



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

East Sussex Fostering Service

**St Mary`s House
52 St Leonards Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3UU**

Lead Inspector
Corrie McKeown

Announced Inspection
21st November 2005 10:00

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	East Sussex Fostering Service
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Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	East Sussex County Council
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Carol Wilkinson
Type of registration	Local Auth Fostering Service
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 11th October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service is responsible for the recruitment, preparation, assessment, supervision and support of foster carers and provides a duty service for the placement of looked after children with foster carers. At the time of the inspection there were approximately 350 children and young people placed with foster carers who are the responsibility of East Sussex Fostering Service, including the Family Link Scheme that provides respite care for children with learning disabilities, a service managed within the Children's Disability Team. The Fostering Plus and Treatment Plus Services provide placements for children and young people whose package of care includes specific specialist support. Where placements cannot be made within the Fostering Services own resources, Independent Fostering Agencies that have been approved as preferred providers by the fostering service are used.

The Service for all of the East Sussex is now based in Eastbourne and is part of a joint Services for Children, replacing the former Social Services and Education departments. A new Operations Manager has recently been appointed and Teresa Lavelle-Hill, one of the Heads of Service for Looked After Children is the agency decision maker with regard to recommendations made by the fostering panel. A Practice Manager, who in turn is managed by the Operations Manager for the Children's Disability Service, manages the Family Link Scheme. The Fostering Panel is responsible for recommending the approval of all carers and changes to their approval status, including those who are part of the Family Link Scheme. The panel chair is the Head of Safeguarding Children in East Sussex Social Services Department.

SUMMARY

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

The inspection was announced and carried out by three inspectors over four days, with some consultation activities taking place beforehand. Feedback was received from foster carers and young people by meeting with Inspectors at events, meetings, in their own homes and by completing questionnaires. Fostering service staff were interviewed individually and in teams during the week of the inspection and at a holiday activity programme horse-riding event. The findings of the last inspection, carried out in October 2004 were that the fostering service delivered by East Sussex County Council is of a high standard, consequently this inspection was conducted with 'a lighter touch' concentrating on key standards identified by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). This document should therefore be read in conjunction with the previous report to gain a complete picture.

What the service does well:

The service as a whole has significantly improved over the past three years and this year the evidence shows that trend is continuing. A high standard of provision has continued in a seamless manner despite changes in the overall management structure and the Operations Manager for the service. The health of the young people is closely monitored, and improvements to health support identified last year have continued. Foster carers in the Link service are very aware of the complex health needs of the young people and work well with parents to ensure they are met. Safety is high on everyone's agenda, with a professional approach to safeguarding children and thorough assessments of potential foster carers, this is supported by a programme of training, supervision and a strong fostering panel. Valuing diversity is a theme promoted in all areas of service delivery. Improved educational outcomes for Looked-After Children have been achieved again this year in examination results and a network of support continues to be offered by a strengthened TEST team, for those young people experiencing placement difficulties. Foster carers show a strong commitment to promoting contact for the young people with their family and friends and in particular this year, evidence shows that in individual cases young people's views are being strenuously supported. Consultation was again found to be a strength of the organisation with the Foster Care Association playing a leading role on behalf of carers and reviews being well attended by all parties.

The service is staffed with well-qualified, enthusiastic and dedicated personnel at every level. The placement team make good matching decisions and the supervising social workers, caseworkers and foster carers work well together to offer the young people a secure network of support. This was particularly remarked on in much of the feedback received from foster parents, one example being 'help is available at all times, a prompt response when you phone and support for my own children as well when they need it'.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Carers report that information about the young people and the introductory process as a whole has improved. The quality of communication throughout the service has been strengthened, information sharing improved and clarified and there is a strong sense of involvement by all parties. The joint education research project carried out over the past year has generally raised the profile of literacy support at home and specifically improved performance in a number of homes. Pathway plans developed for all young people by the 16+ team are now in place. All relevant training courses are available to staff and foster carers alike and the joint training has been well received by all groups participating.

What they could do better:

Although the social work posts are fully staffed there is a significant shortfall in the number of Link Service foster carers. This has existed for some time and with new financial resources very recently agreed, progress should now be made to meeting the needs of those families awaiting a service. Access to mental health services for children is still slow for a small number of young people.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

12

The health needs of the children placed within the service are identified and met by their carers and a wide range of professionals.

EVIDENCE:

The health needs of the young people are identified when they enter the service and although detailed health histories continue to be difficult to access, foster carers report an improvement in the amount of information they receive, particularly valuing chronologies when they are supplied. Foster carers and health professionals carry out ongoing health monitoring, with regular medical, dental and optical checks documented on children's files; these and other concerns are monitored at reviews. The chief reviewing officer confirmed this and reports were held on children's files. When speaking with foster carers it is clear that they are diligent and persistent when carrying out their role in these matters. They are supported by a wide range of therapists and clinicians accessed through the fostering service from the time of referral; these include nurses, psychotherapists, counsellors, play, art and speech therapists. For much of the past year only one of the three LAC clinicians has been in post, but managers report that other practitioners have been commissioned to meet the shortfall. According to carers access to the CAMHS team continues to be slow, except in acute cases.

As local authority services for children and young people work more closely together, protocols regarding the sharing of health information are being drawn up, to ensure the best outcomes for the young people and protect their rights to confidentiality. Training programmes continue to provide information and skills to staff and foster carers regarding a wide range of health issues, including some specifically requested to meet particular needs, including autism, attachment theory, sexual health and teenage pregnancy.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

3,6,8,9,15 and 30.

Children and young people placed in foster care are kept safe and their welfare is protected. This is the result of sound policies and procedures, dedicated and high quality staff and foster carers and a matching process that results in few breakdowns. The fostering panel act together to offer a high level of scrutiny to the whole process.

EVIDENCE:

Previous inspections have highlighted an experienced and knowledgeable management team, well able to manage the fostering service. Necessary checks, references and evidence of qualifications have been seen and meet the requirements as set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

A number of foster carers were visited as part of this inspection, as well as during previous inspections. Home environments were noted to be appropriate for the needs of the children placed, with adequate furnishing and decoration and being maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The service undertakes high quality, comprehensive assessments as part of the process of being approved as a foster carer, which includes a risk assessment of the home environment. This is then reviewed on an annual basis, as well as when necessary, i.e. pets living in the home or when children with particular characteristics are placed together. These assessments were viewed on file. Foster carers are provided with basic training on health and safety issues as

part of their induction, but they also have ongoing opportunities to update this training on more specific issues dependent upon need. Overall, children are being placed in homes that are safe and healthy, and where standards of care are regularly monitored by supervising Social Workers and Support Workers.

The service attempts to carefully match children with foster carers who are capable of meeting the child's assessed needs and appears to have a high degree of success in finding satisfactory matches. This is reflected through the low number of disruptions as well as the high number of children moving in to more permanent care arrangements. Six disruptions were recorded since May 2005, all due to developmental or external issues impacting upon the viability of the placement. The fostering service has also developed clear criteria for the use of Independent Fostering Agencies and there is a preferred provider list in place with those agencies having had to meet clear performance indicators. Ultimate decision making for matching needs rests with the locality social worker for the child, however the fostering service provide a great deal of expertise and personal knowledge about carers abilities. One example of this was demonstrated through a regular meeting – Children Awaiting Placements – where workers were able to discuss a child's needs and carer's abilities. Documentation was noted that collated information about children's needs in order to inform a suitable match. The service may wish to consider a framework for capturing and recording the success they have achieved in this area. However the service does recognise that they have a shortfall in respect of appropriate matches for black and ethnic minority children, teenagers and mother and baby placements and a strategy is in place to address this shortfall.

The Fostering Service is committed to protecting the children placed by them from abuse and neglect. Clear policies and procedures are in place, examples being the East Sussex Child Protection Procedures, Care and Control, Safe Caring and Children Who Go Missing From Care, which guide operational practice. A committed and experienced team uphold these policies and procedures. Training is provided to all foster carers about protecting children, and includes training on signs and indicators of abuse and attending child protection conferences. Discussion with foster carers highlighted that this training was valued and worthwhile. The Foster Care Association has a dedicated support worker available to support foster carers where there has been an allegation of abuse made against them; however not all foster carers were aware of this resource. The management team, along with the Panel provide monitoring and scrutiny of child protection issues. The local authority employ an Anti-Bullying Officer who is able to advise the fostering service if needed.

Previous inspections of local authority services have shown that all the appropriate recruitment checks and vetting procedures are followed in practice when recruiting staff to the fostering service. The new manager is satisfied that all staff used by the service have appropriate CRB checks in place.

The Fostering Panel operate with Practice Guidelines and Terms of Reference meeting the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002. Discussion with the Panel Chair revealed that a small number of changes had been made to the panel, widening the areas of expertise that now include experience of disability and black and ethnic minority issues. Training is planned for January 2006 with the aim of reviewing their remit, in order to offer those members recently recruited the opportunity to revisit and clarify their role with other panel members. Discussion with a selection of foster carers highlighted that attending the Panel can be an intimidating and stressful experience, however all recognised that it was an essential and important part of ensuring children's welfare is safeguarded.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

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

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

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

7,13 and 31.

Diversity issues are a prominent part of the service recruitment plans. Efforts to raise achievements in education are continuing to be successful and respite care arrangements are characterised by very positive working partnerships. There continues to be a serious shortage of Link carers.

EVIDENCE:

Equality and diversity issues are addressed in policies throughout the fostering service and particularly in the recruitment and training of staff and carers. Specific recruitment targets have been set to address the shortage of black and minority ethnic carers and valuing diversity is part of every carer's Preparation for Fostering schedule. East Sussex County Council has two Equality Officers, one of whom specialises in services for children and supports the fostering service recruitment officer in seeking the services of a range of foster carers to meet the identified gaps in provision. Any young people placed with foster parents who are not an ideal match, are offered additional support from suitable adults elsewhere in the service, or from outside organisations. The Link service has been specially set up to cater for children with significant disabilities and the staff and foster carers are recruited with the skills and experience to meet their needs. The service provided is of a high standard with training and support provided to foster carers who forge very helpful working relationships with parents, but there is a serious shortage of foster carers in this area. Currently support is provided to over 45 young people but a similar number are identified as in need of a service; some outreach support is being offered in the meantime and possible options are being considered making greater use of existing carers in the service.

The educational achievements of Looked-After Children in East Sussex have received a great deal of attention in the last three years and examination results this year show another overall improvement; these and other achievements are celebrated and rewarded. Support continues to be available from the TEST team for young people out of school or in danger of their placement breaking down. The team has been strengthened this year with the services of an Educational Psychologist, who is able to fast track assessments for those with special educational needs and offer advice and training. One case of a child being out of school for nearly a year, putting excessive strain on his carers, clearly demonstrated a need for some significant input, he is now suitably placed. Foster carers and other staff have taken part in training to improve their ability to support their children's literacy and numeracy at home and also enable them to campaign on their behalf. One carer recounted a situation where knowing the timescales attached to children out of school, played a significant part in persuading a headmaster to admit her foster child. The research project funded by the Paul Hamlin Foundation to examine the extent of literary support in foster homes has been completed, with the report due early next year. Some of the foster carers involved have clearly gained new skills during the sessions and generally awareness of the importance of home support has been raised. Another example of support was provided by the Foster Care Association, which raised funds for 13 computers to be placed in homes where younger children will benefit.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10 and 11.

Foster carers commit a great deal of time and effort to ensure contact arrangements are honoured. The fostering service encourages feedback from all those associated with the service and incorporates those ideas into the future operation.

EVIDENCE:

Clear arrangements for contact were found on file as part of the foster care agreements and both children and their foster carers reported that meetings go ahead largely as planned. Financial support is available to enable carers to transport young people for contact. Risk assessments are undertaken if these meetings are difficult and outcomes for the child are fed back by foster carers to the local authority social workers, alongside a written record on file.

Training is offered to help them understand the needs and rights of the young people in this situation, as an early part of the foster carers' preparation. The views of the young people are given weight, especially at reviews, although a few young people reported it sometimes takes a while for their social worker to put requested arrangements in place. In one case advocacy was arranged with the appointment of a guardian to support a young child in resisting contact with a sibling, having shared her feelings with her foster mother. Young people in foster care have access to the independent advocacy service, X-Press Advocacy.

Foster children and young people are consulted by the service in a number of ways. When speaking to them it was clear that younger children prefer to talk to their foster parents and older children use a wider range of people including parents, teachers, caseworkers and social workers; they are also asked for their views at statutory reviews. Two young people consulted were members

of the Children's Forum, set up to represent the views of children looked after in East Sussex. They are asked to contribute their views on a number of subjects and said that they feel they make a difference and that 'the service really want to know what we think'. One example offered of their ideas being implemented is that now a photograph of prospective foster carers is shown to a child as part of their introduction. Foster parents views are also sought from the time they join the service, when they are asked for feedback on the induction and training programme. According to their support workers they offer their opinions during supervision, at support meetings and reviews, particularly about any further support they feel is desirable for their foster children and the service in general. The Foster Care Association represents their opinions in more formal arenas and a conference is held annually to discuss current topics. Foster carers are also involved in the delivery of the service, taking part in training for new carers and more recently in a group that helps to plan assessments. They enjoy this opportunity and generally there is a strong commitment to the service that comes across in their feedback.

The fostering service staff say that supervision is their main opportunity for offering feedback and new ideas about the way the service is organised, and if a group have discussed an idea they would do the same, approaching their line manager. There were a number of examples where this has happened involving caseworkers and the duty team and generally a strong commitment to providing the best placements and outcomes for children was evident.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

14 and 29.

Young people are prepared for adulthood in a number of ways by their foster carers and the 16 plus team. Information sharing between these two groups could be improved. Foster carers are paid their allowances promptly.

EVIDENCE:

As part of their training foster carers report they are required to encourage young people to develop appropriate independence skills from an early age. They are also made aware of issues around self-esteem and how to help build that, especially in teenagers, by improving their skills of self-management. The Leaving Care Team has now been renamed the 16 Plus Team in order to be clearer about their task of supporting all young people when they reach that age, as they work towards independence. They work primarily with the young people and work hard to involve them all, including those who move out of the care system at the first opportunity, doing their best to stay in touch in case they are needed. When consulted during the inspection, foster parents of younger children placed on a permanent basis were unclear about arrangements for support when young people reach the age of 16. When this was fed back to the manager of the service, arrangements were made to distribute a booklet to the foster cares, which gave details of how the young people's status changes at 16 and how the 16 Plus team will be supporting them. More information is shared with them as this age approaches. A good practice recommendation made at the last inspection relating to this Standard remains in place, to encourage greater sharing of information between the 16 Plus team and foster carers.

Foster carers reported no problems regarding the payment of allowances. Some discussion was held around travel payments for contact visits, but managers clarified that this information is distributed annually to foster carers.

Management

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17,21 and 24.

In most areas there are adequate numbers of staff and foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people and they are suitably qualified with a range of experience. The service has identified a shortfall of suitable foster carers in some areas but has failed to address this shortage in the Link service.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service staff and foster carers are clearly working hard to meet the demands of the service. They are suitably qualified for the positions they hold and present as an experienced and enthusiastic team, working together very well. Retention of staff is good with regular training, supervision and good support offered throughout the service. The service has identified a shortfall of carers to match the needs of teenagers with challenging behaviour, children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and young mothers with babies; for these groups a targeted recruitment strategy has been devised and included in the service business plan. The Link service has a significant shortage of carers, but this does not appear to be addressed in the same way. During the inspection extra funding was announced for this area, this will hopefully result in a significantly larger number of families receiving a service. The assessment process for carers has been maintained at the high standard identified in last year's report, with detailed evidence available on file. The chair of the fostering panel made a similar assessment and felt the service was recruiting high quality carers.

The strategy for supporting carers is very successful. This was particularly remarked on in the questionnaires returned by foster carers, with comments such as 'efficient, supportive and realistic' 'a font of knowledge' 'encouraging and complimentary' 'always a prompt response' and 'a good employer'. These responses indicate that many support social workers and caseworkers go out of their way to ensure carers feel they are not working alone in difficult circumstances. They also remarked on the recognition they feel they now receive from the service with small thank-you gifts from time-to-time. These efforts extend to the foster carers' own children, who are offered outings and the opportunity to meet with other children who foster. The training programme covers basic courses for new carers and more advanced and specialised training, that is available to all staff employed in the service, such as information about autism, teenage pregnancy and courses for men who foster. An increasing number of carers have achieved the NVQ Level 3 in the Caring for Children and Young People, with some going on to gain their assessors award. The service is also able to respond to individual requests for particular training, in order to meet the needs of young people who have not been ideally matched, for example access to information when caring for children from a minority ethnic background.

Case records compiled by carers and social workers were viewed, they were detailed, comprehensive and included records of unannounced visits.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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	3
29	4

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

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? No

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS17	19	A sufficient number of suitable foster carers must be recruited within the Link Service.	01/10/06

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	FS3	That a framework for capturing and recording the success achieved in matching is devised.
2	FS14	That the role of the 16 Plus Team is made clear to foster carers in their initial training and when they are assessed for permanency.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

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