



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Five Rivers Family Placement Scheme

**Unit 4
The Lions Rest
Station Road
Exminster
Devon
EX6 8DZ**

Lead Inspector
Romana Young

Announced Inspection
4 – 20 December 2006 10:00 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

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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	Five Rivers Family Placement Scheme
Address	Unit 4 The Lions Rest Station Road Exminster Devon EX6 8DZ
Telephone number	01392 824819
Fax number	01392 825797
Email address	fpsdevonandcornwall@five-rivers.org
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	The Midhurst Group Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Pauline Therese Phillips
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection July 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Five Rivers Family Placement Scheme in Devon and Cornwall is an independent fostering service providing the following range of foster care services:

- Long term or permanent care
- Time limited or temporary care
- Emergency care
- Parent and child care

The service is part of Five Rivers Family Placement Service, which is an national independent provider of residential childcare services, aiming to provide professional, sustained, and suitable fostering and residential placements, and other supporting services (for example, education, supervision of contact, or initial therapeutic assessments) for children and young people with needs that require a specialist service.

At the time of this inspection visit, the service had 53 approved fostering households in the local and unitary authorities of Devon, Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall, caring for 48 children and young people, from these and other areas of the South West, London and the South East, the Midlands and Wales. Five of these placements were parent and child placements and four were sibling placements. 60% of the approved fostering households have at least one child of the household aged less than 18 years living at home. 60% of the approved fostering households are approved to take more than one child (not of the same family) at any one time - 38% are approved to take up to two children and young people who are not siblings and 22% are approved to take up to three. Another 20% of the approved fostering households are approved to take two or more children if they are of the same gender and siblings. 28% of approved fostering households are approved to take parent and child placements.

The service is based in Exeter, with a newly opened sub-office in Truro. The service employs fourteen people, on a full-time or part-time basis, organised into three geographically based teams, which include the registered manager of the service, two practice managers, four qualified social workers, four family support workers, a training coordinator and two administrative support staff. The service also employs a further four locum qualified social workers on a sessional basis.

SUMMARY

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

This was an announced proportionate key inspection to assess the fostering service's operation in line with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations, and ascertain a baseline quality rating.

One inspector undertook this inspection over six days, between 4 and 20 December 2006 inclusive. During the course of this inspection, the inspector visited the main fostering service office base in Exeter, and the newly opened sub-office in Truro, and interviewed:

- The registered manager of the fostering service
- The two practice managers
- One of the supervising social workers
- The administrative support staff

The inspector also met with a group of foster carers at a foster home in Plymouth, and a second group at the Truro sub-office, and observed a meeting of the fostering panel, held at the Five Rivers school in Salisbury, and, following this interviewed the fostering panel chairperson.

The inspector visited two foster homes and spoke with the foster carers and two of the three children and young people living there. One of the young people did not wish to take the opportunity to speak with an inspector and so was not interviewed. The inspector also spoke with an adult child of one of the foster carers who is still living at home.

Two foster carers, two children's and two staff files were inspected, along with other documentation provided to the inspector, which included the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment (AQAA); Appendix to PQA: policy and systems update; the statement of purpose; children's guides; foster carer handbook 2006-2007; policies and procedures 2006-2007; registers of foster carers, children placed and staff; foster carer training programme for 2006; four foster carer assessment and three foster carer annual review reports considered by the fostering panel the inspector observed; and minutes of previous fostering panel meetings.

The responses in the 23 foster carers', 12 young people's, 14 placing social workers' and 3 parents' survey questionnaires returned were analysed and also used to inform the judgements made in this inspection report.

The inspector thanks the fostering service staff and foster carers, particularly those who welcomed the inspector into their homes, for their cooperation and assistance with this inspection.

What the service does well:

Foster carers feel that Five Rivers is a very professional organisation, focussed on providing the best care and support possible to the children and young people in its care. They described the supervising social workers and fostering support workers who are working directly with them, and the children and young people, as knowledgeable, experienced, approachable, friendly, and reliable. They feel they are given excellent relevant training, and sound and professional advice and guidance, which they can access at any time. They say that the service takes great care when matching children with them and their family, and that they feel that this ensures good placement stability and good outcomes for children and young people. Foster carers said that the service provides them with all the information it can about the needs of the children and young people placed with them, so that they can care for them properly. They said the service is also very supportive to them in helping the children and young people they care for achieve educationally, and undertake activities in the community. The inspector found the foster carers to be child-focussed, and committed to providing a safe, stable, and caring family environment for the children and young people in their care.

Children and young people feel well cared for in their foster home. They also feel that foster carers listen to them, give them good support with their education and planning for their future, and encourage them to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Placing social workers feel that the service provides good quality family based care for children and young people, with suitably trained, well supported, and committed foster carers. They feel that the service communicates well with them, and takes care to find good matches between the child or young person and their foster carer. They feel that the service is responsive to children's needs, is very good at involving children and young people in decisions about their day-to-day lives, and excellent at ensuring stability for children and young people. They view the service as excellent in supporting children and young people to achieve in education and enabling a child to be healthy and have a healthy lifestyle, and very good at enabling children and young people to undertake activities in the community. Social workers feel that the service is excellent at making sure that children and young people are well cared for.

The staff group is experienced and highly competent. Practice in the areas of the assessment, approval, and support of foster carers is of a high standard.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The service has expanded geographically, and in numbers of approved fostering households, children placed, and staffing, since the last inspection visit. As a consequence of this, the service has been reorganised into three teams, and has just opened an satellite office base in Cornwall to provide closer administrative support to staff and foster carers in Cornwall and Plymouth and an alternative, and more accessible meeting and training venue for staff and foster carers in these areas, to the main office in Exeter.

The service has introduced support groups specifically for male foster carers. Male foster carers told the inspector that that they welcomed this support, find it helpful, and think it is a very good development.

Recording, filing and referral management systems, policies and procedures, and the foster carer handbook and children's guide have all been reviewed and updated since the last inspection visit. Foster carers are now supplied with a lockable box for storing confidential information securely.

What they could do better:

Some people have commenced working for the service before all the required checks have been returned – this is not good practice and should not be allowed to happen. Also the service should ensure that it undertakes a new CRB check on all persons seeking to work for the service and not rely on checks undertaken by another employer.

The service should have robust management systems in place to ensure that reviews of foster carers' approvals and at least one unannounced visit by the supervising social worker are being undertaken at intervals of not more than one year.

The fostering service provider should ensure that the agenda set for fostering panels is not too arduous in content and that there is sufficient time available for panel members to give due consideration to each assessment and review.

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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Achieving Economic Wellbeing

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Scoring of Outcomes

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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 **good**.

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

There are good systems in place to ensure that information about children and young people's health needs is obtained, and shared with foster carers appropriately, and that each child or young person is accessing suitable health care provision.

EVIDENCE:

Discussions with foster carers and responses in the foster carer questionnaire survey confirmed that foster carers are clear about their role in terms of helping to promote the health of any child or young person in their care and that they are provided with good advice and guidance in this area. The foster carers the inspector spoke with said that the service requires them to undertake certificated first aid training which includes first aid specifically relating to babies and young children.

In the questionnaire survey, young people reported that they get good advice and support from their foster carers about healthy living - particularly regarding healthy eating and personal hygiene.

Placing social workers feel that the service is good at enabling a child to be healthy and have a healthy lifestyle – over 60% of the social workers who responded to the questionnaire survey think this service is excellent in this area.

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 and 30

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

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

There are very good systems in place for the assessment, approval, and support of foster carers. Recruitment procedures generally meet the requirements to ensure that only people who are suitable to work with children and young people are recruited to the service, but the service should ensure no person commences employment with the service until all the required checks are fully completed.

EVIDENCE:

All the children and young people who responded to the questionnaire survey said that they always feel well cared for in their foster home. The foster homes visited were warm, homely, comfortable, well furnished, and well maintained. In one of the foster homes visited, one young person agreed to show the inspector their bedroom, which they said they liked and it was found to be comfortably and suitably furnished.

Foster carers were very positive about working for the service and their role, knowledgeable about the needs of the children and young people they provide

care for, and keen to provide a safe, caring, high quality service to children and young people in need.

Foster carers reported that the service gives them all the information it can about the needs of the children and young people they look after, so that they can care for them suitably and safely. They reported that the matching and introduction processes are done carefully and thoroughly. All of the foster carers who responded to the foster carer questionnaire survey thought that the service was good (39%), or excellent (61%), at ensuring that they can meet the needs of children and young people placed with them. All of foster carers who responded to the questionnaire survey thought that the service was adequate or better at supporting them in caring for the children they look after - 30% said the service's performance here was good and 65% said it was excellent. 50% of the foster carers who responded think that they get good support, and 50% think that that they get excellent support, from the service in maintaining placements so that children and young people only move in a planned way.

Placing social workers feel that the service is excellent at ensuring stability for children and young people. One social worker said, "(The service) provides stable, well supported placements" and another commented, "The carers are very committed to the success of the placement".

Checks on foster files showed that written foster carer agreements, placement agreements and safe care plans were in place.

Examination of two files held on staff employed by the service since the last inspection visit, and discussions with the registered manager and staff, confirmed the recruitment procedure followed and that the required checks are being undertaken. However, there was evidence that some new staff have been allowed to commence working for the service before all the required checks (for example the CRB check) are fully completed and that, in some cases, the service has relied on a CRB undertaken by another employer as evidence of suitability. This is not good practice and should cease. There was evidence that the GSCC registration of qualified social workers is being checked.

The fostering panel observed was quorate, well organised, and conducted in a business like way. The reports were sent out to panel members in advance. It was obvious that all panel members had read this material beforehand, in preparation, and so were able to focus on, and discuss, relevant issues. However, the agenda for the panel, with four assessments and three reviews to consider, was very heavy. It was evident that this amount of information was difficult for panel member to absorb and keep details from the various applications separate in their minds. The inspector feels that, with the other agenda items to consider, this number of applications made the panel members task unduly arduous. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring

that fostering panel agendas are not too overloaded and that sufficient time is allowed to give each report due consideration.

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 recognize 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**.

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

The fostering service ensures that children and young people are given encouragement and support to access the type of education and school that meets their needs and achieve their academic potential. Foster carers receive good training to ensure that they can meet children's cultural, ethnic and special needs.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people reported that they are receiving the right help so that they can be successful in their education. In the questionnaire survey, one young person wrote about the excellent success they have had in improving their academic performance in maths and English and others said that their foster carers give them help and support at home with their school work, or liaise with their teachers if there are things at school which are giving them problems.

Foster carers reported that they receive training on equality and diversity and that they feel that the service is excellent at addressing these issues. One foster carer said that the service had been very supportive in helping them access external training they needed, to properly support the young people they care for, who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Another commented

that they had had excellent training in these areas both before and after approval.

Placing social workers reported that they feel that the service is good at addressing issues of equality and diversity, such as culture, ethnicity and disability, and excellent at supporting children and young people in achieving educationally.

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**.

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

The service has excellent for promoting contact arrangements for the child or young person in line with the care plan produced by the local authority. The service is also excellent at ensuring that children and young people are actively involved in decision making about their day-to-day life and planning for their future.

EVIDENCE:

Foster carers feel that the service is excellent at involving the children and young people that they care for in decisions about their day-to-day lives.

All of the children and young people who responded to the questionnaire survey said that their foster carers always listen to them and take notice of their opinions. Some commented:

- They understand what I am saying.
- My carers always listen to what I have to say.
- I speak my mind and my carers listen because they care and love me.
- They like to know what I've been up to.

The children and young people felt that their social worker listens to them and takes notice of their opinion also.

All of the children and young people said that knew who to speak to if they were not happy or had a personal problem.

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**.

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

There is a system in place for foster carers to be provided with an allowance and agreed expenses to cover the cost of caring for a child or young person placed with them. Foster carers are provided with information on current levels of allowances.

EVIDENCE:

Young people said that they are helped to think about their future and that their foster carers talked to them about the importance of doing as well as they can educationally so that they can get a good job.

Foster carers confirmed that they receive financial assistance to cover the cost of caring for children and young people placed with them and did not report any problems with the payment systems.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are recognize 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 recognize 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, 2, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26

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

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

The management systems for the service are sound and generally well implemented. Records are generally well maintained. The service provides

excellent support and training for foster carers. Staff are well respected by the foster carers and are knowledgeable and competent.

EVIDENCE:

The registered manager, and responsible individual, for the service are unchanged. The service receives support from the Five Rivers head office in relation to financial and administrative processes, general health and safety responsibilities, IT services, and HR and staff recruitment procedures. The registered manager receives professional support and one-to-one supervision from the national fostering manager for Five Rivers, who deputises in her absence.

In general, management of the service is good and the fostering service manager provides good leadership for the service. The biggest issue for staff is management of caseloads, which, they say, with an expanding service and a large rural area to cover, can be difficult to manage at times, with staff sometimes having to accrue a high amount of time owed, in order to meet the demands of their jobs. Current caseloads seem to be a little higher than the 10-12 that managers told the inspector was the expected norm. Staff feel that better access to IT equipment would help them to work more efficiently and manage their workload better. Generally, staff feel that they are suitably supported to do their jobs well and enjoy their work.

Foster carers hold the staff working directly with them, and the children and young people, in high esteem and value the advice and support they are given by the service. They feel the service provides good back-up for them and that they can access support and advice whenever they need to. Foster carers the inspector met with said the level of support they receive is "absolutely brilliant" highly professional and very flexible. Foster carers also commented very positively on the service's compulsory residential introductory training for foster carers, which is held over the course of a weekend. Foster carers said that there is "plenty of on-going training", which is relevant to their needs and that they are also encouraged to undertake NVQ training and other external training they need.

The foster carer assessments, and foster carer review reports, seen were detailed, comprehensive and of a high standard. Discussions with staff and foster carers, and inspection of foster carer files, confirmed that supervising social workers undertake planned visits to support and supervise foster carers, and statutory annual reviews of foster carers' approvals. Some (but not all) foster carers the inspector spoke with said that they had been visited unannounced by the supervising social worker. Foster carer file checks, and review reports presented to the fostering panel, also evidenced that not all foster carers are receiving unannounced visits, at least once per year, from the

supervising social worker, and also that not all foster carer reviews are being undertaken with the correct timescale. A recommendation has been made.

Case records for children and young people, and foster carers, were comprehensive, well organised, and generally appropriately maintained. The required registers were being adequately maintained, although, perhaps, electronic versions would be easier to keep up to date and more comprehensible than the bound book system currently used. Some improvement is needed in the foster carer case records to ensure that they include all of the information specified in paragraph 3 of Regulation 30 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 – for example, the age and gender of each child placed, and the circumstances of the termination of the placement, which were missing from the placement details sheet on the foster carer files inspected. A recommendation has been made.

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	4
9	3
15	2
30	3

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

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

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

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

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	FS25	The fostering service provider should ensure that the information specified in paragraph 3 of Regulation 30 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 is fully included in the case record maintained for each foster carer.
2	FS22	The fostering service provider should ensure that supervising social workers undertake occasional (and at least one per year) unannounced visits to foster carers.
3	FS15	The fostering service provider should ensure that no person commences employment with the service until all the required checks have been fully completed.
4	FS16	The fostering service provider should ensure that there are structure and systems in place to ensure that reviews of the approval of foster carers, undertaken in accordance with Regulation 29 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, are being undertaken at intervals of not more than one year.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Ashburton Office

Unit D1

Linhay Business Park

Ashburton

TQ13 7UP

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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