



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Bury Social Services - Fostering

**18-20 St Mary`s Place
Bury
BL9 0DZ**

Lead Inspector
Julie Bodell

Announced Inspection
11th October 2005 09:30

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 Bury Social Services - Fostering

Address 18-20 St Mary`s Place
Bury
BL9 0DZ

Telephone number 0161 253 5102

Fax number 0161 253 5466

Email address d.powell@bury.gov.uk

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Bury M.B.C.

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Diana Powell

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 6th October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The fostering service forms part of the family placement team. It incorporates a number of different arrangements including permanent, temporary, respite and family and friends as carers. The Home from Home scheme offers regular short planned breaks to disabled children and young people for up to twenty eight days a year. A short break scheme for non-disabled children and young people aged between 8-14 years has been developed and is now in operation.

SUMMARY

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

Two inspectors carried out this announced inspection over a five-day period. This included meeting with the managers', the panel chair, six members of staff working in different areas of the service, attending the fostering panel, foster carers training, the looked after children's achievement award ceremony as well as holding a children's meeting. Visits to foster carers who look after children on a long and short-term basis including young children, disabled children and teenagers as well as a foster carer from the Home from Home scheme and family and friends as carers were also undertaken. Files for staff members, foster carers and children and young people were looked at, also policies and procedures.

Surveys to a small group of foster carers and children were sent out from the office but did not arrive at their homes, so unfortunately no responses were received from this group.

What the service does well:

Children and young people appeared happy and well placed.

The service is well managed by a very capable manager and the team received the local authority's team of the year award for 2004 -2005.

The service provides a very good level of support to foster carers through link workers, support workers, the buddy scheme, support groups and the newsletter, as well as the looked after children's team nurse, psychologist, teachers and social workers. Teenagers nearing independence have access to workers from the Extra Mile team and Connexions.

The service provides pre-approval training for foster carers, followed by mandatory training. Foster carers are involved in the delivery of this training.

The fostering service is proactive at looking at ways to improve the service that they offer. Foster carers felt that they had been included in the development of the service and that their ideas were listened to and followed up where appropriate.

There is a strong emphasis on education and a good level of support is provided to children and young people by the LAC teachers and in terms of equipment and opportunity. Foster carers are able to access training to help them support children and young people. Young people spoken with have high aspirations for the future.

What has improved since the last inspection?

This was a very positive inspection and it was clear that a significant amount of development work had been undertaken since the last inspection. The following list is not exhaustive and therefore does not fully reflect all that has been achieved.

The service now has placement choice for children and young people.

Four recruitment drives are held over the year and number of people enquiring to become foster carers continues to increase markedly. The pre-approval training sessions are held four times a year. This impacts on the flow of assessment work to be done by the link workers and ensures that people who make enquiries do not lose interest because they have to wait.

A short-term break scheme for non-disabled children and young people has been developed to support families in crisis and help prevent the admission of children and young people into residential or long-term foster care.

There is an additional worker on the Home from Home scheme who will be responsible for development as well as more access to support workers.

The time in getting family and friends as carers to panel has improved.

There is now a daytime support group that has a crèche.

The budget for clothing and additional extras is now with the manager of the family placement team, which will improve consistency in decision for allocation.

Six foster carers are starting NVQ Level 3. Computer courses are now available to foster carers and courses on promoting literacy are planned for the future.

The statement of purpose and the foster carers handbook have been revised.

What they could do better:

The foster carers agreements need to be reviewed and revised to ensure that the document contains all the necessary information that is legally required.

The LAC placement agreements need to be signed by all the relevant parties if it is to become a fully workable document. It is recognised that this document is a national document that is now out of date due to changes in the law. This is a problem for all local authorities.

The review into the efficiency and effectiveness of the fostering panel needs to be completed and any recommendations for change should be implemented.

There is a delay in checks being returned to panel, which affects the efficiency of the panel. This is a national issue.

For those children and young people in emergency and short term placements ways of improving consistency of the field social worker need to be addressed. This matter is out of the direct control of the fostering service.

The impact on the budget of a future national flat rate boarding out allowance needs continued consideration. This is a national issue.

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.

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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 – The intended outcomes for these Standards are

12

The family placement team promotes the health and development of children and young people by ensuring that they have access to a wide range of healthcare services that offer advice and support.

EVIDENCE:

Policies and procedures are in place that cover the health of looked after children and young people. There was evidence on children's case files to demonstrate that specialist healthcare services were accessed if necessary, for example paediatricians, psychologists, hospital services and CDT. A CAMHS outreach service for looked after children is available.

The LAC nurse is very supportive to foster carers and is involved in delivering training to them. The LAC nurse carries out health assessments, which were seen on the children and young peoples files. A new recording format sheet has been developed to clearly identify health issues of the young person during their placement, that will be easily transferable to the child's case file when a placement ends. Training for foster carers is provided in health topics including first aid, moving and handling and specialist training as required. The service distributed copies of "Healthy Care"(DfES) to all foster carers last year. Birthday packs are given to young people at 11,14 and 18 that include advice on relationships and sexual health.

The inspectors remain concerned about problems in respect of signing the LACS documentation. If this does not happen then there is no emergency consent to treatment in place for the child.

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 30

The fostering service, through regular recruitment drives, is now able to offer placement choice, to children and young people. The fostering panel is under review to ensure that it is able to operate effectively given the changes to structure of the team, an increase workload due to increasing numbers of foster carers being presented at panel and quality assurance function.

EVIDENCE:

The local authority had obtained the required documentation to ensure the suitability of the manager in terms of safeguarding and ensuring that she has the necessary knowledge, experience and skill to manage the service

Inspectors visited five foster homes, meeting with a total of eight carers. Foster carers were providing short or long-term foster care, caring for family member, Home from Home carers, and covered an age range of very young children to teenagers, some of who had a disability. One family visited had fostered over 60 children. From discussion and examination of files it appeared that all young people were well placed and settled. The foster carers homes were comfortable, homely and were generally well maintained and evidence of annual health and safety assessments was seen.

Training is provided in a number of health and safety areas including child car seat safety. The service provides health and safety equipment such as fireguards and stair gates. The foster carers' handbook also covers health and safety topics. Recently held safe caring training was very well attended.

Foster carers were aware that they could be interviewed or visited as part of the Commission inspection process.

Inspectors were satisfied that, where possible, efforts are made to secure an appropriate match of carers and young people. Successful recruitment drives and the establishment of a service panel meeting now mean that the family placement team has at this time placement choice. This is a significant improvement on the last inspection when the service was stretched to capacity. There are plans to work with existing foster carers to prepare them for taking on older teenagers. Young people of this age group are more likely to be placed out of the borough with independent fostering agencies, some at a considerable distance away from Bury. This action will help to reduce this situation.

The young people, who were consulted during this inspection, spoke positively about their foster homes.

Concerns were expressed again throughout this inspection about the lack of adequate information provided by the child's social worker in cases of emergencies and about not being kept fully informed about how the child's case was progressing. And also that social workers allocated to these children were often newly qualified, temporary or agency staff who were constantly changing. One seven-month old child placed had already had three social workers. This was in stark contrast to children and young people in long-term placements who had LAC social workers or for children with disabilities who had permanent social workers. This matter is outside the control of the fostering service.

The fostering service provides training on child protection. Safe caring procedures have been implemented and a video is shown to new foster carers. Foster carers visited talked realistically about the need to achieve a balance between the needs of both the foster children and their own children within a safe framework. A letter from the Child Protection Co-ordinator stated there were no outstanding child protection concerns at this time. The foster carers' handbook and the foster carers' agreement clearly state that corporal punishment is not permissible. There is a policy and procedure in place in respect of allegations made against foster carers and a record is maintained. Independent support is available to foster carers who are subject to investigations into allegations. There is a missing person's procedure.

All the young people who were consulted said that they would approach their foster carers if they needed to discuss anything and felt confident that they would act appropriately.

The local authority has clear written recruitment and selection procedures. A sample of staff files was examined and contained the information required by Schedule 1. References are validated and CRB checks are renewed every three years.

The staff team are qualified and very experienced and include four family support workers. They have access to the expertise of the LACS team, which includes a nurse, teachers, psychologist, the CAMHS team and social workers. Discussions with staff members suggested that they were aware of their roles and responsibilities and were very supportive towards each other.

The fostering panel has written procedures and guidelines, which include details of its functions and decision-making process. These are currently under review, as well as quality assurance and the management of the increase in the workload of the fostering panel due to more foster carers being recruited. The future arrangements of the panel are also being discussed to reflect recent changes in the structure of the family placement team.

There are a number of new panel members that include a new councillor and a foster carer. A further two new panel members, an ex-head teacher and a foster carer for an IFA, who is Muslim, observed the panel meeting. The manager is looking to recruit five independent members to ensure there are two present for every panel. Panel members have recently received training in safe caring and managing challenging behaviour.

The chair of the panel said that the minutes and agenda items are sent to members in advance and that the foster panel meeting is efficiently managed administratively. Inspectors observed a panel meeting. Any conflicts of interest were addressed. There was a very impressive presentation from an independent assessor. Progress was held up on some items because the relevant checks needed had not been returned from various bodies. This is a national issue. The panel meeting appeared to be rushed with no discussion before each item and limited debate or time to make comments after the presentation. Inspectors are however aware that this was the first panel meeting for some members. There needs to be clarity in the use of the terms recommend and approval. Consideration needs to be given to prospective foster carers attending panel meetings.

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 fostering service gives due consideration to diversity and promotes educational achievement by providing a wide range of support to children and young people and their carers. The development of short-term break provision continues.

EVIDENCE:

Both the foster carers agreement, and the handbook, stress the importance of valuing diversity and promoting equality. Training in equality and diversity is provided at both pre-approval and post approval levels. Training also includes developing a positive identity that looks at discrimination against children who do not live with their parents, building secure relationships and considers ways of boosting self-esteem. The scheme continues to increase recruitment of carers from ethnic minority groups with a further four Muslim carers recently recruited. There was evidence on file that careful consideration was given to the placement of children and young people, in terms of returning to panel when a long-term placement was being made where ethnicity between the foster carers and child differs and by placing children of dual heritage together. Provision is made for disabled children by means of supplying the necessary equipment and adaptations to the carers' homes.

All the young people consulted during this inspection said that they attended school regularly, that they enjoyed school and had clear aspirations for the future. There are no permanently excluded children within the fostering scheme at this time. Case records contain evidence that young peoples personal education plans had been completed.

An inspector attended the annual Awards Ceremony for Looked After Children at the Town Hall, which includes categories for educational achievement. Both young people and foster carers enjoyed the event and the efforts of all those people involved in setting it up are to be commended. The event had been carried out fairly and that no child was left out of the proceedings. It was also an opportunity for foster carers and children to meet each other. Foster carers raised no issues in respect of education during the inspection.

The service provides all young people with laptops/computers to assist with schoolwork and computer literacy courses for foster carers to enable them to help children and young people. Learning mentors are also available to young people and additional funding for out of school learning activities where a substantial fee is involved. Funding is also available for one school holiday during both primary and secondary school as well as free swimming lessons. The family placement team is developing links with Early Years to look at joint training for foster carers. Foster carers can access Bookstart and the multicultural toy library. The service offers training for foster carers in *"Promoting Educational Achievement."*

The fostering service has a Home from Home Scheme that provides short term breaks for children and young people with disabilities. There are currently 16 carers providing a service in this area. The service recognises that demands for this service are high. A development worker has recently been appointed and the local authority is looking at developing this service and looking at good practice in other areas. The Local Authority have provided specialist adaptations and equipment in one home to meet the needs of seven children and young people who have manual handling needs on a rotational basis. Specialised equipment and adaptations are provided as required. A moving and handling adviser provides training where necessary. The scheme has written policy and procedures. The foster carer visited said that she had good communication links with the link worker and was very complimentary about the support they received. The link worker visits unannounced and when the child is in placement. The carer had a good working relationship with the child's parent and the child had been gradually introduced to the carer and her home.

The fostering service has developed a short break scheme for non-disabled children as part of a prevention strategy. There is a part-time co-ordinator in place and six foster carers have been recruited to the scheme. The co-ordinator receives a good level of support from the family placement team manager and she is also feeding back statistical information at a national level.

The co-ordinator is working hard to promote the scheme as a preventative measure and reassure families and their children's concerns that this was not an admission into the care system but that placements would be meaningful, flexible and focus on the family needs in a realistic way, to help resolve issues facing them.

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 fostering service promotes contact arrangements and is developing systems that will ensure consultation with children and young people looked after by the service.

EVIDENCE:

Where appropriate, the service actively encourages contact with family and friends. Contact arrangements form part of the placement agreement meeting and are recorded. Risk assessments are carried out by the child's social worker. Some foster carers had found contact arrangements to be quite time consuming and impacted on the needs of the rest of the family. If necessary, supervised contact can be arranged outside the foster home at a local centre. Support with transport in respect of contact can also be arranged. The fostering service pays for transport costs for contact arrangements. Contact is positively promoted during the pre-approval training. For approved carers, further training is available – "*Working in Partnership with Parents and the Department.*" The letterbox scheme is available to children and young people to help maintain contact with their families.

As with previous inspections, although there were no concerns expressed, one young person was vague about the reviewing process. Young people said that they would discuss any problems they had with their foster carers or social worker before the review meeting. A consultation exercise with young people on participation in reviews has been undertaken with children and young people, and it is hoped that a group of looked after children and young people will meet to discuss issues that relate to them on a regular basis. Young people have access to independent advocates who would attend reviews if the young

person wished. Young people spoke highly of the social workers and it was noted that young people had experienced less change in social workers recently, when in long-term placement. Exit questionnaires are being developed for young people leaving a placement and a consultation form, so that young people are able to contribute to the foster carer's annual review. Examination of young peoples files demonstrated that reviews were held in accordance with statutory requirements.

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

14 29

The fostering service has developed links with other agencies, which are able to support young people and their foster carers in the transition to adulthood. The fostering service is aware of the impact a flat rate method of payment to foster carers may have on the budget.

EVIDENCE:

The carers' handbook contains written information about the preparation for adulthood. During this inspection one family consulted who foster young people approaching adulthood said that over the years that support for this group of young people has improved markedly. Good links with the Extra Mile team and Connexions are in place. Continuing care or supported living arrangements for young people who are 18+ who are in employment, education or training has been developed with the Extra Mile.

Boarding out allowances include payments for weekly maintenance, pocket money and clothing allowances. Annual payments are also made towards the child's birthday and Christmas expenses. A holiday grant is available. Allowances received are based on the child's age. The manager now holds the budget for additional funding. No issues were raised at this inspection about funding. The issue of independent fostering agency foster carers receiving higher allowances for an equivalent role was discussed with foster carers. However none of the foster carers said that they would consider moving and that they would remain "loyal" because they received a good level of support from the service.

Since the last inspection proposals have been put forward to council to increase boarding out arrangements for young people 11+. This was not agreed. However the service is aware that Bury is one of the lowest payers in the country and the proposed plans for a national allowance by 2007 would mean a 50% increase, which has major implications for their budget.

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

1 2 4 5 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 32

The fostering service is well managed, organised and efficient. The staff team have received the team of the year award from the local authority. The service is proactive in recruiting foster carers and provides them a good level of support. The family and friends as carers service continues to develop.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose has recently been revised to reflect changes in the service. A colourful box type folder is given to children and young people who are looked after. It contains a detailed children's guide and a copy of the Young People's Guide to the Children's Rights director and is suitable for keeping review notes and other important papers they may want to keep.

There are now two managers in place with the workload being split between adoption/permanence and fostering. This inspection in the main covered fostering. The manager that covers fostering is qualified for the post. She has a CQSW award, a BA in Applied Social Studies and a CIM Advanced Certificate in Marketing. She also has many years experience as a family placement worker and manager. It was clear from discussions with both members of the staff team and foster carers that the manager is held in very high regard and that she has extensive knowledge in childcare and fostering issues, is approachable, supportive, open and fair. This has been recognised by the department in November 2003 when the manager was awarded the Employee of the Year Award. Both team managers are undertaking NVQ Level 4. Each manager will cover for each other during periods of absence.

Staff members consulted during the inspection said that their workload was allocated fairly and was manageable. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability and staff members and foster carers demonstrated that there was a good understanding of roles and responsibilities. All staff members have contracts, job descriptions, and conditions of service and there is an induction programme. New staff members said that the team had been very welcoming. Team meetings take place on a regular basis. It was clear, from discussions with the manager, and staff members, that workloads are monitored and staff supervision is given high priority and annual appraisals undertaken. There has been a slight increase in administrative back up. A range of policies and procedures are in place including, equal opportunities, and disciplinary and grievance. These are available on the Intranet. All staff members have experience of working in childcare services. The family placement team won the Team Achievement Award 2004/2005. A new worker has been appointed and is due to start work in December 2005. The team will then be fully staffed.

There are written referral and assessment processes. There has been a significant increase in the publicity budget. Four recruitment drives are held over the year and number of people enquiring to become foster carers continues to increase markedly, 100% increase year on year in the past two years. The service is aiming to have 80 mainstream carers in place by March 2006 and expects to exceed this. The pre-approval training sessions are held four times a year. This impacts on the flow of assessment work which can now be done to timescale by the link workers and ensures that people who making

enquiries do not lose interest because they have to wait. A number of written assessments were examined and found them to be very detailed.

Thorough checks are made for both staff and foster carers, for instance CRB checks. Other agencies such as the NSPCC, health visitors and probation services are contacted.

Foster carers said that they had "excellent" relationships with their link worker and received good support from them as link workers and the family placement team in general. There are many systems in place to support carers. These included, the carers' handbook (recently revised), foster carers' support groups, quarterly newsletters, automatic membership of the foster carers network, post approval training and the "buddy" scheme. There was evidence on file of the provision of regular supervision from the link worker. This included identification of training needs. All annual reviews have been completed. Family support workers provide an invaluable service in terms of practical support and advice to foster carers. Foster carers were covered under the local council's public indemnity insurance.

The emergency duty team is accessible to foster carers out of office hours. A six-month pilot for a family placement out of hour's service, at the suggestion of foster carers was tried but was not used enough to make it financially viable.

Three of the fostering service family support workers have gained places on a part-time social work course at Salford University. A post for a part-time support worker for 20 hours has been created to help with the logistical difficulties of them attending. Six members of the staff team have now obtained PQ1 and another is undertaking it. A training record is maintained for all staff and foster carers. Staff members said that they felt valued and supported by the manager.

Inspectors examined a number of foster carers agreements. Foster carer agreements need to be reviewed and revised to include all the requirements of the Schedule and it is recommended that the actions around expectations in respect of training is strengthened. The service would like to improve participation in training by offering financial incentives to foster carers who take up training.

There are written complaints and allegations procedures. Records of both complaints, and allegations of abuse, are maintained and are dealt with appropriately.

The service provides foster carers with opportunities to become involved in training. The senior practitioner takes responsibility for co-ordinating training and is seconded to the training section one day a week. Pre-approval training course was observed. Training takes place over 5 sessions, on 2 Saturday's all-day and 3 evenings. The training covers a range of topics including safe caring, understanding behaviour, confidentiality, minimum standards, Courses are arranged at differing times to accommodate people's circumstances. For some courses a crèche is available. Foster carers are involved in the delivery of training, which helps to show the range of carers available. Foster carers are also going to be involved in training social workers in January 2006 in what makes a good placement. The senior practitioner has revised the post-approval training to encompass the new standards, and evidence competencies. Training has been provided in topics such as drug awareness, child mental health, HIV and Hepatitis, caring for children who sexually abuse others, promoting equality, diversity and rights and promoting educational achievement. Foster carers spoke positively about the training opportunities available to them. Six foster carers are enrolled on NVQ Level 3 and twelve carers are committed to do four days training in effective play. Funding is available for promoting literacy and training for carers in looking after teenagers is being developed.

An up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child and retained at the allocated social worker's office. Files examined were well maintained. LACS documentation was completed. There is a policy and procedure "Recording with Care" available to staff members. Entries in case records are clear and legible. The manager monitors the quality of these records through the supervision system and signs and dates the records to evidence this.

The method of completing LAC documentation has changed from hand written triplicate sheets that were often illegible to typed, which is an improvement. However the changes have meant that now many of the placement agreements are now unsigned. LACS documentation as a national recording system for looked after children has been accepted at previous inspection despite there being discrepancies in respect of Schedule 6 and the fact that foster carers sign against legislation that has been revoked under Regulation 51. A new national integrated recording system is now under consultation with local authorities however there are similar discrepancies in the new documentation as the old in terms of Schedule 6 and Regulation 51. Confidentiality is included in the pre-approval training. A section on confidentiality also forms part of the foster care agreement. Confidential information is securely stored.

Children and young people are encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia such as photographs. They are assisted to compile life storybooks and some keep diaries.

The new RAISE computerised record system now has the capacity to incorporate all the information stipulated in the regulations.

The office is situated in the town centre. The Family Placement Team working conditions are very cramped working conditions. There are plans for the team to move to another facility in the future, possibly by the summer of 2006.

Family and friends as carers is now the responsibility of the team manager for adoption and permanency. Inspectors spoke briefly with the manager who said that she was looking forward to developing the service and raising standards in this area.

There are two family placement social workers (one part-time agency) whose role is to support carers who are family and friends. One also acts as a consultant for social workers undertaking assessments and there are links with the family group conference organiser to consider family and friends as carers as part of the care planning process. The manager is hoping to recruit another worker in the near future and introduce a senior practitioner role.

A draft policy and procedure for this service is almost agreed and the expectations of both social workers and carers will be clearer in the future. This might include more use of special guardianship and financial incentives for those carers who attend training.

Family and friends as carers receive a quarterly newsletter and are invited to attend post approval and social events. The development of a family and friends support group is being explored.

Social workers are getting family and friends as carers to panel either within the six week timescale or close to, but the required checks have not always been returned at the point of going to panel which slows the process down. The service has little influence over this situation.

A family and friends carer said that she had received a good level of support from both the family placement worker and the social worker, and had been given both practical and financial assistance.

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	3
8	3
9	3
15	3
30	2

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	3
11	2

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	4
4	3
5	3
16	4
17	3
18	3
19	3
20	3
21	4
22	2
23	4
24	2
25	3
26	2
27	X
28	X
32	3

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection? YES

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	FS22	28	That foster carers agreements are reviewed and revised to contain all the information in this requirement.	31/01/06
2	FS24	34	That foster placement agreements are signed by all relevant parties. (Outstanding)	31/01/06

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	FS26	That adequate space is provided within the present premise to allow the staff team to work efficiently and effectively or that a realistic timescale is reached on a move to another premises.
2	FS30	That the review of the present fostering panel arrangements is concluded and any recommendations for improvement are put into action.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Bolton, Bury, Rochdale and Wigan Office

Turton Suite

Paragon Business Park

Chorley New Road

Horwich, Bolton

BL6 6HG

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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