



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Alpha Plus Fostering Limited

**Hollinwood Business Centre
Albert Mill, Albert Street
Hollinwood
Oldham
OL8 3QL**

Lead Inspector
Helen Humphreys

Announced Inspection
5th February 2007 09:30 am

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

Reader Information	
Document Purpose	Inspection Report
Author	CSCI
Audience	General Public
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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	Alpha Plus Fostering Limited
Address	Hollinwood Business Centre Albert Mill, Albert Street Hollinwood Oldham OL8 3QL
Telephone number	0161 684 2323
Fax number	0161 684 2324
Email address	info@alphaplusfostering.co.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Alpha Plus Fostering Services
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Mary Groarke
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 19th August 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Alpha Plus Fostering Services is an independent agency, established for six years. The Directors of the company are Mary Groarke and Christopher Jackson and the agency recently changed its legal status to become a limited company. It aims to provide a service for looked after children, referred to the agency from Local Authorities, with Foster Carers who are recruited, trained, assessed, reviewed and supervised by the agency. Its premises are in appropriate offices on a business park, close to motorway and public transport links.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out over two days with additional time spent talking to carers and the chair of the fostering panel.

The inspector interviewed the two directors, social workers, education support staff, two social work students who were on placement at the agency and read various files and records.

Questionnaires were circulated to a small number of carers, young people and placing social workers. No questionnaires were received from placing social workers and the comments made by carers and young people have been included in this report.

The manager completed an Annual Assessment Quality Assurance document and a 'data set', which provided statistical information.

What the service does well:

This is a service, which is well respected by professionals, carers, staff and young people. The outcomes for young people placed are positive and carers report that fostering for Alpha Plus has 'changed their lives'. The Panel chair said, 'it is a pleasure to work there, their attention to detail is phenomenal'.

All the young people who met the inspector or returned their questionnaires said that they were happy living with their foster carers, their comments included, 'I am very happy' and 'I just love it here'.

Carers were very satisfied with the support they get from Alpha and no carer on this occasion or previous could identify anything, which the agency could do to support them more than they do. One carer wrote, 'Alpha staff strive to provide a better service continuously and provide 100% support for children and carers.....this is a high quality service'.

The staff present as competent, loyal and committed and have a range of skills and experiences to bring to the work. They have access to a range of appropriate training opportunities.

The panel is chaired by an experienced social work practitioner. The panel is made up of appropriately experienced and qualified people who bring a range of experiences and qualities.

Carers have access to training and support and there is an emphasis on continuous development. Over two thirds of the carers have or are working towards a relevant qualification including NVQ level 3 or a qualification in teaching or nursing.

The two directors of the agency are experienced social work practitioners who manage the service closely and are aware of all matters pertaining to the young people and carers. Staff said, 'there isn't anything which happens here which Mary doesn't know about, she is involved in every placement'.

The files, records and paper work are maintained to a high standard and the agency is supported by a committed and qualified administrative team.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Since the last inspection the directors have made steady progress on the recommendations made at the last inspection and continued to make additional improvements in all areas of practice.

The Directors have changed the legal status of the agency and this is now a limited company. This will have no effect on the day to day running of the company.

The agency has updated a range of documents including, the staff handbook, Carers' handbook and the local authority brochure.

The agency has appointed a health care consultant who works with carers on a range of health care matters and provides training.

The agency has enhanced its training on safe care matters to carers in their initial first year of fostering to remind them of the issues raised on the skills to foster course.

The agency has employed an additional teacher to work with the carers and young people prior to the impending retirement of the education manager. The new teacher will bring a range of additional skills and experiences to the already competent education support service.

The agency has revised the children's guides and these were known to young people who said that they had found them useful.

The agency has provided a range of additional activities over the last year including a drama and circus skills workshop.

The agency has provided training for carers on leaving care issues and worked in conjunction with Barnardos to deliver this training, which included information directly from a young care leaver.

The agency has also provided training on working with refugees and asylum seekers and have worked in conjunction with the Refugee Council.

Some of the staff have gained further qualification including one who has completed Dip.SW and become a supervising social worker having previously been the support worker. Other qualifications include practice teaching qualifications and NVQ level 3 in accounting.

What they could do better:

The agency is always seeking to make improvements in the way it operates and has a clear developmental plan for the following 12 months.

The agency has a very small number of carers who care for babies and it would be appropriate to provide them with training in Sudden and Unexplained death Syndrome. (SUDS) This will take into account recent research and findings of recent investigations following the death of babies in care.

Various members of the Panel are coming close to their end of period of office and one is leaving for personal reasons. As a result of this it is timely to review the make up of the panel and to try again to appoint some one who has at some time been in care or their own children have been in care in order to comply with the standards.

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. The summary of this inspection report can be made available in other formats on request.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

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.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**, the staff and carers promote the good health and well being of the children placed.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Carers and young people were knowledgeable about health care matters and young people said that they have good food to eat and most appear to be taking exercise and being involved in active lives.

Carers said that they had sufficient health care information and this was also recorded on the young people's files. Young people have had their health care assessments and visits to the doctors, dentists etc was recorded and regularly checked by staff.

Carers who require additional health care information are referred to the health care consultant who provides additional support and advice. This work is recorded.

Carers receive training on health promotion matters, including drug and alcohol awareness, sexual health, self-harming and eating disorders.

The agency has updated its smoking policy.

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.

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

3, 6, 8, 9, 15, 30

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent** because young people are safely placed with carers who promote their safety and well-being.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The recruitment and selection process for staff are appropriate and follow regulations. CRB Disclosures and medicals are renewed as required.

The carers seen on this occasion and previously were appropriate people who were providing a good standard of care to the young people placed. They were aware of their needs and how to meet them in conjunction with support, help and training from staff. The homes were clean, tidy and provided adequate space. Health and safety check lists and safe caring policies were in place and these are regularly updated. Carers are provided with training on health and safety matters.

The agency takes care when matching young people and this was endorsed by the carers who said that they had never felt pressured to take a placement and that staff take a range of matters into account when placing children. There has been few disrupted placements in the last 12 months. Many placing authorities have made more than one placement and a number of carers have been approved as long-term carers for specific young people. Matching

decisions are recorded and supported by detailed foster care agreements and placements agreements.

Carers are provided with training in child protection and related matters, which is regularly updated. The carer's handbook provides information on bullying and missing from home. Young people said that they felt safe in their placements.

The agency does not provide training on Sudden or Unexplained death in infants for their carers who care for babies but would now consider this following the inspection.

An experienced social work practitioner who chairs other panels brings a wealth of experience to the role. The panel provides a good quality assurance function to the service; the minutes are detailed and well recorded. The Panel members have undertaken training in the last 12 months.

The panel membership will over the next 12 months change and it is now timely to try again to recruit a member who has previously been in care or who has had their own children in care.

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.

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

7 and 13

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent** because staff and carers were meeting the individual and educational needs of the young people placed and they were making progress.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The staff and carers were aware of the individual needs of the young people and any additional needs arising from their ethnicity, disability or identity.

Staff and carers had found additional resources, including books, literature, training and community projects to support carers when looking after children with additional needs. Staff had accessed specific training arising out of a particular need of a young person.

Training is provided to carers on caring for black children, asylum seekers and refugees.

The agency has a well-resourced education support team who support staff, carers and young people on a range of educational matters. This includes monitoring the educational achievement of the young people, supporting carers in finding new schools, or when there are difficulties for example exclusions and providing additional tutoring for individual young people on specific topics.

All young people were attending school or college and there had been no permanent exclusions in the last 12 months. One young person aged 16 had gained good GCSE grades.

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.

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

10 and 11.

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent** because the arrangements for contact are appropriate and the service promotes consultation.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The agency regards contact as an integral part of the children's lives and support carers to promote this. Contact is taken into account in matching considerations. Some carers are coping with complicated contact arrangements. Carers are required to record all impacts of contact on the young people and this is discussed in supervision. Carers are supported financially to provide transport for contact. There was evidence in file of the positive work, which carers and staff had undertaken with birth families.

All young people said that they were being supported to see the members of their family and friends they wanted to see.

Carers and staff are provided with training on managing contact issues.

Young people are consulted on a range of matters, including their own statutory reviews, carers' reviews and education support visits. The agency has just finished revising their children's guides and young people were consulted over this process.

Carers are involved in carer's days where general discussion is held about the agency. The agency provides a range of social activities for the carers and

young people where there is opportunity for discussions between staff, young people and carers.

The agency runs a group for birth children of prospective carers so that they are aware of the fostering task.

Children and young people were aware of how to make a complaint or raise a concern if they needed to.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**, as the agency has developed appropriate work with carers to support young people as they reach adult hood.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

Over the last 12 months the agency has developed the work with carers to prepare young people as they approach adult hood. Training has been provided by Barnardos and this has been followed up with work in the support group.

The agency is clear on the process it undertakes when approving carers for long term placements and this includes re-assessment and detailed discussion on the implications of caring for young people up to and beyond if necessary their 18th birthday. Not all carers are assessed as being appropriate for long-term care.

The agency was aware that not all young people aged over 16 had pathway plans in place and were advocating on their behalf with the placing authorities. Where possible they had contributed to their completion.

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 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.

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

1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**; this is a well managed agency, with a strong staff team, who support a range of carers who are providing good quality care to young people.

This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

EVIDENCE:

The Statement of Purpose has recently been revised and complies with the standards and regulations. The children's Guides have been revised and young people seen on this occasion were aware of them and had found them helpful and useful.

The agency has sufficient staff all of whom presented as loyal, committed well experienced and knowledgeable about the service provided, the carers and young people placed. The staff have access to a range of training opportunities and could identify how this had impacted on their work. They all reported that they receive regular supervision and annual appraisals.

The agency has a sufficient number of carers to meet their needs at present, but has started to consider recruiting more carers who can meet the particular needs of placing authorities. The assessment of carers is thorough and detailed and meets all good practice requirements.

All carers said that they were well supported by the staff and agency and enjoyed good relationships with all staff. They valued the support they received and made comments including, 'there isn't anything else they could do' and 'I couldn't do this job without them'.

The files inspected were well organised and contained a range of information. The range of information Available varied and there was evidence that staff had tried to obtain further information mainly background information from placing authorities.

The office has a range of administrative records and these are well maintained. The manager monitors the service and prepares an appropriate report twice per year, which is circulated, to the Commission and Panel members.

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	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	4
6	4
8	4
9	4
15	3
30	3

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

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	4
29	X

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1.	FS9	The Registered Person should provide 'SUDS' training for carers who look after babies.
2.	FS30	The Registered Person should try and obtain someone to the panel who has been in care or whose children have been in care.

