

Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Diana Waters
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Date of last inspection	11 September 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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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

Five Rivers Family Placement Service is an Independent Fostering Agency who provides emergency, short and long term foster placements for children and young people of all ages with a range of care needs. The head office is in Fordingbridge in Hampshire. The registered branch of the agency in Cheltenham has been operating since May 2000 and is the subject of this inspection.

Summary

The service is generally providing a satisfactory service to young people and carers. More than half of the young people placed enjoy stability, continuing in placement with the same foster family for more than two years. Staff are supported well and records of supervisory meetings with carers are clearly documented. There are seven actions required at this inspection and two good practice recommendations.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Progress has been made by the service in addressing four statutory requirements/actions made at the last inspection in September 2006; the service routinely and regularly asking for missing information, including health care information, from placing authorities. A vice chair has been appointed to the fostering panel. A matching proforma has been developed for use when placing young people. Complaints are now responded to in line with the written procedure. The requirement to fully check potential employees to the service and the requirement to ensure carers are given sufficient support to ensure young peoples educational needs are met are both repeated. Five good practice recommendations were made at the last inspection. Some have been satisfactorily resolved and two remain outstanding and are repeated. Telephone enquiries are now found on recruitment files. Safe care guidelines are in place, but still need regular updating and signatures. Consultation with young people placed is developing. Support groups have been set up in three areas and records of supervisory meetings are consistently recorded. Not all unannounced visits are completed annually.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Carers confirm young people are registered with all the relevant health services. All illnesses and accidents are reported and dealt with appropriately by carers. Referrals to the relevant specialist services are made but some delay in the provision of services by NHS dentists and psychological help are encountered. The service provides a range of courses for carers to support them in providing healthy lifestyles for the young people they look after. These include first aid training and individual training by health professionals for carers of children with specialist health care needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people have security and stability and are well cared for in their foster homes. The Registered Manager, who has been in post 15 months, has a recognised social work qualification. She is very experienced in managing a family placement team and is fit and appropriate to carry out the role. Foster carers undergo comprehensive assessment and are presented to foster care Panel. Adult children of foster carers who live at home are routinely checked with the Criminal Record Bureau. Safe care policies are found on carer's files but not all are up to date or signed. The service has an on line safety policy and guidelines for young people, although signed copies were not seen on files. The service is able to demonstrate the young people in placement are carefully considered before a match is made with carers and there is no pressure on carers to take inappropriate placements. Young people are able to have introductions to foster families, wherever practicable. Looked after children (LAC) information is held on young people's files. Missing paperwork is identified and followed up with placing authorities. One foster placement agreement related to a previous placement. Some carers report a lack of referrals for placements. Young people placed in the service enjoy stability with a significant proportion of young people placed still living with the same foster family between two and nine years later. The social work staff employed in this team are suitably qualified and experienced. Opportunities are available for further development. The recruitment process for two family support workers appointed in 2006 did not evidence procedures that ensure children and young people are safeguarded, with application forms, cvs and references missing from the file. The service state these papers have been lost and the contents have now been re requested. However, the recruitment checks for sessional workers and the independent social worker appointed to the service in 2007 were examined and are appropriately vetted. Panel minutes show that Panel is organised effectively. The attendance levels are often minimal and minutes of the meetings show they occasionally use an additional social worker from within the organisation to fulfil the attendance of a social work representative.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has several carers and staff from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, young people who are placed come from a variety of backgrounds. Carers also provide placements for children with disabilities and, whilst this inspection did not focus on this provision, resources are available to identify and provide support in this area. Equality and diversity training is provided for carers both pre and post approval. The service helps to develop young people's interests and hobbies. Carers actively encourage young people to participate in the wider community. The service does, in some cases, give a high priority to meeting the educational needs of young people. There are some excellent examples of working together. Placing authority, school, carers, young person and support worker meet together to formulate a plan. They ensure there are clear expectations and regular monitoring. Staff from the service are supportive, attending educational meetings with carers and young people. Carers also provide proactive support, accompanying young people into the classrooms when appropriate. However, in other cases whilst working together is given a high profile by the service, looking after young people without full time education causes pressure on foster placements with little additional support from the placing authority, fostering service, or host authority. A competition for a Christmas card design, which is then used by the fostering service, is organised each year and encourages participation by young people. Achievement certificates are awarded to young people to both recognise and encourage a variety of accomplishments, these are positively received by young people. Workers from the service regularly engage with young people whilst visiting their foster homes.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Staff and carers work very well to support and develop young people's contact arrangements with their families. Carers facilitate young people to access their families and friends, providing transport and support. Carers are positive about, and recognise the importance of, contact for young people. They also promote good communication. Young people contribute to their own care reviews and are able to raise concerns through the service's complaints procedure. The service does not have exclusive groups for young people in care or for carer's children but put on activities for foster families during the main holidays. A newsletter is sent quarterly to all fostering households. Young people in placement are often seen by the fostering service staff. Developments regarding carer's children and grandchildren are in progress.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The service has a Statement of Purpose, this was updated in November 2006, it sets out the services that are provided. Young people's guides are issued in two formats. Staff are well organised and receive good support and guidance from the manager. They are supportive of each other with fortnightly well attended team meetings. The size of the staff team does not satisfactorily support the whole range of practice functions. However, an additional senior supervisory social worker has been successfully recruited to join the team in January 2008. The manager, who has been in post for 15 months, prioritises support to carers, supervision of staff and development of the staff team, in addition to maintaining a carer caseload. Carers are supported by the staff team, with regular supervision visits, visits from family support workers, telephone contact and support at key meetings, which are all clearly recorded. Carer's comments include, "Support to us is faultless". Out of hours support to carers works well and is reported to be reliable and helpful. "They are always there if you need them". Unannounced visits and annual reviews are not currently completed on time for all households. Carers have support groups in three areas and have access to a variety of training. The majority of carers report satisfaction with their supervisory social worker and value the support they receive from skilled and experienced workers. The service enrol all carers into membership of Fostering Network which provides independent support to carers. Foster carer contracts were on the files of some carers, these are being replaced with foster carer agreements (Schedule 5 of Regulation 28) but not all files contain these new agreements. Records of supervisory visits from social workers and family support workers are well recorded. Young people's case files are well organised, audited regularly and reminders issued to placing authorities to complete missing documentation. The service expects carers to complete diaries and send monthly summaries on young people for the placing authorities. Whilst carers are rewarded financially for successful completion of these reports, there are a significant number of carers who do not consistently complete these records. Carers are given the information held by the service on the young person and understand the purpose and duration of a placement. However, information from placing authorities can be limited. The service regularly reminds placing authorities to provide missing documentation. Administrative records, with the exception of lost recruitment records, are well maintained and organised. The administrative support is very good and praised by staff in the service. Central

records are well maintained and monitored, with key data monitored both by clerical staff and by the manager in order to organise and prioritise work.

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 meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
8	make specific reference to matching in any Foster Placement Agreement ensuring the agreement relates to the carer named.(Reg 34)	31 December 2007
15	follow clear procedures for the recruitment, selection and retention of information on staff to ensure children are protected.(Reg 20)	31 December 2007
13	provide sufficient support to ensure the carers are able to meet young people's educational needs and make clear its expectations and the arrangements that will be put in place if any child is not in school, including structured occupation during school hours.(Reg 16)	31 December 2007
21	review carers annually.(Reg 29)	29 February 2008
24	ensure that foster carers keep up to date records of the children and young people in their care.(Reg 22)	31 December 2007
22	ensure that all foster carers have an up to date foster care agreement, which includes all the matters as set out in regulation 28(5)(b) schedule 5	31 December 2007
30	ensure no business is conducted by panel, unless at least one of the social workers employed by the fostering service, who is appointed to the fostering panel, is present (Reg 24 and 25)	31 January 2008

Recommendations

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

- make unannounced visits to carers at least one each year.(NMS 22.6)
- ensure safe care policies are regularly updated and signed.(NMS 9)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

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)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

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)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

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)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

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)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

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)

Annex A

- 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)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.