledge of the child, and taking on the co-ordination role for work with the child. Support workers still make attempts to involve the child's social worker in appropriate decisions, but undertake necessary tasks if there is no other option. This is appreciated by the foster carers and young people. However, this may also have led to an expectation by placing social workers that the work will be done by The Agency. The questionnaire responses were mainly positive, with some saying the support was 'excellent', however others felt there were occasional gaps.

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?****3**

All foster carers have named link workers to support them. The workers provide supervision and support to the carers on a regular basis. Records, signed by the worker and the carer, are kept on the foster carers' files and were seen by the inspectors. In some areas the records were slightly out of date, but the workers were aware of this and were working on it. Carers told the inspectors that they feel the support has changed over the years in response to The Agency expanding. This has led to some of the longer serving carers feeling that the support is less personal and not so responsive. However, the majority of the carers spoken to, and those who returned the questionnaires were very positive about the quality of the supervision. There is a comprehensive foster carer handbook covering all required topics, including the complaints/allegations procedures. In addition to the support/supervision offered by the link workers there are a number of support groups available to carers, birth children and fostered young people. These were greatly appreciated by some, not so much by others. However, it was clear that there is a range of options provided to support carers. Respite care is financed for two weeks each year, although some carers found this difficult to access due to the needs of the young people.

The out of hours arrangements have been changed in the past 12 months to provide social workers with more time 'off-duty'. This means that some calls are answered by workers outside of the carers' area. Whilst most people could see the benefit of this for The Agency, some carers felt it was another example of The Agency getting too large and being less personal. However, the inspectors did not hear of many situations where appropriate support/advice was not forthcoming.

Carers' files detailed any complaints and allegations made and the resulting action taken.

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?****4**

In addition to the training arrangements already mentioned, The Agency provides a range of support groups for carers, carers' children and fostered children. The carers spoken to generally appreciated this, although some choose not to attend very frequently. There is also a mentoring system where newly approved and/or those being approved, can be linked up to experienced carers who can give them advice and support. Carers said they had made good friends with other carers and were able to make babysitting arrangements between themselves.

The carers' annual reviews are thorough and highlights areas of additional support needed. The main carer within the household is expected to attend the training identified at the review. Partners of the main carer are strongly encouraged to attend and times of courses have been altered to make this a more realistic option.

The range of opportunities for training of carers exceed the standards.

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?

3

The information kept about the child is separate from the carer's files. The files seen by the inspectors had: essential information, checklist for matching, placement agreements, care plan including safe caring plans, Looked After Children paperwork and specific information about the child's health, education and social needs. Memory boxes are provided for each young person and foster carers are helped to maintain records, photographs etc to help the child celebrate and understand life events. Carers complete logs/diary sheets that are placed on file. These can be a trial for some carers who find recording difficult. Some were written in pencil and others on scraps of paper. It is however, made clear how important this part of the task is and inspectors observed discussions by social workers on how this could be improved. In addition to the files held by The Agency, each child would have a file held by the placing authority. These were not seen by the inspectors. It is recommended that carers' files are regularly audited by team managers to ensure the records are up to date.

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?

3

There are clear administrative systems in the regional and area offices to ensure required records are kept. Numbers of children placed, carers approved, placements ended etc were all provided to the inspector. The records are kept in locked and safe filing systems with controlled access to these. Social workers are keen to share records with foster carers and get their signature on supervision notes, reviews etc. Allegations and complaint records include action taken and eventual outcome. Some inspectors commented that it would be helpful to have better access to computers as the current sharing arrangements can cause delay in record keeping. It is recommended that this be considered by The Agency.

Number of current foster placements supported by The Agency (Solent region):			118
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			44
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			36
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			34
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			16
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	350	Maximum £	700

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
<p>Each area covered by the Solent branch has it's own office.</p> <p>The Isle of Wight office is spacious, well placed for access by carers and young people and suitable for the purpose. There are areas where young people can do educational projects, activities and prepare for independence. The Agency has considered using the basement area to provide a residential respite facility but as yet have not applied for registration for this. There is ample space for staff, files and training.</p> <p>The Poole office is on the first floor and does not have disabled access. It is near to public transport and parking. The space is limited and there are some concerns about the confidentiality when carer groups use the conference room. The team manager explained that they are always on the look out for more appropriate and spacious accommodation. In the meantime they have done their best to make the most of the facilities. Files and confidential information is securely stored.</p> <p>The Worthing office has a reception area, conference room, therapy room, and resource workers room with computer and phone, as well as office space for the social workers, manager and administrative staff. There is room for safe storage of files and a small library. The office has a kitchen, male and female toilets and a small courtyard with seating. The office is accessed by an alarmed entrance.</p> <p>The Southampton office is also the head office of the Solent branch and therefore accommodates many more staff, files and information than the other offices. It is centrally situated in Southampton and is very easy to access by public transport. There are a number of public car parks nearby and limited staff parking space. The office is spacious and light. The only major problem with the Southampton office is the tendency for the basement area to flood in very wet weather. This has led to the basement being re-furbished to return it to use as a meeting room, training provision etc. The underlying cause of the flooding has been taken up with the appropriate authorities but there does not appear to be an easy answer. For this reason the manager is considering other local options.</p> <p>Generally the premises are all well maintained, attractively decorated and furnished and meet the standards.</p> <p>Appropriate insurance is in place.</p>		

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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?

3

The Agency is continually expanding and can evidence success as a business. During the inspection the inspectors were told by a range of staff and carers that money is not a major issue when arranging placements and supporting carers. There was nothing to suggest that The Agency is struggling financially. The only financial difficulties regarding placements arise when the placing agency withdraws the finance for the placement requiring the young person to move on. The inspectors heard that The Agency has occasionally made generous discounts in order to protect a successful placement for a child. However, this places the agency in a difficult position as previously highlighted elsewhere in the report.

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?

3

The Agency's Head Office financial department deal with the overall financial affairs. Audited accounts are published and The Agency can demonstrate financial viability. The separate area offices have budgets and financial procedures that are adhered to. The staff responsible for making the books balance at a local level feel The Agency is generous to its staff, but has a realistic attitude to spending. Corporate decisions are made with regard to computers, office equipment etc, but day-to-day decisions and negotiations regarding placements and fees can be made by the branch manager.

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

Carers informed the inspectors that the fees paid were received promptly and accurately. They were clear about the service covered by the fees and this was explained early on in the preparation process. This clarity appeared to minimise the time spent negotiating fees and allowances and helped carers feel they are being adequately rewarded. Carers do not receive any retainer when they do not have a placement. Whilst this was accepted and understood by the carers it is a potential area of anxiety, particularly for those carers who have made huge changes in their homes and careers in order to foster for The Agency. Some staff felt that a small retainer would help carers budget when placements come to an end. The manager of The Agency explained that this issue is being continually considered.

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?	3
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The inspectors observed a Fostering Panel as part of the inspection. There is a Fostering Panel Operational Procedure guide that is thorough and clearly written. The Panel was appropriately established and has a range of independent members, including retired health visitor, head teacher and social work manager. The Panel also has, as members, a foster carer, respite carer and ex fostered child. These members gave a wide perspective and were particularly appreciated by the carers who were attending Panel as applicants. The information provided to the Panel members was thorough and enabled them, along with the questions they put to the applicants, to make well-considered decisions. Although the medical advisor does not sit on the Panel as a member, the chair is given the comments by the advisor following consideration of the applicant's medical forms. Applicants are expected to attend the Panel and were observed being treated with sensitivity and respect. The Panel asked appropriate questions and discussed, prior to the attendance, any issues which may not be sensitive to ask in the large group. Applicants were advised of the Panel recommendations before leaving the building. They are made aware that the recommendations are to be considered by The Agency Decision Maker before approval can be confirmed. The processes observed followed the written procedures and met the standards.

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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Although The Agency offers respite placements for children placed with their foster carers there is not a dedicated short-break scheme operated by the Solent region.

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?

9

This standard is not applicable

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

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 week beginning 10th January 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI 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

YES

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

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 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

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

Other: <enter details here>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI 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, [Name], of Solent Foster Care Associates confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above dates 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, _____, of Solent Foster Care Associates
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
dates 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.

Commission for Social Care Inspection
33 Greycoat Street
London
SW1P 2QF

Telephone: 020 7979 2000
Fax: 020 7979 2111

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120
www.csci.org.uk

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