



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

**Foster Care Associates (North West)**

**Palatine House  
53 Palatine Road  
Didsbury  
Manchester  
M20 3PP**

*Lead Inspector*  
**Sarah Oldham**

*Announced Inspection*  
**23rd January 2006      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](http://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](http://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** Foster Care Associates (North West)

**Address** Palatine House  
53 Palatine Road  
Didsbury  
Manchester  
M20 3PP

**Telephone number** 01527 556480

**Fax number**

**Email address**

**Provider Web address**

**Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)** Foster Care Associates Limited

**Name of registered manager (if applicable)** Isobel Tempest Marshall

**Type of registration** Fostering Agencies

**No. of places registered (if applicable)** 0

**Category(ies) of registration, with number of places**

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

1. FCA (North West) operates a range of fostering services in the North West of England including:  
  
Short-term, long-term, emergency, bridging and assessment placements as well as parent and child placements for 'looked after' children/young people.
2. The agency's key activities are carried out from the regional branch office.  
Area offices do not operate independently and only carry out ancillary activities.
3. The organisation must at all times employ a suitably qualified and experienced manager who is registered with the Commission for Social Care.  
Inspection.

**Date of last inspection**            8th November 2004

## Brief Description of the Service:

Foster Care Associates (FCA) is a national organisation providing family placement to children/young people "looked after" by local authorities. FCA North West head office is located in Didsbury, South Manchester. Since the last inspection the assistant director who is also the fostering service manager had been promoted to the position of Director. As well as the Director there is 1 Deputy Director, 1 Assistant Director, (5) Team Managers, Family Placement Workers (12), Senior Supervising Social Worker responsible for recruitment (1) Administrators, (13) Therapists, (3) and Resource Workers (11), 1 Reviewing Officer, 1 Marketing Officer, 1 Panel Manager, 2 Teachers and 2 Education Workers based within the four (4) North West offices. The offices are Manchester (Head Office), Cumbria, Liverpool, Chorley and Ashton. This inspection focused on the Manchester, Chorley and Liverpool offices. An inspection of the Cumbria office took place in 2003.

The fostering service provides short-term, long-term, emergency, bridging placements, assessment placements as well as parent and child placements for "children/young people looked after" by a range of local authorities. In addition there is a resource service, which is established to provide additional packages of support to children/young people. This ranges from educational programmes intended to support a child/young person in school to supervising contact between a child and their birth parents.

# SUMMARY

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

The inspection took place over a one week period and involved two inspectors. The inspection included an interview with the director, deputy director, team manager, staff and foster carers. A range of policies and documents were viewed. These included the managers self assessment and pre inspection questionnaire which provided additional material.

Visits were made to the homes of three foster carers and some foster children spent time with the inspectors.

Letters and questionnaires were sent to carers and young people aged over 8 and placing social workers.

## **What the service does well:**

The foster carers met at this inspection were very positive about the agency and the support that they provide to the carers and the children that they care for. The foster carers said that the agency ensures that they are visited at least every two weeks with telephone contact on a weekly basis. Support groups were held on a regular basis as well as ongoing training and development.

Questionnaires returned from a placing social worker indicated that the agency provided a high level of support and care for the young people placed. In addition they felt that the foster carers had received a high level of training and were responsive to the needs of the young people placed.

Carers spoken to felt that the support, training and development that they received from the agency was of a good standard. One carer said " the agency is a very good agency to work for and I really feel part of a team". Another said " the support given to me is excellent. I know that I can contact the office for advice and support at any time".

The young people spoken to said that they were happy with their care arrangements and none could identify anything that they wished to change about their placement. One young person said " I feel safe and happy here and want to stay with my new family forever. I really enjoy the outings that we go on and it's nice to have fun with my friends".

The arrangements for the health care needs of the young people were good and the carers were provided with health care information and received training on health related matters.

All carers received training on child protection and all carers have safe care policies, these are reviewed on an annual basis.

The agency placed emphasis on the matching process to ensure that the young person was matched with a foster carer who was able to meet the needs of the young person. Carers spoken to were aware of the importance of the matching process and felt that the agency matched children well.

The agency gives high priority to meeting the educational needs of the children/young people in placement.

The agency supports carers in managing and maintaining contact.

Administration arrangements were good and well organised and the social work staff felt that they were well supported. The administrative records and files were well kept and organised.

## **What has improved since the last inspection?**

The agency has developed a policy on computer storage for the foster carers including the use of password protection.

The agency continues to develop the group for looked after children and the birth children.

## **What they could do better:**

Prior to the inspection the agency had a burglary that resulted in the theft of the computers. The agency did not have a back up server within the office. The agency had addressed this with additional security to the building and appropriate back up servers had been ordered for the office.

At the time of the inspection the agency were preparing to move to new premises to provide additional facilities. These facilities were not viewed as part of the inspection

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](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

## **CONTENTS**

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

# 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

12

The policies, procedures and practice of the staff and carers promoted the health, welfare and development of the children/young people placed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

A random selection of children/young peoples files were viewed and contained detailed health care information from the placing authorities. One file viewed did not have all the information, however there was evidence that the agency had requested this information on a number of occasions and were actively monitoring the responses to the request.

Carers who were interviewed were fully aware of the health care needs of the young people and maintained clear records of any healthcare needs or intervention that was required. This was discussed with the supervising social worker either on the weekly telephone contacts or at the fortnightly visits and any changes were recorded on the supervision notes. One carer spoken to was able to give a detailed overview of the young persons health care needs, how this impacted on the young person and how the health care needs were managed.

Carers also said that they were provided with updated and ongoing training on health promotion for the young people placed with them.

One young persons file viewed did not contain Consent for Medical treatment information. This was discussed with the director of the agency at the time of the inspection and action was being taken to address this.

## **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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

3, 6, 8, 9 & 15

The children placed with carers were cared for safely and the agency was able to clearly demonstrate that there was a commitment to safeguarding.

### **EVIDENCE:**

The operations director had been employed with the agency for a number of years and had appropriate qualifications to manage the service. She was very clear about her role and responsibilities in the agency as well as the leadership of the service.

A selection of personnel files were viewed and found to contain appropriate information that included job descriptions, references, proof of qualifications, and Criminal Record Bureau enhanced disclosure details. The agency had clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff to work for the agency.

The social work staff who were interviewed presented as competent to carry out the tasks that they were appointed to undertake and were well aware of the needs of the carers and those of the children/young people placed.

In addition to the social work staff the inspectors spoke with educationalists and therapy staff who worked in conjunction with the children/young people and other professionals to ensure that the needs of the young people were

met. Again these staff demonstrated that they were competent to under-take their role and had a clear understanding of the needs of the young people.

The foster homes inspected were found to be appropriate and the carers were providing a high standard of care. Records were maintained regarding health and safety checks, these were carried out on a regular basis. Each carer writes a safe care policy, a copy is maintained on the file within the office and also within the carers home.

The agency ensured that the matching of the children/young people was carefully monitored to ensure that the young person was placed with carers that were able to meet the assessed needs of the child/young person taking into account the child's racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs.

Clear records were maintained with regard to the age range and type of placement that carers were able to provide, taking into account the skills of the carers. Carers spoken to felt that the matching process was very thorough and although one carer responded that they had to wait some time for a child to be placed with them they were fully aware of the reasons why.

Annual reviews were held for carers and records maintained on the carers file. The young people who were interviewed said that they 'liked living here, it was nice being part of a family'.

# 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

7, 13 & 31

The agency met the educational cultural, physical, social and emotional needs of the young people placed with the agency.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency was able to clearly demonstrate their commitment to supporting children/young people regarding valuing diversity and promoting equality. A number of carers spoken to during the foster carer group meeting said that the staff at the agency supported them when dealing with complex needs of children placed with them. This was undertaken through one to one support with the supervising social worker, through training and through the foster group meetings. It was evident speaking to a number of carers who had children/young people placed with them who had a diverse range of needs, that carers actively supported them to ensure that they were able to achieve their full potential. Foster carers said that the agency was exceptionally supportive and 'nothing was too much trouble'.

The agency had policies and procedures in place with regards short term breaks for children in foster care. One carer spoken to who provided short breaks for children/young people was able to give details about how they liaised with the young person's parents to make certain that information was shared to ensure that the needs of the young person continued to be met.

The educational needs of the young people were met by the statutory educational system. Where additional help and support was required or the

young person was not attending school the agency had educational support in place to assist the young person and to provide support and advice to foster carers. Foster carers said that they were involved in attending parents evenings and discussion with teachers to support the child to attain their maximum potential.

The inspectors had the opportunity to look at the support given to a young person who was receiving additional support with their school work. There were clear plans for the young person with goals set to help the young person achieve the level that they required to enable them to attend further education facilities.

# **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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

10 & 11

The agency ensured that the wishes and views of the young people were sought and promoted.

## **EVIDENCE:**

There were clear procedures available to staff around promoting contact for the children/young people.

The contact arrangements for each child placed were recorded on their individual care plans. Foster carers spoken to were aware of the importance of contact to the children/young people that they looked after. Foster carers spoken to felt that the agency supported the children well with regards to contact.

A number of resource workers were employed by the agency and part of their role was to facilitate contact by taking children/young people to contact or supervising the contact for the local authority. One resource worker spoken to was able to explain clearly her role and responsibility in promoting contact including the health and safety issues when transporting children/young people to their contact arrangements and the reports that she prepared following contact, detailing observations made during the contact session.

Young people spoken to said that their wishes and views were listened to. One young person said, " my foster carer always discusses things with me and asks me what I think. We do lots of good things in the holidays".

The responses back the questionnaires received back also indicated that the views of the young people were listened to. One said " I am asked about where I would like to go and what I would like to do".

Foster carers spoken to at the foster carer support group also said that the agency listened to what the children wanted. They also felt that the agency listened to their views and their opinions were sought.

The foster carer group clearly demonstrated that the views of the foster carers were sought and it was encouraging to see such good levels of communication between foster carers and the agency staff team. Some foster carers raised issues regarding activities that were arranged for the school holiday not being appropriate for the some of the younger children. This matter was discussed with the outcome being that further details would be sought regarding activities with a wider age range and that these would be brought back to the foster carer support group meeting.

All children/young people are provided with a Children's Guide. The Children's Guide details the complaints procedure and details of how to make a complaint.

Children and young people spoken to and those that returned questionnaires confirmed that they understood what to do if they were unhappy and wanted to make a complaint.



# 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

29

The agency ensures that the carers are paid their allowance and agreed expenses within appropriate time scales.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The agency had a clear policy and procedure regarding payments to foster carers. The inspectors met with a group of foster carers who said that they received their payment on time. They said that they could not fault the systems that were in place and had no concerns about the way in which payments were organised.

There was some discussions with foster carers regarding those foster carers who had been approved and who had given up their job in order to become a foster carer but had not had any placements. They appreciated that the service had to ensure that the child was appropriately matched with the foster carer. They were also aware that the agency did not pay a retainer fee and this had been explained to them as part of the assessment process but still felt some concerns if they did not have any placements for a number of months. This was discussed with the fostering agency manager who confirmed that a retainer fee was not paid and that foster carers were informed of this.

# 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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are**

17, 21 & 24

The agency is effectively managed and staffed with competent staff who provide appropriate support to foster carers to meet the needs of the children and young people placed.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Foster carers who were spoken to by the inspectors as part of the inspection process and those that returned questionnaires felt that the agency was appropriately staffed. All those spoken to said that they had never experienced any problems regarding contacting the agency and confirmed they received advice and information.

Foster carers support groups were generally well attended and the director ensured that she attended these groups whenever possible.

Just prior to the inspection a new senior social worker had been recruited to the Manchester team and the service did not have any vacancies. This ensured that the children were well supported.

All staff had appropriate social work qualifications. This included the director, deputy director and assistant directors. All the fostering service staff had lengthy experience of childcare.

The agency had policies and procedures in place with to regards recruitment and selection for both agency staff and foster carers. Recruitment of foster carers was undertaken through a number of channels including advertising in local and national press, the website and word of mouth. This was evident at the foster carers support group when many of the carers spoken to said that they had joined the agency because they either had a friend or a relative work for the agency.

Assessment of foster carers was carried out using the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) form F. Assessments were carried out by the social workers working for the agency and also independent assessors.

Carers spoken to said that the assessment process was very thorough and at times felt quite intrusive however they felt that this was understandable as the promotion of safe caring for children and young people was the main priority. One carer said that they had not realised initially how in-depth the process would be.

A number of form F assessments were inspected and found to contain very clear detailed information that was of a high quality.

Once approved the agency had clear policies and procedures in place regarding supporting the foster carers to undertake their role. The Foster Care Agreement detailed the support that the carer could expect to receive. This included supervision and support from their social worker. Foster carers confirmed that the level of support and supervision that they received was of a high standard and appropriate.

Training for foster carers was comprehensive and carers spoken to felt that the training provided was of a high standard. They felt that the training provided

them with the appropriate skills to ensure that the children placed with them received a high standard of care. Training commenced for foster carers prior to becoming approved

Most case records relating to the children/young people placed contained the Looked After Children (LAC) documents. However, one file viewed was missing part two documentation. The social worker had written to the young person's social worker requesting this and was awaiting a response.

Another file did not contain the consent for medical treatment for the child placed although there was evidence that these had been requested.

Prior to the inspection the agency had their computers stolen and this highlighted the need for the agency to have a back up server. This had been agreed by the head office and was in the process of being arranged. The manager had informed foster carers about the theft.

All files viewed contained the necessary information and foster carers were aware of the circumstances leading up to the placement of a child with themselves and the objective of the placement.

# 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>
<b>12</b>	4

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

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

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

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

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>1</b>	X
<b>2</b>	X
<b>4</b>	X
<b>5</b>	X
<b>16</b>	X
<b>17</b>	4
<b>18</b>	X
<b>19</b>	X
<b>20</b>	X
<b>21</b>	4
<b>22</b>	X
<b>23</b>	3
<b>24</b>	X
<b>25</b>	X
<b>26</b>	X
<b>27</b>	X
<b>28</b>	X
<b>32</b>	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
1	FS24	The agency should ensure that relevant LAC documents are obtained prior to the placement of a child including authorisation for medical consent.

## **Commission for Social Care Inspection**

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