



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

**Suites 4 and 5
2nd Floor, Warren House
10 - 20 Main Road
Hockley
Essex
SS5 4QS**

Lead Inspector
Jacqueline Graves

Announced Inspection
6th March 2006 10:00

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

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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 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

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

Name of service Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

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2nd Floor, Warren House
10 - 20 Main Road
Hockley
Essex
SS5 4QS

Telephone number 01702 208520

Fax number 01702 208529

Email address woodyclachar@hotmail.com

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Children First Fostering Agency Ltd

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Woodrow Lloyd Clachar

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 7th April 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Children First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency with limited company status.

The agency was established in April 1999 and aims to provide fostering placements for children and young people within the birth to eighteen years age range.

The agency is fully committed to providing a multi-cultural service and has recruited foster carers from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In particular, the agency has specific expertise with regards to caring for children of an African or Afro-Caribbean background.

The agency assesses each child's needs against the carers' ability to meet these needs and only offer placements where an appropriate match can be made.

The agency arranges long term, short term and respite, bridging, emergency, and parent and child placements.

Children First is centrally managed from its head office in Hockley, Essex. New accommodation has been provided in Bedford to replace the Luton office.

At the time of the inspection, fifty-five children were placed by the service.

SUMMARY

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

Jacqueline Graves carried out the inspection; only the key fostering standards were assessed.

The inspection began on 24th February, when a meeting of the fostering panel was observed, and concluded on March 29th when feedback on the inspection was given to the directors. Some time was allowed after this date for the return of questionnaires from placing authorities, so their views could be incorporated into the report.

Questionnaires were received from eleven carers, sixteen young people and three placing social workers. Three foster carer families were case tracked and visits made to their homes. Records were sample checked. Updated written information was supplied by the agency.

Please note the email address has changed to children-first@cffa.co.uk and will be displayed correctly in the next report.

The inspector would like to thank the foster carers, children, staff and directors for their help with this inspection.

What the service does well:

The agency continues to provide an excellent service with children's needs at the centre of all it does. National Minimum Standards were all met, with some exceeded.

The service is effectively managed. The process of recruiting staff and carers is robust. Effective quality assurance ensures that only carers, who will work with the agency to provide the best possible service to children, continue to be employed. Support and training offered to carers is well regarded. A high profile is given to education.

Children wrote their views on the best things about fostering:

'You get a roof over your head and you get to continue the journey of your life.'

'That I have the best family in the world. Thanks Woody.'

'You meet other kids who know what it feels like to be in a similar situation as you.'

In questionnaires, carers gave their views of the best things about the agency:

'Regular supervising social worker visits. No payment problems. The AKAMAS course.'

'The back-up and telephone contact when needed.'

'Approachability, consistency, training...lots of information, when needed. Support. Support group.'

A carer wrote in response to the question 'do the staff do a good job?'
'Always helpful. Has always been someone available to speak to if I have contacted the office. Queries and problems are always dealt with quickly and efficiently.'

'Excellent communication between foster carer and fostering service.'

What has improved since the last inspection?

Carers praised the on line training which has been set up specifically for carers and will lead to a BTEC Levels 3 and 4 qualification. They felt the course was challenging, interesting and of good quality.

No requirements were made at the last inspection. The agency has continued to monitor its own performance and make improvements wherever they think the service can be improved.

What they could do better:

Carers were asked in questionnaires about the worst things about the service:

'To date everything has been satisfactory.'

'Nothing.'

'Fear of deregistration. Long periods without placements.'

The last comment was discussed with the managers who felt that this could be seen as positive in that the agency will place children only where there are good matches and will only place where carers continue to have the best interests of children at heart.

Carers made some suggestions to improve the service:

'I think new carers should be invited to the Carer Support Group by the Chair. A personal invitation would encourage carers to attend. This group has been very supportive of me.'

'Just need a support group in my area (Luton). There is none at present.'

'Respite arrangements – I would like a 'buddy' system so that children know who they are going to stay with if possible.'

No requirements or recommendations were made.

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 or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

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Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

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

The agency promotes the health of children and young people.

EVIDENCE:

There was evidence on children's files that that their health needs are considered when first placed with the agency.

The agency continues to have some difficulties in obtaining all necessary information on children, as they are reliant on local authorities providing this; records showed evidence of the agency trying to chase for missing information.

Records showed that children had access to health professionals when needed, for example, orthodontist, dental hygienist, enuresis service and specialist consultants. The services of a nurse for looked after children are used. All children case tracked had received their statutory medical examinations.

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):

6,8,9,15,30

There are systems in place to promote the safety and well being of children.

EVIDENCE:

Those foster homes visited provided safe, healthy and nurturing environments for the young people being cared for.

Those staff recruitment files seen were very well organised. Prospective staff are thoroughly checked to try to ensure their suitability. References are followed up by telephone calls, which are recorded in meticulous detail. It was reassuring to read in a reference of a possible area of inexperience, which had been followed up in supervision and with training once the person joined the agency. All files contained sufficient evidence of identity, medical and police checks.

Carers receive training on child protection, bullying and safe caring. Carers spoken to were aware of the devastating effects bullying can cause. An example was given of carers working closely with a school when a child began to bully and of getting the child to understand the consequences of their behaviour. Another example was given of carers appealing for a place at a school more appropriate to a child when bullying had caused a considerable problem for them.

Carers spoken to, understood that corporal punishment was not acceptable. In those questionnaires returned, all carers said the service had made clear what punishments are acceptable and that they agreed with them.

Children described some of the ways carers manage unacceptable behaviour:

'Sent to room.'

'Sit on steps, go in bedroom, grounded.'

'Sit quietly and read.'

Those parenting officers who returned questionnaires said that the carer's use of measures of control had been made clear to them and they thought them acceptable.

A panel meeting was observed. The panel is efficiently organised, well balanced regarding the expertise of its members and reaches decisions after rigorous examination of information presented to it.

The panel fulfils a quality assurance function by ensuring that both newly appointed and experienced carers continue to be suitable to work with children and able to put children's needs first.

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

Education is given a high profile. Carers encourage the individual interests of children.

EVIDENCE:

Carers reported getting good support for the education of the children they look after. Carers gave an example of the education advisor providing home tuition until a suitable school could be found for a young person. Carers spoke of attending school meetings, sometimes with the education advisor, to ensure the best support for the children's education.

The inspector was advised that all children, apart from one who recently entered the country, have an educational placement. Young people visited were encouraged by their carers to complete homework and to take part in school activities.

The agency recruits a diverse range of carers to meet the needs of children. Those carers and children visited felt they had been well matched to each other.

Young people visited spoke of being encouraged to pursue their individual hobbies and interests, such as horse riding, attending a youth club, football, ice skating and street jazz dancing. They also described taking part in different activities with their foster families that they had not done before, such as going to football matches and for long walks.

Carers said they wished to encourage young people to develop their interests and also to promote children's self esteem and confidence through trying different activities and meeting new people.

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

The views of young people are regularly sought.

EVIDENCE:

Those young people spoken to were aware of their contact arrangements and had been listened to when they had asked for changes to be made.

Some contact meetings are held in the Children First office. Carers gave examples in questionnaires of how they support and promote contact arrangements:

'Receive families into our home for contact visits.'

'Encourage phone calls to siblings.'

'Ensuring phone always topped up. Being available to escort to and from meetings.'

There is an open culture in the organisation, where children are encouraged to give their views to carers, staff or the directors. Examination of files showed that young people's views are sought at reviews and in meetings with children's' social workers.

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)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

29

Carers receive sufficient, promptly paid allowances to meet the needs of children.

EVIDENCE:

Those carers spoken to said they are paid allowances promptly. Carers are given a breakdown of what the fee should cover, which includes savings for the child. The agency feels it important that children, who are looked after, should accumulate some savings for their future.

Records of supervision showed that supervising social workers check how the allowances are used and check that children's savings are being made.

One carer felt the clothing allowance was not sufficient for a growing child, but examination of the allowance as a whole showed it was more than sufficient to meet the needs of children.

The agency advised that all fees are reviewed annually.

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, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

17,21,24

The agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers. Children's case records are comprehensive. There are sufficient trained, experienced staff.

EVIDENCE:

Those children's case files examined were well-organised and contained relevant, detailed information. Considerable difficulties have arisen, for the agency and carers, when significant information has not been provided by local authorities, for example, placement plans and LAC forms. Where local authorities had not provided information, there was evidence of the agency trying to obtain this.

An adequate number of suitably trained and experienced staff is employed to provide a quality service. In questionnaires, all carers who responded thought there were sufficient staff in the agency. Those spoken to said someone was always available for help or advice when needed.

Records showed, and carers confirmed, that regular supervising social worker visits are made, with telephone and out of hours contact as further support. Carers run their own support groups.

Some carers mentioned the annual holiday provided by the agency to be a high point of the year. Carers visited said that respite care had been provided when a placement had been very demanding. The agency advised that respite is also available for short and long-term placements but makes clear that children placed long term with a family would be expected to join in family holidays.

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

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	X
6	3
8	4
9	4
15	4
30	4

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	4

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

NO

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

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