

inspection report

Fostering Services

Synergy Fostering Ltd

Barkat House

2nd Floor, Suite 18

116-118 Finchley Road

London

NW3 5HT

19th July 2004

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

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

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

FOSTERING SERVICE INFORMATION

Local Authority Fostering Service?

NO

Name of Authority

Address

Local Authority Manager

Tel No:

Address

Fax No:

Email Address

Registered Fostering Agency (IFA)

YES

Name of Agency

Synergy Fostering Ltd

Tel No

020 7433 2545

Address

Barkat House, 2nd Floor, Suite 18, 116-118 Finchley Road, London, NW3 5HT

Fax No

Email Address

enquiries@synergy-fostering.co.uk

Registered Number of IFA

G070000192

Name of Registered Provider

Synergy Fostering Limited

Name of Registered Manager (if applicable)

Miss Shobha Patel

Date of first registration

26th February 2004

Date of latest registration certificate

26th February 2004

Registration Conditions Apply ?

NO

Date of last inspection

none

Date of Inspection Visit		16th July 2004	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10.00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Jill Marriott	083058
Name of Inspector	2		
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist (e.g. Interpreter/Signer) (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of inspection			

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Independent and local authority fostering services which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Children Act 1989 as amended.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Synergy Fostering Ltd. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services published by the Secretary of State under sections 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, for independent and local authority fostering services respectively.

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to independent fostering agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action, and in relation to local authority fostering services regarding notices to the local authority and reports to the Secretary of State under section 47 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Notifications to the Local Authority and Reports to the Secretary of State
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Providers response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the agreed regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.
<p>Synergy Fostering Ltd is a small fostering agency situated in Finchley Road, Camden, London. The agency has one office. Synergy was originally located in Slough and moved to its current address in 2003.</p> <p>The agency aims to provide safe and nurturing foster placements for looked after children by providing culturally diverse carer's. At the time of inspection 19 children were placed by the agency. Placements are generally within the M25 boundary.</p> <p>The agency offers long and short stay placements and bridging placements.</p> <p>Assessment and emergency placements can also be provided. Synergy Fostering does not offer short-term breaks or family and friends as carer's placements.</p>

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

Inspector's Summary

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The inspection took place over a 2-week period starting with an observation of the agencies foster panel on 16/7/04. The planning meeting was held on 19/7/04.

The inspector found that many of the standards and the requirements made at the previous inspection had been met or partially met. The overall service provided was good. There was evidence seen throughout the inspection to show that Synergy Fostering Ltd are continuing to develop and improve the services offered to carers and children. The inspector would like to thank Carers, young people and the staff team for their co-operation throughout the inspection.

The following methods were used to inspect Synergy Fostering Ltd.

1. Planning visit and meeting with the manager. 19th July 2004
2. Visit to four Carers. 20,21,27, 30th July 2004
3. Visit to four children 20,21,27, 30th July 2004
4. Observation of Fostering Panel 16th July 2004
5. File tracking 29th 30th July 2004
6. Discussion with social workers. 29th July 2004
7. Meeting with the Panel Chair 26th July 2004
8. Meeting with the Registered Manager 30th July 2004

Statement of Purpose. Standard 1.

Standard fully met.

Synergy Fostering Ltd have a Statement of Purpose and a children's guide to fostering. The Statement of Purpose is available to all carers. It is written in plain English and includes the aims and objectives of the service.

Fitness to Carry on or Manage a fostering Service.

Standards 2-3 Both standards were fully met

The fostering service managers are qualified and experienced in the childcare field. Evidence from the inspection shows that the managers offer a good support service to the staff and carers.

Management of the Fostering Service.

Standards 3-4. 1 standard remains partially met.

The service has clear management policies and procedures. All staff have appropriate Job Descriptions and service contracts. The financial procedures for the service were seen as appropriate during the inspection.

Securing and Promoting Welfare.

Standards 6-14. 8 of the 9 standards were fully met. 1 standard was partially met.

The fostering service offer training and support to carer's to enable them to fully support the young people placed with them.

Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers.

Standards 15-23.

8 of the 9 standards were fully met 1 standard remains partially met.

The service was adequately staffed with qualified social workers and carers trained and supported to offer good quality care. As the fostering service is expanding the Directors of the company are considering employing more staff.

Records

Standards 24-25. Both standard were partially met.

Records seen were mainly in good order. However the manager must ensure that all recorded information is accurate and up to date.

All records were kept in locked filing cabinets.

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

Standard 26. This standard was fully met.

The premise met the required standard.

Financial Requirements

Standards 27-29 both standards were fully met.

The fostering service was financially viable. Finances are monitored and audited regularly.

Fostering Panel

Standard 30 was partially met.

Since the last inspection the panel chair has changed, which has held up the development of the panel. The foster panel was observed during the inspection and has clearly made improvements since the registration inspection.

The foster panel is developing its role and clear policies and procedures for the panel are being developed. Some policies were available to the inspector. The panel role will eventually include a quality assurance function within the agency. The panel has access to relevant professionals as necessary.

Short term Breaks.

Standard 31. Standard not applicable.

Family and Friends as Carers.

Standard 32. Standard not applicable

Reports and Notifications to the Local Authority and Secretary of State

(Local Authority Fostering Services Only)

The following statutory Reports or Notifications are to be made under the Care Standards Act as a result of the findings of this inspection:

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(3) of the Care Standards Act 2000 that the Commission considers the Local Authority's fostering service satisfies the regulatory requirements:

NO

Notice to the Local Authority under section 47(5) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of failure(s) to satisfy regulatory requirements in their fostering service which are not substantial, and specifying the action the Commission considers the Authority should take to remedy the failure(s), informing the Secretary of State of that Notice:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(4)(a) of the Care Standards Act of a failure by a Local Authority fostering service to satisfy regulatory requirements which is not considered substantial:

NO

Report to the Secretary of State under section 47(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000 of substantial failure to satisfy regulatory requirements by a Local Authority fostering service:

NO

The grounds for the above Report or Notice are:

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NO

If No please list below

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS				
Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Services Regulations 2002.				
No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	
1	16	FS14	<p>The registered person must ensure foster carers are aware of the written policy and procedure to prepare young people for independent living. The registered person must ensure young people preparing to live independently have appropriate pathway plans on file.</p> <p>This requirement is repeated.</p>	<p>31/3/04</p> <p>New date for action.</p> <p>30/9/04</p>
2	22	FS25	<p>The registered person must ensure that all complaints are recorded. The records must include actions taken to date, and outcomes on completion of the investigation.</p> <p>This requirement is repeated.</p>	<p>1st April 2004</p> <p>New date for action</p> <p>30/9/04</p>

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)**(Registered Independent Fostering Agencies only)**

Providers and managers of registered independent fostering agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector Jill Marriott**Signature** _____**Second Inspector** _____**Signature** _____**Regulation Manager** Hannah Hanley**Signature** _____**Date** 8th October 2004

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The appropriate Officer of the Local Authority or the Registered Person (as applicable) is requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan will be made available on request to the Area Office.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children Act 1989, the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, or the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The Authority or Registered Person(s) is/are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for fostering services.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	
1	43(1) schedule 8	FS4	The Registered Person must ensure that notifications as requires in Regulation 43 (1) Schedule 8 are referred to the commission.	30/9/04
2	16	FS14	<p>The registered person must ensure foster carers are aware of the written policy and procedure to prepare young people for independent living.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure young people preparing to live independently have appropriate pathway plans on file.</p> <p>This requirement is repeated.</p>	<p>31/3/04</p> <p>New date for action.</p> <p>30/9/04</p>
3	22	FS25	<p>The registered person must ensure that all complaints are recorded. The records must include actions taken to date, and outcomes on completion of the investigation.</p> <p>This requirement is repeated.</p>	<p>1st April 2004</p> <p>New date for action 30/9/04</p>

4	20(3)(d)(1) Schedule 1(3)	FS15	<p>The Registered Person must ensure that all references received regarding suitability of staff to work for the agency are on headed paper or are stamped by the person/ previous employer supplying the reference.</p> <p>The Registered Person must ensure that information asked for on reference requests is completed in full or the returned reference includes details of why all information is not included.</p>	30/9/04
5	42 schedule 7. 30(2)(a)	FS24	<p>The registered person must ensure all files hold appropriate and up to date information.</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that the approval details of the carers on files accurately reflect the numbers of the children to be placed and their ages.</p>	30/9/04
6	24(4)	FS30	The registered person must ensure it is clear who is replacing the professional advisor to the panel and how the role will be covered in the future.	30/9/04
7	26	FS30	The registered person must ensure that a policy is produced to show how recommendations made at panel are monitored and reviewed.	30/9/04
8	26	FS30	The registered person must ensure the minutes of panel meetings talk about recommendations made to the Agency decision maker and not about decisions taken at panel	30/9/04

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Authority or Registered Person(s).

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	FS6	The inspector recommends that unannounced visits are made regularly to all carers and these visits are recorded on files.
2	FS17	The inspector recommends that the training needs of staff and carers are met by supplying in-house training and training by approved trainers such as BAAF

3	FS25	The inspector recommends that complex complaints have a chronology of events attached to them.
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* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g FS10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Number of Inspector days spent	8
Survey of placing authorities	YES
Foster carer survey	YES
Foster children survey	YES
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	YES
• Directors of Social services	NO
• Child protection officer	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	NO
• Local Foster Care Association	NO
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	YES
• Interview with foster carers	YES
• Interview with agency staff	YES
• Contact with parents	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	NO
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of foster carer training	NO
Observation of foster panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records	YES
Interview with individual child	YES
Date of Inspection	16/7/04
Time of Inspection	10.00
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	41.00

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

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

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.6)

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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The Agency has a Statement of Purpose, which meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. There was evidence seen during the inspection that the Statement of Purpose reflects the practice within the agency.

There is a Children's Guide to Synergy Fostering. Children spoken to during the inspection confirmed they had received a Children's Guide, which includes a range of leaflets and relevant additional information about services available for them.

Fitness to Carry On or Manage a Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.4)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and have the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Both the Responsible Person and the Registered Manager of Synergy are qualified social workers with many years experience of working in childcare services. Feedback from the staff and foster carers interviewed showed that the management team are supportive, always accessible and willing to give help and advice where appropriate. There was no evidence to suggest that the company's financial position was anything other than sound.

Standard 3 (3.1 - 3.4)

Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Synergy Fostering Service has only recently been registered with the Social Care Commission. The inspector has seen evidence of relevant information relating to the suitability of the Responsible Person and the Manager. The references seen are current and appropriate and the Criminal Records Bureau disclosures are clear.

Management of the Fostering Service

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The fostering service is managed ethically and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 (4.1 – 4.5)

There are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspector saw evidence that both staff and carers are aware of the guidance produced by the agency. There is a comprehensive Foster Carers handbook a copy of which is given to each household. The carer's handbook clearly explains the role of the carers and the responsibilities of the agency. Evidence was seen of regular staff meetings and regular carers groups. From the records and discussion with carer's it was clear that supervising social workers met with carers and young people regularly. These meetings were recorded on the files seen.

The financial procedures are monitored and reviewed six monthly. It was noted during the inspection that one child was seriously ill while in placement. The information was not notified to the commission.

The registered person must ensure that all incidents identified in regulation 43(1) Schedule 8 must be notified to the commission.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

1

Death of a child placed with foster parents.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the service as unsuitable to work with children.

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Outbreak of serious infectious disease at a foster home.

0

Actual or suspected involvement of a child in prostitution.

0

Serious incident relating to a foster child involving calling the police to a foster home.

0

Serious complaint about a foster parent.

1

Initiation of child protection enquiry involving a child.

0

Number of complaints made to CSCI about the agency in the past 12 months:

3

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated:

X

Standard 5 (5.1 - 5.4)**The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.****Key Findings and Evidence****Standard met?****3**

The job descriptions and written staffing structure was seen. These written roles define the level of accountability for different staff working within the agency. The agency is aware of the need to expand its staff team to include a social work manager and more social work staff.

There is a clear cover arrangement identified in the absence of the manager.

Securing and Promoting Welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 (6.1 - 6.9)

The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The inspector met with four carers in their own homes. Each of the carers has been through a thorough preparation course to assess their suitability to meet the needs of children from a range of different backgrounds. The process starts with a home visit and statutory checks made regarding the carers and their close family network. All carers are assessed by a qualified social worker who following a number of visits, training sessions and health and safety checks presents a report to the foster panel. Carers are welcome to attend panel. Records show that households are visited regularly by link worker who also see the children in placement. The inspector was told that health and safety risk assessments are discussed and reviewed at each LAC (Looked after Children) planning meeting. There was evidence on some carer's files of unannounced visits to carers. **The inspector recommends that unannounced visits are made regularly to all carers and these visits are recorded on files.**

Standard 7 (7.1 - 7.7)

The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

There was evidence to show that carer's are recruited from a range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Documentation seen during the inspection referred to the agency providing a safe and nurturing environment for Looked after Children, through recruiting culturally diverse carers.

It was evident from the inspectors meetings with a number of carers and from documents seen at the agency that Synergy Fostering match children and young people with carers that can appropriately meet their ethnic, religious and cultural needs.

Standard 8 (8.1 - 8.7)

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

It was evident from discussion with carers and young people and from records seen that Synergy Fostering that a matching process is in place. Following this process placements are progress with the Local Authority. Foster Carers confirmed that the agency provides as much information about the child prior to placement as is available.

Standard 9 (9.1 - 9.8)

The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The agency has a child protection policy, which is included in the carer's handbook. The policy defines physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect. The policy includes information and guidance for carers on what action should be taken if an allegation were made concerning the welfare of the child in their care. The foster carer's agreement includes a section in which the carer agrees not to use corporal punishment. There is a clear policy on reporting children missing from care to the appropriate professionals.

Percentage of foster children placed who report never or hardly ever being bullied:

100

%

Standard 10 (10.1 - 10.9)

The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The foster cares handbook includes a section on working with parents and refers to working in partnership. The arrangements for contact with parents are also referred to in the handbook. There was evidence on files that family contact was agreed through placement planning meetings.

Standard 11 (11.1 - 11.5)

The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues that are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Link social workers are in regular contact with foster carers both by phone and through regular visits. Visits are made to the foster households every 2-4 weeks. Evidence was seen on records that link workers spent private time with each child to ascertain their wishes feelings and views about the placement.

Foster children spoken to by the inspector said they felt their views were listened to by the agency.

Standard 12 (12.1 - 12.8)

The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

There is a written policy, which sets out the foster carers role in relation to each foster child's health needs.

Foster children are registered with a local GP if they have moved away from their previous GP area.

Evidence was seen on case files that foster carers were given relevant information regarding the health needs of the children placed with them.

Standard 13 (13.1 - 13.8)

The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

There is a written policy, which sets out the foster carers role in relation to education. There was evidence from case records and from discussion with foster carers that children are supported to attain their full education potential. Foster carers also told the inspector that they received appropriate support from the link social workers to find suitable education resources for young people placed with them.

Standard 14 (14.1 - 14.5)

The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****2**

There was evidence on one file seen that pathway plans had been requested from the appropriate local authority. No plans were seen on file. There was no recorded information on the file seen about any plan for the young person to move on to independent living despite this being age appropriate.

The agency has recently introduced a policy related to preparing young people for adult living. The introduction of the policy should improve the planning process for young people living with Synergy Carers who are going through the leaving care process.

The Registered Person must ensure that young people reaching leaving care age have appropriate support and pathway plans are developed for them with regard to their future needs.

Recruiting, Checking, Managing, Supporting and Training Staff and Foster Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 (15.1 - 15.8)

Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

Evidence was seen of clear recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff. Staff and carer references were seen on files. CRB disclosures have been received and police checks have been acquired for Social workers coming from abroad.

Evidence was seen of qualification verification for Social Workers trained abroad.

One carer's reference seen was not fully completed. Another staff reference was not on headed paper or stamped by the sender. The agency must take care to ensure all references received are on headed paper or are stamped by the company sending the information. The agency must ensure that all reference requests for staff and carer's are completed correctly

The Registered Person must ensure that all references received regarding suitability of staff to work for the agency are on headed paper or are stamped by the previous employer. The Registered Person must ensure that information asked for on reference requests is completed in full, or includes details of why the information is not included.

Total number of staff of the agency:

6

Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months:

0

Standard 16 (16.1 - 16.16)

Staff are organised and managed in a way that delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Each fostering household has an allocated link-worker. Records indicated that there were regular visits to the carers and time was spent with the children in placement.

Foster carers told the inspector they valued the support offered by the Link-worker.

Synergy also offer a carers support group, which is well attended in spite of the difficulties for some carers to get to the venue.

It is difficult for the agency to locate venues suitably for all cares. Carers are based across the London area. The agency try to ensure the venues are central to all carers. The staff records and discussion with staff showed that regular appropriate supervision takes place.

Standard 17 (17.1 - 17.7)

The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The current structure is adequate to meet the needs of the service. The fostering agency is very small at present with just two social workers in post. One worker is very recently appointed and is undertaking training to enhance her skills for the post. The social workers told the inspector that their training needs were identified during supervision and the training they receive is appropriate and includes presentation of competency based assessments as identified in the previous inspection report.

Foster carers and young people placed told the inspector that the support received by the link workers was very good.

There was evidence on files seen that as far as possible young people are matched to carers who reflect their cultural, ethnic and religious identity.

The inspector recommends that the training needs of staff and carers are met by supplying in-house training and training by approved trainers such as BAAF

Standard 18 (18.1 - 18.7)

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The agency has appropriate policies and procedures. There are job descriptions for staff within the agency. There are suitable out of hour's management support services. Carers told the inspector that support was always available when needed, both face to face and by phone. The service has a whistle blowing policy.

Adequate insurance cover was seen for staff and carers.

Standard 19 (19.1 - 19.7)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

A training programme was seen by the inspector, which covers the financial year 2004/5 the training appears appropriate to the needs of carers. There are some difficulties regarding venues as carers come from a range of different areas across London. This standard will be reviewed at the next inspection to monitor how many carers/staff were able to attend the training identified on the plan.

Members of Synergy staff told the inspector that their training needs were being met. The training plan offered training identified in supervision sessions.

Standard 20 (20.1 - 20.5) All staff are properly accountable and supported.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>There was evidence from discussion with social workers, managers and the agencies records that the staff team are supported by the agency.</p> <p>Clear guidance was seen of the responsibilities and accountability of the social workers within the agency.</p>		

Standard 21 (21.1 - 21.6) The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Social workers (link workers) confirmed that they visit foster households regularly. There was evidence from carers and the files seen to support this. Foster carers told the inspector that they valued the support they received from Synergy. There is a support group, which is chaired by a carer. Training is offered at support groups and at separate events. Carers told the inspector that Synergy offers outings and holds social events for carers, children and foster children. On occasion and where appropriate respite care is offered to carers to support the placement.</p>		

Standard 22 (22.1 - 22.10) The fostering service is a managed one that provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.		
Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>A foster placement agreement is completed at the beginning of each placement. Referring local authorities use Looked after Children forms. There is a comprehensive foster carers handbook, which details the role of the carer. Each foster household has a named link worker. Foster carers told the inspector that their allowances and expenses were paid regularly. All social workers visit foster carers regularly every 2/4 weeks.</p>		

Standard 23 (23.1 - 23.9)

The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

The agency offers a pre placement training and assessment package, which includes the assessment of prospective foster carers. Equal opportunities and anti discriminatory practice was included in all identified training. The inspector saw evidence that all training is recorded on individual files. Training for this year will be evaluated at the end of the year, the evaluation will inform the training programme for next year as required in the inspection report 24th November 2004.

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 (24.1 - 24.8)

The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspector tracked 4 case files for foster carers and children. Files were mainly up to date. Despite the files being audited by the manager one of the files did not have appropriate information on the front sheet. Not all files include relevant information such as care plans and Looked after Children reviews. One eighteen year old did not have any evidence of pathway plans on file.

One couple were approved for one child but the file showed two children had been placed no information had been recorded to show the decision had been approved. Not all care plans and childcare reviews are up to date. One file showed evidence that a request had been made to the local authority by the agency social worker for information to up date the child's file. On one file a carers reference had not been fully completed by the referee.

The registered person must ensure all files hold appropriate and up to date information. The registered person must ensure that the approval details of the carers on files accurately reflect the numbers of the children to be placed and their ages.

Standard 25 (25.1 - 25.13)

The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspector viewed a sample of records kept by the agency. Employment records were seen and the content was satisfactory. The agency has a written policy on recording information. Foster carers told the inspector that they were given guidance regarding the recording of relevant information. Evidence was seen that link workers review this information and discuss any recording difficulties with the carers.

The agency also has a policy regarding young peoples access to information held about them.

The complaint file was seen by the inspector. The complaints on file are still awaiting outcomes. Each complaint recorded must show at what stage the complaint is at. Complainants must be informed if the actions agreed are not completed within the time scales.

The registered person must ensure that all complaints are recorded with actions taken and outcomes on completion of the investigation.

The inspector recommends that complex complaints have a chronology of events attached to them.

Number of current foster placements supported by the agency:			19
Number of placements made by the agency in the last 12 months:			13
Number of placements made by the agency which ended in the past 12 months:			X
Number of new foster carers approved during the last 12 months:			5
Number of foster carers who left the agency during the last 12 months:			1
Current weekly payments to foster parents: Minimum £	283.50	Maximum £	350

Fitness of Premises for use as Fostering Service

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- **The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.**

Standard 26 (26.1 - 26.5)

Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The offices used by Synergy Fostering are in a purpose built office block. The building is alarmed and access is by intercom. There is a lift, which gives access to all floors. The agency has two rooms on the second floor. The rooms have appropriate good quality office furnishings and equipment. Support group meetings and training events are held externally to the venue. A copy of the agency's insurance certificate was seen during the inspection.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 27 (27.1 - 27.3)

The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The agency's financial resources are satisfactory. The agency's budget was seen during the inspection. There is no evidence to suggest that the agency is not able to fulfil its financial obligation.

Standard 28 (28.1 - 28.7)

The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Information regarding the agency's finances was seen during the inspection. Evidence showed that the accounting standards and practices are appropriate. The agency accounts are subject to external audit.

Standard 29 (29.1 - 29.2)

Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Foster cares confirmed that they receive regular payments. Carers also confirmed that extra expense are paid without delay. Allowances and fees are reviewed at yearly intervals.

Fostering Panels

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- **Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.**

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.9)

Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

2

The inspector observed the foster panel on 16/7/04. The inspector had access to the assessments presented at panel and the minutes of the previous panel meeting.

The inspector also interviewed the chair of the panel on 26/7/04.

- From the information available and from observation of the panel. It was clear that improvements to the panel have been made since the registration of Synergy Fostering Agency. The panel still has some way to go to meet this standard. Training for the Foster Panel has been undertaken and further training identified.
- It was unclear from evidence seen as to how panel recommendations are monitored and reviewed. A clear policy regarding the carrying out of panel recommendations must be developed to ensure the decisions are adhered to. For example if specific training is recommended for carers how does panel know the carers have received the training?
- The panel must have a procedure to explain how the vacant post of advisor to the panel will be covered.
- One of the form F's seen by the inspector included evidence of the carer's competence, skills and their strengths and resources. The other form F' did not contain enough information. Panel members quickly identified the issues regarding the second form F. A recommendation was postponed pending further information.
- The type of approval was clearly recorded on both form F's discussed at panel.
- Following recent training for the panel the Synergy Fostering Service now invites prospective carers to the panel. One couple attended the panel observed by the inspector.
- It was observed that the role of the agency decision maker is now clear. The decision maker is no longer part of the panel. The agency decision maker is not involved in the recommendations made regarding the approval of carers.

The panel has met on four occasions (two monthly) since November 2003 and panel members have received training identified in the last report. From discussion with the panel chair it was clear that the role of the panel is under review. Policies and procedures are being developed to ensure the panel reaches the required standard.

The registered person must ensure that a policy is produced to show how recommendations made at panel are monitored and reviewed.

The registered person must ensure that a procedure is produced to show how the panel will cover the vacant post of advisor to the panel.

Short-Term Breaks

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangement recognises that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 31 (31.1 - 31.2)

Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
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This standard is not applicable to this agency.

Family and Friends as Carers

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 32 (32.1 - 32.4)

These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friend carers.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?
This standard is not applicable to this agency.	

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor

Signature

Date

PART D**PROVIDER'S RESPONSE****D.1 Registered Person's or Responsible Local Authority Manager's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.**

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 19th July 2004 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary

NO

Comments were received from the provider

NO

Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report

NO

Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate

NO

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider responsible Local Authority fostering service Manager both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 16th September 2004, which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required

YES

Action plan was received at the point of publication

YES

Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion

YES

Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion

NO

Provider has declined to provide an action plan

NO

Other: <enter details here>

NO

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents. Reports on children's homes are only obtainable on personal application to CSCI offices.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's or responsible Local Authority Manager's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I _____ of _____
confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation
of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that
I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with
these.

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____
am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

--

Print Name _____

Signature

Designation

Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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