



Making Social Care  
Better for People

# inspection report

Fostering Services

## **Reach-Out Care Ltd**

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

8th 9th 10th 11th 12th November 2004

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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

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

### **The role of CSCI is to:**

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

## **Inspection Methods & Findings**

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

### **The 4-point scale ranges from:**

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

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

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

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

**FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Local Authority Fostering Service?**

NO

**Name of Authority**

**Address**

**Local Authority Manager**

**Tel No:**

**Address**

**Fax No:**

**Email Address**

**Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)**

YES

**Name of Agency**

Reach-Out Care Ltd

**Tel No**

01388 770850

**Address**

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

**Fax No**

01388 770851

**Email Address**

**Registered Number of IFA**

B040000389

**Name of Registered Provider**

Reach-Out Care Ltd

**Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)**

Mrs Maria Rosa Jones

**Date of first registration**

22nd October 2003

**Date of latest registration certificate**

11th June 2004

**Registration Conditions Apply ?**

YES

**Date of last inspection**

8<sup>TH</sup>  
March  
2004

<b>Date of Inspection Visit</b>		8th November 2004	<b>ID Code</b>
<b>Time of Inspection Visit</b>		09:30 am	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>1</b>	Michele Hargan	076522
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>2</b>	Gavin Purdon	
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>3</b>		
<b>Name of Inspector</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable)</b> 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.			
<b>Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)</b>			
<b>Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection</b>			

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

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the 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.

This is the third annual inspection of Reach-Out Care since National Minimum Standards were introduced on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002 at which time a comprehensive audit was carried out. Reach-Out Care has been in operation since 1999. Currently the agency comprises a proprietor, fulltime manager, deputy manager 4 administrators, 2 social workers (1 post currently vacant) and 6 support workers. A Director of Children's Services is in place to work for Reach- Out Care and its sister companies. Since the time of the last inspection the agency have moved to new premises which clearly provide very good quality accommodation more suited to the operation of the agency.

At the time of the inspection Reach Out Care was not actively recruiting foster carers. Discussion with the management team confirmed that the agency was going through a period of consolidation in terms of updating, revising and reviewing policies and procedures and ensuring that existing carers, children and young people were in receipt of all necessary support commensurate with their needs. However systems remain in place within the agency so that an initial assessment at the stage of a first enquiry from prospective carers can be carried out. All applicants are required to complete the "Choosing to Foster" course, which includes many essential aspects relating to safe caring, child protection and meeting the emotional needs of children who have had experience of being "Looked After".

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

## **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.)

This is the third inspection of Reach –Out Care since the introduction of National Minimum Standards and The Fostering Service Regulations 2002. Since the time of the last inspection the agency notified the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) under The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 Schedule 8 Regulation 43 (1) as to a significant event concerning the accidental death of a child placed with foster carers. Reach- Out Care commissioned an independent investigation by BAAF into the circumstances around the death of the child.

The purpose of this inspection was two fold firstly to follow up on formerly identified requirements and recommendations made at the time of the last inspection. Secondly to assess the day-to day functioning of the agency in light of the notification received concerning the previously referred to events. Due to the seriousness of the notification a decision was taken by CSCI to interview all foster carers and also to afford an opportunity to all the children placed with the agency to meet face to face with an inspector in their placement to say something, if they so wished, about their experience of being with Reach-Out Care registered foster carers.

The inspection team would like to thank the children, young people, foster carers and staff of the agency for their full co-operation with this inspection process. All foster carers were interviewed and questionnaires were also distributed to all concerned including placing authority social workers. Much of the detail of the report is reflective of the high level of service user involvement in this process and the general comments and themes from speaking with service users are commented upon. The inspection team were very interested to discern with foster carers, children, young people and staff what additional health and safety measures were in place since the time of the last inspection.

The inspection process highlighted that significant improvements have been made since the time of the last inspection. It is fair to say that the agency, have prioritised matters for further development in light of reported events as indicated above. However it was also clear that despite deficiencies identified at the time of the last inspection and subsequent areas for development identified by the independent BAAF investigation that there were many examples of good practice already in existence, which evidenced the child centred approach adopted by the agency in working and supporting foster carers.

The following is a brief summary of the inspection findings in each area more detailed reporting is to be found within the main body of the report.

#### **Standard 1 Statement of Purpose.**

This standard is met. The statement of purpose meets the National Minimum Standards (NMS), aside from containing information about numbers of complaints and their outcomes; assurance was given that this would be addressed. Most foster carers and children interviewed were able to produce recently revised and re-issued statement's of purpose and children's guide. It was evident that there was a well-organised process of distribution, which at the time of the inspection was largely but not yet fully completed.

#### **Standards 2-3 Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service.**

Both standards are met. The concerns raised in the last inspection report about management over stretch have been firmly addressed. Foster carers spoken with said that the increase in support workers available to them together with the reorganization and the development of the agency's management team had been very beneficial. In the carers view the difficulties previously posed for them as carers by the expansion of the agency had been successfully overcome. It is clear that the aforementioned changes to the agency by the provision of a tier of management have made a real difference to the agency. The persons

carrying on and managing the agency are suitably experienced and qualified individuals able to provide such a service. It was evident throughout the inspection that the agency was concerned with the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people placed.

#### **Standards 4-5 Management of the fostering service.**

Both standards are met. The view of foster carers is that following the reorganization and development of the agency's management, administrative and carer support teams, and the changes to the policy procedure and documentation now underway that there is greater clarity of role, better communication and more accountability. Consultation with carers revealed that systems are in place so that documentation as part of a new controlled quality process is being appropriately distributed. Favourable comments were made about the usefulness of the agency newsletter. Consultation with foster carers confirms that the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the agency overall has improved. Foster carers commented that whilst management has always been active, supportive involved and effective in child centred matters, efforts and resources were now also being directed into developing policies and procedures and practices that underpin the work of the agency.

#### **Standards 6-14 Securing and promoting welfare.**

Eight standards are fully met and two standards are exceeded. Risk assessments were in place for all children and young people in place. Managers confirmed that these would be revised and updated to take account of changing needs and the format altered to more accurately reflect the nature of the service offered. Consultation with managers and staff confirms that the agency place a great deal of emphasis on diversity training for carers from initial training and throughout all of their contact with carers. The majority of placements are planned so there is opportunity for children and young people to have a period of introduction and their views are elicited by the agency so as to further inform this process. It was evident that proper awareness and consideration is given to the issue of bullying with carers, children and young people being encouraged to report any such instances. It was also reported to be most often identified via a stand alone educational support service "Inclusion And Support In School" (ISIS) which is solely contracted to the larger sister organisation of Reach Out Care.

Guidance about contact is contained within the Foster Carers Handbook. The importance of contact is emphasised and it was clear that the agency are pro-active and energetic in facilitating contact despite prohibitive distances. Consultation with managers and staff confirms that consultation with children and young people does take place, however this was also identified as an area that could be further developed, particularly with regards to capturing young persons comments and informal complaints about any aspect of the service they receive and the Director of Children's Services is going to lead in this area. The agency were in the process of compiling a health care record in respect of all children and young people and it was envisaged that these would be in place by within the month following inspection. Acknowledging children's achievements and working with them through difficulties in a creative and determined manner is an ongoing process in which carers and support workers are actively engaged. Many carers expressed their concern and awareness of the challenges that are posed by children attaining adult status and wanted the children they were looking after to be in a position to meet these as best they could.

#### **Standards 15-23 Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.**

Six standards are met and three are almost met. Reach- Out Care uses the service of an appropriately qualified psychologist who is available to offer support to staff and foster carers should the need arise. Support workers confirmed that they receive formal written

supervision on a monthly basis. There were firm plans in place for accredited NVQ and TOPSS training to be undertaken by staff and identified foster carers from Reach- Out Care. Many of the carers spoken to recalled the rigours of the “Choosing to Foster” training and how they had been tested by the challenges of the process. Carers commented on the highly responsive “24x7” on call support available to them from the agency. Some carers commented that their own supervision arrangements were in a process of change, with regard to the personnel involved and the supervision methodologies followed.

The Director for Children’s Services takes the lead for staff training and the inspector understood that training in one form or another would be made available to staff on a monthly basis, with some events being held jointly with foster carers. Consultation with staff concludes that without exception all staff considered themselves to be accountable and well supported by managers. Reach- Out Care’s strategy for supporting and working with foster carers was described by carers as helpful, reliable and responsive. It was noted that not all supervision sessions included the reading of foster carers diaries although discussions centred around the diary content. The ongoing training provided by Reach- Out Care was described as acknowledging that carers were likely to be mature experienced adults with substantial experience of caring and training. Training was also described as flexible with a choice of daytime or evening sessions and back up arrangements for individual including briefing and tuition where attendance was not possible.

#### **Standards 24-25 Records.**

Both standards are almost met. The full range of records held by carers, relating to children, such as Looked After Children’s Care Plans, Essential Information Records, Reviews, Placement Agreements, and the manner in which these were held and used varied amongst foster carers. In some cases records were organized accessible and complete, in other cases they were less so. There are separate files in place with regards to staff, foster carers, children and young people complaints and allegations. Access to staff files is appropriately restricted. Informal systems are in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records including the reading of all case recording by the registered manager before it is placed on file.

#### **Standard 26 Premises.**

This standard is met. Reach Out Care has moved premises, which enables all relevant meetings including those of panel to take place on the premises. The accommodation is clearly of a high quality and security appears to be robust. Difficulties were being experienced in terms of accessing IT and internet facilities and this was being addressed with landlords.

#### **Standards 27-29 Financial requirements.**

Two standards are met and one is almost met. Information was submitted to the lead inspector by the Responsible Individual for Reach Out Care, which clearly demonstrated the continuing financial viability of the agency. Additional sources of evidence to support statements in this regard were included within the financial statement. Staff and carers did not raise any concerns regarding any financial matters related to the agency. The responsible individual stated in writing that carers were paid promptly on a weekly basis, and that payslips show the total monies paid.

#### **Standard 30 Fostering panel.**

This standard is almost met. Policies and procedures are in place for the guidance of panel members including decision-making when all panel members are not in agreement. CRB

checks of a standard level are carried out on panel members and difficulties were reported with securing checks at an enhanced level via the CRB agency.

**Standards 30-31 Short term breaks and Family and friends as carers**

Not applicable.

## **Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State**

**(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)**

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

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

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

NO

**The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:**

N/A

## Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

**If No please list below**

### STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

**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.**

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>YES</b>
The appointed manager of the service must, by January 2005, attain a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management or another qualification, which matches the competencies required by NVQ level 4.		
<b>Comments</b> Reach Out Care have appointed a manager to work alongside the existing registered manager for a period of time with the intention of submitting an application to become the registered manager for the agency to CSCI early in the new year. The proposed manager designate holds both a social work qualification and a management qualification in compliance with National Minimum Standards.		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

<b>Condition</b>	<b>Compliance</b>	
<b>Comments</b>		

**Lead Inspector/ Regulation Manager**      Michele Hargan      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Second Inspector**      Gavin Purdon      **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**      20/12/2004

## 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	
1	20	FS4FS4	The registered person must ensure that documentary evidence of qualification is obtained and in place for all social work staff.	28.2.2005
2	29	FS16FS16	The registered person must ensure that foster carers reviews take place on an annual basis.	28.2.2005
3	19	FS19FS19	The registered person must ensure that a good quality-training programme for staff is implemented and evidence of evaluation and review of this are be maintained.	28.3.2005
4	18	FS22FS22	The registered person must ensure that robust systems are in place so that complaints procedures are followed in accordance with Reach Out Care policies and procedures and appropriate written responses made to the CSCI when required.	28.2.2005
5	31	FS24FS24	The registered person must ensure that dates of reviews of foster carers be included within the foster carers register.	30.1.2005
6	25	FS30FS30	The registered person must ensure adequate panel minutes are maintained in every case, which clearly record the reasons for the recommendations made.	30.1.2005

7	25 28	FS30FS30	The role of panel advisor must be clearly distinguished from that of social work representative for the agency and registered manager so as to avoid any possible conflict of interest or breach of regulatory requirements.	30.1.2005
8	20	FS30FS30	The registered person must ensure that CRB checks are carried out at an enhanced level on all panel members.	30.1.2005

### GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

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

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS1FS1	The registered person should ensure that the numbers and outcomes of any complaints about the service are included within the statement of purpose.
2	FS4FS4	The registered person should ensure that the conflicts of interest policy be included within the foster carers handbook.
3	FS8FS8	The registered person should ensure that documentation is maintained which demonstrates considerations with regards to the process of matching are appropriately carried out.
4	FS9FS9	The registered person should ensure that policies and procedures regarding the recognition, recording and management of any bullying are updated.
5	FS11FS11	The registered person should ensure that systems are in place so as to elicit and record any comments and informal complaints made by children and young people about any aspect of the service they receive including what action the agency has taken to address matters raised.
6	FS12FS12	The registered person should ensure that basic healthcare and first aid training are included in the initial training for carers, and that a health care record be maintained on each child with the child aware of the nature and content of the record.
7	FS14FS14	The registered person should ensure that policies and procedures regarding independent living are included and referenced within the Foster Carers Handbook.

8	FS18FS18	The registered person should ensure that formal supervision of carers takes place regularly and that a consistent supervision model is adopted by the agency throughout.
9	FS24FS24	The registered person should ensure that a policy is in place with regards to the purpose, format and contents of files in compliance with 24.2.
10	FS25FS25	The registered person should ensure that a written policy and procedure be compiled and implemented for staff regarding the keeping and retention of case files, ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.
11	FS26FS26	<p>The registered person should ensure that:-</p> <p>All reasonable measures are taken so as to prevent any unauthorised access to the confidential information retained within the office accommodation.</p> <p>Measures are taken to ensure that administration staff not working directly for Reach- Out Care fostering agency are not privy to confidential information about carers and children young people placed with the agency.</p> <p>Health and safety information pertaining to staff based on the premises of the agency be retained within a single document for ease of reference and future inspection purposes.</p>
12	FS29FS29	The registered person should ensure that a written policy regarding fostering allowances be compiled and made known to foster carers in compliance with 29.2 of NMS.
13	FS30FS30	The registered person should ensure that the role of the agency Decision maker is clearly outlined to all appropriate persons and panel policies and procedures need to reflect this also.

\* 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	X
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	YES
• Child protection officer	YES
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	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	YES
Observation of foster carer training	YES
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	8/11/2004
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	X

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?

3

Most foster carers and children interviewed were able to produce recently revised and reissued statement's of purpose and children's guide. It was evident that there was a well-organised process of distribution, which at the time of the inspection was largely but not yet fully completed. Such information is confirmed as being received in writing by the recipients and copies of confirmation is retained on the appropriate file. The statement of purpose meets the National Minimum Standards (NMS), aside from containing information about numbers of complaints and their outcomes; assurance was given that this would be addressed. All policies and procedures are in the process of being revised and updated and where footers to evidence dates of review are not present assurance was also given that this would be implemented as part of a quality assurance process.

The registered person should ensure that the statement of purpose includes details of the numbers and outcomes of any complaints received by the service. See recommendation 1.

## 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 concerns raised in the last inspection report about management over stretch have been firmly addressed. Foster carers spoken with said that the increase in support workers available to them together with the reorganization and the development of the agency's management team had been very beneficial. In the carers view the difficulties previously posed for them as carers by the expansion of the agency had been successfully overcome. In particular the appointment of a Director responsible for Children's services was remarked upon by staff of the agency as having made a tangible difference in improving the quality of service available to children and carers.

Further improvements in this area are going to be made and at the time of the inspection a new manager had been employed to work alongside the existing registered manager for a period of time with the intention of submitting an application to become the registered manager for the agency to CSCI early in the new year. This proposed manager designate holds both a social work qualification and a management qualification in compliance with National Minimum Standards. All carers were consulted as part of the inspection process and all children and young people were visited and offered an opportunity to make their views known to the inspectors. All those consulted spoke very highly of the service they received from the agency.

### 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

It is clear that the aforementioned changes to the agency by the provision of a tier of management have made a real difference to the agency. The persons carrying on and managing the agency are suitably experienced and qualified individuals able to provide such a service. It was evident throughout the inspection that the agency was concerned with the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people placed. Scrutiny of staff files demonstrated that improvements have taken place since the time of the last inspection, including a more detailed reference form and evidence that references are followed up with telephone calls. Recruitment files were well ordered and there were systems in place so that senior managers could sign off recruitment processes. There was also evidence of good practice with copies of whistle-blowing policies and childcare principles and practices policies being signed as read and understood by all employees. One deficiency was identified in that there was no documentary evidence to demonstrate the social work

qualifications of one worker.

The registered person must ensure that documentary evidence of qualification is obtained and in place for all social work staff. See Requirement 1.

## 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

The view of foster carers is that following the reorganization and development of the agency's management, administrative and carer support teams, and the changes to the policy procedure and documentation now underway there is greater clarity of role, better communication and more accountability. Consultation with carers revealed that systems are in place so that documentation is being appropriately distributed as part of a new quality control documentation process. The usefulness of the agency newsletter was also favourably commented on. In the view of the carers the agency's senior staff were now freer to manage. They were no longer being deflected from management into the support work role due to the employment of additional support workers. These developments address concerns about management overload raised in the last report. Purchasers are made aware as to the charges for level of services. A conflict of interest policy is in place and this should also be made known to carers by inclusion within the foster carers handbook.

The registered person should ensure that the conflicts of interest policy be included within the foster carers handbook. See Recommendation 2.

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

**Death of a child placed with foster parents.**

1

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

0

**Serious illness or accident of a child.**

0

**Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.**

0

**Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.**

0

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

X

**Serious complaint about a foster parent.**

0

**Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.**

1

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

1

**Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:**

1

**Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)****The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Consultation with foster carers confirms that the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of the agency overall has improved. Foster carers commented that whilst management has always been active, supportive involved and effective in child centred matters, efforts and resources were now also being directed into developing policies and procedures and practices that underpin the child centred work of the agency. Deputising arrangements are currently in place so that in the absence of the registered manager, an experienced and senior manager in addition to a Deputy manager is available to oversee the day-to day management of the agency.

## 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?
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As previously stated all of the foster carers were visited and interviewed during the course of the inspection in addition to the use of questionnaires. The majority of children and young people placed with carers were also consulted. Particular emphasis was placed upon establishing with the agency and carer's what health and safety arrangements, considerations and measures were in place in order to secure and promote the welfare of children and young people placed. Discussion with carers confirmed that as a group they were all undertaking an extensive rolling programme of further training in the basic issues of safer caring. A very strong view was expressed by carers that this training was essential, covering the current principles of safer caring and how to apply these appropriately to their own home environments and the particular needs of the children being looked after. Carers confirmed that training would lead to the introduction and completion of revised risk assessment documentation, and that implementation would be overseen by Reach Out Care's supervising social workers.

Risk assessments were in place for all children and young people in place. Managers confirmed that these would be revised and updated to take account of changing needs and the format altered to more accurately reflect the nature of the service offered.

Each child has their own bedroom, health and safety is included within the foster carers training and health and safety checklists are used as part of the assessment process and these are reviewed and updated at the time of foster carers reviews. Foster carers spoken to were very clear as to their responsibility to secure promote and protect the welfare of the children placed. They were clear about the main care objectives and what they were aiming for, how to work positively on difficulties encountered and what successes had been achieved.

**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?**

4

Consultation with carers demonstrated that the agency had given due regard to ensuring that foster carers recruited were a diverse group who were able to promote equality and able to meet the varying needs and circumstances of the children and young people placed. Foster carers were situated in a range of community locations, with varying interests and circumstances, carers were able to provide a range of particular styles and approaches of care so that collectively they demonstrated a substantial resource for Reach Out Care to draw upon.

Consultation with managers and staff confirms that the agency place a great deal of emphasis on diversity training for carers from initial training and throughout all of their contact with carers. The agency manager described its main task as being able to restore and build the self-esteem of children and young people in partnership with carers. Each child has in place a support package designed to enable children and young people to make the most of educational and leisure opportunities available to them. This was clearly an area in which the agency had made substantial investment and as such is to be commended.

**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 children and young people seen during the course of the inspection appeared to be very much at home and at ease with their carers and the setting in which they were placed. Good rapport between children, young people and carers was also noted. Discussion with staff also confirms that matching is carefully considered. A matching proforma is in draft form at present and it was agreed that this would be finalised and adopted by the agency to further evidence this process. The agency liaises appropriately with the local authority as part of the matching process. The majority of placements are planned so there is opportunity for children and young people to have period of introduction and their views are elicited by the agency so as to further inform this process. Carers appeared to be resilient and resourceful and reported that whilst all placements were not trouble free, support from the agency enabled carers to work through any difficulties.

The registered person should ensure that documentation is maintained which demonstrates considerations with regards to the process of matching are appropriately carried out. See recommendation 3.

**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**

Carers spoken with had a clear insight into child protection matters. The initial "Choosing to Care" training for prospective foster carers was repeatedly commented upon in this respect by the carers interviewed, as was the most recent "Safer Care" training course attended. Carers commented that their own experience of being a parent was not in itself a sufficient basis to provide protection but that their training did provide the necessary insight and guidance. In view of the seriousness of the notification made to CSCI earlier in the year a major review of all aspects of Safe Caring policies has been carried out after careful consideration as to what would be most effective. Safe Care policies in respect of all carers where in the process of being agreed with carers, children and young people in placement are also enabled to be a part of this process. It was evident that proper awareness and consideration is given to the issue of bullying which carers, children and young people are encouraged to report. It was also reported to be most often identified via a stand alone educational support service "Inclusion And Support In School" (ISIS) which is contracted to the larger sister organisation of Reach Out Care.

The written procedure for use if a child/ young person goes missing was revised immediately following notification of the aforementioned significant event. The lead inspector was able to observe foster carers training which included recording and record keeping as to anything of significance on specific formats for ease of reference, reporting and monitoring by the agency.

The registered person should ensure that policies and procedures regarding the recognition, recording and management of any bullying are updated. See recommendation 4.

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

100

%

**Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

Carers spoken with were very sensitive to the issues of promoting appropriate family and friendship contacts. Carers mentioned this as always being a key element of The Looked After Children's Care Plan, from which they took their lead. In practice this could mean protection from such contact, or encouragement and support to sustain it. In discussing this particular issue, carers showed themselves to be very diplomatic, to be enabling, neutral or protective as the situation required. Children and young people spoken with confirmed this was the case. Carers and children gave examples of how contact was planned, and then supported either by arranged outings, telephone conversations, or by hosting visits. Carers acknowledged the vital role in this provided by Reach- Out Care support workers.

Consultation with staff confirms that contact arrangements specified within the Care Plan for each child are supported by the agency. Guidance about contact is contained within the Foster Carers Handbook. The importance of contact is emphasised by the agency and it was clear that the agency are pro-active and energetic in facilitating contact despite prohibitive distances. Supervision of carers is used as a vehicle in which to address any issues including contact. At the time of the inspection carers were trained and inducted as to the

use of a new system of diary recording and details of contact arrangements would also be expected to be made within this record. Supervising link workers are going to be required to read and review the new diary system and any other arising issues. Information arising from contacts is made available to placing authorities.

**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

It was clear from discussion with carers and children that proposed actions were discussed with the children and that the child's wishes and preferences were taken into account. Areas of disagreement were described as something talked about rather than simply dictated and enforced. Children gave examples of how they were supported in making some difficult decisions and to take actions that helped them have more control of their own lives. These difficult matters were talked about by children with a definite sense of relief, pride and achievement. Carers commented upon on how it was essential to revisit decisions put on record as a child's wish, to ensure that this was still current particularly where it may have long- term serious consequences for the child.

Consultation with managers and staff confirms that consultation with children and young people does take place, however this was also identified as an area that could be further developed, particularly with regards to capturing young persons comments and informal complaints about any aspect of the service they receive and the Director of Children's Services is going to lead in this area.

The registered person should ensure that systems are in place so as to elicit and record any comments and informal complaints made by children and young people about any aspect of the service they receive including what action the agency has taken to address matters raised. See recommendation 5.

**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

It was evident that help is in place, which ensures that children and young people receive appropriate support from foster carers and the agency so that their health needs are met. From records seen in the carer's home and based on discussion with the carer's, children and young people this was found to be the case. Informed participation by children and young people was viewed as the norm. Carers stated that non-participation in any aspect would be most exceptional and for specific reasons. Scrutiny of children and young peoples files demonstrated variance with regards to written information about the health care histories and needs. The agency were in the process of compiling a health care record in respect of all children and young people and it was envisaged that these would be in place within the following month. Consultation with staff and the Director of Children's services confirmed that there were plans in place for staff and all foster carers to complete first aid training.

The registered person should ensure that basic healthcare and first aid training are included in the initial training for carers, and that a health care record be maintained on each child with the child aware of the nature and content of the record. See recommendation 6.

**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

Arranging appropriate education and offering children encouragement and support to participate and fulfil their potential were seen to be high priorities for carers and support workers. Much time and effort from carers and workers go in to educational issues, they were very keen to encourage and recognize any improvements in a child's school behaviour and educational performance. Acknowledging children's achievements and working with them through difficulties in a creative and determined manner is an ongoing process in which carers and support workers are actively engaged.

A sister company to Reach out Care ISIS (Inclusion & Support In School) has been set up since the time of the last inspection and this represents a major development in terms of a quality support which exclusively seeks to work with the children and young people placed and as such is to be commended. The overall aim of the service is "To work in partnership with relevant professionals to ensure that children looked after and in need of support are provided with high quality teaching and social support in school, in their educational placement or within any other relevant provision, thereby reducing the likelihood of social exclusion and/or placement breakdown."

Community facilities were used by the agency to deliver educational additional support to children/young people and systems are in place in order to monitor educational attainments and any concerns are addressed by joint working by ISIS with carers and education services.

**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**

Carers spoken to were very much aware of the intended objectives of the care being provided and how activity had to be directed in stages towards particular goals being achieved. As such, with a wide varied group of children, in terms of ages, needs and intended pathways, a wide variety of styles and content of care provided was seen. This appeared to be consistent with the intended objectives for individual children and their current levels of skill competence and knowledge. Many carers expressed their concern and awareness of the challenges that are posed by children attaining adult status and wanted the children they were looking after to be in a position to meet these as best they could. Consultation with staff and managers confirms that community resources and assistance are available in order to support foster carers, children and young people with the development of independent living skills. A policy document was compiled at the time of the last inspection for the information of carers however this was not found to be in place within the foster carers handbook.

The registered person should ensure that policies and procedures regarding independent living are included and referenced within the Foster Carers Handbook. See recommendation 7.

## 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?

3

A recruitment and selection policy is in place and this was going to be revised and reviewed as part of the overall review of all policies and procedures. As previously referred to improvements were evident in terms of recruitment practices and the organisation of recruitment files. The Director of Children's Services is the lead person with regards to recruitment and was in the process of revising and reviewing the staff handbook so as to ensure that all relevant information was provided to staff employed. Social work staff employed were all reported to be qualified and documentary evidence confirmed this in all but one instance and a requirement has been made in order to address this. All foster carers have a named and qualified member of staff allocated to them. One vacancy existed for a qualified social worker at the time of the inspection, and as an interim measure the newly appointed manager deputising for the registered manager was also acting as an allocated worker. Reach- Out Care uses the service of an appropriately qualified psychologist who is available to offer support to staff and foster carers should the need arise. Support workers confirmed that they receive formal written supervision on a monthly basis.

The perception of carers is that qualified social work staff and support staff at Reach- Out Care are skilled, resourceful, energetic and reliable helpers and advisors and that their own success and continuance as foster carers has been greatly assisted by them.

**Total number of staff of the agency:**

19

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

2

**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**

Evidence was seen of a structured on going training for carers, including programme details of recent and forthcoming events, certificates of attendance and reference materials received. New carers and carers of long standing spoke positively about the training they had received. There have been major changes to the management structure of the agency since the time of the last inspection and this is commented on in more detail within Standard 2 of this report. Consultation with both staff and carers confirms that there is clear management accountability. It was evident that the staff are supervised by managers with significant appropriate experience. Operational and strategic matters have been divided up within the agency and the direct support to foster carer's children, young people and staff has significantly increased.

At the time of the last inspection a significant area of concern was that reviews of carers were in the main all overdue, this issue was being addressed by reviews being prioritised by panel and additional time being allocated by panel in order to clear the back log. Reach- Out Care has submitted the necessary information to local authorities in order to become an accredited provider. There were firm plans in place for accredited NVQ and TOPPS training to be undertaken by staff and identified foster carers from Reach Out Care. Increased administrative support is now in place, which also services the sister, companies of the Reach- Out Care. Consultation with the senior administrator for the agency confirms that there are suitable systems in place so that enquiries are promptly dealt with. It has been agency practice for the Responsible Individual to carry out the initial visit to carers, following an enquiry and some discussion took place as to the possible conflicts of interest that may arise from this practice as this person also sits on panel. Assurance was given that this would no longer be the case.

The registered person must ensure that foster carers reviews take place on an annual basis. See requirement 2.

**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**

Many of the carers spoken to recalled the rigours of the "Choosing to Foster" training and how they had been tested by the challenges of the process. As they recalled, not all candidates survived the third weekend of training, and they were well aware that their own qualities, competencies and aptitudes to foster had been under very close scrutiny. As previously indicated the agency had made a decision to consolidate the present level of service rather than actively recruit additional carers. A full time vacancy for one social worker exists and there were plans in place to recruit accordingly. Consultation with foster carers, staff and children did not evidence staffing shortfalls in any area. Everyone was aware of the additional management appointments and considered that this had enabled procedural changes to take place, which were viewed by foster carers and staff as necessary in underpinning day-to day practice. The assessment process takes into account those areas outlined within National Minimum Standards.

**Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)**

**The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Carers commented on the highly responsive “24x7” on call support available to them from the agency. Some carers commented that their own supervision arrangements were in a process of change, with regard to the personnel involved and the supervision methodologies followed. Not all carers had received records of their supervision. Not all supervisions had followed the same format. However, there were indications that a consistent model of supervision was in the process of being established. The registered manager for the agency stated that further consideration was being given as to how to improve practice in this area, with the aim of maintaining and improving the retention and recruitment of staff and carers.

An independent investigation by BAAF was commissioned at the request of the agency as part of its response to the accidental death of a child. The CSCI also made requirements of the Reach Out Care at that time, concerning all aspects of health and safety for foster carers, children and young people and the carrying out of risk assessments for all children. These requirements have in the main been fully responded to by means of a thought through action plan specifically compiled to address the issues raised. There were ongoing plans in evidence to ensure that all matters will be satisfactorily concluded and monitored. It is fair to say that in addition to having to evidence to all other external agencies practice in this area, all health and safety matters throughout the agency have been under internal scrutiny with the intention of ensuring that scrupulous practice in this area becomes the norm. The inspector was given to understand that foster carer’s diaries would be under the “microscope” so that any matter of any concern could be identified and addressed. This point was also clearly made within foster carers training. A Speaking Out policy is in place and evidence was maintained to confirm that this had been distributed and read by all staff and carers.

The registered person should ensure that formal supervision of carers takes place regularly and that a consistent supervision model is adopted by the agency throughout. See recommendation 8

**Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)**

**There is a good quality-training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.**

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****2**

Staff consulted were all aware that training was being developed. The Director for Children’s Services takes the lead for staff training and the inspector understood that training in one form or another would be made available to staff on a monthly basis, with some events being held jointly with foster carers. It was acknowledged by the registered manager that staff training had been patchy and that this was an area that needed to be addressed. An audit has been undertaken in order to establish a baseline for training. Consultation with staff confirms that induction takes place and plans are in place for all staff to have a personal development plan. 2 foster Carers and 2 staff are to commence NVQ training following the inspection process. Training for foster carers and staff has been revised to take into account the code of practice UK National Standards for Foster Carers. It was evident that much consideration had been given as to the formatting and commissioning of an appropriate programme designed to meet the training needs of all staff. Team meetings and supervision are used as vehicles for updating staff with regards to changes in legislation and practice.

The registered person must ensure that a good quality-training programme for staff is implemented and evidence of evaluation and review of this are be maintained. See Requirement 3.

**Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5)**

**All staff are properly accountable and supported.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**3**

Consultation with staff concludes that without exception all staff considered themselves to be accountable and well supported by managers. Documentary evidence confirmed that staff were provided with written details as to their responsibilities together with policies and procedures. Staff confirmed that they receive supervision and that these were planned in advance and recorded and lasted for at least an hour. Verbal assurance was given by the registered manager that staff appraisal were carried out on an annual basis as necessary. Regular staff meetings took place. Staff morale seemed high within the agency despite the obvious difficulties and sensitive issues that the agency have had to address. Staff were optimistic about the changes that had taken place and conveyed their enthusiasm and commitment to carry the changes forwards and expressed confidence in their line managers.

**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**

Reach- Out Care's strategy for supporting and working with foster carers was described by the latter as helpful, reliable and responsive. Carers with experience of other fostering services thought the quality and amount of support provided by the agency compared favourably with what they had experienced elsewhere. Carers described a sophisticated style of standard and additional support, which varied, depending on the circumstances, the preferences of carers and the needs of children and young people. Carers commented that the style and amount of support received had often been a vital contribution in enabling them to deal with the management of very difficult situations.

The strategy for working with carers is made evident within the statement of purpose. Questionnaires from foster carers, children and placing authorities where on the whole very favourable, one respondent from a placing authority expressed some concern about the agency crossing the boundary between link worker and case- worker for the child/young person. Reach Out Care link workers supported foster carers with contributing to the review process for the child.

**Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10)**

**The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.**

**Key Findings and Evidence**

**Standard met?**

**2**

As previously stated there was variance with regards to style and format of supervision with firm plans in place for this to be addressed. However supervision sessions with qualified link workers were viewed by foster carers as important, productive and an indispensable form of support and oversight. It was noted that not all supervisions including reading of foster carers diaries although discussions centred around the diary content. The standard of diary keeping seen varied, where gaps in recording or occasional lapses into casual language were noted foster carers acknowledged the need and intention to improve. Some diaries seen were examples of highly professional record keeping. Carers commented how some diaries had been read very carefully by supervising link workers and phrases such as “very annoyed” had been picked up on and explored by the worker’s. Signing off foster carers diaries was raised with a link worker and there was evidence that this practice was implemented by the worker during the course of the inspection process.

Additional support from Reach- Out Care’s qualified link workers was described by foster carers as very readily available and very welcome. “If things are difficult we might see them 2or 3 times a month not just once. They might ring to say they might drop by if that was okay or they might just phone to check out how things are going”.

Carer’s handbooks, which provide written support and guidance, are in the process of being re-issued and foster carers commented that they had noticed a tightening up of the administrative system for acknowledging the receipt of updated documents. Although the position is improving, at present, not all carers are in possession of the same calibre, range or versions of key records or documentation. The inspection team were given to understand that the recommendations of the BAAF investigation regarding improvements to the Foster Carers handbook were to be fully implemented.

1 complaint was received by CSCI since the time of the last inspection and an action plan was compiled in response to requirements and recommendations made by CSCI as a result of further investigation into the matters raised. It was disappointing that written confirmation was not received from the Responsible Individual as to the outcome of matters in connection with the complaint. Discussion with the Director for Children’s Services took place with the lead inspector regarding complaints procedures and it was acknowledged that this was an area that needed to be improved upon.

The registered person must ensure that robust systems are in place so that complaints procedures are followed in accordance with Reach Out Care policies and procedures and appropriate responses made to the CSCI when required. See requirement 4.

**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?**

**3**

Discussions with carers showed that as a group they had a very high regard for the training they had received, and for the manner in which it was presented. The ongoing training provided by Reach- Out Care was described as acknowledging that carers were likely to be mature experienced adults with substantial experience of caring and training. Training was also described as flexible with a choice of daytime or evening sessions and back up arrangements for individual briefing and tuition where attendance was not possible. Generally carers welcomed the group style training and commented that the agency was very ready to incorporate and use the views of foster carers into the training and development process. Training was perceived by carers to be challenging, stimulating and even enjoyable. It was viewed as purposeful activity that prepared the way for providing a better service. Recent training on Safer Care, Risk Assessment, Boundary Setting, and responding to unplanned absences was spoken off with some enthusiasm and the revisions of procedure and practice following on from the training is looked forward to. Foster carers produced copies of their programme of recent and forthcoming training events.

The lead inspector was able to observe training regarding health and safety and carers diaries. The presentation and standard of training was excellent and despite the seriousness of the topics this was done in such a way as to enjoyably engage foster carers in the process without detracting from the crucial importance of the subject matter. Reviews of carers includes taking into account carers attendance and commitment to training events.

## Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

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

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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The full range of records held by carers, relating to children, such as Looked After Children's Care Plans, Essential Information Records, Reviews, Placement Agreements, and the manner in which these were held and used varied amongst foster carers. In some cases records were organized accessible and complete, in other cases they were less so. Whilst work is being undertaken to address these matters consistency in this area is still yet to be achieved. Carers demonstrated an awareness of confidentiality and the need to for safe keeping of records in the home. Carers were very clear about the overall objectives and specific goals as set out in the care plans and review minutes.

Scrutiny of children's records concludes that they are maintained in a consistent way in accordance with regulatory requirements. The registered manager stated that a policy with regards to the purpose, format and contents of files in compliance with 24.2 is not as yet in place. Consultation with managers and foster carers confirms that the experience and reasons as to why children are placed with foster carers is carefully relayed in order to support children/young people placed. Information is passed to the placing authority upon request and where a child leaves the agency all relevant records are sent to the placing authority.

As previously indicated a new procedure and system for diary recording by foster carers was being implemented by the agency and all appropriate documentation was provided to carers to support them with this. It was also pleasing to note that a substantial health and safety resource was made available to all foster carers in the form of leaflets and reading material placed in individual files for retention and reference purposes of all foster carers.

The registered person should ensure that a policy is in place with regards to the purpose, format and contents of files in compliance with 24.2. See recommendation 9.

The registered person must ensure that dates of reviews of foster carers be included within the foster carers register. See requirement 4.

**Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)**

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

**Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?**

2

There are separate files in place with regards to staff, foster carers, children and young people complaints and allegations. Access to staff files is appropriately restricted. Informal systems are in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of records including the reading of all case recording by the registered manager before it is placed on file. Records are stored securely. Records are maintained in suitable formats so that they can follow the child or be sent to the placing authority. Assurance was made that children and young people are able to access their files, (excepting third party information) however this did not appear to be well publicised by the agency. Staff were confident in reporting that foster carers were made aware that children and young people could view diaries. A written policy and procedural guidance for staff regarding the keeping and retention of case files ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them was in the process of being compiled.

The registered person should ensure that a written policy and procedural guidance for staff regarding the keeping and retention and of case files ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them be compiled and implemented. See recommendation 10

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

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

X

## 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

As previously indicated Reach- Out Care has moved premises, which now enables all relevant meetings including panel to take place on the premises. The accommodation is clearly of a high quality and security appears to be robust. Difficulties were being experienced in terms of accessing IT and internet facilities and this was being addressed with landlords. Visitors are expected to report to a reception desk and to sign in and out, however it appeared that there was the potential for undetected entry to the agencies offices and the siting of staff did not facilitate ease of monitoring by visitors. A lead officer was appropriately establishing health and safety considerations in respect of all staff of the agency.

The registered person should ensure that all reasonable measures are taken so as to prevent any unauthorised access to the confidential information retained within the office accommodation. It is also recommended that measures are taken to ensure that administration staff not working directly for Reach- Out Care fostering agency are not privy to confidential information about carers and children young people placed with the agency. The registered person should ensure that all health and safety information pertaining to staff based on the premises of the agency be retained within a single document for ease of reference and future inspection purposes. See recommendation 11.

## 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

Information was submitted to the lead inspector by the Responsible Individual for Reach-Out Care, which clearly demonstrated the continuing financial viability of the agency. Additional sources of evidence to support statements in this regard were included within the financial statement. Contingency plans are in place in the event of any financial crisis in compliance with NMS. Reach- Out Care's accounts are submitted to Companies House on an annual basis.

### 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 financial statement presented by the agency outlines the financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers. Close and regular weekly monitoring of financial matters is reported to take place by the agency. A financial administrator has been appointed to assist with matters in this regard. Staff and carers did not raise any concerns regarding any financial matters related to the agency.

**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?**

2

The responsible individual stated in writing that carers were paid promptly on a weekly basis, and that payslips show the total monies paid. Foster carers rates of pay are reviewed on an annual basis. The registered manager stated that a written policy regarding fostering allowances was not in existence.

The registered person should ensure that a written policy regarding fostering allowances be compiled and made known to foster carers in compliance with 29.2. See recommendation 12

## Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

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

### Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

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

#### Key Findings and Evidence

#### Standard met?

2

Policies and procedures are in place for the guidance of panel members including decision-making when all panel members are not in agreement. CRB checks of a standard level are carried out on panel members and difficulties were reported with securing checks at an enhanced level via the CRB agency. Medical expertise is available to the panel however this person

is not able to attend panel meetings in person. Consultation with the registered manager and panel chair confirms that panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process. Reviews were carried out by panel during the course of the inspection and it is the intention of the agency that all reviews will be conducted by panel. A lay member of the panel is a teacher and one of the independent members of the panel fulfils the criteria as outlined within 30.9 of NMS.

The lead inspector was able to observe panel whilst reviews were being undertaken. Panel minutes were also inspected as part of this process and the quality of these ranged from acceptable to very poor.

The registered person must ensure adequate panel minutes are maintained in every case, which clearly record the reasons for the recommendations made. See requirement 6.

The registered person should ensure that the role of the agency decisions maker is clearly outlined to all appropriate persons and panel policies and procedures need to reflect this also. See recommendation 12

The role of panel advisor must be clearly distinguished from that of social work representative for the agency and registered manager so as to avoid any possible conflict of interest or breach of regulatory requirements. See requirement 7.

The registered person must ensure that CRB checks are carried out at an enhanced level on all panel members. See requirement 8

## 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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The agency does not provide short-term breaks for children as outlined by NMS.	
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## 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?
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N/A.

**PART C**

**LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY**

**(where applicable)**

N/A

**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 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 November 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action Plan was not received within given timescales.

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

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

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

NO

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

NO

**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 3 February 2005, 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

NO

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

NO

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

YES

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

YES

Other: <enter details here>

NO

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

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

**Print Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Designation** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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