

# London Borough of Enfield Fostering Service

Inspection report for LA Fostering Agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	10/01/2007

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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**

London Borough of Enfield Fostering Service recruits, approves, trains and supports foster carers in the area. The service consists of three separate teams: a Recruitment and Assessment Team, Support and Development Team and Kinship and Permanency Team. Each team has a Deputy Manager. The service works closely across the department and with partner agencies including independent sector in order to meet the diverse needs of children and young people who are looked after by the authority and are fostered.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This inspection was announced. The main finding is that the London Borough of Enfield provides a good quality fostering service with some outstanding features. It encourages and achieves positive experiences and outcomes for fostered children in the area. The way in which this service supports health and wellbeing of fostered children and young people has been judged as outstanding. The service has established excellent professional links with the CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service). The other outcomes for fostered children have been judged as good. Children and young people are given ample opportunities to influence the service and learn that their views count. One requirement relating to the frequency of foster carers' reviews was made at this inspection.

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

No requirements and one recommendation had been made at the previous inspection. The recommendation related to the appointment of a permanent manager for the service. Paula Stacey, who was an interim manager at that time, has been appointed as the permanent manager and continued to lead on the improvement of the fostering service in Enfield.

The major areas of improvement relate to the establishment of the therapeutic fostering service and development of the new marketing strategy based on 'read between the lines' campaign. A new post for the family finder has been created within the kinship team, as this type of fostering service continues to grow within the borough. Commissioning of independent resources has been reduced. The paper files have been transferred to electronic records in line with the council's commitment towards saving the environment. Policies, procedures and social care practices continued to be regularly reviewed. The service has developed an improved Foster Care Agreement document, as well as a specific statement regarding recruitment of the fostering panel members.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Foster carers receive excellent support from the Enfield Fostering Service that enables them to promote health and wellbeing of children they foster. A health advisor is a voting member of the fostering panel. A designated doctor reviews foster carer's and LAC (Looked After Children) medicals. Health related information is included in the foster carer's handbook and training is available on a number of health related themes, such as the health needs of LAC, the attachment theory, children who self harm, first aid, sexual health and development, teenage pregnancy, drugs awareness and DUST (drug use screening tool).

The service emphasises the importance of relationship between the foster carer and the child for the child's wellbeing and development. This relationship is monitored and supported by the supervising social workers who work closely with other professionals in the social and health care field. There is a staff consultation group led by a CAMHS psychiatrist and a psychologist where particular dilemmas and possible solutions are discussed. Another group that consists of carers and a psychologist considers a case each week. Carers for children under five years of age receive further support from the CAMHS that enables them to develop the understanding of the impact of early life experiences on behaviour, emotional, social and general development of children. Psychodynamic and anti-discriminatory principles are embedded in the service.

The service has also established a specialist, in-house Therapeutic Fostering Scheme that offers individually tailored treatment programmes set within a family placement for children with complex, severe and enduring behavioural, psychological and emotional needs. The purpose of the scheme is to bring together the multi-professional resources and integrated treatment models to benefit the child's mental health, enable healing and promote psychological, emotional and social development.

Fostered children and young people are supported to gain the understanding of their own histories and deeper awareness of themselves through life-story work and the animation projects. A foster carer's work on a child's 'memory-box' recently featured in the Community Care magazine.

The carers, who look after children with complex physical needs and disabilities receive additional support from Cheviots Disabilities Team.

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

The provision is good.

The London Borough of Enfield Fostering Service has good policies and procedures in

place to ensure that people involved in looking after fostered children, as well as the council's staff are suitable. All staff were subject to the rigorous pre-employment checks. Criminal Records Bureau checks are repeated every three years.

Prospective foster carers are offered information and a course of six sessions, which aims to introduce them to fostering. The assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough and includes completion of Form F. Following the assessing social worker's presentation and interview with prospective foster carers, the fostering panel recommends the approval, if appropriate. The panel's membership composition is in accordance with legislation, thus ensuring a breadth of experience as well as professional expertise in fostering and working with children. The panel is well organised and has a chair, who is independent. The service's manager, or her deputy, attends the panel meetings in an advisory role.

After being approved, the foster carer signs a Foster Care Agreement and gets a supervising social worker assigned to them. Matching children with carers is carefully done, ensuring that the carer is able to meet the child's needs. If practicable, the child is given the opportunity to spend some time with their new carers and get to know them, before moving in. There is a placement panel that has a monitoring function and considers all placements made on a weekly basis.

The council has good strategies in place to support the fostering placements and foster carers, their learning process and development of skills. The core-training courses for foster carers include safeguarding topics, such as keeping safe, child protection, child sexual abuse, understanding emotional abuse and trauma.

The foster carer's reviews are chaired by an independent reviewing officer before being presented to the panel for consideration and recommendation on continued approval, changes to the terms of the fostering approval or termination of the approval. The council aims to conduct the reviews on an annual basis, but this has not always been achieved.

All complaints and allegations are swiftly handled in accordance with the appropriate policies and procedures. The LSCB (Local Safeguarding Children Board) has a lead officer for fostering. They are available for consultation with fostering management and staff regarding particular issues of concern. The LSCB protocol for children missing from care and home is comprehensive. It includes specific circumstances, such as trafficking and child abduction. Staff can access the multi-agency training relating to safeguarding issues, such as internet and other forms of high tech abuse, managing complex cases and safeguarding children within faith communities.

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

The provision is good.

The fostering service values individuality, diversity and promotes equality. These values form the intrinsic part of the information given and the training provided to

the foster carers. A more specific training on anti-discriminatory practice and diversity is included in the core-training courses for foster carers. A 'Total respect' training is facilitated by children in care and run in partnership with the Children's Rights service.

Children are well supported to develop their identity in line with their respective backgrounds, experiences and choices. The feelings of self-worth and respect towards others are sensitively nurtured. Professional advice from CAMHS psychologists and Cheviots Disability Team is available to facilitate this process of learning and discovery that might be challenging for some looked after children.

The foster carers encourage each child to attend educational facilities and use other ways of learning to fulfil their potential. All fostering households looking after children over the age of 10 have been provided with a computer and ongoing technical support. Young people who are struggling to achieve the minimum of one GCSE are identified by the council and invited together with their carers to attend an informal educational panel in order to look at what additional resources may be provided to assist them. Educational and other achievements of children, young people and foster carers are appropriately celebrated.

Enfield Foster Care Association has been re-launched as FACE and is providing activities and events for fostering families and children looked after.

At the time of the inspection, no short-term breaks were provided by the London Borough of Enfield Fostering service, although there is a scope for this type of service to be provided in partnership with the disabilities team.

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

The provision is good.

The London Borough of Enfield Fostering Service is committed to being a listening service and has established a wide range of options for children, carers and staff to express their views.

Children and young people are asked to comment about the care they receive from their foster carers as part of the annual foster carer review process. They were also consulted in developing the council's new marketing and recruitment materials. Their views influenced the eventual choice of advertising. They continue to be involved in training activities and have carried out training for staff, councillors, carers, the police, education and health professionals. Young people attend the corporate parenting board and meet with the Assistant Director for Children's Services on a regular basis to share their views on the services that they receive. The animation projects that are run in partnership with the Arts and Leisure Service offer further opportunities to children and young people to express themselves and their experience of journey through care via the medium of film. The fostering service also carries out satisfaction surveys. Children have made the following comments when

responding to the Ofsted survey on quality of the fostering service 'Every time I got a problem my foster carer sits down and listens to me carefully and help me how to solve it' and 'She let me have choices about how I look and listens to my opinions'.

Foster carers meet on a regular basis to share their views amongst themselves and with the fostering service. They are generally satisfied with the service, but there have been some issues in relation to consultation and initial placement information available about the contact arrangements. This becomes particularly significant when the required level of the contact between a fostered child and their birth family members is high, for example, seven days a week. The fostering service has taken proactive steps to address these issues and represent the foster carers' concerns and family rights in their meetings with the local magistrates. A multi-agency development day on contact has been recently held.

Foster carers are committed to working positively with birth families of the children they foster as per agreed arrangements. Some foster carers have been recently awarded for successfully facilitating high level of contact amongst six siblings.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Fostered children and young people enjoy a good economic wellbeing. Their carers promptly receive the allowances that cover the full cost of caring for children and agreed expenses. The council's finance policy review group is looking into the ways to ensure that kinship foster carers and children are not disadvantaged when transferring to Special Guardianship.

The carers appropriately encourage children's and young people's independence and development of life-skills in accordance with their age, abilities and assessed risks. Preparing for independence training is included in the core-training for foster carers.

The fostering service works closely with the Leaving Care Team to ensure smooth transition of fostered children into adulthood. Care leavers were involved in the development of a pathway planning tool and also work closely with the connexions advisors. A housing panel has been set up in order to help young people secure housing and learn about managing their own tenancies.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The London Borough of Enfield Fostering Service is efficiently managed, in the ways that fulfil its stated aims and objectives, and benefit the fostered children in the area. The manager is a qualified social worker with many years of experience in children's

services and the management of those. In addition to her competencies in social work, fostering and management, she also has a MA in Therapeutic Childcare and is currently undertaking another MA at the Tavistock Clinic in Consultation and the Organisation of Psychoanalytic Approaches. She is supported by three deputy managers, who are also qualified, have extensive relevant experience and are actively pursuing their continuous professional development.

The service is fully staffed and the staff turnover is negligible. Social workers are appropriately supported in their roles by the existence of up-to-date guidance and comprehensive strategies in place for carrying out fostering social work and ensuring the best outcomes for children. This is further enhanced by individual and group supervision, consultancy, appraisal system and good training opportunities. The staff benefit from the open, inclusive and supportive ethos of the fostering service which one social worker described to the inspector as 'we really care for each other'. There are frequent and regular team meetings on different levels providing further opportunities for consultation and sharing of information and practice issues. The whole service meets every three months. The service works in productive partnership across the borough including the independent sector to secure the best for the fostered children.

Good social fostering work is evidenced by electronically kept records. Case records for children are maintained by the LAC team and the fostering staff have full access to them. Foster carers receive necessary information and also keep appropriate records about day to day activities and observations of children they look after.

There are good monitoring processes in place that can identify any early trends requiring action and ensure the quality of service. The fostering panel also plays part in quality assurance. The annual service review and development plan is available and evidence the council's commitment towards continuous improvement.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### 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.

Std.	Action	Due date
6	ensure that the approval of each foster parent is reviewed at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 29.2)	25/04/2008