



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

The Together Trust Fostering Service

**Quay House
2 Wellington Grove
Stockport
Cheshire
SK2 6RH**

Lead Inspector
Susan Winson

Announced Inspection
5th September 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	The Together Trust Fostering Service
Address	Quay House 2 Wellington Grove Stockport Cheshire SK2 6RH
Telephone number	0161 480 8677
Fax number	0161 474 0860
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	The Together Trust Fostering Service
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The service should at all times employ a suitably qualified and experienced manager who is registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Date of last inspection 25th July 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

This fostering agency is part of The Together Trust, which is a registered charity providing residential care, education, fostering and adoption services. The fostering services was set up in 1997 to provide foster homes for children who were living in The Together Trust's residential homes but it now takes referrals directly from local authorities. The service's main office is in Stockport and there is a branch in Preston which is registered by CSCI. Thirty-nine foster carers are presently supported from the Stockport branch. Many of the functions of the agency are carried out centrally from the Stockport office, including panel meetings, recruitment, referrals, team meetings and training co-ordination. The responsible individual is Mrs Pat Walton and the post of manager was not filled at the time of this inspection.

Fees vary according to the type of placement.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was undertaken by one inspector who inspected The Together Trust Fostering Service, Preston the following week. The inspector observed a panel meeting, spoke with staff, including administrative staff, and inspected records, including CRB checks at The Together Trust's headquarters. Completed questionnaires were received from three young people, two foster carers and three placing social workers.

There have been considerable staff changes during the last 18 months. The principal manager left in April 2006 and the support manager in June 2006. No registered manager was in post at the time of this inspection, although an appointment had been made. The support manager (training) was acting manager. As a result, some of the planned developments of the service have not been completed. It is to the credit of the staff at the agency that high standards have been maintained in many areas of practice.

The inspector was assisted by the fostering support manager (training) who co-ordinated the inspection in an efficient and effective manner.

What the service does well:

The agency is child focused and is committed to supporting its foster carers to meet the needs of young people.

Young people said that they were listened to and know how to make a complaint. The agency consults regularly with a range of people and has taken action on young people's wishes.

Placing social workers commented that communication with supervising social workers is good, that foster carers encourage and support contact and that standards of care are "excellent". Placement stability is good.

Foster carers commented positively about the support they receive and the usefulness of the training offered. Foster carers who the inspector met demonstrated an understanding of issues such as disrupted attachments and the effects of past experiences on present behaviour.

Foster carers showed a commitment to helping young people achieve and enjoy education. Close links with schools and teaching staff are maintained to support young people. Progress in education is evident, with young people having been helped to attend regularly and gain certificates of achievement.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Further clarification on the role and functioning of the panel has taken place and the panel chair has a job description. Panel training has taken place.

The use of risk assessments and effective risk management planning has developed, to further safeguard young people in foster care.

A medication policy is in place and foster carers have received training on administration of medication and recording.

Systems are in place to ensure that staff and foster carer CRB checks are both satisfactory and updated as necessary.

Induction training for new staff and ongoing training for foster carers has been improved.

What they could do better:

A service manager needs to be in place, who is registered with CSCI, to support and supervise staff, monitor the functioning of the agency and allow for planned areas of development to be progressed.

The agency needs to continue to pursue information from placing social workers to inform matching decisions and care planning.

Preparation for independent living and leaving care is an area for development.

The agency needs to review panel membership to ensure that all meetings are properly constituted and are quorate.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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 is good. The fostering agency can demonstrate that the health needs of children and young people are largely met. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers outlined how they ensure that young people are registered with a GP, dentist and optician and have regular check-ups which are recorded on file. The agency provides training for foster carers on health and safety and healthy eating, and young people gain food hygiene certificates from training provided by The Together Trust at their headquarters. The agency can demonstrate that foster carers promote healthy living and encourage young people to take regular exercise.

The agency has developed their guidance and provided training for foster carers on the administration of medication and recording. Records of any accidents or illnesses are notified to the supervising social workers by foster carers. Monthly reports compiled by foster carers include health issues and actions taken which are appropriate.

Additional training and support is provided from other Together Trust services to assist foster carers in caring for children with disabilities and complex health issues.

Problems with gaining full written information from placing social workers persists. With some young people, there are no records of immunisations or medical history. It is evident that foster carers and supervising social workers are active in gaining this information from other sources.

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 is good. The agency can demonstrate that it is largely effective in safeguarding children and young people. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

The lack of a permanent registered manager has affected the agency's ability to move forward with planned developments and improvements. The interim manager has appropriate experience. Inspection of staff and foster carer records demonstrate that staff and foster carer CRB's are updated every three years and are signed off as satisfactory by the manager. Records of social workers' registration with GSCC are on file.

The agency's procedures and practices for the recruitment and assessment of foster carers are thorough and serve to protect children and young people. Full records of assessments of potential foster carers are maintained which demonstrate that all the required checks are completed prior to placements. Medical reports are signed by the agency medical advisor. Personal referees are interviewed and reports compiled demonstrate that there is a focus on safeguarding young people.

The assessment reports are comprehensive and contain evaluation of the information provided as well as the supervising social worker's views on the strengths, support and training needs of applicants. Birth children of applicants are included in the assessment process. Guidelines on who will be interviewed during assessments need to be in place.

The process of assessment of foster carers' abilities to meet the needs of young people is ongoing and comprehensive supervising social worker reports are provided for annual reviews.

The agency also has a small number of approved respite carers who provide support for specific young people and who are mainly relatives of full time foster carers. Placements are usually less than 21 days per year. The assessment of these carers is also focused on safeguarding young people. The respite carers are known to the young people and information is passed over to ensure consistency of care.

The agency can demonstrate that care is taken in matching young people with appropriate foster carers. From records and discussions with supervising social workers it is evident that they make efforts to obtain sufficient information (with varying degrees of success) to consider matching, in consultation with the foster carers involved. An example given involved an emergency placement where the agency was flexible about timing in order to meet the needs of the young person.

Foster placement agreements have improved for permanent placement, in that, they outline the specific tasks expected of the foster carer to meet young people's assessed needs. The agreements for many of the short term and emergency placements have yet to include this level of planning and do not always contain information on how gaps in matching will be managed. This has been addressed through changing systems and is improving.

Safe caring policies, both general and specific for each young person, were on file and it was clear from discussions with staff and foster carers that guidelines and strategies are followed in practice.

Unannounced visits take place regularly and are recorded on file and on the foster carer's review forms. Health and safety assessments are updated on the visit. Risk assessments are compiled as necessary and include comprehensive descriptions of the risk but are less specific on risk management and reduction. The staff stated that this is an area on which they have been focusing recently.

The agency has a policy on behaviour management and provides training on positive behaviour management for foster carers. Supervising social workers check that foster carers are keeping appropriate records of behaviour management measures. From records and discussions with foster carers, supervising social workers and young people, it is evident that behaviour management measures used are reasonable and that praise and rewards are also used. The foster carers with whom the inspector met balanced an understanding of young people's behaviour and a sympathetic approach with the need to make and maintain firm and consistent responses. Examples were given where young people had responded positively to this approach.

Records of complaints are maintained which demonstrate that appropriate actions are taken. No allegations have been made since the last inspection. Appropriate systems are in place for children missing from home and training is scheduled in the near future. The agency consistently informs CSCI of any notifiable incidents in writing.

Minutes of panel meetings are comprehensive and include clear reasons for decisions and demonstrate effective and thorough scrutiny of information. The panel provides an advisory role where supervising social workers can bring subjects for discussion during assessments. Foster carer reviews are brought to panel for information as are any changes of approval. All papers are signed by the agency decision maker. A written job description for the panel chair is in place.

The meeting observed by the inspector was effectively chaired, with everyone having the opportunity to contribute to discussions.

The panel includes people with relevant experience, including a person who was a looked after child. The agency experienced difficulties in panel's proper constitution due to lack of independent members and needs to review their panel membership to avoid future problems.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

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

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

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

7, 13 and 31

Quality in this outcome is excellent. The agency values diversity and promotes educational achievement. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carer training includes valuing diversity and promoting equality, as does Together Trust's policies and procedures, and it is evident that the agency is focused on recognising and meeting young people's ethnic, cultural and religious needs. Support and information is available to foster carers on meeting personal and dietary needs. Facilities exist within The Together Trust for making information available in alternative forms of communication.

It is clear that the agency supports foster carers to help young people attend school regularly, achieve and enjoy education. From records and discussions it is clear that foster carers attend meetings and school events and work in partnership with education staff. Support workers have worked with both schools and foster carers to ensure consistency in approaches to managing young people's behaviour.

There has been an improvement in the monitoring of educational achievement which reflects good outcomes for children and young people. School attendance is 100%. Training for foster carers on promoting education outlines their responsibilities, including advocating on young people's behalf, keeping in regular contact with schools and praising and rewarding achievement.

The agency's short break scheme is at a very early stage of development and will be inspected on the next occasion.

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 is excellent. Young people are supported to maintain contact. Consultation is consistently promoted. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency can demonstrate that foster carers are committed to supporting young people to maintain contact with friends and family. The Together Trust makes available its contact centre to local authorities. Examples were given where foster carers take and collect young people to face to face contact and encourage them to send cards and letters. The agency provides an information booklet for parents informing them about foster care and the assessment processes.

It is evident that the agency is working to enable young people to participate in decision making. The Together Trust has a specific worker for children's rights and a participation day was held recently to inform young people of their rights and responsibilities. Feedback from young people was said to be positive.

Information for children and young people is provided in booklet form, including a Makaton version. The fostering agency produces a newsletter four times a year and young people are encouraged to participate. One young person contributes a regular book review.

Supervising social workers ensure that they speak with young people in placement on a regular basis to elicit their views and opinions. Examples were given where changes in practices had been made as a result of listening to young people's views and suggestions. The agency is in the process of developing the use of a computer aided confidential service which will be available to children in foster care. A pilot has now finished and the service is shortly to be launched.

The agency has an annual short holiday for foster carers, their own children and young people placed with them. This also affords an opportunity for staff to speak informally with young people about the service they receive and feedback forms are sent out after the holiday.

Foster carers encourage young people to complete consultation forms and attend their statutory reviews.

Assessment questionnaires are completed by applicants which ask for their views on the process and they have been consulted about their experience of attending panel. The agency outlined how they have taken criticism seriously and acted upon the views of foster carers.

End of placement reports are requested from placing social workers and are usually received.

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):

14 and 29

Quality in this outcome is good. Young people are prepared for adulthood and foster carers' allowances and payments are satisfactory. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

The agency acknowledges the need to formalise its leaving care planning and preparation for adult living to ensure that young people are developing age-appropriate life skills. It is evident in practice that foster carers are active in supporting young people towards independence. Outcomes would be improved by further training, development of policies and procedures and monitoring systems.

Comprehensive information to foster carers on allowances and payments is provided and there are effective administrative systems in place which ensure that payments are made on time. Foster carers expressed satisfaction with the payment systems.

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, 4, 5, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 25

Quality in this outcome is adequate. The agency cannot demonstrate consistent management and monitoring of its services. Staff support and accountability could be improved. Support and supervision of foster carers is effective. This judgement has been made using available evidence, including visits to the fostering agency.

EVIDENCE:

Monthly reports are compiled and sent to the registered provider. Management systems for the formal monitoring of standards of care have not yet reached the stage where patterns and areas for development or training can be identified. The agency acknowledged the need for improved data collection and analysis.

The agency is developing the use of disruption meetings, both to monitor their own practice and assist local authorities in future planning for young people. One of the supervising social workers has considerable experience of chairing disruption meetings.

The staff complement consists of an interim service manager, a support manager training, two senior practitioners, three supervising social workers, three support workers and seven administrators (some of whom are shared with other services). There is a vacancy for a supervising social worker and the appointed service manager has not yet started in her post. Staff stated that the structure of the service and job descriptions are to be reviewed when the new manager arrives. The agency has not used any external assessors since the last inspection.

The agency has a team of experienced supervising social workers and support workers who are flexible and focused on supporting foster carers and safeguarding young people. Positive and supportive working relationships were said to be maintained within the team. Team meetings and placement meetings take place regularly, are documented and are said to provide a valuable forum for discussion.

Staff supervision has not taken place at the intervals outlined in the agency's supervision agreement due to staffing changes and vacancies. Annual appraisals are carried out and recorded which include identification of training needs and professional development. The management and supervision of the support workers has been disrupted by the changes of personnel and there is a need for clarification of roles and responsibilities.

The social work team are supported by an efficient and effective administrative team who are well managed and supported and who said that their roles and responsibilities are clear. Recent training has included safeguarding for administrators which was said to be useful and informative. The administration manager is involved in budget monitoring, which has developed in the last year, and in collecting and collating data to assist the manager in her monitoring and to provide statistics.

The recruitment strategy is managed centrally at the Stockport office and is informed by analysis of the range of referrals of children. They are aiming to recruit a more diverse range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people. There has been progress in the use of a variety of recruitment techniques and in monitoring responses. The website was said to be a valuable source of enquirers. Publicity material is of high quality, reflects the diversity of the community and includes positive images of disability.

Case records are well organised and stored safely. File audits are carried out on a regular basis by the administration manager. Gaining full written information from placing social workers is problematic and despite the efforts of the agency PEP's, completed LAC forms and health information are still outstanding in some cases. Some of the forms are incomplete and others out of date, and some foster carers stated that they had received verbal information. Some improvement was reported following the agency being more active in pursuing missing information.

Regular reports on young people's progress are provided by foster carers, linked to the five outcomes under Every Child Matters. Foster carers have locked boxes for storage of confidential information in their homes. The premises of the agency are fit for purpose and regular health and safety checks are carried out.

Foster Care Agreements outline the agency's expectations and the support, supervision and services that are provided. Foster carers were positive about the support provided to them, including out of hours telephone facilities and said that there is always someone they can talk to. The frequency of supervisory visits to foster carers is negotiated between the supervising social worker and the foster carer. Records demonstrate that long term settled placements are at a minimum frequency of three monthly and foster carers said they can ask for extra visits as the need arises.

The agency has a system where annual reviews of carers are chaired by a manager from another office and are held in foster carer's homes. First reviews are presented to panel. Due to staffing changes and shortages, a level of independence of the chair has not been possible nor have all reviews taken place at yearly intervals.

Applicants complete an initial training course which includes information on child protection, contact, child development and safe care. Ongoing training profiles are maintained for all foster carers. Courses offered include safeguarding, diversity, behaviour management, emergency first aid and health and safety. Regular support groups for foster carers also have a training element.

The Together Trust has a dedicated training department and regular bulletins of events are sent out to all staff. An induction package for new staff is in place.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

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

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

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

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

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

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	2
29	3

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? Yes

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1.	FS4	42(1) and Schedule 7	The registered person must ensure that systems are in place to monitor the matters outlined in Schedule 7 of Regulations (previous timescale of 1/10/2005 not met).	01/12/06
2.	FS5	6 and Care Standards Act 2000	The registered person must ensure that a manager is in place who is registered with CSCI.	01/01/07

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	FS2	The registered person should ensure that a manager is in place with the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications.
2	FS8	The registered person should ensure that all foster placement agreements contain specific reference to additional support needed to compensate for any gaps in matching.
3	FS8	The registered person should continue to take all reasonable steps to obtain full information from placing authorities to inform matching and care planning.
4	FS9	The registered person should continue with the development of risk assessment and risk management planning.
5	FS14	The registered person should develop policies and procedures to ensure that young people are supported to independent living.
6	FS16	The registered person should ensure that staff have clear roles and lines of accountability.
7	FS17	The registered person should ensure that the service has sufficient staff.
8	FS20	The registered person should ensure that staff receive supervision in accordance with the agency's guidelines.

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