



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

**Barnardos North West Fostering Service (NW
Region)**

**5 Lineside Close
Liverpool
Merseyside
L25 2UD**

Lead Inspector
Jeff Banham

Announced Inspection
10th July 2006 09:30

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 Barnardos North West Fostering Service (NW Region)

Address 5 Lineside Close
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Merseyside
L25 2UD

Telephone number 0151 488 0822

Fax number

Email address

Provider Web address www.barnardos.org.uk/faim

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Barnardo`s North West Region

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr John Hardy

Type of registration Fostering Agencies

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 6th March 2006

Brief Description of the Service:

Barnardo's North West Fostering Service specialises in finding suitable foster carers for disabled children and young people with severe learning difficulties. The agency provides placements for local authorities mainly in the North West of England.

The services include

- long term foster care to assist a young person into adulthood
- short term break fostering
- contract care offering short term breaks for disabled children and their birth families

At the time of the site visit the agency had a total of sixty three approved fostering households providing eighty one approved places, seventy one of which were filled, seven were vacant and three were not available.

Barnardo's North West was managed and operated from its offices in Liverpool. The fostering team consisted of the service manager, deputy manager, team leader; four social workers in the long-term team and three in the short term break team.

SUMMARY

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

This announced site visit was part of the service's annual key inspection. It lasted one week, during which the inspector spoke with the Assistant Director who was also the Responsible Individual for the service; the service manager; deputy manager; team leader of the short term break team; four social workers, and one of Barnardo's educational psychologists.

The inspector attended a meeting of the fostering panel and spoke with the panel chair.

The office premises were inspected; records, policies and procedures were seen, and the files of four foster carers, and the children placed with them were also seen.

Survey questionnaires from four foster carers were received.

The inspector visited four foster carers in their own homes.

Each "outcome area" or section of this report contains a statement about the quality of the service. This judgement has been made using all available evidence, including the site visit.

What the service does well:

Barnardo's North West recruits carers who are committed to the welfare and development of the children placed with them. Many carers treat the children and young people as part of their families, and work hard in every respect to ensure they develop to the best of their potential.

The service provides effective support to carers, and many carers commented on how responsive, understanding and helpful all the staff are.

The service emphasises the importance of child-centred practice. The welfare and development of children and young people are at the heart of the agency's policies and practices. Of particular note is the work Barnardo's does in achieving successful transitions for young people, often having to work with local authorities whose expertise in the area is not as great as Barnardo's.

The matching of carers with children and young people is considered and thoughtful. Carers' strengths are matched to a child's needs, and the introductory process ensures that all parties can get to know each other over time and in a supportive fashion.

Staff believe that Barnardo's is a good employer. The agency's commitment to high quality practice enables staff to work in a structured and well-managed way. Staff feel they are given every opportunity to be part of the continued development of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Barnardo's was last inspected very recently – in March 2006 – and has continued to develop its practices and procedures since then.

The agency continues to promote its commitment to anti-discriminatory practice into every part of the service through training, the approval of same-sex carers, and by attempts to recruit black and ethnic minority families.

What they could do better:

The composition and functioning of the fostering panel would benefit from review in order for the service to be able to demonstrate clear lines of accountability and independent scrutiny of practice.

The training needs of staff could be reviewed, in order for the task of competency-based assessment and approval, of health and safety assessments of carers' homes, and the understanding of the role of the supervising social worker to be enhanced. Staff should be clear about the responsibility of the supervising social worker in objective monitoring of a carer's practice.

The "out of hours" service is currently a relatively *ad hoc* arrangement, with social workers and managers giving their home numbers and mobile phone numbers to carers. There is no rota as such, and the manager recognises that this service has operated well and provides effective support, but its strength may also be its weakness.

The organisation of children's records could be reviewed to ensure they all contain relevant, accurate and up to date information of children. Records are currently held in historical files, hard files and on computer systems. Staff know a great deal about children and families, and the service need to be able to demonstrate that that knowledge is converted into written records.

Barnardo's has developed considerable expertise in, and commitment to, assisting young people through the complex process of transition into adulthood.

It may be possible for Barnardo's to exploit that transition expertise to develop a greater "control" of the process and thereby achieve more successful outcomes for young people.

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.

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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

The service for this outcome area is excellent.

This judgement has been made using all the available evidence, including the site visit.

Foster carers are given detailed information about the children they care for. Comprehensive health care plans are made and reviewed, and carers are well trained and clear about their responsibilities in ensuring the health needs of children and young people are met.

EVIDENCE:

Each child placed by Barnardo's has a case file.

Each file has a copy of an "Inter Agency Placement Agreement" that sets out the responsibilities of each party involved in the placement. The local authority is required to arrange for the child to have a full medical before placement, and to supply detailed information about the health needs of the child or young person. This information should also include history of previous abuse and any susceptibility to bruising.

This file includes a "Programme of Care" document that provides personal details, a diagnosis of significant health conditions (e.g. *severe haemophilia, spastic quadriplegia, divergent astigmatism*), a summary of health care needs, safe caring guidelines and information about communication needs, mobility, continence, medication and diet.

The Programme of Care document also contains an "Emergency Planning Document" that provides basic information in the event of an emergency involving the care of the young person.

The Foster Placement agreement completed in respect of each child sets out the specific responsibilities of the foster carer in supporting the child placed with them, and this includes all the tasks associated with meeting the identified health care needs.

A separate and additional "Foster Placement Agreement" is drawn up when a child receives respite care with another carer. This document also contains a clear statement about health care needs and the responsibilities of the respite carer.

Carers receive training so that they can administer any invasive therapies such as the administration of medication rectally. Only carers specifically trained are able to carry out such procedures.

Each child has a set of documentation – "*Looking After Children*" or "*LAC*" documents – that provides detailed information about all aspects of their history, needs and care. Contained in these documents were specific details of health care, and the responsibilities of those caring for the child.

Written consents to medical treatment were obtained and held on file.

Specialist medical reports, for example a "*Psychology Update Report*", and reports of annual medical assessments, were also obtained and held on file.

The manager said that a number of children had their annual medicals with their GP, and the records of these medicals are obtained by Barnardo's, seen by the medical adviser and held on file. Sometimes Local Authorities request that school or community physicians undertake medicals, and Barnardo's does not always receive a copy of the medical. The manager recognised that there was a need to improve the system for obtaining this information.

Detailed "*Safe Caring Records*" were completed and reviewed. For children with disabilities a large proportion of the information on these relates to health care and specialist treatments and handling.

Children were subject to the statutory review process under the "*Looked After Children*" procedures. These reviews include monitoring of health care needs and a child's progress, and are held every six months.

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

The service provided by the agency is good. This judgment is based on all available evidence including the site visit.

Matching of children with carers ensures the best possible opportunity for children's needs to be met.

Children's safety is central to recruitment practices.

The operation of the fostering panel could be reviewed to ensure it provides clear lines of accountability and offers the service independent scrutiny of practice.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service was inspected in March 2006. The managers and staff were then in post were all still working for the agency. No new staff had been employed, and all recruitment and selection procedures remained the same.

All carers are subject to enhanced CRB checks. These are reviewed every three years.

The foster carers that were visited provided suitable homes for the children/young people being cared for. The children who were in placement had their own bedroom and accommodation arrangements that reflected the child's need for space and privacy.

Specialist equipment such as beds, baths and hoists is provided where required. Barnardo's had supported two carers in building an extension to their houses. The extensions included a walk-in bathroom, storage facilities, hoists, a ramp and an adapted vehicle.

The organisation undertakes comprehensive health and safety risk assessments with the foster carers. This process includes a hazard risk checklist that assists carers in maintaining and promoting the health and safety of children in their care. This checklist is used during the preparation and training of carers and raises the issue of health and safety to prospective foster carers from the outset. It enables families to identify health and safety issues in every room of the house, in the garden, and in routine family activities.

Social workers said they undertook health and safety assessments of prospective carers' homes as part of the initial approval process, and again as part of the annual review. Records of the checks were kept on file. Some social workers said they had received training in health and safety risk assessments, but it was some time ago. Others said they had not done any training and felt to do so would help them to feel more confident in that area of their work.

See recommendation 1

Once a child is placed with foster carers, a social worker from the fostering service also completes a safe caring document. Long-term carers have this safe caring document reviewed by the Barnardo's social worker, every six months and short-term break or contract carers have the document reviewed on an annual basis.

Barnardo's has a Safeguarding and Protecting Children Manual, which informs staff and carers on the "core" operating standards of the organisation. In line with these standards there is a robust recruitment and selection policy and the service adheres closely to these procedures.

The inspectors were advised that as part of foster carers' assessment training, sessions are held on promoting and safeguarding the welfare of the child. The following training is also provided to carers: -

- Child protection
- Child Abuse
- Safe Caring
- Sexual Health Education

Foster carers are also given the "Safeguarding and Protecting Children," Barnardo's Policy Manual (2002) and the North West Fostering Service's "Safeguarding Children Guidelines for Foster Carers and Volunteers".

Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of allegations of neglect and abuse of a child in foster care.

Referrals of children to be placed are made to Barnardo's. Suitable carers are then identified. Possible matches are offered to the referring authority for the decision on placement to be made. Social workers and carers confirmed that the matching process is detailed and lengthy, and a gradual series of introductions enables carers and children to get to know each other.

Short-term carers are matched with children by the team responsible for short-term care. This matching is based on the team's knowledge of the young person, the long-term carer and the short-term carer. Introductions between carers and children are lengthy and thorough, and significantly increase the chances of a successful placement. Long term and short break carers themselves then meet to discuss the child about any respite care arrangements and issues that may arise in any placement.

The fostering panel operates on behalf of two of Barnardo's fostering services. These are "Barnardo's North West" and "Fostering Adolescents in Merseyside" (FAIM).

The panel membership on the day of the visit was eleven people, and the panel administrator. The membership included the Responsible Individual, the Service Manager, Deputy Service Manager and an Assistant Director from another section of Barnardo's as chair.

The panel was well organised, administered and chaired, and had all the required members. The panel had a member from an ethnic minority, although this was her last panel. Another member was also formerly in Barnardo's residential and foster care.

The chair said that the panel was continuing to develop experience and competence through its work and training opportunities. She said the membership of the panel was suitable for the task; she recognised that some of the members were relatively new and would therefore need to be assisted to ensure the continuing development of their abilities and understanding of their role.

One item on the agenda was the approval of applicants to undertake long term fostering. They had no previous experience of fostering, nor any experience of disability. The panel recommended their approval as long-term carers. There was a brief reference in the subsequent discussion to the fact that this approval might not be appropriate, given their lack of experience, but no panel member apparently felt this might not be suitable and there was no significant debate about the matter.

The chair said that the panel received a six monthly “quality assurance” report from the manager of the service. This provided information on the numbers of referrals, the numbers of applications that had not progressed to approval, matches and placements and a range of other information.

The panel did not have a system for identifying and reporting on issues about overall practice that members felt relevant. The opportunity for the panel to review its operation was limited by the fact that meetings were two-monthly, and therefore had to concentrate on “business” matters in order to get through the agenda. More frequent meetings may offer more time to look at panel development and functioning. This may be one way in which the panel could itself produce a regular quality assurance report to be provided to the fostering service.

See recommendation 2

The Children’s Service Manager sat through the panel discussion, although he was not a member of the panel. He was however also the agency decision maker. Given the membership of the panel and his role as Service Manager, Barnardo’s should review this arrangement to ensure it provides the greatest possible degree of objectivity and independence for the panel process. The panel is a crucial element in the overall “quality assurance” function and the success of this depends to a large extent on clear lines of accountability and the opportunity for independent scrutiny of all aspects of the fostering service. The appointment of a chair from outside Barnardo’s would also enhance the “independence” of the panel.

See recommendation 3

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 and 31

The service provided in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using all available evidence including the site visit.

Barnardo's commitment to valuing diversity is translated into effective practices, and carers are committed to ensuring that children receive the best opportunities to develop their potential.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service has an Equal Opportunities Policy statement and action plan, which promotes diversity and anti - discriminatory practice. The inspectors were advised by the manager of the service and staff that promoting equality and managing diversity training is provided for all carers and staff. Carers said they were given the opportunity of training. A carers' day focussing on "Black History" particularly the history of the slave trade, took place during the site visit. Carers were clear about their responsibilities in ensuring that the children placed with them, all of whom had severe learning difficulties, were not discriminated against because of their disabilities. A particular strength of the service provided by carers was the acceptance by, and commitment of, carers' own children to children placed.

The inspector asked one carer's child how he described to others the young person placed long term with the family. "*He's my brother*" was the reply.

The manager of the service stated that where carers cannot reflect the child's religious, cultural, racial, linguistic (communication) background and needs, additional training and support is given.

A booklet, "*Getting to know you*", is provided to foster carers before a child is placed; this is an innovative way of describing a child's needs and how the child would like them to be met. It includes information around a child's interests and activities that they enjoy. The examples of these booklets that were available on the files inspected were well presented and provided a great deal of information in a succinct and clear manner.

Barnardo's North West Fostering Service's commitment in employing educational psychologists emphasises the importance that this service gives to the promotion of the education and development of the children and young people fostered. This in turn is communicated to foster carers, who ensure that an environment is provided where education and learning are valued.

The foster carers agreement, and foster placement agreement, clearly outline the expectations of Barnardo's North West Fostering Service's in relation to the foster carers' contribution to the assessment of the children's educational needs and progress, in the planning and review process.

Carers were involved in the review process for children who had Statements of Special Educational Need. Copies of the statements and records of the reviews were on file.

Barnardo's provides both long term and short-term care. The short-term carers offer support to those carers who have children placed long term. Arrangements for placing are clear. Carers know what they can have as planned support, and both sets of carers have a great deal of contact and communication about the children they care for. The short break service is seen as offering valuable support to long-term carers.

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):

The service provided by the agency in this outcome area is good. This judgement is based on all available evidence, including the site visit.

Foster carers are supported to assist children and young people in contributing to all aspects of their care in accordance with their abilities. Carers are clear about the significance of supporting contact arrangements.

The service needs to provide carers with documentary evidence of any legal order or restriction of contact to ensure they have the best possible information to keep children safe.

EVIDENCE:

The service is clear about the significance of maintaining and promoting contact between the child and his/ her family, in accordance with the Children Act 1989 and other relevant guidance. Contact is therefore addressed at every stage of the care planning process, in the development of the care plan, at "Looked after Children" reviews, during the matching process, at foster panels and sometimes via the legal system. During these processes the service makes every effort to ascertain the views and wishes of the child or young person in relation to contact with their family.

In the promotion of contact, foster carers are provided with an informative booklet, entitled, "Contact: Maintaining Links with Families." This booklet covers a whole range of aspects relating to contact, which includes the nature of contact, its purpose, the effects of contact on children, parents, foster carers, the role of social workers, and practical and legal matters regarding contact.

One carer was seen who looked after a young person subject to a Care Order under Section 31 of the Children Act, and on whom there was a restriction of contact on her parents. The file documentation was not clear about the status of this restriction, and the carer said she did not have a copy of the care order or the restriction of contact although both documents were on the file. Although the care order had recently expired the position of contact with parents was unclear, given that the young person, although now an adult, did not have the capacity to protect herself if that were needed.

See requirement 1

Many of the children/young people, who are fostered by Barnardo's North West fostering service, have severe learning difficulties. The service uses a variety of methods to communicate which includes, utilising the Picture Exchange Communication system (PECs) as well as Makaton sign language. These are used with a view to eliciting the foster child/young persons' feelings and wishes. The service also makes use of local advocacy services.

The fostering service has a complaints policy and procedures. All foster carers are provided with a leaflet, entitled, "Having your Say", which encourages users to comment upon or complain about the service they have received. This leaflet also talks of the use of advocacy and provides brief information, regarding the 'formal complaints' procedure, directing the individual to obtain a booklet, entitled "Your Right to be Heard", which details the process of making a 'formal complaint'. The foster carers said they clearly understood the complaints system.

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):

14 and 29

The service provided by the agency in this outcome area is excellent. This judgement has been made using all available evidence including the site visit. Foster carers are clear about the payments due to them. Barnardo's works hard to achieve successful transitions for young people and has a lot to offer local authorities in developing their practice.

EVIDENCE:

Foster Carers are supported by the payment of a maintenance fee that is in line with the recommendation of the Fostering Network, and a professional fee paid by Barnardo's to recognise their work with children with severe learning disabilities.

Carers are informed about the rates for payment of fees and additional payments such as holiday and birthday allowances. Other specialist payments, such as equipment replacement, are made if the need arises.

Carers said they understood the payment system, and were paid on time. One said that she felt the system to be better now the BACS (direct transfer from bank to bank) was in operation.

The manager said the Transition period (the move from being supported by Children's Services to Adult Services when a young person reaches nineteen) remains a difficult area. One Barnardo's social worker was asked about Transition and said "*It makes me so angry. It makes us all so angry.*" The manager felt that the success of the Transition arrangements was dependent on the placing authorities' attitude towards young people and their legal status entering adulthood.

It was recognised that as all the young people have severe learning difficulties their ability to attain independence or some independent living is unusual, and a great deal of work needed to be done, starting when the child was relatively young, to ensure that the Transition would be made and the young person would continue to be supported.

The manager was able to provide evidence of a significant number of cases where Transition had been, or was still being, problematic. The issues that were described concerned resolution of funding between the authority who had initially placed the child, and the one in which the young person lived, and perhaps had lived for some time.

Other difficulties arose within Local Authorities at the time of transfer from Children's to Adult Services. There were examples of no plans for day support being made, and carers not having any idea of what, if any, payments they would receive. Staff at Barnardo's believed a resolution of the issue was time consuming and created anxiety for carers and young people. In one case the manager said Barnardo's had continued to fund a payment, as one authority had not made a decision about funding.

In another case the manager was able to list ten social workers and one psychiatrist who had been involved over the past year in undertaking or being involved in assessments.

Another carer said her experience of managing Transition had been *"Horrendous. I started looking for somewhere for her to go three years ago. We spent a lot of time constructing a Pathway Plan – only for Adult Services to say they would take no notice of it and that they would do their own."*

Clearly Barnardo's has considerable expertise in what needs to be done, and when, to achieve a successful transition for a young person being supported by Children's services to being supported by Adult services.

In most cases the expertise exceeds that of placing authorities and Barnardo's consistently demonstrates a considerable commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for young people.

In recognising that, Barnardo's could exploit that expertise by, for example, creating a guide or checklist for the specific outcomes required, together with actions, timescales and responsibilities. This protocol could be incorporated into every agreement made with local authorities. The agreement could include what actions Barnardo's would take if tasks were not completed. These actions could include providing independent advocacy for the young person, providing explicit information to senior as well as local managers, or using the Children Act 1989 (Section 27) to initiate a complaint on behalf of the young person.

The manager said he was aware that the implementation of a more "assertive" approach to transition and other care planning issues was a potentially difficult and sensitive tactic for an independent agency to adopt in its relationships with placing authorities.

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):

5,17,18,19,20,21,22, 23,24,25 and 26

The service provided in this outcome is good. This judgement is based on all the available evidence, including the site visit.

The service is well managed and demonstrates a clear commitment to good practice and service development.

Barnardo's could review some established areas of practice to see if there were changes to be made that could be of further benefit to its work.

EVIDENCE:

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently. The manager and deputy manager have been at the agency for some time and have developed an extensive knowledge of practices, policies and carers.

The assessment of carers is undertaken by all social workers. The assessment documentation is that prepared by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). Social workers said they used the "competency based" approach. Some social workers said they had received some training – one day-on competency-based assessments. In order to fully achieve the best possible practice in assessment and approvals, and to develop the competency-based approach into carer supervision and annual reviews, a review of current practice might be beneficial.

See recommendation 4

Staff said that supervision and appraisal were carried out regularly in line with Barnardo's and was supportive to their development.

Training was provided for carers in line with their identified needs. Records of training were kept on their files. Carers were supported by educational psychologists who offered assistance in educational and behavioural matters. Their support was greatly appreciated by carers.

Carers said they felt very well supported by Barnardo's. One carer said, "*The support is fantastic. There's always someone there at the end of the phone, and if you need them they'll be out in a minute.*"

The out-of hour's arrangement was however *ad hoc*, and was not subject to a rota arrangement. Carers were given the home telephone numbers or personal mobile phone numbers of social workers, who were, in effect, always on call. Although the demand on social workers was relatively low, and staff said they felt the system was part of the agency practice, the manager could review this arrangement that, it was admitted, had "*strengths as well as weaknesses.*"

See recommendation 5

The foster carer agreement, copies of which are signed by carers and held on their file, refers to the need for confidential handling of information relating to children.

The June edition of the Foster Carers' newsletter contains information about "new placements". It gives the names of two carers and the children placed with them.

One carer said she did not have secure storage for information relating to children, and the paperwork was "*probably kept in a carrier bag.*"

See requirement 2

Foster carers received regular visits and supervision from social workers. Records of visits and supervision sessions were completed and kept on file. Carers said they were given their own copies of the documents. A written "Schedule of visits", perhaps on one sheet either on paper file or computer, could list the visits made to a carer, the date, the purpose of the visit and could include the identification of the unannounced visit.

See recommendation 6

There was evidence that supervising social workers were approaching the task of supervising carers in different ways. One carer did not have appropriate documentation; another did not have the child's information stored securely. Another carer was recording information on children in a diary, together with other information, and these diaries were "*piled up somewhere*". In another case the information on a child's "programme of care needs" did not accurately reflect the child's situation, even though the supervising social worker had a considerable knowledge of the case.

The agency could review its approach to the role of the supervising social worker to ensure the responsibilities were clear and carried out consistently. Training for supervising social workers may be of benefit.

See recommendation 7

The agency maintained a file on each foster carer. The manager said that evidence of carers' identity was established as part of the assessment and CRB check process. There was however no copy of the documentation used to confirm a carer's identity. Files did not contain photographs of carers, although the manager said that the issue had been discussed several times in the past.

See recommendation 8

Each carer is subject to an annual review, and written records of these reviews are kept on file. The manager said that the system of reviewing was for himself and the deputy manager to undertake the reviews between them. The reviews are conducted with the Barnardo's social worker who has day to day supervisory responsibility for the carer. Both managers had a great deal of knowledge about the carer, and to some extent had been involved, or remained involved, in one way or another. This system may not offer the greatest possible objective and independent scrutiny of carers.

See recommendation 9

The office premises contain accommodation for staff, administrative support systems and storage for documentation. The premises are suitable, comfortable and secure.

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	4

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	4
9	3
15	3
30	2

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	4
13	4
31	3

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	2
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	4
29	3

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

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	FS10	14	The manager must ensure that carers are provided with all documentary evidence of legal orders and restrictions of contact.	31/08/06
2	FS25	38(3)(d)	The manager must ensure that all information relating to children is held confidentially.	31/08/06

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	FS6	The manager should ensure that social workers are competent to undertake health and safety assessments of carers' homes.
2	FS30	The manager should ensure that the fostering panel provides the service with regular "quality assurance" reports.
3	FS30	The manager should ensure that the fostering panel operates with clear lines of accountability and is able to offer the service effective independent scrutiny.
4	FS17	The manager could review the agency's approach to

		competency-based assessments to ensure staff are trained and supported by systems to achieve the best possible practice.
5	FS18	The manager could review the system of the "out of hours" support available for carers.
6	FS22	The manager could introduce a "schedule of visits" checklist to improve monitoring of visits to carers.
7	FS21	The manager could ensure social workers are clear about the responsibilities associated with the supervision task, and that training is provided if required.
8	FS25	The manager could ensure that carers' files contain evidence of identity and photographs.
9	FS21	The manager could ensure the arrangements for carers' reviews offer as much independent scrutiny as possible.

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