

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report
Fostering services**

Fostering Solutions

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Dates of this inspection episode:	20,21,23 May and 2,3,5 June 2008
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	Registration of new manager
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Other regions contributing to this report:	None

Introduction

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the fostering service undertaken by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations.

The primary focus of the report is to comment on the quality of life and quality of care experienced by service users (foster carers and children in placement).

The report contains information on how we inspect and what we find. This inspection focuses specifically on the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 but also takes into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The report is divided into nine sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection:

1. Summary of findings
2. Policies and procedures / information
3. Management and staffing of the service, (including premises and finance)
4. Provision of foster carers (including fostering panel)
5. Quality of care and safety for children placed
6. Placement of children, parts v & vi of the regulations
7. Records
8. Short term placements
9. Family and friends as carers

CSSIW inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect fostering services at any time. Inspection enables CSSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate, and for IFAs this will include satisfaction that continued registration is justified. It also ensures that all fostering services are compliant with:

- Care Standards Act 2000 and The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, whilst taking into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- The service's own statement of purpose.

At each inspection episode there are visits to the service during which CSSIW may adopt a range of different methods in its attempt to capture service user's and their relatives'/representatives' experiences. Such methods may for example include self-assessment, discussion groups, case tracking, visits to carer's homes, observation, interviews, and the use of questionnaires. At any other time throughout the year visits may also be made to the service to investigate complaints and to respond to any changes in the service.

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector at a specific period in time. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times.

The registered / responsible person/s is/are responsible for ensuring that the fostering service operates in a way which complies with the service specific regulations. CSSIW will comment in the general text of the inspection report on their compliance. For those regulations which CSSIW believes to be key in bringing about change in the particular service, they will be separately and clearly identified in the requirement section.

As well as listing these key requirements from the current inspection, requirements made by CSSIW since the last inspection, which have been met and those which remain outstanding are included in this report. The reader should note that requirements made in last year's report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with.

Where key requirements have been identified, the provider is required under regulation 42B, (Compliance Notification), to advise, in writing, the appropriate regional office of the completion of any action required by CSSIW.

The regulated service is also responsible for having in place a clear, effective and fair complaints procedure which promotes local resolution between the parties in a swift and satisfactory manner, wherever possible. The annual inspection report will include a summary of the numbers of complaints dealt with locally and their outcome.

CSSIW may also be involved in the investigation of a complaint. Where this is the case CSSIW makes publicly available a summary of that complaint. CSSIW will also include within the annual inspection report a summary of any matters it has been involved in together with any action taken by CSSIW.

Should you have concerns about anything arising from the Inspector's findings, you may discuss these with CSSIW or with the registered person.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales is required to make reports on regulated services available to the public. The report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW web site, www.cssiw.org.uk

Contents

Section		Page
Section one:	summary of findings	5-6
Section two:	policies and procedures / information	7
Section three: (including premises and finance)	management and staffing of the service	8-9
Section four:	provision of foster carers (including panel)	10-12
Section five:	quality of care and safety for children placed	13-14
Section six:	placement of children, parts v & vi of the regulations	15
Section seven:	records	16-17
Section eight:	short term placements	18
Section nine:	family and friends as carers	19

Section one: Summary of findings

This was the third annual inspection of this service and comprehensive self assessment documentation was received from the agency prior to the inspection, which together with the 2007 inspection report and service activity during the 2007/08 period led to the development of an inspection plan. The focus of the inspection was to ascertain the views of the users of the service whilst undertaking a general assessment of the service. In addition to gather information on the model of behaviour management promoted by the agency.

Questionnaires were sent to a number of foster carers, to children in foster placements, to placing authorities and to members of staff. The inspectors received returned questionnaires from a majority of these sources. Discussions were held with the service manager, the registered manager, three supervising social workers and three foster carers. In all of the questionnaire responses that were received there was a positive theme about the management and support provided by this agency. Fostering Solutions had undertaken an annual review of its services, seeking responses from foster carers and children in placements. The responses were published and circulated to all the families together with action that was undertaken in response to the feedback received. A significant number of documents have been reviewed during the past year including the statement of purpose. The documentation viewed during this inspection is of a high standard, comprehensive and very easy to read.

The current registered manager was recruited during the past year as were three new members of staff, one recruit is a supervising social worker who will work within the South Wales area. The personnel files of the new members of staff were seen and confirmed the safe recruitment practices of this organisation. Staff confirmed their registration with the Care Council for Wales and that they receive regular supervision.

A standardised process is in place for the assessment of foster carers which includes quality assurance checks. Foster carers are assessed using the competency model of assessment and receive the Skills to Foster training programme. A range of post approval training is available and foster carers were particularly interested in all training that related to teenage behaviour. Ten foster carers are currently undertaking the NVQ Level III award.

Panel minutes were seen for this inspection that demonstrated the systems put in place for the operation of this process are functioning as required.

There is a clear referral process for local authorities seeking placements for children. A data base system is in place, which allows for the management and storage of records. To inform local authorities of placement availability a magazine is produced containing details of families who are available to receive placements.

The agency requires local authorities to provide a wide range of information on the child referred to ensure matching appropriately. There was evidence within children's case files of planning and review processes in place. During this inspection the process in place around disruption was assessed, the inspectors have made comments in relation to children having an opportunity to contribute their views on events. Fostering Solutions use

several methods to gather children's views and to feedback to them. The annual survey has been mentioned; children also receive a quarterly newsletter and are invited to attend a range of group meetings.

There are no requirements made from this inspection and very few good practice recommendations, therefore a very satisfactory inspection, with evidence that the high standards established by this agency are maintained within this service.

The inspectors would want to thank the managers and staff for being so organised and supportive of the inspection and all of the foster carers for responding to questionnaires and agreeing to be interviewed. A big thank you to the young people who sent back filled in questionnaires with very clear and helpful answers.

Section two: Policies and procedures / information

Inspector's findings:

The statement of purpose for this service has been updated since the 2007 inspection. The document has been constructed to include the legal context under which the organisation operates the business status and management structure of the organisation and provides information in excess of that required of The Fostering Services [Wales] Regulations 2003. The statement of purpose contains statistical information on the number of foster carers and children placed with the organisation and the recruitment process and the training and support that is provided to foster carers. Included are details of the complaint procedure and an analysis of the complaints made over the past year.

There are a range of age appropriate children's guides available, which contain pictorial images and written information relevant to variable ages of the children and young people who are in placement.

Information was received with the self-assessment documentation with details of the policies and procedures that had been revised in 2007. Copies of the latest revised core policies were provided to the CSSIW.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section three: Management and staffing of the services, (including premises and finance)

Inspector's findings:

A new manager has been appointed since the 2007 inspection. A manager assessment was undertaken following the CSSIW guidelines, which identified the applicant as appropriately experienced and competent to undertake the role of manager of this service. The manager has achieved a social work qualification, the PQ1 and an Introductory Certificate in Management. She has also received the Practice Teaching Award and is registered with the Care Council for Wales. Since appointed the manager has gained the NVQ Level IV manager award. The manager has been qualified as a social worker for five years, has past experience as a foster carer, of working within a local authority fostering service and of managing this service during the absence of the previous manager.

The service manager was present throughout the inspection, providing support to the manager and the inspectors during the inspection process. The service manager and director of operations are identified as the persons who will provide cover in the absence of the registered manager. The registered manager is required to submit a monthly report to the senior management team, which includes the service manager and director of operations, on operational issues within Wales.

During the past year two members of staff resigned, the manager and the office administrator. Temporary cover was arranged for the manager and temporary administration cover was organised through an agency. It was learned that this arrangement was not always effective as several staff were drafted in to cover the post. An existing supervising social worker was recruited to the vacant post of manager and a new administrator and two supervising social workers have been recruited. Within the following year two members of the supervising social work team will have planned absences from the work place, which the manager plans to cover with temporary staff. There have been comments made by foster carer about anxieties they feel about the planned absences, and how cover will be provided. All members of staff who have been recruited as supervising social worker have a social work qualification, a good understanding of foster care and the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertake the tasks required of them. Evidence from foster carer assessments, from recorded visits and foster carer annual review confirm the skills and knowledge of these staff.

The personnel files of two supervising social workers who had been recruited since the last inspection as well as the manager's personnel file were examined. As in previous inspections, requirements set out in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services [Wales] Regulations 2003 were followed when recruiting these staff to this service. Enhanced CRB's are renewed every three years for all employed staff. After several unsuccessful attempts the service has now recruited to a post in South Wales, which will now provide an opportunity to develop the service and the support offered to foster carers who live in this area. Pre-inspection questionnaires were returned by two members of staff and all three members of the social work team were interviewed. Each member of staff presented as a competent, experienced person with a strong commitment to the work they do for this agency. They each confirmed that they had received regular supervision and appraisals, probationary or annual were planned. The staff were able to provide

evidence of the variable training they had received during the past year or since their employment with this agency, which included induction. Fee based staff are engaged to undertake assessments; these staff are supervised whilst undertaking these assessments.

The service in Wales operates out of a rented property within the town of Wrexham. The premises are suitable for the purpose of this agency with office space available for staff and a meeting room. A security alarm system in place and entry to the office is via an intercom. A management information system is used to hold and record information on foster carers and the children who are placed with these families. The database is password sensitive. Case files are in place for foster carers and for the children in placement, these files are stored within a fireproof cabinet with the keys to the cabinet securely stored. Panel members and foster carers are provided with lockable facilities for the storage of confidential information. The need for foster carers to lock away all paperwork that relates to children in their care is reiterated within the foster care handbook. Fostering Solutions ensures the service in Wales receives adequate funding to fulfil its obligations and pursue developmental opportunities. An audit of the company accounts was undertaken in September 2007, it is recorded that no recommendations were made as a result of this audit. Information is available for the commissioners of services on charges that are made for services provided by this agency.

An annual survey was undertaken during 2007, which sought the views of foster carers, children in placement and local authorities on the quality of the service provided by the agency. The responses received have been reported in two leaflets and what the agency has done, or plans to do in response to the information they received is reported in the centrefold of one leaflet. It was noted that foster carers in Wales had influenced action in four of the areas identified.

Employer and public liability insurance is in place for this service.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)

Inspector`s findings:

A register of the agency's foster carers was provided as part of the pre-inspection information.

This inspection confirmed the findings of previous inspection in relation to the thoroughness of the agency's practice in recruiting and training foster carers. A pre-assessment screening process is in place for those potential foster carers who make enquires to the agency. This process, it is suggested, reduces the number of foster carers who leave fostering early in their fostering experience. The competency-based model of assessment is undertaken within the agency, which includes quality assurance mechanisms to ensure a standard of assessment is maintained throughout the agency. A competency portfolio, containing twelve tasks for the applicant to complete, is discussed during the assessment. In reviewing foster carers files it was noted that robust assessment had been made of the foster carers and their family and life situations and that diligence was applied in obtaining information from referees. The Skills to Foster training programme is in place, which applicants to foster are required to attend. This training is run in conjunction with an experienced foster carer.

Questionnaires were sent to foster carers as part of gathering information for this inspection and individual interviews were also held. Foster carers, in their responses indicated that post approval training is available to them on a variety of fostering related topics and they provided details of the training they had attended during the year. On the whole foster carers were positive about their experience of training with this agency, particularly valuing the training relating to teenagers. However some foster carers said they would have liked this training earlier in their fostering experience and would want to see this training developed to include the wider range of issues that can influence teenage behaviour, some felt the information provided pre-approval about the challenges of fostering teenagers could have been expanded. The organisation is responding to the feedback from foster carers on the training they feel they need to help understand and manage teenage behaviour, and have organised four specific training events in North Wales and three in the south of the country over the past year. In addition Team Teach, a 'bild' accredited training programme on positive strategies in managing behaviour, is gradually being made available to the agency's foster carers. It is to be expected that teenager behaviour is a factor for foster carers this year as an analysis of the age range of children referred in 2008 indicated that all referrals were within the 11-16yrs range. [North Wales Referrals and Placements] Nine foster carers are currently working through the NVQ Level III award. The need for foster carers to attend training events is emphasised during the assessment process, during monthly supervision and training attended is recorded in annual review reports. A safe caring policy is available and foster carers are appropriately trained in safe caring practice.

A policy is in place that outlines the level of supervision and support to be provided to foster carers and by whom. The minimum standard is for one telephone call per week and a monthly supervision session in the carer's home by the supervising social worker, and unannounced visits to the home. Details of these contacts are recorded within the case files. All the foster carers spoke positively about the support groups that are run within this agency for the carers, their own children and the children they have fostered. The carer groups are usually held bi-monthly but following a request for more frequent

meetings are now held on a 6 weekly cycle. Despite this increase in the frequency of meetings there was strong representation for the foster carer support groups to be held on a monthly basis. In attempting to uncover why this request was being made the inspectors learnt that a significant amount of the support group meeting time is taken up with the NVQ programme. Indeed on the occasion an inspector attended a support group it was observed that apart from a presentation of referrals the rest of the meeting was devoted to the NVQ. It is recommended that the manager seeks an opportunity to discuss these matters with the foster carers to agree a way forward for support group meetings. On the whole foster carers were positive about the out-of-hours support offered to them, in one incident when the standard service that was expected was not available the foster carers received an apology. The comprehensive foster carer Handbook is available as a hardback copy and on CD Rom.

Fostering Solutions has systems in place to manage all elements relating to panel. During an earlier inspection a thorough assessment of panel management and function was undertaken, which provided evidence of the quality control elements in place for the panel, therefore Panel was not assessed during this inspection. The minutes of three previous panel meetings were submitted pre-inspection that confirmed that the agency has an appropriate process in place for considering matters that relate to the approval and review of foster carers. Questionnaires were completed and returned by independent panel members who outlined the training they had received and the written guidance that was available to them. Panel members confirmed they had locked cabinets at home to store panel documents. They recorded very positive comments about the management and staff of the agency, suggesting that staff are caring, knowledgeable and child focussed. It was also commented that the carers have given positive responses about the support they receive from their supervising social worker.

A note was made during this inspection of the very wide age ranges of the children foster carers are approved to care for. An assessment of this element will be undertaken during the 2009 inspection.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
It is recommended that discussions are held with foster carers to ascertain their preference in relation to the frequency and content of support group meetings.	NMS 22

Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed

Inspector`s findings:

A list of all the children currently placed with foster carers with all of their details was provided as part of the pre-inspection information.

The agency has a very clear referral process for local authorities seeking foster placements. Data is stored on a management information system, which is also used for statistical analysis. Local arrangements for the co-ordination of placements are managed by the office administrator and the registered manager. To assist local authorities in making placement choices the organisation has developed a magazine that contains details of the families available for placements. There is evidence of the comprehensive information on the needs of the child the agency requires when a referral is to be made, which is in addition to the LAC documentation. It was evident from the form F assessments and from Panel meetings that specific attention is given to the accommodation available to a foster child and the general safety of the property and its surrounds. Issues relating to diversity are introduced to foster carers during assessment process and their responses and experiences are recorded. It is this wealth of information, together with supplementary information on past placements that provides the basis for the matching process. Written foster placement agreements are in place which contains the elements of matching taken into consideration in agreeing the placement. If areas are identified where additional support is required this is provided. Evidence of this information gathering process is available within the agency and specifically within the case files that were examined.

A child protection policy is in place and training on child protection is provided to foster carers, all of the foster carers who were visited confirmed they had received this training. Safe caring guidelines are in place and safe caring agreements were in place in the case files examined. The child protection issues that had arisen during the past year had been dealt with following the appropriate procedures.

The level of contact agreed for children to have with their birth families is recorded within their placement plan and relates to their particular family circumstances.

Children were not interviewed during this inspection but in previous inspections the inspectors have joined groups of children in their established activity groups. During these contacts it was noted that the children were familiar with senior staff that were visiting on the day and referred to them by their first name. Fostering Solutions are committed to ensuring the voice of the child is heard and have introduced proactive initiatives to help children feel their views are heard and acted upon. An annual children and young peoples survey is undertaken and outcomes and actions fed back through leaflets and within a quarterly newsletter. In Wales there are groups the children can attend such as the craft group arranged for birth children and foster children and a looked after children's forum is being developed for the 13-18 age groups. Responses were received from two young people to the pre-inspection questionnaires sent by the CSSIW. The young people were positive about the information contained within the children's guide, about their place within the foster family and what they have learnt whilst living with these families. Foster carers had recorded and told the inspectors that supervising social worker had good relationships with the children placed with these families.

It was decided for this inspection that the case files of children who had been through a

placement disruption, whilst with Fostering Solutions would be examined, three children were selected and as these children had been found an alternative placement with foster carers within this agency six foster carer files were also seen. Evidence found from reviewing these files confirmed that placement and matching agreements were in place. LAC reviews had taken place. Children who were of school age were attending and there is within the contracts made with local authority's specific attention to responsibilities around education. Details of children's health needs are gained at the time of placement, and information within the files confirmed that foster carers had networked children into local health arrangements; they were registered with a GP, health visitor and dentist. The agency has networked into local authority looked after health services, which includes the Looked After Nurse.

In relation to the specific issues found around placement breakdowns, the inspectorate would want to commend the organisation for having a system in place that assesses the breakdown. However there is a recommendation made in relation to process and content. The overriding observation was that children's views had not been recorded within the report compiled of events. The events leading to the disruption were adult focussed that led the reader to infer that the child was responsible for the disruption. The inspectors would want to see that children had been encouraged to be involved in the post disruption analysis of events. It was also difficult to assess how this process encouraged and fed into a learning exercise, both for the children the foster carers and the agency. The inspectors would suggest that improvements could be made to the way in which the assessment of disruptions is managed.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
It is recommended that children are encouraged to be involved in the post disruption analysis of events.	NMS 11

Section six: Placement of children parts v & vi of the regulations

N.B. Use of this section of the report will apply primarily to inspections of local authority fostering services and the duties and responsibilities covered in Parts 5 and 6 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 only. It may need to be used for inspections of independent agencies where a local authority delegates certain duties to them under Regulation 40.

Inspector`s findings:
There are delegation agreements in place with local authorities who have placed children with this agency. Three copies of current agreements were provided as part of the pre inspection information; each provided the information required under Regulation 40 of the Fostering Services [Wales] Regulations 2003.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section seven: Records

Inspector`s findings:

There are clear written procedures in place on record keeping that ensures that staff records are maintained to a prescribed format. The files viewed were up to date and provided an accurate reflection of the service provided by Fostering Solutions. A previous recommendation made to include within the front section of foster carer`s files a chronology of the children currently in placement was not evident on all foster carer files. On reading the files it was not always easy at a glance to assess which child/children were currently in placement. Foster carer agreements are in place as are placement agreements and there is evidence that the foster carer is regularly visited and supported by a representative of the agency. Contractual agreements are in place between the agency and placing authorities. Foster carers are required to record daily events and are provided with lockable units to store all information relating to the foster child.

A complaint policy and procedure is in place and previous discussion with the complaint receiving officer indicated a data base of all complaints is maintained together with the status of the complaint. The policy is promoted through the foster carer handbook, through the children's guides, leaflets, and the website and periodically through the quarterly newsletter sent to all children/young people in placement. There has been one complaint made during the previous year that was resolved through local resolution.

Administrative records contain all relevant matters relating to the running of the service as required by legislation. Separate records are kept for employees, independent assessors, for foster carers and for children. The records that were viewed for this inspection were assessed to be well structured, up to date and securely stored. Staff files were examined and it was noted that all checks and references had been obtained and their outcomes recorded.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section eight: Short term placements

Inspector`s findings:

A short break service is not provided by this agency as defined by regulation 37 of The Fostering Services [Wales] Regulations 2003. However the service does provide respite provision for foster carers with carers who are recruited and trained by the agency. How respite is provided and received was not assessed during this inspection. There is an issue relating to clarity in recording the beginning and ending of respite periods within the foster carer's case files that the inspectors would want to be addressed. There were recordings that indicated the planned period of respite but after that date had passed it was not made clear if the planned period of respite had ended or if the placement extended for a longer period. This issue is linked to a wider observation related to children in placement that is expanded on in section seven of this report.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section nine: Family and friends as carers

Inspector`s findings:
Not applicable to this service

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source