

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Solutions Fostering Agency

**The Business Centre
Llangarron
Herefordshire
HR9 6PG**

Lead Inspector
Suzanne
Young

Announced
12 September 2005

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	Solutions Fostering Agency
Address	The Business Centre, Llangarron Herefordshire HR9 6PG
Telephone number	01989 880701
Fax number	
Email address	01989 770011
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Solutions (Ross) Ltd
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mr A J Brooks
Type of registration	Independent Fostering Agency
No. of places registered (if applicable)	N/A
Category(ies) of registration, with number of places	Fostering Agency

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. Change age range to 8 - 17 years
2. Solutions will only place children under the age of 10 years in a foster placement if it is intended that they receive education in a local authority school until such time that the DfES have agreed the variation in registration of Queenswood School (Solutions DfES registered school) to provide education for children aged 8 - 18 years.

Date of last inspection 8 November 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

Solutions Fostering Agency is a project that is part of a larger organisation, Solutions (Ross) Ltd a private company which provides residential child care services with education to young people who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. It's Statement of Purpose states that the agency will provide foster placements for young people aged between 6 and 16 years who are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties and who are likely to make considerable demands on those caring for them. These young people may be admitted directly to foster care, others may have progressed from Solutions Residential units where it has been determined that their needs will be best met in a foster care placement. These plans may include either medium or long-term care and in some circumstances rehabilitation to their family home. Education is provided either through Solutions School or in mainstream schools or colleges. They recruit carers from a wide range of backgrounds. All carers are trained, given a high level of support appropriate to their needs. Solutions recruit carers to undertake a variety of tasks the categories given are; Short term, long term, respite and holiday placements.

SUMMARY

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

This inspection was carried out by two inspectors over five days. Four foster carers and the young people placed with them were selected, their files were read and they were visited in their homes. Interviews were undertaken with the registered manager and a member of the social work team. A range of records of the fostering agency was also read. Questionnaires were sent to foster carers, young people and placing authority social workers. The manager completed a pre-inspection questionnaire.

What the service does well:

Feedback from carers indicated that they feel well supported and receive good training. In particular, the out of hours support by the agency has been highlighted.

Foster carers review reports produced for the fostering panel are of a high standard and competency based. Young people are consulted about their care and day-to-day arrangement on a regular basis.

The agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of young people. Foster carers have developed a positive working relationship with their local school and act, as a "good parent" in relation to education needs. All young people at the time of this inspection were in fulltime education.

Contact arrangements are well known and supported by foster carers.

The agency has a workforce, which is well qualified, supported and trained to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in foster care.

Foster carers have a good awareness of safe caring principles.

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has developed a system of consultation with young people to inform improvements to the service.

The foster care agreement has been further developed since the last inspection to meet requirements.

Quality care systems have been developed to inform improvements regarding the quality of care for young people.

What they could do better:

Since the last inspection the agency has developed a foster placement agreement and matching document. This needs to be further amended to evidence consent has been obtained with respect to health interventions.

The foster placement agreement and matching document needs to be completed in respect of all placements including respite placements made with approved foster carers.

Full background information including health records need to be obtained for all young people looked after. Health records need to be maintained and updated during placement to evidence health needs and outcomes.

A procedures need to be established to ensure internal staff transfers comply with vetting requirements.

A systematic approach needs to be developed with regard to case file management to ensure easy access to files.

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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Management

Scoring of Standards

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcomes these Standards are:

- 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 outcomes for standard(s) 12

Solutions Fostering Agency promotes the health and development needs of children and young people placed in their care. The agency should ensure they receive a full history health record for each young people placed and continuous recording of health information needs to be improved.

EVIDENCE:

Initial referral forms address the health needs of children and young people referred and health is part of the matching considerations undertaken.

Necessary health information is obtained at the point of placement. Carers described difficulties at times in obtaining full health histories of the young people placed with them.

Carers receive on going training on the health of looked after children.

Carers were proactive in ensuring that children's health needs were met and all the young people who were visited attended their dentist, optician and general practitioner. Health care interventions and outcomes need to be clearly evidenced on young people's files in a written health record.

One young person visited was not in receipt of the specialist service he required. Whilst the agency was aware of the circumstances a more timely and proactive response should have been acted upon.

A number of young people's questionnaires indicated that foster carers place an emphasis on healthy eating.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes 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, and 15 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for standard(s) 3,6,8,9,15

The agency places a strong emphasis on ensuring young people are protected from abuse and neglect. The agency matches young people to carers appropriately; this process needs to be expanded to include respite foster carers.

The agency is managed by persons who are appropriately qualified and recruits carers who are suitable to work with children and young people. The workforce is well qualified, supported and trained to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

Suitable recruitment procedures continue to be in place. The manager and staff team are appropriately qualified and able to demonstrate they have the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their duties.

Checks of personnel files demonstrate that the agency is ensuring vetting requirements are addressed. Procedures need to be followed that ensure internal staff transfers comply with vetting requirements.

Visits confirmed that foster carers homes were warm, adequately furnished and comfortable. It was noted that the homes represented a diverse range of locations and environments. The supervising social worker makes regular

announced visits to the foster carers homes. The visits include annual health and safety checks. Where shortfalls have been identified these were highlighted in the report produced. The agency should ensure regular checks continue where potential health and safety issues have been identified to improve and maintain standards.

The agency has a combined foster placement agreement (FPA) and matching form. Some good evidence of matching was seen; where gaps in matching had been identified these areas had been addressed. The matching process was not recorded consistently and in one case no evidence of matching could be seen or of a FPA being completed. The FPA and matching document did not evidence that consent to health interventions had been obtained. This needs to be amended to evidence that this has been obtained. FPA's are not undertaken with placements made with respite foster carers and evidence of matching with respite carers could not be seen on foster carer's files.

Some foster carers expressed concerns about the lack of full information regarding the background of the young people placed with them. The agency needs to ensure this information is received from the placing authority on arrival or as soon as possible following placement.

There are policies and procedures in place on child protection and safe caring. Staff and carers are aware of the procedures for dealing with allegations, complaints and absconding. Each foster carer has been trained in child protection and safe caring and has been given a copy of the fostering networks "safe caring" booklet. Foster carers demonstrated awareness of safe caring and stated they have in place safe caring guidelines for their home. These guidelines needs to be present in both the carers and young people's files and cleared with the young person's social worker.

A consistent approach needs to be developed by the agency to evidence that foster carer's car insurance and MOT's where appropriate have been checked. Evidence that appropriate checks had been made could not be seen on all the carer's files sampled during the inspection.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 7,13

Issues of diversity and equality are taken seriously by the agency. Awareness of foster carers in relation to issues of equality and opportunity for young people in their care is clearly demonstrated.

The agency gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of the young people looked after.

EVIDENCE:

Files, discussion with supervising social workers and foster carers evidenced the active role the agency takes in ensuring that each young person's identity and diversity is supported.

Carers have been very successful in obtaining educational placements for young people with the support of the agency. All the young people were in full time education.

There were many examples of close working relationships between carers and schools and the agency had supported these relationships where needed. School reports and personal education plan (PEPS) were seen on many young people's files.

The manager has developed an information system, which will demonstrate the educational attainment of the young people placed with them and will demonstrate the numbers excluded from school.

Solutions have two registered schools which young people in foster homes may attend if the placing authority requests this.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 10,11

The agency ensures contact arrangements and agreements are promoted and maintained. The agency promotes consultation and has developed its practice in order to improve consultation with young people.

EVIDENCE:

Files and discussions with foster cares and young people, confirm the efforts made by the agency and carers to ensure contact is maintained and appropriately supervised. Carers stated they felt well supported and were not expected to supervise contact.

Foster carers supported communication between young people and their birth families. Carers had been helped to understand the importance of contact with families even when there were adverse effects on the young person's behaviour.

The agency has developed a format for consultation with young people. Each file evidences a recent consultation. The agency intends that this process will take place on a quarterly basis to ensure regular consultation. The agency has acted upon information gained from the consultation process.

The manager was clear about using the consultation process to improve the quality of care for young people looked after.

Details are provided in the children's guide entitled "Young Person's Welcome Booklet" on how to make a complaint. There was evidence of the complaints procedure being used by young people and being acted upon by the manager.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes 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 standard(s) 29

The agency provides sufficient fees and allowances to recruit and retain carers and to enable carers to meet the young people's needs.

EVIDENCE:

The foster carer handbook outlines the fees and allowances that can be expected once a young person is placed.

Foster carer's questionnaires and review of files revealed that any concern about financial provision to carers is appropriately acted upon by the agency.

Management

The intended outcomes 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 cares 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 standard(s) 1,4,17,21,22,24,25

The agency has an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff.

Foster carers are well supervised and receive a high level of support. The agency is managed effectively and promotes good practice by social workers and foster carers.

Assessments of foster carers are being carried out appropriately. This needs to be extended to include 'back up carers'.

The monitoring of quality of care is taking place and has been used to inform improvements.

Records in relation to individual foster carers and young people need to be organised in a more systematic manner.

EVIDENCE:

The statement of purpose must reflect the conditions of the agency's registration. It must be stated that the agency will provide placements for children and young people between the age ranges of 8-17 years.

The manager had in place procedures for the monitoring of the agency. The manager meets on a quarterly basis with senior managers and evidence was seen of the quality of care being improved as a result.

The staff files and agencies policies evidence a sufficient level of staff numbers, qualification and experience. Over the summer months there has been a shortage of support workers available to young people. In questionnaires received and through interviews with foster carers concerns were expressed about the availability of support workers. The agency recognise this and plans are in place to rectify the situation.

There is a clearly set out assessment process for foster carers which is followed by the supervising social workers. The agency uses BAAF form F to process the assessment and uses a set of competencies to measure the skills and abilities of potential foster carers. The foster agency use members of foster family's extended family as 'back-up carers' for respite. This can be beneficial to children and young people and reflect 'normal family life'. The agency was not at the time of this inspection carrying out an assessment of back up carers, which meets the criteria, stated in Schedule 3. Back up carers need to be assessed and checked to the legal minimum standards that meets the criteria of Schedule 3, be approved by Panel and be annually reviewed along with the main carers review. Where care is being provided for several days, back up carers should be provided with the necessary paperwork and written information to enable care for the young person to be appropriately carried out.

Foster carers receive regular supervision and spoke positively of the support they receive from their supervising social workers. In particular all foster carers praised the out of hours support. All carers were in receipt of a foster

carers handbook, which outlines the aims, and objectives of the agency and makes clear the roles and responsibilities.

Annual reviews were being held within the appropriate timescales. Review reports were competency based and of a high standard.

Foster Care Agreements have been developed to meet all requirements in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2001.

The manager and social worker interviewed stated that unannounced annual visits were not being conducted to foster carers. These visits should be conducted and evidenced on foster carer's files.

The agency maintains separate files for each young person and foster carer. There is a written policy and guidance on case recording expected of foster carers, which is in the foster carers handbook. Electronic records are maintained in addition to paper records. The agency need to ensure a systematic approach to case record management to ensure easy access to information.

A record needs to be maintained on each foster carers file of each placement made which states the name, age, sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination.

The agency needs to ensure staff and foster carers sign a declaration regarding any possible conflicts of interest.

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	3
6	3
8	2
9	3
15	3
30	X

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
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	3

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

yes

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
1.	1	3	The statement of purpose must be amended to reflect the conditions of the agency's registration.	30/11/05
2.	4	42(2)	The registered manager must supply to the Commission a report in respect of any review of the quality of foster care provided which is conducted by the agency. A copy of the report must be made available to foster parents, children placed with foster parents and placing authorities.	31/3/06
3.	8	34(3),37	Foster Placement Agreements and matching documents must be completed in respect of all placements made including respite placements made with approved foster carers.	30/11/05
4.	8	34(3) Schedule 6	The Foster Placement Agreement must be developed to include evidence that consent has been obtained for health and medical interventions .	30/11/05
5.	15	20 Schedule 1	The registered manager must ensure all internal transfers comply with the requirements outlined in Schedule 1	30/11/05
6.	17	27,29, Schedule	The registered manager must ensure all 'back up carers' are	30/12/05

		3	assessed and checked to the legal minimum standards that meets the criteria of Schedule 3, be approved by Panel and be annually reviewed along with the main carers review. Where care is being provided for several days, back up carers should be provided with all necessary paperwork and written information.	
7.	25	30 (3) (a)	The registered manager must ensure a record is maintained on each foster carers file of each placement made, which states the name, age, sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination.	30/11/05

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
1.	6	The agency should ensure shortfalls identified through health and safety checks are reviewed to ensure compliance. These should be evidenced on foster carer's files.
2.	6	The agency should develop consistency in evidencing that foster carer's MOT and car insurance is checked.
3.	4	The agency needs to ensure staff and foster carers sign a declaration regarding any possible conflicts of interest.
4.	9	Full background information on young people placed should be obtained by the agency as soon as possible following placement.
5.	9	Safe caring guidelines need to be cleared with the young person's social worker and evidenced on both foster carer's and young person's files.
6.	12	Health care interventions and outcomes need to be clearly evidenced in a written health record on young people's files.
7.	25	The agency needs to ensure a systematic approach to case

		record management.
8.	22	Unannounced visits should be conducted to foster carers at least once a year.

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