

# Cornerstone North East Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Setting address</b>	Cornerstone, Annie House, Master Road, Thornaby, STOCKTON-ON-TEES, Cleveland, TS17 0BE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01642 751 144
<b>Email</b>	elaine.vizor@cornerstonenortheast.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service
<b>Registered manager</b>	Elaine Vizor
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Janet Elizabeth Lancefield
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	01/02/2008

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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**

Cornerstone (North East) Adoption and Fostering Service is an independent fostering agency. The agency provides long-term and permanent family placements, that may lead to adoption, for children with foster carers who have a practicing Christian faith background.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This fostering agency has encountered financial difficulties in the last year or two. This has had a serious impact on its ability to recruit new carers and to enable it to develop. It has recently secured donations which will ensure its financial viability for the next 12 months. On this basis, the agency is looking forward to making a fresh start. Despite the financial constraints, it has continued to provide young people with good outcomes in health and education. Young people are able to contribute their views effectively. Young people approaching the end of their foster placements are well supported in making the transition to adulthood. Statutory requirements have been made concerning the way in which the agency responds to child protection concerns, notifications and its current financial position. There are recommendations relating to the quality of assessments, panel minutes and training and development.

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

The agency has responded positively to all recommendations from the last inspection. Foster carer agreements setting out terms of approval are now in place, all measures of control and discipline are monitored through supervision and the agency ensures that young people's views are sought prior to review meetings. This ensures that carers are clear about what is expected of them and that young people are able to make a positive contribution to discussions about their future.

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

The provision is good.

Young people's health care needs are met well. Carers have a good understanding of their responsibilities to promote the health and well-being of young people. They ensure that young people's primary health care needs are met and are actively engaged in arranging specialist health care as the need arises.

Young people with complex health care needs have good access to services such as speech and play therapy and benefit from paediatric oversight of their care.

Arrangements are in place for immediate admission to hospital as and when required. Each young person's health care history and current needs are set out in well organised individual health care plans. The information is discussed at young people's review meetings, ensuring that the health care needs of young people are given an appropriate level of prominence and are continuously monitored.

Young people enjoy active, healthy lifestyles and understand the importance of healthy eating. One young person is very keen on riding their bicycle and walking the family dog. Young people live in foster homes that are spacious, ensuring that they have sufficient space to play safely and can enjoy privacy when they want to.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are looked after safely and feel safe in their placements. Foster carers have undertaken child protection and safeguarding training and understand the importance of implementing safer caring plans in protecting young people from harm. Young people are aware of safer caring plans and understand how to keep themselves safe. This contributes to their overall safety and well-being.

In general, foster carers understand their responsibilities to promote the safety and well-being of young people. However, they have not always reported child protection concerns to the agency promptly. The agency, in turn, has not always followed up child protection issues with partner agencies to satisfy itself that appropriate action was taken in response to any concerns; additionally it has not notified the regulatory authority of safeguarding incidents. This approach does not fully protect young people.

The fostering agency has made appropriate checks of all employees, panel members and foster carers to ensure that they are safe and suitable people to work with children and young people.

There have been no incidents of young people going missing from home.

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

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy positive relationships with their foster carers and their families. They are encouraged to behave appropriately and develop their social skills. The agency's positive approach is acknowledged by placing social workers. One commented that in the year that one young person has lived with their carers they 'have made excellent progress emotionally and socially – they have really brought [them] on.'

Some foster carers have had difficulty in managing challenging behaviour and, on occasion, have given inconsistent messages to young people. The agency has

recognised that this has the potential to undermine the stability of placements and has taken positive steps to address the issues directly with carers through supervision.

Young people are encouraged to pursue their interests and hobbies. They talked enthusiastically about the things they like to do such as caring for their guinea pigs, walking the dog, and listening to music. Depending on age and ability, young people have opportunities to develop their skills for independent living and participate in daily household tasks.

Foster carers understand it is their responsibility to promote the education of individual young people and actively liaise with schools and teachers. Young people have excellent school attendance and are achieving well in line with their age and ability.

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

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged to share their wishes and feelings with the agency and can have their say at their looked after children's review meetings. They have regular opportunities to spend individual time with their placing social workers, fostering social workers and independent reviewing officers. Young people are helped to understand their own personal circumstances and the reasons why they live with foster carers. This assists them in developing a positive self-view and emotional resilience. The complaints policy has been shared with young people but, to date, none have felt the need to complain.

The agency recognises the importance of ensuring that contact with significant family members takes place. This is facilitated by foster carers who have benefitted from specific training in this area. They ensure that contact takes place as directed by the courts or placing authority. The agency's approach ensures that young people have constructive contact with their relatives.

Young people are welcomed into foster carers' homes and are clearly made to feel part of the immediate and extended family. All placements are planned and are offered with a view to permanency or preparation for adoption. Young people who reach the age of 18 benefit from being able to stay with foster carers until they feel ready and able to move on to independence. The agency ensures that placements end in a positive manner.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The agency makes every effort to ensure that young people make a positive transition to adulthood. They are provided with opportunities to acquire independent living skills in accordance with their age and ability. One young person talked

enthusiastically about the household tasks that they are able to carry out and about learning to manage on a limited budget. The agency has a staying put scheme which relieves the pressure on young people making the step towards moving into their own tenancy. This means they do not have to move before they feel ready to do so. As and when young people leave foster care, the agency continues to provide them with support. One placing social worker was very impressed with the agency in this regard and described the work put in as 'above and beyond' expectations. The agency ensures that young people have solid foundations on which to begin their adult lives.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The fostering agency has experienced financial difficulties in recent years and had given notice that it was giving serious consideration to closing. However, it has secured charitable donations which will enable it to operate for a further 12 months. The financial difficulties have hampered its progress in many ways and it is looking to make a fresh start.

The agency has not been in a position to recruit new foster carers in the last 12 months. There are no prospective carers awaiting approval. The most recent completed assessment dates back two years. It provides a good description of the foster carers' lifestyle and history but is short on evaluation and analysis of competencies. This does not ensure that the information provided to panel is sufficient for it to make appropriate recommendations on the suitability of prospective carers.

The agency manages to make appropriate matches between foster carers and young people. It only offers placements where young people require permanency or preparation for adoption. The process is effective and has led to a high level of placement stability. In response to a previous recommendation the agency now ensures that foster carer agreements setting out terms of approval are in place. It also ensures that all measures of control and discipline are monitored.

The agency's statement of purpose is up to date and provides an accurate account of the services provided. The staff are familiar with its contents and are clear about the agency's aims and objectives.

The agency is managed and operated by staff who are appropriately qualified and experienced. They are subject to vetting processes which ensure the suitability of staff to work with young people. The staff are supervised at regular intervals and feel well supported. They are provided with access to training which ensures that their practice is up to date.

The fostering panel meets up to four times per year and its members are drawn from a central list. The agency has responded positively to a recommendation in the last inspection report concerning the attendance of the agency decision maker at panel.

It is clear that they attend only as an observer. Panel minutes show close scrutiny of matters coming before panel members but do not set out the reasons for its recommendations.

Foster carers feel well supported and supervised by the agency's staff and the majority have completed the Children's Workforce Development Council training. However, some carers have yet to complete this work and have been reluctant to participate in ongoing training. This does not promote their learning and development as foster carers.

All records are held securely and all young people are cared for in line with their placement plans.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency only employs staff and recruits carers who are practising Christians. However, it strongly promotes the individuality of young people and draws on carers from a range of different backgrounds.

## 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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
11 (2011)	ensure that the welfare of children is safeguarded and promoted at all times by making sure that foster carers promptly report any child protection concerns to the fostering agency and that the fostering service liaises effectively with partner agencies (Regulation 11(a))	02/04/2012
12 (2011)	ensure that the fostering agency promptly notifies the Chief Inspector of any child protection concerns (Regulation 12(c))	02/04/2012
37 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with information as to the financing and financial resources of the fostering agency (Regulation 37(3)(c))	29/06/2012

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that the written report on the suitability of prospective carers contains sufficient analysis to enable panel to make objective recommendations (NMS 13.7)



- ensure that the written minutes of panel meetings record the reasons for its recommendations (NMS 14.7)
- ensure that foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively (NMS 20)