

# Bristol Social Services Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC043438
<b>Inspection date</b>	26/11/2007
<b>Inspector</b>	Paul Clark
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	13/11/2006

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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

Bristol City Council's fostering service is based in a central area of Bristol. The fostering service is part of the Children and Young People's Services in Bristol which links Education, Health and Social Services to form a cohesive service for young people.

The resource provides services to 'Looked After Children' (LAC) in Bristol and provides foster placements for approximately 550 young people of whom 112 (at the time of the inspection) were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). A Commissioning Team identifies an appropriate placement with an IFA when this becomes necessary and monitoring visits are carried out on IFA foster households.

The fostering service provides and supports:

Mainstream placements.

'Fostering Plus' a service for young people with more complex needs.

Emergency/reception placements.

Kinship care.

Remand fostering placements. (This element of the service is based within the Youth Offending Team and was not formally assessed during this assessment. This will be a focus of the next inspection.)

Family Link Service

Core services are provided by four distinct teams each providing particular aspects of service delivery and each are supervised by a Team Manager:

Recruitment Team: Recruiting, training and assessment of foster carers and adopters. Initial support for foster carers recently approved (up to six months).

Preparing and supporting carers during the first reviewing process.

Permanency Team: Support for long-term foster carers and kinship carers and their regular review. Assessment and support of prospective adopters.

Short-term Support Team: Support and regular review of short-term carers and family finding. Out of hours support (overall management).

Family Link Service: Supports disabled children and their families and operates largely independent of the fostering services with its own Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide. The team provides a range of services specific to the needs of disabled children which includes a Fostering Plus Service for disabled young people with complex needs.

The Bristol Collaborative Service (BCS), a project team made up of social workers, foster carers, Psychologists and teachers which provides specialist placements for young people with more complex needs.

There is a policy and protocol for monitoring Private Fostering which is implemented by district social work teams and the authority keeps a register of children who are privately fostered.

The fostering service has links to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which also provides Clinical Psychology services via their 'Thinking Aloud' team.

The authority have a service level agreement with 'Reconstruct' who provide an advocacy service to LAC.

The authority operates Foster Panels who consider foster care approvals and annual reviews. These are chaired by a manager of the authority who is independent of the fostering service.

## **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The fostering service is staffed and managed by well qualified and experienced practitioners who recruit, train and support foster carers to look after the needs of young people using the service. A good level of service is provided.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

The foster panel can now access the Community Paediatrician for medical expertise.

The service has been formally registered under the name of 'Bristol City Council, Children and Young People's Services'.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Foster carers follow guidance given in the Foster Care Handbook to ensure that young people placed are registered with a GP, Optician and Dentist and that routine checks are made by these services in line with LAC reviews. Initial medicals following placement are carried out by a medical practitioner. A LAC nurse is available to foster carers for help and advice about the health of young people. Specialist psychology and psychiatric services can be accessed via the CAMHS team and Clinical Psychology consultation is available from the 'Thinking Aloud' project. Specialist help is also available for young people with more complex needs. The Bristol Collaborative Service is a project team made up of social workers, teachers, psychologists and foster carers and attempts to support young people whose behaviour is particularly challenging.

All case files on young people seen had a completed LAC Health record. The service has yet to develop the provision of a individualised health record for young people which would provide them with a dated history of such information as inoculations,

illnesses, accidents, allergies for example.

The core training programme for foster carers includes training on healthy eating and food hygiene. Young people spoken to were happy with the food they received. Foster carers also receive first aid training and there is a system in place to ensure that this training is regularly updated.

Upon placement the fostering service provides young people with an extensive array of information relating to their health and wellbeing. This is contained in a 'Smiles Box' and includes contact details and how they may access the LAC Nurse, the 'Thinking Aloud' service, drug and alcohol agencies and information on sexual health. The box also contained a document on LAC's health published by the 'Who Cares Trust?'

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

The provision is good.

Supervising social workers use a health and safety checklist at the time of assessment and pre-approval to ensure that foster carers households do not present any physical risks to young people. This is repeated annually for the foster carer's review.

There are policies in place on Child Protection, Bullying and Complaints and there is training given to supervising social workers and foster carers in these areas. The service also has a policy on action to be taken in the event of a young person going missing. All of these policies are contained in the Foster Carers Handbook and in brief in the Young Person's Guide. The Young Person's Guide should be updated to contain the contact details of Ofsted. An effective system is in place for the recording of complaints received and actions taken.

Supervising social workers and foster carers all have clearances on their Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and these checks are updated every three years. Appropriate references are taken prior to appointment and verbally followed up. Medical clearances have been taken. Social workers are registered with the General Social Care Council.

Foster panels are efficiently run. Panels include members with expertise in child health and education. One of the panel members had personal experience of having been fostered. The panel had a fair representation of members from minority ethnic groups. Although the panel had no male members the authority took steps to address this on the week of the inspection.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering service access the services of the Education of Looked After Children's Service (ECLAS) which has a team of qualified teachers who make links with LACs' schools and act as an education advocate for young people. They will also offer support to the foster carers and will support young people's education if they have been excluded from school. All young people placed in foster care receive an Education Pack comprising of a selection of educational materials and contact details where they can get help with their education. All LAC are monitored and tracked in their educational progress by the ECLAS team.

All the case files of young people seen had Personal Education Plans and Pathway Plans (where relevant) in place.

The authority currently has an 'Attendance Project' which gives LAC awards for full school attendance. The project also monitors any truancy and chase these up on a daily basis.

Although the authority have purchased a number of computers to be made available for LAC, there is an ad hoc arrangement for the provision of internet access in foster households. The service should form a written policy on Safe Internet Use and train foster carers in assisting with IT as it is used in modern education.

All approved foster households have stipulated conditions of approval. For example, age, gender, numbers of places offered and this forms part of the matching process.

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

The provision is good.

The authority has a service level agreement with the 'Reconstruct Advocacy Service' who young people may contact directly to ask for support or advice or to discuss any aspect of their care. The service is also available to support young people at their LAC review meetings. Reconstruct also produce a quarterly newsletter for LAC.

The fostering service has set up the 'Kickass and Shout' (a name chosen by the young people) group which holds a monthly forum where young people can express their views about the service they receive and be consulted about any intended changes to the service.

The authority promote contact between young people and their birth families (except where in circumstances where this would be inappropriate). Several foster carers have received training in supervising contacts. The authority has numerous premises available where supervised contact can take place.

Foster carers receive a monthly newsletter 'Fostering Focus' which keeps them

informed of any developments and events occurring within the service. Foster carers birth children can attend a support group 'TLC' which puts on leisure activities for them.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Placement Plans were seen to be in place for age appropriate young people. These included plans for their ongoing education, training or work development.

The levels of expected age related pocket monies and birthday and Christmas allowances and clothing allowances are advised in the Foster Carer's Handbook. Young people are encouraged to open savings accounts.

The authority has arrangements in place to give foster carers a short respite from caring, this is also available to kinship carers.

Fostering fees are clearly made known to foster carers and payments are generally made on time. The authority are developing plans to give enhanced fees to carers who undertake all training opportunities offered to them. Fostering Plus carers receive a 50% retainer for up to 12 weeks if no children are placed with them.

In order to keep larger sibling groups together there is evidence that the authority have made substantial financial contributions to increase the numbers of bedrooms in foster care households, for example, loft conversions. This contributes to an outstanding level of service provision.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

A clearly written Statement of Purpose is in place which contains the aims of the service and an outline of the various services provided. There is a separate Statement of Purpose for the Family Link Service and a comprehensive information pack is given to parents using the service. Several practitioners identified the scarcity of long term foster care placements available and this should be addressed.

Case records for young people are well organised and clearly sectioned. They are clearly written and up to date and are kept under secure conditions.

The Fostering Service managers and staff are all professionally qualified and have appropriate experience in the provision of children's services. Supervising Social Workers receive one to one supervision at least once a month and there are weekly team meetings. There are clearly written job descriptions.

Foster carers receive support and supervision from their supervising social workers within appropriate frequencies. There is an 'out of hours' support system provided by



a rota of the management team and carers may also contact the authority's Emergency Duty Team. The fostering service has a mentoring support scheme in place where newly approved carers can contact an experienced carer for help and advice. There is also a 'Fostering Support' phone line available. Carers are given free membership of the 'Fostering Network'.

There are comprehensive induction and ongoing training programmes for both supervising social workers and foster carers. Foster carers are encouraged to undertake a NVQ Level 3 qualification in child care. Foster carers can receive enhanced payments by attending all training offered to them.

## **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):

- develop the provision of a individualised health record for young people which would provide them with a dated history of such information as inoculations, illnesses, accidents, allergies.(NMS 12)
- update the Young Person's Guide to contain the contact details of Ofsted. (NMS 9)
- ensure that the fostering service form a written policy on Safe Internet Use and train foster carers in assisting with IT as it used in modern education. (NMS 9)
- address the scarcity of long term foster care placements available. (NMS 17)