

# Wigan Social Services Dept. Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Sarah Oldham / Helen Humphreys
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	04/09/2006

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality  
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong  
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound  
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

Wigan Social Services Department's Fostering Service provides care and accommodation through recruited foster carers to a large number of children and young people using public care. Placements with family or friend foster carers provide a valuable service to children and young people enabling them to remain within their own families or extended networks. Family network foster carers provide short term breaks for children, young people and their families who require this specialist service. The service aims to work 'with flexibility to meet the diverse needs of children', providing 'training and support to foster carers to enable them to offer a competent, safe and caring service'.

The service has a team manager who manages both fostering and adoption services

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced inspection was carried out by two inspectors and took place over five days. The inspection included interviews with the manager, staff, independent reviewing officer for young people and carers, a Looked After Children's (LAC) nurse and the manager of the after care team. The panel was observed and the panel chair was interviewed following the meeting. Six cases were case tracked and visits were made to some foster carer's homes. Various files and records were inspected. Surveys were sent out to carers. The registered manager completed a self assessment and data set prior to the inspection, which provided information about the service.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the previous inspection in September 2006 two requirements were made relating to the Panel recruiting an Elected Member and the service ensuring that the children and young peoples files contained comprehensive and updated information. Both of these requirements have been addressed. Children and young peoples files maintained within the area teams have been subject to an audit and redesigned to ensure that the information is appropriately maintained and clearly demonstrates the desired outcomes for the children and young people.

The service continues to hold consultation events with young people and carers.

The aftercare team have developed information packs for carers and for young people containing information about the services available for young people to prepare them for independence.

A designated LAC nurse has been appointed. Developments to how the LAC health care assessments are undertaken is resulting in additional training for health care staff within the authority to undertake these assessments.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The fostering service supports children and young people with their health care. General information about health is provided in the foster carer handbook and also at initial skills to foster training and post approval training. Foster carers are provided with details of the individual health care needs of the children and young people placed with them. This enables carers to continue to support children and young people with all their health care needs.

The authority has a dedicated LAC nurse and additional funding has been approved for another LAC nurse. The LAC nurse is continuing to promote the health care needs of the young people and is providing training to health care visitors and school nurses regarding implementing a new strategy for the health care assessments of looked after children.

Health care plans are produced as part of the assessment process. Health care plans provided detailed health care information for the young people.

Supervising social workers undertook regular supervision visits with carers and used these sessions to also monitor that the health care needs of the children and young people continued to be met.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

A sample of staff personnel files, including the registered manager's file were inspected at the last inspection in 2006 and found to be satisfactory. Staffing levels within the team continue to be maintained and there are appropriate numbers of suitably qualified, skilled and competent staff to meet the needs of the service.

The service has a total of 76 recruited carers and 61 family and friend carers. All carers have a safe care policy and appropriate health and safety checks in place. Carers spoken to and those visited were able to demonstrate a good understanding and a commitment to provide children and young people with a safe and supportive home with appropriate facilities to meet their ongoing needs. Risk assessments were in place and addressed issues relating to holidays.

The service ensures that there is a thorough matching process in place to enable children and young people to be placed with carers who have the necessary skills, training and accommodation to meet the needs of the young people. All carers had a

foster care agreement in place with details of their approval status.

As part of this inspection the panel was observed and the panel chair interviewed. The panel have up to date knowledge with regards the Fostering Regulations, standards and current good practice. The panel was quorate with representatives from health, education and independent carers as well as social workers from the authority. The panel chair was independent and had experience and knowledge of chairing fostering panels.

Panel minutes from the previous three panels were examined and discussed with the panel chair and the fostering manager.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The fostering service supports children and young people with their educational needs. There is a designated team of teachers and support workers who are aware of and support all Looked After Children and liaise with local schools about the progress of children and young people. A training session for carers has been developed regarding education. Carers who have attended this training have stated that they found it very helpful. This training has been mainly for recruited foster carers and the LAC education team are hoping to extend this training further to enable and support more family and friend carers to access this.

The service continues to try to recruit carers from a black and ethnic minority backgrounds but acknowledges that this has been difficult to do so. A recruitment campaign to address this is ongoing.

The service provides a short break service for children and young people with complex needs. Carers work in conjunction with birth parents to provide a consistent and responsive service for the children and young people.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Contact details and arrangements are documented on individual young peoples files and are known to the carers and the young people. Some carers supervise contact and all carers are aware of the importance of contact and the impact that this has on the young person. Training regarding contact is provided to carers at the initial preparation to foster training.

Last year the service commenced a number of consultation events with carers about the service and also with the young people. These consultation groups were very successful and ongoing groups are planned.

Foster carer support groups are held on a regular basis throughout the borough.

These are planned in advanced and carers notified of the dates for the forth coming year.

Young peoples views are gained as part of the foster carer review and clearly documented. Young people spoken to felt that their carers and the fostering service listened to their views and acted upon any issues raised.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people receive support from their carers to prepare them for independent living. There is an after care team that has developed two information packs, one for young people and one for carers about services and support available to them. Young people and their carers have found these packs very useful and informative. Additional training is also available for carers to enable young people prepare for adulthood.

Foster carers are paid an allowance for the support and care provided. The levels of this are detailed in the foster carer handbook and an update of the allowances are provided to carers on an annual basis. Following the consultation held with carers the service now provides additional information regarding allowances/tax and insurance as part of the post approval training. Carers confirmed that they receive their allowances within appropriate timescales.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The service has a clear Statement of Purpose that is reviewed on an annual basis. This clearly identifies the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The Statement of Purpose is made available to all carers and staff.

The service is managed by a team manager who has the necessary qualifications, skills and experience to manage the service. In addition to the manager there are two senior practitioners and a team of family placement social workers and support workers. The team provide support to both recruited carers and family/friend carers. Staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of the service.

The service has a recruitment strategy in place and continues to recruit carers on a planned basis. The service acknowledges that there still needs to be further recruitment specifically for black and ethnic minority carers and has continued to address this.

Foster carers are supported with their training needs with a comprehensive training programme that includes post approval training and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training as well as specific training, for example, health and safety, child protection and educational attainment. The service maintains records of training that

has been undertaken by carers.

Foster carers receive supervision and support from the family placement social workers. Supervision takes place on both announced and unannounced visits and records are maintained of the outcome of the supervision. Carers felt that they were supported well by staff and had a clear understanding of the process involved. Carers are reviewed on an annual basis and training for carers forms a part of the review process.

The manager routinely audits carers files to make sure that all required documentation is in place and any missing documentation is clearly identified and raised with the family placement social worker with clear timescales for this to be addressed. The service does not maintain the children and young peoples files within the office. However a number of these files were inspected as part of the inspection process. They contained appropriate information and had also been subject to regular audits by team managers to make sure that documentation and recording clearly reflected the current needs of the children and young people.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the panel has identified replacement members prior to the current panel members resigning their role on panel (NMS 30)
- continue to recruit carers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds (NMS 7)
- continue to review the payment levels to carers in line with other authorities within the arera (NMS 14)
- continue with the consultation programme for carers and young people (NMS 11)