



Making Social Care
Better for People

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Alliance Foster Care

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

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection

Commencing Monday, 3rd October 2005 09:00

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

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

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

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

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

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

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service	Alliance Foster Care
Address	1 Maple Court Ash Lane Collingtree Northampton NN4 0NB
Telephone number	0870 240 2395
Fax number	01604 497830
Email address	
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Alliance Foster Care Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Pamela Altena
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies
No. of places registered (if applicable)	0
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 5th August 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

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

In addition to the above Managers, there is an Operations Manager, a Principal Social Worker, a Training Officer and Resource Officer. The Resource Officer ensures appropriate education provision is identified and supports children in their education. There is a Social Work team, support and administrative workers. Qualified Therapists, Counsellors and Social Workers also provide services on a regular basis.

The Agency provides Emergency, Respite, Bridging, Long and Short Term placements, as well as Mother and Baby and Assessment placements.

At the time of Inspection the Agency supported 43 carers and provided placements for 65 children

SUMMARY

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

This Announced Inspection took two Inspectors 80 hours in total.

For the purpose of the Inspection four foster carers, and the children placed with them, plus additional cases, were tracked through the inspection of case files, home visits, and discussions with relevant staff, including Managers. The Inspectors also attended education and team meetings, and met with carer representatives from support groups.

The above information provided the Inspection evidence for each Standard assessed. Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook, and other documents have been fully inspected on the occasion of previous Inspections and were consulted only for clarification purposes on this occasion.

Written requests inviting comments were sent to a Specialist Therapist and Advisor who undertake sessional work for Alliance Foster Care, as well as to the Directors of Social Services and Area Child Protection Committees of Local Authorities, who commission foster placements through Alliance Foster Care.

Questionnaires were returned by 10 carers, 14 children and 17 placing social workers, and these have been referred to within the body of the report.

What the service does well:

The Alliance Foster Care team demonstrates a stated commitment to providing good quality placements for children, and has in place rigorous systems to match children to placements.

Maintains very good individual records for children and carers.

Consults very well with children and young people placed, through newsletters, workshops and age appropriate literature, and have recently produced an impressive interactive CD ROM especially to facilitate consultation.

Actively prioritises educational achievement, through the direct support of children and young people in their school placements, and after school activities. Promotes reading and literacy.

Provides an excellent level of support and training to carers.

Has a stated commitment to working in partnership, and developing good relationships with, placing Local Authorities.

What has improved since the last inspection?

A Principle Social Worker has been appointed, to assist with the operational and management task.

Record and filing systems have been streamlined.

What they could do better:

The Agency has been recommended to record CRB clearance reference numbers on staff files.

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

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

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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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

Standard 12 inspected.

The Health needs of children and young people are given very good attention.

EVIDENCE:

- Carers visited confirmed to Inspectors that they provide healthy meals for children placed with them. Children also referred to 'healthy eating' and exercise in their questionnaires 'I eat a healthy diet and I can now have a bath every night.' Many children and young people said they enjoy sporting activities (e.g. swimming, football and horse riding) in their spare time.
- There was good evidence on file of ongoing monitoring and recording of children's health care and health care needs. All Health documentation is filed under a discreet heading. There is a separate Health Care recording sheet in each child's file plus a monthly summary on each child, provided to placing social workers, contains medical and health care information under a special heading. This is commendable. Carer's supervision sessions include special reference to health matters (appointments and medication etc) and children's health and development is routinely discussed at carer reviews.
- The Agency gives priority to ensuring that as far as possible, full information is provided about children's health care needs at the time of placement. Staff, carers and files gave evidence to this. On all files tracked, a full Placement Plan was available, in addition to Looked After Children documentation. This is commendable.
- Health related training is provided to carers, including Child Development, Drug Awareness and Eating Disorders. The new Carer's

Handbook will contain extensive health care information, (the Inspector viewed the contents page).

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

Standards 3,6,8,9, and 15 were inspected.

The Fostering Service works very hard to ensure that children and young people are provided with safe placements.

EVIDENCE:

- Files looked at provided very good evidence that Health and Safety checks were undertaken annually. Health and Safety is referred to during carer supervision. Carers visited by Inspectors were aware of their Health and Safety responsibilities. At one house, building work was in progress, and the carers had appropriately cordoned off this particular area.
- Safe Care policies, drawn up during the Assessment process, are incorporated into carer Family Policies. Managers said that these are considered and reviewed at the time of each new placement, and are represented in the Agency's overall comprehensive Foster Placement Agreement and Placement Plan. Any risk assessment would be recorded within this plan. Inspectors were impressed with Placement Plans seen during the Inspection, including those of a child placed only a week previous to the Inspection.

- In addition to Safe Caring training undertaken prior to approval, carers are now to be provided with a 'Staying Safe' course, linked to the Fostering Network 'Safer Caring' book. Inspectors were shown the Training Plan for this course, which gives very good attention to the need for carers to examine not only their role as carers, but also their attitudes and feelings towards different forms of child abuse. An excellent training programme is also provided to help carers understand and appropriately respond to the complex and difficult behaviours that may be presented by children placed. Central to this is the Therapeutic Crisis Training that incorporates a Team-Teach approach to managing children's behaviour. Other relevant courses are provided, including Attachment, Separation and Loss, and Recovery Needs of Children who have been Abused.
- The Agency has in place a Matching Matrix, which is rigorously referred to at the time of new placements being made, completed on all files looked at. The Fostering Team is highly commended for a well-evidenced commitment to prioritising the appropriate matching of children to carers. Staff at all levels, when asked what they thought the Agency did well, made comments such as 'We always aim to place the children with the right carers' 'We must make the right match. We must match everyone's needs; the carers, their children, and other children placed.'
- The 'Hi this is me' interactive CD Rom produced for the use of children placed, along with other written information, provides them with good advice and information about bullying.
- Managers confirmed that the Agency monitors its systems and processes for protecting children through the regular supervision of placements by supervising social workers, and through team and management meetings. Notifications are appropriately forwarded to CSCI. Unannounced Visits are carried out at least annually by Managers and supervising social workers.
- Inspectors examined three personnel files. These were very well organised and clearly accounted for recruitment checks. Two of the files did not contain photographic identity, however Managers have confirmed that they routinely see photographic evidence of candidates at interview, and are therefore advised to record this on file. One file, an internal appointment did not contain two written references for that specific post, however formal application and interview processes had been adhered to and one written reference from the previous appointment with the Agency was available on another file. The Registered Provider and Manager were reminded that two references should be sought for all appointments including internal appointments.

- A list of all staff CRB checks and outcomes is maintained by Agency, and referred to on a good profile sheet at front of file. The Agency should include the CRB reference number with this information.
- It was not possible to observe the Agency's Fostering Panel on the occasion of this Inspection, however three sets of Panel meeting minutes were looked at, and discussion held with the Registered Manager and Provider, about Panel membership and function. Inspectors noted that it is current practice for the Agency Decision Maker to 'sit in' at the Fostering Panel, and to observe the hearing of Fostering Applications. The Agency Decision Maker confirmed that he did not participate in Panel discussions, taking the role of Agency Decision Maker very seriously, and that hearing the full Panel discussion helped to inform his decisions. The Inspectors advised that the presence at the Panel of the Agency Decision Maker was not in keeping with the spirit of the legislation, and that the Fostering Regulations 2002 had split the function of the Fostering Panel and that of the Agency Decision Maker. The independence of the Agency Decision Maker is seen to be key to promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children. The Agency have confirmed that discussion is now taking place about the attendance of Agency Decision Maker at future Panels. (This issue had not been identified at previous Inspections).

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

Standards 7, and 13 were inspected.

The Fostering Service provides an excellent level of support to carers and children, to promote the educational achievement of all children and young people placed.

EVIDENCE:

- Within the Alliance Foster Care team there is a Resource Worker who actively supports placed children within their school placements. The Agency aims to provide all children placed, with an Education Plan within 7 days of them being placed. This will commence the process for any further Personal Education Plan. One child tracked during the Inspection had been placed only the previous week, and there was an Education Plan, produced by the Agency on file. Pre school children visited by Inspectors also had an Education Plan in place. The Resource Worker intervenes and monitors situations where children are experiencing difficulties within their school. Monthly Education Meetings are held with senior staff and Managers to discuss all placements where extra Education support might be necessary. The Agency is highly commended for prioritising children and young people's educational achievement.
- The Agency, during the summer holidays ran an Alliance Foster Care Reading Trail when over 30 children placed (aged 5 to 16) read nearly 200 books. Each child read five books and recorded comments about

each book on a specially designed comment card. Their achievement was recognised through a Prize Giving event when a well-known National children's author presented book rewards. A National Book Club supported the scheme. Carers and staff provided Inspectors with specific examples of how the Reading Trail scheme had captured children's imagination and had motivated them to achieve individual successes. The Agency has developed good relationships with a local city library and plans to continue running reading schemes for children and carers.

- Inspectors visited homes where children placed were being provided with extra tuition by the Agency to support their school studies. Young people were seen to be undertaking their routine homework sessions, encouraged by carers. Carers told Inspectors about the commitment of the Agency to educational achievement. One family confirmed that computers had been provided to the children, along with CD ROMs, DVDs, to support their key stage subject studies.
- Carers are provided with training about educational system and issues for Looked After Children. The new Carer's Handbook will include this information.
- Young peoples' racial and cultural needs are properly responded to. In one placement of a non-English speaking Albanian young person, carers had been supported by the Agency to access translator support by telephone. The carers had also obtained a translation book and liaised closely with the school. Another carer visited, who cares for a dual heritage child, was conscientious about appropriate skin and hair care and providing books with appropriate ethnic characters.
- Some carers visited, approved this year, care for a young child who has Learning Disability/Autistic tendencies. The carers are now being provided with training to support the placement.
- The Agency's 'Hi This is me' interactive programme, provided to all children placed, gives excellent attention to religious, cultural and ethnic needs, as well as disabilities.

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

Standards 10, and 11 were inspected.

Alliance Foster Care and their carers consult with children and young people very well.

EVIDENCE:

- Contact arrangements were very well documented within a dedicated section in children's files. Three of the four sets of carers visited support children's contact with family members, through visits, phone calls or correspondence. The Agency provides extra resources when necessary, to support family contact. Inspectors noted some commendable examples of carers facilitating contact.
- The Agency has produced an impressive interactive CD ROM, 'Hi this is me' to encourage children and young people talk about themselves and to tell carers and workers about the things that are important to them. Inspectors were given a demonstration of the programme, which has attractive bold colourful pictures and enables children to choose and select favourite aspects of their own daily lives, and to indicate the things that they do not like. This programme is also excellent for children who have difficulty writing and reading. The Agency is highly commended for investing in the production of this programme and for importantly consulting children and young people throughout the process.
- There was good evidence on file that children and young people are routinely consulted on the occasions of reviews and meetings about

themselves. One young person is recorded within the carer review process as saying 'my carers are the greatest in the world, because they do not treat me as a foster child, they treat me as one of their own children'. They also told Inspectors this.

- Children and young people receive letters, and tokens of recognition from the Agency when they start school, or attain personal achievements. They also receive newsletters and information about activities and outings. The Agency is now developing a children's section on its website.
- The Agency will involve Advocates if this is considered necessary and in one case tracked, had involved the National Youth Advocacy Scheme to assist young people to successfully represent a complaint to their placing Local Authority.
- Carers visited were aware of the need for consultation with children on day-to-day matters as well as within life planning meetings. Children gave very good examples of being consulted in questionnaires, citing examples of being consulted about clothes, leisure activities, meals and bedroom decoration. One young person told the Inspector that the Agency 'do good outings' and said that 'all the staff always talk to us'.

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

Standards 14, and 29 were Inspected.

Alliance Foster Care and their carers provide young people with very good support in preparation for independent living.

EVIDENCE:

- The Agency has produced an Independent Living Skill pack that provides young people with information about their rights as Looked After Children when they leave care. The pack includes a section for them to keep certificates, recipes, contact numbers etc. The key function of this folder is to prepare young people in a practical way to look after them self, by detailing the competencies they would need to live independently. These are laid out with colourful graphics, and there are columns for young people, with their carers, to identify when, and how well, these tasks have been achieved. These folders were being used in two of the carer homes visited during Inspection.
- The Training Officer provided the Inspectors with the written lesson plan for a Preparation for Adult Life training session being delivered to carers later this year, based on the Fostering Network's Preparing for Independence. It was also noted that a future First Aid course would include young people.
- The Agency pays carers one week in advance through a reputable computerised payment system. The Managers confirmed that they work positively with Local Authorities and carers to negotiate payments for 'big' holidays. Additional financial resources can be requested through

supervising social workers from the Life Chances budget, for e.g. extra maths/english lessons, music and drama classes etc.

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

Standards 4,17,21, and 24 were Inspected.

The Agency is led by a committed and focussed Management team and very good systems are being developed to monitor performance. Carers receive excellent levels of support.

EVIDENCE:

- The Managers informed Inspectors that the management team are now developing key performance indicators, against which to monitor the Agency's performance. The aim of these will be to achieve positive outcomes for placements. The Management team has recently been expanded and were seen to be working well together to improve systems and to provide a high quality fostering service. All team members and carers confirmed that the Registered Provider and Registered Manager of the service were open and approachable. While providing good leadership, they were seen to take on responsibility at all levels of the service. Their values were described by a senior member of staff to be one of the 'key strengths' of the organisation, along with their clear commitment to providing appropriate placements.
- Foster Carer Assessments were inspected and noted to be of a good standard. Core Training has been reviewed and increased, and is now based on the Fostering Network Skills to Foster course.
- The Agency has achieved Investors in People status with a very positive report from IIP Assessors.
- Carers visited and those who returned questionnaires were unequivocal in their praise about the level of support they receive from the Agency. This ranges from fortnightly supervision, 24-hour support 'with someone you know and trust at the end of the telephone', a robust and relevant training programme, social activities, and carer support groups. One carer told the Inspector 'We may be the front line, but it's reassuring to know there is such a good team behind you.' Another said 'We are totally satisfied with our experience of the Agency' and 'The Agency is interested in my comments, and thank me for my support. They insist on quality care.'
- Carer Annual Reviews looked at were of an excellent standard. All carer reviews are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer and then taken to the Fostering Panel.
- Inspectors noted that one carer's Approval Status is recorded on file and on the Foster Carer Register as being 'up to 6 siblings'. The Agency is reminded that carers can only be approved as such for 3 children and that this number can only be exceeded if the children are all siblings. The Approval Status however must not state the number of siblings.
- Carers are provided with a good and relevant training programme. There is an expectation that they attend a minimum number of courses a year. Four carers have successfully piloted and achieved NVQ level 3 in

one year, working as a small group. It is anticipated that this model will be taken forward. Carers must have worked three years with the agency and have attended at least nine courses to be eligible to undertake NVQ 3. The Training Officer confirmed that an identified training pathway would ultimately feed into NVQ 3.

- Some children visited were happy to show Inspectors photographs and information about themselves, collated with their carers, sometimes for the purpose of Life Story work. Carers maintain logs and other records. Although they confirmed that these are stored 'out of reach' not all were being routinely locked away, and the Agency is reminded to ensure that confidential records maintained by carers are secured in a locked facility.
- Both carer and children's files were very well organised. Information was clear and accessible. Essential planning documents were available, and evidence to indicate that where Local Authorities did not provide these there were systems for chasing these. At the front of carer files there is an excellent chronological 'see at a glance' list of all contacts made with the carers. A member of the Management team routinely monitors the case files.
- The Agency was noted to have developed good working relationships with placing Local Authorities to achieve the best outcomes for children. All placing social work questionnaires noted that the Agency worked either 'very well' or 'well' with the placing authority.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

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

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

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	4
9	4
15	2
30	X

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

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

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

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

NO

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

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

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	15	The Agency should note CRB clearance reference numbers on staff files.

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Leicester Office

The Pavilions, 5 Smith Way

Grove Park

Enderby

Leicester

LE19 1SX

National Enquiry Line: 0845 015 0120

Email: enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.csci.org.uk

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