



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Foster Care NCH: Wessex Community Projects

**213 West Street
Fareham
Hampshire
PO16 0EN**

Lead Inspector
Corrie McKeown

Announced Inspection
14th August 2006 10:00a

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	Foster Care NCH: Wessex Community Projects
Address	213 West Street Fareham Hampshire PO16 0EN
Telephone number	0207 704 7000
Fax number	
Email address	
Provider Web address	nch.org.uk/cotswoldcommunity
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	NCH
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Ms Barbara Patricia Russell
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

1. The agency may place children between 10 and 17 years of age who are on remand or licence

Date of last inspection 16th March 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

NCH (National Children's Home) is a national children's voluntary organisation that has a large number of projects operating throughout the country. The Wessex Community Project offers an alternative to remand to custody and post custody care for vulnerable and troubled young people up to the age of 17, by providing safe, secure and stable family placements within the community, so that the young people can experience a positive model of life for the future. Additionally the project now offers fee-based, specialist placements for children and young people aged 8-18 years on a short and long term basis. The third project is the Intensive Fostering Programme (IFP), which is an innovative programme, developed in the USA and commissioned by the Youth Justice Board as an alternative to custody for young offenders. The service is promoted through its website and established links with local authorities. Fees range from £766 to £988.

SUMMARY

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

This announced inspection was carried out by two inspectors over three days and incorporated visits to three foster homes, interviews with nine foster carers, five young people, three supervising social workers, the training officer, the office manager, the Registered Manager and the Team Leader. The panel chair was interviewed on the telephone, meetings were observed and records were checked. At the time of the inspection four individual placements were operating in each of the three schemes. Recent reports were used for information where no change in circumstances was indicated.

This annual inspection was brought forward in time to meet the needs of the regulatory body in preparation for the move to OFSTED. In spite of this, the Agency's managers and staff cooperated fully to assist the inspection process.

What the service does well:

The service provides a dedicated and enthusiastic team of staff and carers, who work well together to support a group of young people to access the opportunities they need to make progress. As part of this process the project works hard to overcome the negativity previously experienced by the young people, using good listening skills, positive reinforcement and a lifestyle that is caring and helps to raise their self-esteem. The Agency is successful in their efforts to gather the necessary information prior to placement, which supports the foster carers to meet all the young people's needs. A comprehensive preparation and on-going training programme is provided, that foster carers say meets their needs and ensures that they provide a safe and caring environment. The matching procedure is given a lot of consideration and has some flexibility that has led to positive outcomes. A colourful introductory leaflet is produced for the young people on the remand and post custody scheme by their prospective families. There has been a low level of complaints received, which are handled appropriately and the young people felt their concerns were dealt with promptly. Training in anti-discriminatory practice and equal opportunities ensures that this is effectively promoted by the whole team. Working with birth families is a central feature of the IFP and there was evidence of positive results in this area.

The service is developed and improved using the feedback of everyone involved in the care and progress of the young people.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Criminal Record Bureau checks are now renewed every three years in line with Standard 15.4.meeting a previous requirement. Clear procedures are now in place with regard to medical consent and improved recording and supervision guidelines have been developed.

What they could do better:

The recruitment checks detailed in Schedule 1 must be completed for all staff and official documents used as evidence should be countersigned as genuine copies. On-going professional training must be made available to social work staff and they should all be registered with the General Social Care Council. Training in the safe handling and administration of medication should be included as part of the core training programme.

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

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

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The health needs of the young people are well known to their carers, who work actively in co-operation with other professionals to support them.

EVIDENCE:

When placements are made foster carers feel the Agency works hard to make sure they are given as much health information as possible. Much of this is gathered at the referral stage and clarified at the initial placement meeting. At the time of the Inspection all of the young people were registered with local health practitioners, according to their supervising social workers and all of the young people's health needs were being met or followed up by their carers. Two young people were receiving specialist help from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), two are receiving other forms of therapeutic intervention and another is undergoing orthodontic treatment.

Carers receive training in health and hygiene, first aid, substance misuse and health promotion, which is included as part of the skills for fostering training package and supported by information in the foster carers' handbook. Further training is sometimes provided to help foster carers manage specific individual health conditions. Currently training is being sought to help foster carers understand autism and in some cases training is accessed individually. There are clear procedures in place regarding medical consent, which the foster carers are fully aware of. When matching young people with appropriate carers, the Agency will ensure that the carer has the necessary skills to support and manage any health problems.

Foster carers visited felt very supported in meeting any health needs presented by the young people. Carers of young people over the age of 16 are asked to ensure they do not smoke in the homes, under that age it is actively

discouraged. Daily records are made of health appointments and concerns and a new system of recording has recently been devised, which will lift information from the log onto a separate health sheet.

In the homes visited practice around the administration of medication was not consistent. One foster carer was not recording appropriately, although other carers consulted were clear about the required procedure. Another foster carer was failing to store medication securely, when this had been advised as part of the young person's risk assessment. Closer monitoring of practice is part of the new system of recording, but training in the administration of medication would be advisable.

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):

3,6,8,9,15 and 30.

Quality in this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people are kept safe with a range of strategies and are encouraged and supported to keep themselves safe.

EVIDENCE:

The Registered Manager and Team Manager are qualified, competent and suitable to manage the Fostering Agency; all other members of staff are qualified and experienced to undertake the roles and responsibilities assigned to them.

The Agency has a range of strategies in place to ensure that their carers provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Homes are assessed by supervising social workers as part of the initial assessment of carers and annually thereafter. The homes visited by Inspectors were comfortable and offered the young people a welcoming environment. Each family working with young people on the remand and post custody scheme produces a colourful leaflet, to inform a prospective young person about their home and what to expect. All young people have their own rooms, which they can personalise. Transport is vetted as part of the annual household safety checks, to make sure that appropriate insurance is in place and that vehicles meet safety standards. In addition to the training already mentioned, carers undertake

courses in safe caring, health and safety and behaviour management, these are delivered as part of their preparation and core training. An individual safe caring strategy is in place for each household, detailing any special measures to ensure everyone in the house is protected.

Matching details of foster carers were contained in their assessment paperwork and for the young people in the initial information sheet completed by the Agency. Where the matching procedure identifies that the foster carers may require additional support, training and information has been provided. Examples include advice regarding specific health conditions and behaviour management strategies delivered by supervising social workers. The statistics gathered by the Agency show that a large number of the placements made are very successful. An enthusiastic comment made by a young person was "It's cool living here, we always talk about football. The whole family is really nice and it's really relaxed." A placing social worker commented: "A very good placement, I could not have asked for more."

Specific training is offered in safeguarding skills and procedures to keep young people safe and working with young people who have been abused. These subjects are included in induction training and in more detail as a core-training course. All carers were clear that corporal punishment is not acceptable, this is clearly stated in the foster care agreement and the young people raised no concerns in this area when they spoke to the Inspectors. The service operates a policy of not restraining young people and the foster carers are well versed in alternative strategies. In the past when an allegation has been made against a carer, proper procedures were followed by the Agency and other agencies became involved where necessary. No concerns have been raised since the last inspection. Detailed written procedures are available for all staff to follow when dealing with safeguarding issues. All of the young people reported that they knew how to make a complaint and quoted situations where they had had concerns or worries; they were satisfied with the swift responses they had received. One complaint made since the last inspection by a parent was unresolved and being investigated by a senior practitioner. One incident of bullying described by a young person whilst on a respite weekend was appropriately managed by the Agency and training is offered to carers in anti-bullying strategies, as part of their preparation for fostering. The new recording and monitoring system specifically addresses recording in this area. Records of significant incidents were seen on file; they were low in number and included details of the agencies that had been informed.

The Registered Manager, Office Manager and NCH staff in the Glasgow office carry out the recruitment procedure for staff. Criminal Record Bureau checks are now renewed every three years, meeting a requirement made at the last inspection. When two files were scrutinised by Inspectors, not all of the checks detailed in Schedule 1 of the National Minimum Standards had been evidenced as undertaken and a checklist needs to be completed for all staff before they begin work. When official documents are photocopied it would be good practice

to sign a statement saying that the original had been seen. The Panel and other professionals working with the young people need to be similarly checked. All social work staff working for the Agency are qualified and they are trained and experienced in assessment work, but some are not yet registered with the General Social Care Council.

A Panel with experience in childcare monitors the assessment of potential foster carers; the composition of the panel meets all the requirements and recommendations. Education, health and black and minority ethnic group advice is sought from an appropriate group of consultants. The decision maker is the Regional Director for NCH. The standard of assessments presented to the panel is improving to a good standard according to the panel chair and carers felt they had been "thoroughly vetted" and "had a very searching assessment." All said they were supported well through the process. The panel also perform a quality assurance function for the Agency by scrutinising all foster carer reviews and changes to approval. The panel chair said in conversation "These foster carers always go the extra mile."

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 and 13.

Quality of this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. Young people have access to a range of chosen activities and opportunities and they attend education, employment or training where possible.

EVIDENCE:

The service provides basic equal opportunities and diversity training for foster carers as part of the induction process and the on-going training programme. Placement demand has not recently included young people from black and minority ethnic groups, but training and resources are in place and carers feel confident to challenge any discriminatory behaviour displayed by the young people. Good evidence was available to suggest that foster carers provide encouragement and equal access to opportunities to develop young people's talents, interests and hobbies, enabling them to take part in a range of activities that raise their self-esteem and encourage a healthy lifestyle. The inclusive ethos of the organisation is supported by the schemes it operates, and the attitudes and practice of its carers.

Foster carers are active in ensuring appropriate education is provided for all the young people. The Agency provides a great deal of support for carers in this area, but for some shorter-term placements it can be difficult to access full time education before the young people move on. Foster carers are aware of their responsibilities to provide an activity programme that has an educational flavour for those out of school. Some young people on special programmes continue with them throughout the holidays. As part of the socialisation aspect

of the various programmes delivered, the young people are encouraged and enabled to seek employment and Inspectors were made aware of examples ranging from paper rounds to part-time work. Supervising social workers offer additional support for young people on the IFP to engage them in social skills development. Feedback from foster carers was very positive about the support they received in this area. One interesting outing taking place during the inspection was the result of a town tour conducted by a supervising social worker and the young person had responded by offering to show her his home town. Another young person talked of an interest in fishing and one family were actively involving the young person in their leisure interests, providing good role models. A young person on the point of successfully completing his commitments on the IFP, was moving to a full-time job in his home town.

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 and 11.

Quality of this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. There are good systems in place that promote appropriate contact between young people and their families and foster carers are committed to this work. The Agency enables all parties concerned with the care of the young people to contribute their views, so that positive outcomes are achieved.

EVIDENCE:

Feedback from the young people indicated that their foster families welcomed their friends and family members, where this was appropriate. The foster carers and placing social workers enable contact outside of the home, where risk assessments indicate this is necessary. One social worker seconded from the youth offending team has specific responsibility to work with birth families, with a view to easing the pathway for young people returning home. During one visit to a foster placement, where a young person was expected to arrive later in the day, a birth parent rang to find out about the placement. The foster carer was clearly pleased with this early contact and commented that it would make it easier for her to work with the birth family; he was apparently reassured that his son was to be placed in a family setting. The Agency offers training and guidance to support the carers in this area of work and recording of contacts is included in the daily records. One birth parent said " He was treated wonderfully by his foster carer."

A number of young people commented in their feedback that they felt listened to by their carers and supervising social workers; they gave examples of this in the management of contact, their views on placements and their choice of activities. One commented in feedback "I really like it there, they are really

nice and I like the house.” The young people consulted during the inspection were clearly able to put forward their point of view and had the confidence and opportunities to do so. All of the young people said that they knew how to make a complaint, but it appeared that their concerns were dealt with at an early stage.

The Agency seeks annual feedback on foster carers’ performance from all parties concerned. Foster carers were unanimous that their views were heard and actioned promptly, where necessary. Managers attend weekly meetings with foster carers on the IFP, as regular consultation is an important part of this programme, to ensure the early identification of concerns. At the end of every placement a meeting is held with the supervising social worker, to identify the outcomes for the young person and any possible training needs for the foster carer.

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)

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

There are no key standards to assess in this section of the report and no concerns have been raised since the last inspection or in recent reports.

EVIDENCE:

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, 24 and 32 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 and 24.

Quality of this outcome area is good. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service. The service is well managed and provides an experienced, qualified and enthusiastic team of staff and foster carers. Some systems and procedures are being modified to achieve consistent practice across the three projects.

EVIDENCE:

Staff working for the Agency are suitably qualified and experienced. Post qualification training for social workers is not currently supported by the organisation and the new system of being invited to training is reducing their access. The Agency social workers report they are well supervised and feel they can contribute their ideas to the development of the service. Recently as a result of a training course, a comprehensive restructuring of the recording of foster carers' supervision was devised and adopted by all three fostering schemes. This is one move in an on-going gradual process of amalgamation and rationalisation, to ensure consistent practice across the three schemes run by NCH at the Fareham office. Foster carers feel that there are adequate staff to meet their needs and the needs of the young people placed. The range of foster carers recruited is suitable to match the needs of the young people referred and the Agency is in the process of recruiting more foster carers, in order to offer more placement choice and meet current demand, particularly for IFP placements. Targeted recruiting is carried out to ensure those with appropriate existing skills or the ability to develop their skills, are available. 25% of current foster carers have a relevant qualification and one is working towards achieving NVQ Level 3 in the Caring for Children and Young People.

According to all foster carers consulted, the strategy for supporting them includes weekly or fortnightly visits from a supervising social worker, a well-received training programme that meets their needs, a local support group in the northern catchments area and an excellent 24 hour on-call emergency service. Supervision visits are recorded and the notes are offered to carers as a record of their performance. Performance reviews are carried out for the foster carers at six months, twelve months and annually thereafter and all are scrutinised by the panel. These include feedback from the young people placed in the home, birth families, placing social workers, the youth offending team and the foster carers' children, one of whom commented "It seems exactly the same for the foster kids as it was when I was growing up, which was pretty good." Training needs are also identified at this time. As foster carers increase their skills and experience, their approval is sometimes extended, enabling them to work across all three fostering schemes. All approval changes are referred to the panel. Feedback from all foster carers contacted showed high praise for their supervisors, commenting particularly on the out-of-hours service and how someone else always covers any absences. They clearly felt secure in their support with comments such as "excellent," "always professional in their work", "friendly and approachable" and "The support is always there and they will come out if it's an emergency". Working partnerships between placing social workers and the supervising social workers were very good in most cases reviewed and supervising social workers make regular attempts to engage with the young people in the placement; the level

of engagement depends on the scheme. A successful support group is operating in the north and the Agency are hoping to establish a similar group in the southern region.

Case records are maintained for all the young people and placing social workers are able to receive monthly updates on their progress, compiled by the supervising social workers in consultation with the foster carers. The young people are helped to keep a record of their life while being fostered. This takes a variety of forms and some foster carers help them to produce interesting portfolios. Discussions were held with the Agency on ways in which this record may be extended. Reports are prepared for Looked After Children (LAC) reviews in collaboration with the foster carers and the young people where appropriate. Training is given to foster carers about storage of information and carers have suitable lockable facilities for the purpose. Supervisors monitor recording and this system has recently been reviewed and improved.

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	3
9	3
15	2
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	3
13	3
31	N/A

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

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

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	4
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
1	FS15	20 (3)(d)	The recruitment checks detailed in Schedule 1 must be completed for all staff. and official documents are countersigned as genuine copies.	30/08/06
2	FS17	21 (4)(b)	On-going professional training must be made available to social work staff.	30/10/06

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	FS12	That safe handling of medication be included as part of the foster carers training programme.
2	FS15	That all social work staff are registered with the General Social Care Council.
3	FS15	That a list of the recruitment checks to be undertaken is completed for all staff and that official documents photocopied and kept as evidence should be countersigned and dated as a true copy.

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