

# Fostering Matters Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	3 October 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**

Fostering Matters is an independent fostering agency providing a family placement service for children and young people. The office is based in Gloucester and young people are placed predominantly with carers in Gloucestershire, Bristol, Wiltshire and South Wales. The staff team consists of three qualified social workers, a full time office manager and a support worker.

### **Summary**

Fostering Matters is providing a good or satisfactory service in all key outcome areas. Support is available to ensure young people's health needs are met. The service continues to ensure young people's placements meet their needs and support to carers, young people and placing authorities is good. The service supports young people's educational efforts and works well with schools. Contact arrangements and support to facilitate these arrangements are good. The management and monitoring of the service has improved and placing authorities are being reminded of missing paperwork. The foster care panel does not currently ensure they have the personnel with the range of skills and experience required and does not always monitor exemptions applied for by the service. There are three requirements/actions from this inspection and five 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**

At the previous inspection in October 2006, three statutory requirements were made and 11 good practice recommendations. The service has since the last inspection appointed a full time office manager, this has enabled monitoring of key areas to be more effective. Systems are more robust and placing social workers are reminded of their responsibilities. Young peoples guides are issued by the carers and monitored by the service. Staff recruitment procedures have improved. Safe care policies are found on carers' and young people's files.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is satisfactory.

Carers confirm young people and children are registered with the relevant health services. Referrals for NHS dentists are easily made. First aid training is accessed locally by carer. Good links are evident with the health services and close attention is paid to the needs of very young children in placement. The service is proactive and introduced a complete no smoking policy in May 2007, to ensure no looked after young people and children are exposed to secondary smoke. Seat belt legislation is also actively promoted amongst the service and support given to ensure young people travel safely. Medical consent was not ready available to current carers despite written reminders from the service to the placing authority.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

The registered individual and the registered manager of the service remain in post and were registered in July 2004. Both posts are filled by experienced child protection social work managers. Recruitment and approval of foster carers are generally good and subject to the

recognised BAAF F format. When assessing existing foster carers transferring to the service, there were some gaps in the checking process. However, other systems were in place to reduce the risk. Seat belt legislation is actively promoted and support given to ensure young people travel safely, for example baby seats are provided by the service. Matching processes are evidenced at the point of referral and carers confirm they are not put under any pressure to accept placements. The service regularly turns down unsuitable placements. Introductions are made, wherever possible, to familiarise young people to their potential new homes and carers. Individual safe care documents are on files and vary in quality. Safe care is promoted by the service and they have provided interest free loans to provide appropriate physical safety. The recruitment process for the most recent member of staff was satisfactory. An assessor was recruited with one open reference. The social workers are appropriately qualified and very experienced in child protection. The member of staff who is unqualified in social work is supervised by a qualified social worker. In general the foster care panel is good. However, the current compilation of panel members is lacking the expertise of an independent member who has been fostered or whose child has been fostered. Panel quoracy is monitored, prior to panel meetings taking place and the service is actively seeking additional members. The service applies appropriately for exemptions from the local authority where the carers reside, however the local authority has not responded in writing. The wording of some recommendations for foster carers approval are ambiguous.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

Carers are recruited from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and include same gender carers. The service works hard to keep young people in local placements and maintain important contact with significant people and places. Carers encourage, promote and develop young people's interests, but predominantly they encourage young people to live within foster homes as valued family members. The workers in the service are exceptionally skilled at working together to resolve difficulties and provide sound advice and support to carers, young people and placing authorities. Despite many placement moves for some young people the service give a high priority to enable them to remain in the same schools, where appropriate. Support for carers at school meetings is provided and valued. Carers demonstrate a commitment to enhance young people's educational attainment and are in regular contact with schools. Support to young people is also provided by the support worker from the service. Innovative ways are used to remind young people of basic tasks and carers are flexible in their approach to different ways of learning.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Staff and carers are excellent at promoting contact for young people and their families. Both carers and staff from the service facilitate young people, to access their friends and families, providing support, transport and supervision. Carers are positive about and recognise the importance of contact for the young people. Social workers in the service have clearly recognised skills in supervising difficult contact and regularly undertake contact supervision to ensure positive outcomes. The workers additionally train and support carers to be pro active and confident in this area. A parent response states "I am extremely satisfied with the support provided for my child". Young people contribute to their care reviews and are able to identify people to whom they are able to express their concerns. There are no groups for looked after

young people or support groups for carers, however the workers in the service are particularly adept at ensuring they talk to the young people in placement and will endeavour to involve the placing officers to resolve difficulties in placement at the earliest opportunity. Young people report they value the opportunity to talk to the fostering service workers.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

This outcome area has no key standards and was not inspected on this occasion.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose was updated in November 2007. The children's guide was updated in October 2007, with a new audio aid. Carers are issued with several copies and a letter to give to each young person on admission. The fostering service monitors confirmation of receipt of these guides. The fostering service provides copies of references and acknowledgements from placing authorities to demonstrate satisfaction with the service. The staff employed by the service are organised and managed effectively. They are clear about their roles, work well together and are supportive. The service has benefited from the appointment of a designated office manager and systems are now in place to monitor and track essential paperwork. A further social work post was advertised in October 2007 and interviews take place in January 2008. Training for staff in the service is available. Training for carers post approval still requires some further development, however individual on the job training is good and supportive to individual placement circumstances. Carers support groups are not yet operational but some carers have family and friendship connections. Carers responses to the questionnaire sent by Ofsted remain overwhelmingly positive about the good relationships and support they receive from the service, "They are always at the end of a telephone, day or night, they visit regularly and will come out if there are problems and talk this through with us and with the young people". Carers report that both the individual workers and the team collectively are effective, "The team have been very helpful through lots of problems. We and the children can contact them at any time". Case records seen on the young people tracked are well recorded, with carers recording daily. Placing authorities are provided with monthly summaries. Records are regularly monitored and local authorities are reminded to supply any missing paperwork. Complaints have been appropriately handled by the fostering service. Notifications are held centrally and appropriate agencies, with the exception of Ofsted, have been notified. The importance of retaining appropriate memorabilia for young people is understood well by carers.

### **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.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Due date</b>
30	ensure that the Panel comprises of people with the skills and experience as set out in Regulation 24.	31 March 2008

30	ensure the quality assurance function of the Panel is understood, implemented and maintained. (Regulation 26) that information on carers is obtained as specified in Schedule 3, specifically updated enhanced CRBs as portability is limited to a maximum of three months. (Regulation 27)	31 March 2008
25	ensure that Ofsted is informed of Schedule 8 events notifications and oral notifications are confirmed in writing. (Regulation 43)	31 March 2008

## Recommendations

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

- maintain up to date medical consent for young people with current carers. (NMS 12)
- monitor any exemptions applied for and agreed, to ensure compliance with the regulations, as set out in Schedule 7 of the Childrens Act 1989. Specifically that the carer has written agreement from the local authority. (NMS 8)
- ensure the approval status recommended by fostercare panel is clearly worded to detail age range, numbers and gender of children and does not exceed the maximum permitted fostering limit of three children (unless siblings). (NMS 30)
- continue to monitor and promote post approval training for carers. (NMS 19)
- continue to develop support systems amongst carers and review the need for more formal carer support networks. (NMS 21)

## 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.**