



*Making Social Care  
Better for People*

# inspection report

## FOSTERING SERVICE

### **Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service**

**Family Placements Service  
Orchard House  
Orchard Street  
Lincoln  
LN1 1BA**

*Lead Inspector*  
Sharon Treadwell

*Announced Inspection*

Week Commencing Monday, 4th September 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

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

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

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

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

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

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# SERVICE INFORMATION

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<b>Name of registered manager (if applicable)</b>	Mr Philip Hunt
<b>Type of registration</b>	Local Auth Fostering Service

# SERVICE INFORMATION

## Conditions of registration:

**Date of last inspection**      7th February 2006

## Brief Description of the Service:

The Head of Service, Children in Public Care has specific responsibility for the Family Placement Services and is the Local Authority's nominated manager for this service.

Service delivery is split into three geographical areas, South (Sleaford), West (Lincoln) and East (Louth).

Management of this service is devolved through three Service Managers (Looked After children and Family Placement) and Four Practice Managers (Family Placement), one with responsibility for each of the geographical areas and one with responsibility for the Placement Plus service.

The Family Placement Team has responsibility for Adoption services as well as for the assessment and support of foster carers.

The Fostering Service employs a number of Placement Support Workers who provide direct support, including some respite day care, to carers.

The Lincolnshire Local Authority Fostering Service sets out within its Statement of Purpose the aim to 'provide a range of foster carers able to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, religious and ethnicity needs of all the children looked after by the local authority'.

Fostering placements provided include the following types:

Task centred, Respite Care, Permanent, Specialist Carers for children with disabilities, Placement Plus Carers for children with challenging behaviour and Kinship Carers.

The authority has a contractual agreement with NCH Caring Together for the provision of a respite scheme for children with a disability and additionally commissions fostering placements from a number of Independent Fostering Agencies.

At the time of this inspection Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service was supporting 251 foster carer households and the number of placements being provided was 343.

# SUMMARY

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

This was a planned inspection carried out by two inspectors: Sharon Treadwell and Trisha Gibbs, with a pre-inspection visit being made to the service on June 2nd 2006. Inspectors were based at Orchard House in Lincoln for this inspection, which is the base for the West Team.

This is the third inspection of the Lincolnshire Family Placement Service in the last year (two fostering, one adoption) and as a reflection of this only three young people and the two carers with whom they are placed, were tracked. Tracking involves the inspection of case files, home visits and discussions with young people, foster carers, placing social workers and relevant agency staff, either in person or by telephone. Additional carers' and young peoples files were examined as a result of information supplied in questionnaires or issues arising during the inspection.

During the inspection discussions were also held with the Head of Service, Children in Public Care (nominated manager for fostering), the Performance Manager, Fostering and Adoption, two of the Service Managers and all four Practice Managers, the Duty Officer Family Placements and various staff involved with health and education services for Looked After Children.

At the time of preparing this report, questionnaire responses had been received from 19 carers, 15 placing Social Workers and 27 young people, and the views contained in these have been reflected in the report. No questionnaires were returned by the parents of young people placed.

A letter was received, on August 4<sup>th</sup> 2006, from the Business Manager of the Local Safeguarding Children Board Detailing Child Protection enquiries relating to the Fostering Service, undertaken since the previous inspection, and their outcomes.

The inspectors met with a group of foster carers at Grantham during the inspection.

No Fostering Panel was observed during this inspection. The panel was observed during the fostering inspection in February 2006.

Prior to the inspection the Performance Manager, Fostering and Adoption provided the Commission for Social Care Inspection with a range of written information about the operation of the Fostering Service. This information was commendably comprehensive and detailed and has informed this report

No requirements have been identified during this inspection but four recommendations have been made.

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

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is an extremely detailed document in an easily accessible format, which clearly outlines the constitution, aims, objectives and principles of the fostering service.

There is very good management monitoring and overview of the service.

Staff turnover in the Family Placement Team is notably low and the inspectors noted a strong staff commitment to promoting positive outcomes for children and young people. Staff said they felt well supported both by their colleagues and their managers.

The service promotes the educational and personal achievement of fostered children, and there are a range of innovative opportunities for fostered young people to participate in arts based projects, which both ensure effective consultation, and develop social skills. Carers are encouraged to facilitate children's involvement in a range of leisure/educational activities: 'We live in a rural location but the fostering service is very keen to fund transport to enable children to attend after school clubs, youth clubs etc'.

Young people feel well cared for and listened to by their carers: 'I know I am a very valued member of this family'; 'I have a foster carer but will be leaving care shortly. I hope that other children in my situation will be as lucky as me'.

Carers feel well supported, particularly by their Family Placement Officers: 'We have found Lincolnshire a great support network in dealing with all manner of problems relating to fostering. We couldn't have done it without their incredible help and support'.

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

A Health Services Co-ordinator was appointed in April to track health assessments, introduce individual health recording systems and improve access to specialist services and a Sexual Health Advisor has also been appointed to offer advice and support to Looked After Children.

Since the previous inspection child protection guidance has been included in the Foster Carers' Handbook, specifically how to appropriately respond to and report disclosures of abuse. The service has developed carer training opportunities and Child Protection and First Aid refresher training has been included in the training programme but the service needs to monitor carers' take up of this training (see below).

Carer payments have been clarified and brought fully into line with Fostering Network recommended levels.

There has been a focus on returning children and young people, placed out of county, to local foster placements, where appropriate. This has resulted in

developments in commissioning strategies and closer working with selected Independent Fostering Service providers.

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

All foster carers should be provided with a written health record for children in placement, which can be updated throughout the placement. Carer recording should include the administration of medication.

The Fostering Service should have a clearly stated expectation for carers to renew/complete certain elements of training. These should include Child Protection and First Aid. Carer training records need to evidence this.

Matching considerations must be clearly recorded in respect of each placement made. This record should indicate any potential shortfalls in relation to the match and how these will be addressed. Where other children are already in placement consultation with these young people should be evidenced.

Safe caring guidelines should be provided for each foster home. Considerations of safe care should include the completion of a risk assessment where children are required to share a bedroom, particularly if those children have been abused or have abused another child.

Foster carer recording practices should be reviewed against service policy as stated in the Carers' Handbook. Foster carers' records of placement should be retained in a manner that makes them accessible to the child.

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

The report of this inspection is available from [enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk) or by contacting your local CSCI office.



# **DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS**

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# Being Healthy

## The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

**The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

### 12

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The local authority is currently developing several good strategies to ensure robust health provision for Looked After Children. The implementation of these strategies needs to ensure better recording of health needs and interventions.

## EVIDENCE:

Young people, in their questionnaire responses, confirmed that their carers encouraged them to stay healthy: 'Mum and Dad (carers) always tell me to keep out of the sun because of my fair skin'; 'They always tell me to eat fruit'; 'I get told I'll be healthy if I do sports and eat lots of fruit and vegetables'; 'I have a full check up every year'.

Placing Social Workers also made some positive comments about foster carers' efforts to promote healthy lifestyles: 'D has recently had an eye test and is registered with a dentist. D has problem teeth and this is being well addressed'; 'He is encouraged to play outside in conjunction with using the computer and playstation'.

A range of training opportunities is provided to carers including Autism and Aspergers and Drugs and Alcohol Awareness and the Modular Training Programme (distance learning model) includes two modules devoted to health: 'Promoting a healthy lifestyle' and 'Mental Health and well-being'.

A recommendation was made during the previous inspection relating to the need for carers to be provided with refresher training in First Aid. Although the training programme supplied by the Fostering Service evidences the inclusion of First Aid training, none of the carers spoken to during this inspection had a

current First Aid certificate. One carer had not undertaken First Aid training for six years.

Currently post approval training is largely optional for carers and the Fostering Service has been advised that there should be a stated expectation for carers to renew/complete some elements of training at specified intervals. This should include First Aid.

One carer visited, who was providing placements to young people with very specific health needs, had been provided with specialist training from health professionals and had regular input from a Community Nurse.

The Fostering Service has been reminded that evidence of this training (copies of certificates) should be placed on the carer's file.

A specialist CAMHS post supports foster carers in dealing with Mental Health issues and can facilitate a fast-track referral, if needed.

The authority has also recently appointed a Sexual Health Advisor Nurse to work specifically with Looked After Children and resource packs have been distributed to carers covering teenage pregnancy.

The inspectors met during this inspection with members of the Looked After Children Health Team, including the Health Services Co-ordinator appointed in April.

The previous inspection identified a shortfall in the absence of a written health record for all children, which could be updated throughout a child's placement. Such a record is still not in place but the inspectors were apprised of work in progress to develop this and to better organise the monitoring of annual medicals for Looked After Children. Work has already been undertaken to improve access for young people to dental treatment.

The inspectors are strongly in favour of plans to run a 'Health Roadshow' for foster carers.

Currently health information relating to young people is difficult to isolate in their written records. One of the files tracked during this inspection related to a young person with complex health needs and yet the designated health section of the file contained little information. Within the file there was evidence that the young person's health needs were being monitored through the Looked After Children review system, by the Placing Social Worker during visits to the child and by the Family Placement Officer during carer supervision visits. Members of the Looked After Children Health Team agreed that health information was difficult to isolate and felt that the planned development of an Individual Health Care Plan and the introduction of a written health record would improve this.

Guidance in the Carers' Manual details that the issue of medication, whether prescription or none prescription, should be recorded by foster carers, though there is no indication in what form this should be recorded (see comments on carer records under 'Management'). Discussions with carers indicated that this

was not being generally undertaken. In one of the foster homes visited during the inspection children were prescribed particularly invasive medical treatments, for example rectal diazepam, the administration of which was not recorded.

The Fostering Service should clarify its expectation that medication be stored in a locked cabinet.

The local authority has purchased a software programme called 'Lifecard', which provides young people with a CD created as part of their personal life story work. It is intended to include access to personal health records into this.

# Staying Safe

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

**The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

## **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):**

**3, 6, 8, 9, 30.**

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The fostering service is staffed by qualified and experienced staff who are suitable to work with children and young people.

Discussions with carers, young people, staff and placing social workers confirm that young people are appropriately placed and safely cared for. The agency records do not provide good supporting evidence.

## **EVIDENCE:**

The Fostering Service is managed at all levels by appropriately qualified and experienced personnel who evidence a commitment to ensuring positive outcomes for young people placed.

There is evidence of good stability within the service with a low staff turnover rate.

Three personnel files were examined and records evidence that CRB checks are carried out on a 3-year rolling programme in respect of all staff employed, and references are obtained and followed up appropriately. Full records are retained of the recruitment process. In addition the file relating to a recently recruited member of the Fostering Panel was examined and contained a

contract of employment, which included confidentiality requirements and confirmation of Criminal Records Bureau clearance. This panel member was not an independent member so no references had been sought.

A Fostering Panel was not observed during this inspection but the inspectors examined the minutes of three panels. The panel was found to be appropriately constituted for these sessions and the minutes reflected discussions held.

The inspectors have suggested to the Panel Advisor that, where panel consider and approve a foster carer annual review, the minutes should detail the carer approval status, which has been agreed and whether this constitutes a change of approval status or not.

The Foster Carers visited during this inspection were found to provide a good standard of care to young people in placement and young people said they felt well cared for: 'I feel really safe and am well looked after'; 'Warm bedding, get proper clothes, feel loved and live in a warm house'. The files tracked evidenced that the young people tracked had made considerable progress in their placements and had been provided with stability.

Lincolnshire was chosen, in December 2005, as an example of good practice in the DfES qualitative study 'Placement stability for Looked after Children'.

Placing Social workers felt generally that young people were well cared for. One Placing Social Worker said that what the fostering service did best was 'to provide stability within education alongside meeting children's holistic needs. The matching process is very important in this'.

The service has clear and comprehensive policy guidelines relating to behaviour management, bullying and young people missing from care and these are included in the Carers' Handbook.

In their questionnaire responses four of the twenty-seven young people responding, indicated that they were being bullied in school. Details of the young people concerned have been shared with service managers and will be followed up in a sensitive manner.

Both 'Child Protection' and 'Safe Care' feature in the carer training programme for this year and in the modular distance learning programme and carers have access to training opportunities provided for staff by the Lincolnshire Social Services Directorate. As detailed under 'Being Healthy' the inspectors would advise that there should be a stated expectation for carers to renew some elements of training at specified intervals and this should include 'Child Protection'.

The Carers' handbook details that all households should have a Safe Care Policy and includes good guidelines on what should be included in this policy. Additionally all carers are issued with 'Safer Caring' guidelines produced by

Fostering Network. The files tracked during this inspection did not contain a safe care policy, which was specific to the household and to the individual needs of young people in placement. The service has however developed an individual risk assessment pro-forma, which is completed in relation to each young person placed and this requires specific behaviours/attitudes to be identified and the strategies for managing these within the foster placement to be clarified. It is particularly good that, where no high risk is identified a 'nil return' pro forma is placed in the file.

Some of the risk assessments viewed during this inspection did not appropriately clarify strategies for managing identified high risk behaviours, for example, where a young person had threatened to take her own life the entry under 'Strategies to manage the behaviour' stated only that the social worker had been informed.

During the inspection one file examined related to two siblings displaying inappropriate sexual behaviour who were sharing a bedroom. No risk assessment had been completed in relation to this situation.

The Service Manager and the Performance Manager, Fostering and Adoption detailed the intention to review the Risk Assessment Process in October this year.

There is a need within this review to ensure that monitoring of the completion of risk assessments is thorough and that there is understanding within the staff team of the need to be very clear about how behaviours, identified as high risk, will be managed within the foster placement.

The risk assessment address only behaviours portending significant risk and not issues of general safe care, for example where there is a requirement to provide personal care, and needs to be supportive of not replace safe care policies, which should clarify the day-to-day living issues in relation to the young people accommodated.

The young people tracked during the inspection were noted to be well matched with their carers and most of the staff and carers spoken to said that matching was an important consideration in the making of placements. Some carers spoken to however told inspectors that there was not enough consideration given, in the making of placements, to the carer's approval status and skills.

The Family Placements Team has a Duty Placements Officer, who was interviewed during the inspection. She said that 'Matching is a thought process not really a written process' but the inspectors noted that it was a fairly thorough process. The Duty Placements officer often requests additional information from social workers seeking placements and has a good knowledge of individual carers particular skills. The Duty Placements Officer completes referral paperwork relating to the placements she makes but these records are not placed on the files of either the carer or the young person.

Requests for permanent placements are completed on a 'Family finding form' and contain good information regarding the specific needs of the child. Such requests are submitted to a specialist family finding group.

The files examined during this inspection contained no evidence of how a placement match was made nor was there any identification of any shortfalls in the match. This applies in the case of all placement types since although the 'Family finding form' clearly details the child's needs there is no subsequent evidence of the matching of these to a carer's skills.

A recommendation was made during the previous inspection for the service provider to develop a process for recording matching considerations and to identify any gaps and detail how shortfalls would be addressed. This recommendation is restated within this report.



# Enjoying and Achieving

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements 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 – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**7,13.**

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Young people's personal and educational achievement is strongly promoted and their specific individual needs are well provided for.

## **EVIDENCE:**

Young people, in their questionnaire responses, spoke very positively of the support provided by their carers in relation to education: 'J & C helped me to pass my exams and get into college'; 'I go to a good school and get 1/1 help'; 'School and connexions are helping me at school and my mum and dad (carers) help me at home';

A new Personal Education Plan, designed in consultation with young people, was launched in May 2005. The service has now purchased a software programme enabling a Personal Education Plan to be completed electronically in a very visual, interactive, child centred way and this system is to be piloted from September this year.

All the young peoples files examined contained minutes of relevant meetings with educational professionals and Personal Education Plans as well as, where appropriate, a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Foster Carers are provided with an Education Handbook and also receive a regular newsletter 'Education Matters', which provides information about the

educational achievements of Looked After Children as well as details of the wide range of educational activity programmes operated by the service.

Staff with nominated responsibilities relating to the education of Looked After Children were able to confirm that there were good systems for monitoring young people's achievements at all key stages and for reducing the risk of exclusions and that work was in process to develop systems for monitoring attendance.

Many foster carers and placing social workers spoke positively of the support offered by the service in relation to young people's education; 'Through various school placement breakdowns the fostering service have been very quick to support us in helping the child at school or with the move to alternative education'; 'There is a definite commitment to improving children's educational achievement'.

Some of the carers spoken to however, and some questionnaire responses felt said that better support was needed where young people were excluded from school. Fostering service staff assured the inspectors that additional support was available to carers in these circumstances. The fostering service has been advised that it should better clarify for carers how these additional support systems should be accessed.

Currently education information relating to young people is difficult to isolate in their written records (see under 'Management').

Fostered children and their carers in Lincolnshire can become involved in a range of innovative projects using arts and creativity programmes to enable LAC to develop self confidence, and participate in activities which are socially inclusive. These projects include a NACRO Fun in the Sun project, a national citizenship and life skills programme, known as Life Routes, One Jam, which combines gospel R n B with filming, photography, lyric and song writing, and a heritage project, Young Roots, which involved the facial reconstruction of an Anglo Saxon Skull, found locally. These projects provide opportunities for young people to widen their social interaction, and develop a range of creative and artistic skills.

An annual Celebration of Achievement Awards ceremony gives accreditation to young people for their personal, educational and artistic achievements throughout the year.

This year Lincolnshire has been selected as one of ten pilot sites for the introduction of the Youth Opportunities Card, which will provide young people with £25 per month to spend on local sport and leisure activities.

Young people spoke highly of the range of activities made available to them: 'I like doing army cadets, rugby, youth club, boxing, skate boarding and fishing'. Placing social workers also felt that young people were encouraged to become involved in a good range of activities: 'The fostering service provides activities and encourages carers to support the child with those activities'; 'The foster

carer has encouraged D to seek out new activities. He has taken a keen interest in wildlife, farming and horse riding and has continued his interest in football'.

A training course has been made available for all staff in the service, aimed at promoting their understanding of race and diversity issues. All managers have already undertaken this training. Equality and diversity is an essential element of foster carers' core training and the authority have introduced a seminar into the training programme entitled 'Me, myself and I', which addresses issues of identity.

Lincolnshire County Council accommodates largely white, British children (337 out of 343) and accordingly has predominantly white, British carer households (241 out of 251).

Paperwork supplied by the service, prior to this inspection details several examples where children's very specific individual needs have been addressed by the provision of interpreter services, independent visitors and by adaptations to carers' homes or the provision of specific equipment. Foster carers are caring for unaccompanied young people from a range of countries. Liaison with education services has taken place to ensure appropriate language support, where necessary for these young people.

The lack of paperwork relating to the matching process does make it difficult for the fostering service to evidence the priority given to ensuring that young people's needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality are prioritised, though this is clearly demonstrated in discussions with staff and specific examples highlighted.

The authority has a contractual agreement with NCH Caring Together for the provision of a respite scheme for children with a disability.

## **Making a Positive Contribution**

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

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

### **The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

### **JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

#### **10,11.**

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The agency consults with young people and actively promotes contact with young people and their families.

### **EVIDENCE:**

Contact issues for young people were well managed by the carers tracked during this inspection. The inspectors particularly noted the very positive and pro-active promotion of regular contacts for a large group of siblings placed with several carers. The young person spoken to valued this contact highly.

Carers' responsibilities in relation to contact are clearly stated by the fostering service and contact arrangements were clearly detailed in the young peoples files examined. Where support staff supervise contact, records are clear and concise.

The Family Placement service has recently developed a draft version of its 'Contact Strategy', which contains advice on the promotion and facilitation of contact and will be circulated to all carers.

One placing social worker commented: 'The fostering service promotes the independence and equality of young children and strongly promotes contact with the birth family'.

Young people generally felt that their carers listened to their views: 'K is understanding, she listens to what I say and we have a good relationship'; 'We sometimes sit at the table and have a really good talk'; 'My carers always listen to me and they take notice'.

Lincolnshire County Council operates a commendable number of project initiatives (see under 'Enjoying and Achieving') for Looked After Children, where opportunities are provided for informal consultation, both with each other and with staff. One of the developments resulting from young peoples input is a move to get work undertaken on the arts based projects accredited.

An independent Children's Rights Service is commissioned from the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS). A representative of this service was spoken to during the inspection and he told the inspector that the Family Placements Team had been taking information packs out to young people detailing what NYAS was able to offer including the provision of an advocate to young people wishing to make a complaint. The NYAS representative said that contacts from young people were 'increasing steadily' as a result of the issuing of these packs.

NYAS currently has no regular input with foster carers, although they have attended a support group meeting of carers providing placements under the Placement Plus Scheme. The inspectors have suggested to the fostering service, that in terms of the need for the Children's Rights Service to be proactive rather than reactive, initiatives to raise foster carers awareness generally of value of the service to young people are important.

The NYAS representative advised the inspector that he is currently unable to provide statistics relating to the number of fostered children accessing the service since these are inseparable from the numbers of Looked After children using it. Such figures would provide useful information to the fostering service. However a Looked After Children Service Manager has operational responsibility for the Children's Rights contract, and meets the Children's Rights officer on a quarterly basis to discuss operational matters. These meetings provide opportunities to discuss themes emerging from the NYAS advocacy role.

The local authority has commissioned NYAS to run a series of workshops for Looked After Children during the coming year to focus on their experiences of fostering and residential care.

Currently, although young people's views are actively sought in relation to their own reviews by means of a consultation document, the views of fostered children are not represented in the paperwork for foster carer annual reviews. This shortfall is being actively addressed and a consultation form is being designed. The views of carers' own children are obtained at the time of the carer's review.

Carers did feel that children and young people were well consulted: 'We have only had children under 4 but they are still asked age appropriate questions when involved in meetings'.

# Achieving Economic Wellbeing

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

## JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

### 14,29.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Importance is given to helping young people to develop daily living skills in preparation for adulthood and independent living.

Significant improvements have been made to the fee structure and allowances paid to foster carers bringing payments more in line with National recommended allowances.

## EVIDENCE:

Lincolnshire County Council has a service level agreement with NCH for the provision of leaving care services. The staff from NCH provide training to foster carers on helping young people to achieve full independence and additionally work with foster carers in the development of Pathway Plans for young people. Written information supplied by the fostering service prior to this inspection details that 94% of eligible young people currently placed, have a Pathway Plan.

The 'Homelincs' housing project, operated in partnership with NCH and local district councils aims to improve accommodation choices for young people leaving the care system and will be operational from Autumn 2006. NCH operates a weekly 'drop in' service for care leavers, which offers advice to care leavers as well as a range of accredited short courses to develop independence skills such as 'Can't cook, won't cook'. The authority also currently has a project operating to place ten care leavers into modern apprenticeships.

Social work staff and carers raised some issues relating to the transitional arrangements for young people with disabilities from children's services to adult services, where continued support was needed. Concerns raised have been passed on to the Service Manager for consideration by the authority.

Carer payments have been fully reviewed and increased, with a stated commitment to meet Fostering Network recommended rates with effect from April 2006. Carer payments are clearly stated and no comments were received from foster carers relating to allowances.

# Management

## The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are 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, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.**

**JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):**

**1, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 25, 32**

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The managers provide clear effective leadership and a good level of support to staff and foster carers to enable them to undertake their roles and responsibilities.



## **EVIDENCE:**

The Executive of the County Council approved an updated Statement of Purpose with effect from 15<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

The Statement of Purpose clearly identifies the aims, objectives and principles of the fostering service, and is well laid out and accessible.

The information contained in the Statement of Purpose is commendable with full information about the services available, clear detail regarding the recruitment and approval processes for foster carers and a clear organisational structure, which fully details staff experience and qualifications.

Leadership and operational management of the fostering service is fully integrated with adoption and the inspectors have suggested that this is clarified when the Statement of Purpose is next updated.

Two children's guides to the fostering service are available, which summarise what the service sets out to do for children, in age appropriate formats.

Staff turnover in the Family Placement Team is notably low with several of the carers spoken to saying that the same worker had supervised them for many years. Foster carers generally spoke highly of the support they received and particularly highly of their individual Family Placement Officer: 'Always on hand to give advice and help with any problems. Keeps very regular contact'; 'The service of my FPO is 100% professional and committed. They do a wonderful job'; 'I My FPO would always go out of her way to ensure that we have what we need in order to care for children placed here'.

A Fostering Inspection Group, made up of senior managers, meets regularly to review compliance with the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards and to negotiate changes/improvements to service delivery. Practice Managers told the inspectors that management teams (Service Managers/Practice Managers) also meet regularly to ensure consistency of service delivery.

In their discussions with staff the inspectors noted a strong commitment to promoting positive outcomes for children and young people and staff confirmed that their own support systems were strong, with regular supervision, annual appraisals and robust mutual support systems within the Family Placement Service ensuring appropriate cover for staff absences.

A programme of recognition events has been introduced for staff entitled 'Making a difference', which celebrates contributions made by staff members to improve outcomes for young people. This encourages staff to feel valued and could perhaps be replicated in respect of foster carers. Whilst many carers completed questionnaires positively, some of the foster carers spoken with felt

that they had provided many years of positive placements and that their work was not valued by the service.

Administrative support was noted by the Practice Managers to be good and administrative staff were viewed as 'the front line service to carers'. Some anomalies were noted in the level of administrative support provided with the West Team having significantly less than the other two teams. The Fostering Service nominated Manager is aware of this anomaly and is seeking to have this support increased.

Records of carer support and supervision were good and inspectors were particularly impressed with the two part pro-forma record for carer supervision addressing the carers own needs (part 1) as well as the specific needs of young people placed (part 2).

Currently out of hours support to carers is provided through the Emergency Duty Team but the Family Placement Service is currently working to develop a carer lead out of hours support system specifically for its carers.

The Family Placement Service has been innovative in terms of developing training opportunities for carers. Lincolnshire covers a wide geographical area and accessibility of training has been an issue. A series of modules are now available for carers to complete either as workbooks or CD's as a 'distance learning' project. Carers can additionally access in service staff training courses and a programme of special interest seminars is operated at different venues across the county covering topics such as attachment, managing challenging behaviour and safe care.

As previously detailed all carer training is currently optional and the service has been advised that there should be a stated expectation for carers to renew/complete some elements of training at specified intervals. This could be followed up through the Foster Care Agreement and carer review processes. Records of carer training are not currently reflective of the training, which has been undertaken and the fostering service has been advised to review these.

In discussion with carers inspectors were apprised of some arrangements for respite for children in placement, which, whilst clearly having positive outcomes for children in that they were staying with carers known to them as 'family friends', appeared to be orchestrated by carers independently and then notified to the fostering service. One single carer of two young people was observed asking other carers if she might be entitled to any respite. The fostering service has been reminded of the need for clear procedures relating to respite and for Family Placement Officers to ensure that carers are made aware of these.

Carer records of placements are not currently being retained in an appropriate manner. With one exception, all the carers visited and spoken to were retaining records relating to all children in placement in one diary. Under Data

Protection Legislation these records are therefore not accessible to the children they relate to. The placement records retained by carers are currently minimal and not in full compliance with service policy on carer recording as detailed in the Carers' Handbook. Crucial information, particularly relating to health and education is in danger of being lost.

The inspectors note that some information is captured within placing social worker records, records of carer supervision and carer submissions to Looked After Children reviews but these alone do not 'evidence the quality of care provided'. Current carer recording practices will not 'contribute to the young person's understanding of her/his life events' and could not 'be seen by the child and by his/her parents'.

A number of placing social workers commented in their questionnaires that they did not see any carer records with one saying 'It would really help if we got a written monthly update from the fostering service or the carer'.

Kinship Carers are assessed as part of the work of the Family Placement team and approved through the panel. They receive the same support and payment as mainstream carers and have access to the same training opportunities. A one day training course has recently been devised specifically for kinship carers and, if this is successful there are plans to set up a dedicated support group.

The inspectors visited a kinship carer during the inspection, who spoke highly of the support she had received.

The inspectors found some of the Family Placement social workers had very limited awareness of Special Guardianship Orders and some carers spoken to confirmed that they had raised questions about these with their Family Placement Officers and been unable to obtain information regarding their use or appropriateness. The inspectors spoke with the Practice Managers who agreed that there was a need to raise the profile and awareness of Special Guardianship Orders and evidenced a sound awareness of the need to keep practices relating to kinship care under review, whilst ensuring that kinship carers were not marginalised.

# 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

<b>BEING HEALTHY</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>12</b>	2

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

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

<b>MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION</b>	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
<b>10</b>	3
<b>11</b>	3

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

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

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.	FS12	The fostering service provider should ensure that all foster carers are provided with a written health record for all children, which can be updated throughout the placement. Recording should include the administration of medication.  All foster carers should be provided with First Aid training at appropriate intervals.
2.	FS8	The Fostering Service should ensure that it retains full evidence of matching considerations in respect of each placement made. This record should indicate any potential shortfalls in relation to the match and how these will be addressed. Where other children are already in placement consultation with these young people must be evidenced.
3.	FS9	The fostering service provider should ensure that safe caring guidelines, based on a written policy, are provided for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household.

		Considerations of safe care should include the completion of a risk assessment where children are required to share a bedroom, particularly if those children have been abused or have abused another child.
4.	FS24	The fostering service provider should ensure consistency in carer recording practices and that these practices are compliant with service policy. Foster carers' records of placement should be retained in a manner that makes them accessible to the child.

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