



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Alliance Foster Care

**1 Maple Court
Ash Lane
Collingtree
Northampton
NN4 0NB**

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection
27th November 2006 09:20

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Alliance Foster Care
Address	1 Maple Court Ash Lane Collingtree Northampton NN4 0NB
Telephone number	01604 879373
Fax number	01604 859113
Email address	admin@alliancefostercare.co.uk
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Alliance Foster Care Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Pamela Altena
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection

Brief Description of the Service:

Alliance Foster Care is an Independent Fostering Agency based in Collingtree Northamptonshire. The organisation is owned and managed by its Directors Pamela Altena (Registered Manager) and John Duffield (Registered Provider) both who have substantial experience of childcare and family placement work.

In addition to the above Managers, there is an Operations Manager, a Principal Social Worker, a Training Officer and Resource Officer. The Resource Officer ensures appropriate education provision is identified and supports children in their education. There is a team of four qualified Social Workers, two Support Workers and a Youth Worker supported by a strong Administrative team. Additional Qualified Therapists, Counsellors and Social Workers also provide services on a regular basis.

The Agency provides Emergency, Respite, Bridging, Long and Short Term placements, as well as Mother and Baby and Assessment placements. The charge for a standard placement is £684.36.

At the time of Inspection the Agency supported 43 carers and provided placements for 61 children

SUMMARY

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

This Inspection took one Inspector 44 hours in total.

For the purpose of this Inspection two sets of foster carers and the four children placed with them were tracked, through the Inspection of case files and visits to the family homes. Three Supervising Social Workers and the Management Team, including the Registered Manger and Registered Provider, were interviewed. Informal discussions were held with the Office Manager and the newly appointed Youth Worker.

The Fostering Panel was observed during the Inspection and the Inspector had lunch with the Panel Chair and Foster Carers, who had attended for Annual Reviews.

The above information provided the Inspection evidence for each of the five outcomes for children. Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook and other Agency documentation were referred to throughout the Inspection, in addition to the Pre Inspection Annual Quality Assurance Assessment and Data Document.

Questionnaires were received from 8 Professionals, 22 young people, 18 carers and 12 placing social workers. These were almost all very positive about the work of the Agency and have been referred to within the following report.

What the service does well:

The Alliance Foster Care team demonstrates a stated and evidenced commitment to providing good quality placements for children, and to promoting positive outcomes for children on a day-to-day basis. There are very good systems to match children to appropriate placements.

The Agency maintains very good individual carer and children's records in well-organised files that capture essential placement information.

The Agency gives a high priority to meaningful consultation with children and young people placed, through newsletters, workshops and age appropriate literature, and an interactive CD ROM.

The Agency prioritises educational achievement, through focussed and direct support to children and young people in their school placements, and through after school and holiday activities.

Staff and carers are valued and very well supported through regular supervision and appraisals and relevant professional training opportunities.

A strong inclusive Management Team leads the fostering service. There are very good management systems in place to monitor the service being provided

Children said in questionnaires. 'I am very happy'. 'I like living here'. 'I have everything I need'. 'I feel happy, safe and I know I am cared for'. 'They treat me like I am part of their family'. 'I do feel cared for'. 'I am happy and I have everything I need'. 'I think Alliance is the best Agency you can get because they care so much about the children they look after'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Personnel files for the staff team contain evidence that the full range of pre appointment checks have been carried out.

What they could do better:

Panel membership could be more clearly represented in written Procedures.

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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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 Health and Development needs of children and young people in placement are given very good attention.

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

EVIDENCE:

Carers and children in questionnaires and during visits demonstrated a very good awareness of the need to live healthy lifestyles, through healthy eating and exercise. Children said 'My carer has always been good at teaching me to be healthy'. 'My carer and I do shopping and cooking together'. 'They teach me to have a healthy diet'. 'They are concerned about my health'. 'I eat vegetables here, like broccoli and peas and sometimes I eat salad'. 'I take good exercise'. One child said 'I do not like healthy food'.

Although the Agency does not maintain a separate Health Passport as such for children placed, carers and supervising social workers produce an excellent monthly Health Report. These reports were seen on children's files during the Inspection and summarise the health information that is recorded in carer logs. The report includes confirmation of medical appointments, illnesses and accidents, medication given and all health related information. Carers complete separate charts when children are prescribed medication. The Managers noted that some children might bring with them a Health Passport

provided to them by their placing Local Authority at time of placement, and that these would be completed accordingly.

The Carer Handbook includes good information about Healthcare needs and includes a very good Child Development Chart. Very good training opportunities are provided to staff and carers, and more recently for children and young people. Training this year has included First Aid (for adults and children), Drug Awareness, Child Development and Health Matters. The Agency plans to focus special activities and projects next year, for children and carers, on Healthy Lifestyles and to provide some training on Sexual Health.

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, 10

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The Agency works hard to ensure that children and young people are well matched to safe placements.

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

EVIDENCE:

Recruitment files for staff and Fostering Panel members looked at, were well-organised and contained evidence of the full range of required checks taking place.

Evidence of Health and Safety checks were seen on file, routinely undertaken at time of Annual Review and sometimes discussed in carer supervision. Health and Safety checklists now include Fire Plans. Safe Care policies are drawn up, within a Family/Household policy at time of carer Assessment. While those seen were thorough and well considered there was little evidence

that they were being referred to or reviewed on the occasions of a new placement being made. Safe Care training is provided to carers, and Staying Safe issues are discussed at the time of carer Annual Reviews. It is suggested that the Safe Care Policy could be more actively utilised for placements and generally be given a higher profile. Carers visited provided a very good standard of care and demonstrated a good understanding of the principle of Safe Care. One young person spontaneously came into the room during the Inspector's visit to check with her carers that she could access the Internet for homework. The carers confirmed that the children always let them know if they need to use the Internet.

The Agency provides good quality training for carers and staff about Child Protection and the Impact of Abuse. Carers spoke very enthusiastically and positively about the impact of this training on how they carried out the day-to-day fostering task. Carers, staff and Fostering Panel members were very impressed with a recent training event 'Post Traumatic Stress' led by an international speaker and author, looking at how providing care to children who have suffered significant loss and trauma can adversely effect the carer. Carers also commented on the value of Therapeutic Crisis and Team Teach training in helping them understand and respond to difficult behaviours.

The Agency has in place clear written Matching Policy and utilises a Matching Matrix. The Matrix was fully implemented on the children's files looked at. Placement Agreements are also linked to Care Plans and there was evidence that the needs of each placement had been fully considered against the strengths and skills of individual carers. Shortfalls identified were accounted for and supported. The Agency demonstrated a real commitment to careful matching, and there was evidence of planned introductions for some children tracked.

The performance of the Agency is supported and monitored by a very well constituted, representative Fostering Panel that includes a young person who has experience of being fostered as a child. The Panel observed was chaired with authority by a Panel Chair who has significant past experience in Child Care and Child Protection work. Panel members were facilitated to fully contribute and related well to carers attending. Issues were appropriately identified and discussed and during Annual Reviews a good balance of consideration was given to both children's needs, and to carer needs and development. The Managers were advised to make clearer some issues, and to confirm Panel membership and respective roles, within the Agency's written Panel Procedures

No complaints have been registered with regard to the Agency since the last Inspection.

Questionnaire Feedback from Professionals involved with Alliance Foster Care included the comment 'The Agency is meticulous in ensuring that children are kept safe'.

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, 13

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

The Agency provides an excellent level of support to carers and children to promote educational achievement and enjoy leisure activities.

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

EVIDENCE:

The Carer Handbook gives good attention to the day-to-day care needs of Black and Ethnic Minority Children and provides information about the celebration of important religious Festivals. Carers and staff have attended for training on how to positively support children's ethnicity and cultural heritage, and a special training workshop event has been commissioned for children and young people next year about Diversity and Identity. In December there is a special DJ Workshop for girls, run by a professional female DJ where they will experiment with the use of sound equipment and develop DJ music skills, and have an 'enjoyable time' while developing confidence.

Carer's who provide placements for children who have a disability confirmed that they are supported well by the staff team, through additional resources,

training and information. One carer looking after a child with autism had of her own volition made links with local networks and utilised the Internet to learn more about the condition and to better understand the child's needs.

Alliance Foster Care maintains a Life Chances budget that can be accessed to support children to access extra tuition for school subjects or e.g. music lessons and try out new activities. Additional tuition was being provided in both cases tracked and fully supported by committed carers. Carers commented about the lasting impact of last year's Reading Trail project, and how this had encouraged their children to read and to continue reading.

The new Part Time Youth Worker is currently collating the returns from a survey sent out to all children, asking them about the activities they currently undertake and those that they would like to 'have a try at' if they had the chance. The Managers hope that the results will provide good information about the uptake of healthy activities and interests and how these should be promoted in the future.

Within the Alliance Foster Care team there is a Resource Worker who actively supports placed children within their school placements. The Agency aims to provide all children placed with an Education Plan within seven days of them being placed. This will commence the process for any further Personal Education Plan. All children placed with Alliance have a Personal Education Plan. The Resource Worker intervenes and monitors situations where children are experiencing difficulties within their school. Monthly Education Meetings are held with senior staff and Managers to discuss all placements where extra Education support might be necessary. Monthly Education reports are maintained by Supervising Social Workers using carer logs and other records to summarize all educational events for that month, and include PEP targets, school events and achievements.

An I.T. advisor, employed by the Agency is available to carers and children for help and advice when computer problems arise. Colourful newsletters also provide very good accessible inclusions about school, activities and recognition of individual achievements. Young people also write about their experiences. Recently at the start of the new term the newsletter contained two pages of helpful 'bite size tips' for children starting or returning to school.

Children in questionnaires said 'I get help with Homework and I do it the day I get it'. 'I get lots of help from my carers'. 'I did a project in the school holiday'. 'My carers reward me for my achievements and help me with my school life. They tell me how important me education is'.

Questionnaire Feedback from Professionals involved with Alliance Foster Care included the comment 'We have seen some very positive educational achievements'.

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, 11

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**.

Children are well supported to have contact with their family and friends where appropriate.

Alliance Foster Care prioritizes consultation with children and young people to ensure that their views and wishes are taken into account.

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

EVIDENCE:

All children have a contact plan, confirmed at time of placement. The monthly record of contact monitors all contact events and any issues arising. Arrangements for exchange of cards and presents are also clarified on the contact plan. Contact was seen to be appropriately supported and managed, and carers had a good awareness of the potential impact of contact for some children.

The Agency undertook a major Summer Project this year, involving children, young people, carers and staff. Children and carers visited were very happy about the outcomes from the project and how it had been managed. Children over eight were invited to complete a project, in any format, about anything

they wished. A special launch day was arranged and carers and children of all abilities attended for separate 'motivational' workshops. Following this resources were provided that could be 'purchased' with tokens for the children to undertake their projects. Over the summer period the projects were completed and all children were rewarded with a trip to Alton Towers and a party with a prize. The Inspector looked at the completed projects and was very impressed with the range of subjects chosen for the very colourful projects. Children collated projects on wild life, sea life, football, dogs, cats, themselves and one used KNEX to complete his project. One young person had produced her own book; another made a folder all about sign language. One young child made a nursery rhyme in collage. This was an excellent undertaking on behalf of the Agency, carers, staff and children and has been recently featured in a national fostering magazine.

There was good evidence that the Agency consults with children in a meaningful way. Support groups and events for children are set up to seek their views about a variety of issues, and they are asked what they think about activities and training. Children are helped to participate in their own reviews and to give feedback about their placements at the time of carer Annual Reviews.

Children said about consultation.' I can talk to my carers'. 'They pay attention'. 'They listen to me'. 'They ask what I think about a situation and take it into consideration'. 'We talk very often'. 'I get treated very fairly and sometimes I get spoiled, but I love it'. 'She is so considerate'. 'If I need to speak to someone they are always there'. 'She sits down and listens to me and we discuss things'.

Questionnaire Feedback from Professionals involved with Alliance Foster Care included the comment 'Alliance are very strong advocates for children. They represent children and their views very well'. 'I am impressed with the positive regard Alliance have for both carers and children'.

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, 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**

Young people are very well supported to develop independence skills. Carer allowances are paid in advance, and some additional allowances are made available.

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

EVIDENCE:

Managers and staff demonstrated a real commitment to supporting young people through transition from foster care into their adult life and independence and were very aware of the impact of their vulnerability at this time.

A part time Youth Development Worker has been appointed and this worker will support young people to develop their independent living skills utilising a very good pack, which is given to young people aged fourteen, and over. The Skills Pack works through a significant range of every day tasks and skills that young people will need to acquire for adult life, and the new worker will work together with carers and young people to 'practice and sign off' identified skills. Young people visited were being appropriately encouraged to do things for themselves and to take some responsibility for keeping their bedrooms tidy.

The Agency pays carers one week in advance through a reputable computerised payment system. The Managers work positively with Local Authorities and carers, to negotiate payments for 'big' holidays. Additional financial resources can be requested through supervising social workers from the Life Chances budget, for additional tuition and lessons, music and drama classes etc.

The Carer Handbook provides good information about the breakdown of allowances, and advice on tax and insurance matters.

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, 4, 16, 17, 24, 25

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**

A strong Management Team, that actively seeks to promote and monitor positive outcomes for children in placement, leads the Fostering Service in an open inclusive manner. Staff and carers are very well supported.

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

EVIDENCE:

The service provided by Alliance Foster Care is clearly detailed in the Agency Statement of Purpose. Children and young people are provided with booklets, leaflets and an excellent interactive CD Rom about being in foster care, with advice about where to seek help if necessary.

Very good systems are in place and are being developed, to monitor the work of the Agency and to measure placement outcomes for children. A new database has been purchased to assist the Management Team to monitor the activity of the service. The Management Team is well qualified and meet on a monthly basis discuss monthly activity reports that include key performance indicators.

The staff group are appropriately qualified and sufficient to meet the needs of carers, children and young people. Some of the Managers also hold a small caseload. Very good staff and carer support systems are in place and staff spoken to report that they felt valued and had been provided with solid induction programmes, and with excellent training opportunities, some provided by BAAF. There is a clear Management structure and a strong administrative team who receive the same level of support and supervision as qualified staff. The Managers confirmed that they plan to undertake all staff appraisals at the same time early next year in order to link staff personal objectives with the setting of the annual objectives for the Agency. There has been no increase in carers this year, and the Agency continues to undertake recruitment initiatives.

The Agency continues to promote good relationships with Placing Authorities and seek to achieve strategic commissioning partnerships with some. Professional staff from Local Authorities commented in questionnaires 'I am impressed with the quality of care provided by the Agency's foster carers'. 'An

excellent standard of care is provided by Agency carers'. 'I find the Agency approachable honest and thorough'. 'It is my view that they are driven totally by the best interests of children in all they do'. 'I have been very impressed with Alliance commitment to providing a service of the highest quality'.

Carers were unequivocal about their appreciation of the support they are provided with. Very good training programmes are provided and a there is a very good take up of these. Carers can apply to undertake NVQ level 3 after three years service, and with evidence of attendance for nine key courses. NVQ 3 achievement is recognised by an additional skills payment. Carers told the Inspector that the most important element of support for them was having 'someone you know, who knows the child, at the end of the phone at any time of the day, even if it is 4.a.m. Christmas morning'. Other comments included 'They care'. 'They value children'. They couldn't do more, they offer all I look for in an Agency'. 'I have been with them from the start, they actually know the child'. 'We get help 24/7 and on occasions someone has come out to us and stayed until 11 p.m. to help us through a difficult situation'. 'Support is second to none'. These are only a small sample of the very positive comments made by carers about the Agency.

Agency records looked at were of an excellent standard. Carer and children's files were very well organised and maintained, with very good accounting of children's placements and carer supervision and support. Essential planning documents were on file, and evidence to indicate that where Local Authorities did not provide these there were systems for chasing these. At the front of carer files there is an excellent chronological list of all contacts made with the carers. Files are routinely audited and outcomes of audits looked at by Managers. Very good administrative systems are in place and files are securely stored.

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	3
6	3
8	4
9	4
15	3
30	3

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	4
29	3

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	4
2	X
4	4
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	X

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

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line

Telephone: 0845 015 0120 or 0191 233 3323

Textphone: 0845 015 2255 or 0191 233 3588

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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