



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Nene Valley Fostering Agency

**The Wharf House
Station Road
Oundle
Peterborough
PE8 4DE**

Lead Inspector
Trisha Gibbs

Announced Inspection
11th October 2006 10:00

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	Nene Valley Fostering Agency
Address	The Wharf House Station Road Oundle Peterborough PE8 4DE
Telephone number	01832 274715
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Email address	nvfaenquiry@aol.com
Provider Web address	
Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable)	Nene Valley Fostering Agency Limited
Name of registered manager (if applicable)	Mrs Susan Fowler
Type of registration	Fostering Agencies

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration: None

Date of last inspection 7th November 2005

Brief Description of the Service:

Nene Valley Fostering Agency is an Independent Fostering Agency based in Oundle Peterborough. The organisation is owned and managed by its Directors Sue Fowler (Registered Manager) and Rachel Vickery (Registered Provider) both who have substantial experience of childcare and family placement work.

The staff team, pending a recent recruitment, comprises of five qualified supervising social workers (known as link workers), three of whom work on a sessional basis, providing carer support, training, therapeutic input and the undertaking of Form F assessments. There are also six sessional support/resource workers who provide a range of support tasks including the supervision of contact. A support worker with an education welfare background is now formalised in an Educational Advisor role and provides educational support to placements. In addition to this there are two administrative workers and a business manager.

The Agency provides Emergency, Respite and Holiday, Time Limited and specialist Permanent placements as well as Mother and Baby placements. Placement charges range from £601.44 to £751.80 per week.

At the time of Inspection the Agency supported 23 carers and provided placements for 35 children.

SUMMARY

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

This Inspection took one Inspector 34 hours in total.

For the purpose of this Inspection two foster carers and the children placed with them were tracked through the Inspection of case files, and one of these households was visited. A supervising social worker, a resource worker and the education support worker were interviewed in addition to the Registered Manager and Provider.

The above information provided the Inspection evidence for each of the five outcomes for children. Policies and Procedures, the Carer's Handbook and other Agency documentation were referred to throughout the Inspection, along with the Annual Quality Assurance Assessment and Data Document.

The Fostering Panel was not observed on this occasion, having been inspected during the last twelve months, however three sets of Panel minutes were looked at and Panel functioning discussed with the Registered Managers.

Questionnaires were received from three Professionals who work for the Agency, eight young people, nine carers and sixteen placing social workers and these have been referred to within the following report.

What the service does well:

Nene Valley Fostering Agency has incorporated the Every Child Matters outcomes into key recording documents on children's and carer files, and assesses children's progress against the five outcomes in a report on a two monthly basis.

Utilises Placement Meetings and Placement Agreements to consider how children will be matched to placement, how needs will be met and shortfalls addressed.

Makes very good and systematic use of the Risk Assessment process, with regard to planning for safe placements.

Has developed very good management systems to fulfil monitoring responsibilities under the Fostering Regulations and to measure Outcomes For Children.

Provides a very good level of support to carers.

Consults well with and advocates on behalf of children and young people in placements. Has introduced a Speak to me postcard for all children in a fostering household to contact the Agency about anything at anytime.

The Agency has a strong Fostering Panel. The Fostering Panel Chair is experienced and child centred, and the Panel members work very well as a team.

Provides good educational support to placements.

Children's comments about their placements include 'My carers is the best carer ever'. 'We are very well cared for'. 'I like it here'. 'She really cares about me'. 'We work well as a family and I don't feel myself as in care, as we are a proper family'. 'She gives us lots of nice food and looks after us'.

Some of the many positive comments from placing social workers in Questionnaires included 'This is a robust placement, Directors are motivated, resources are child centred and there is an emphasis on training and development for carers'. 'The Fostering Service has provided a very good service in respect of children placed by my team'. 'This is the best Agency I have engaged with, good understanding of real issues, committed carers, good staff, child supported to achieve educationally'

What has improved since the last inspection?

Personnel files contain all required documents and evidence that references are followed up with telephone checks.

Fire Plans have been completed for all placements.

The Carer's Handbook provides information about what will happen when children are excluded from school. The Carer's Handbook also provides information about the role of back up carers and financial payments.

What they could do better:

No recommendations or requirements have been made following this Inspection.

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

DETAILS OF INSPECTOR FINDINGS

CONTENTS

Being Healthy

Staying Safe

Enjoying and Achieving

Making a Positive Contribution

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

Management

Scoring of Outcomes

Statutory Requirements Identified During the Inspection

Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

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

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Health and Development needs of children and young people in placement are given very good attention.

EVIDENCE:

There was very good evidence on carer and children's files that children's health and development needs were being attended to and appropriately recorded.

Each child has an individualised 'Being Healthy' care plan detailed within the Initial Placement Meeting. Two monthly reports are subsequently completed for all placements and under the 'Being Healthy' heading, children's physical and emotional needs are summarised, and any routine health appointments that have taken place are confirmed. Accidents or emergencies are also noted. These reports ultimately inform Looked After Children reviews. The Registered Managers are developing an IT system to record health information with regard to children placed and to measure the outcomes.

Carers complete a separate record for logging health appointments and the administration of medication, and these were seen on file.

The Agency is able to access therapeutic and counselling support for children if placing authorities request this. One of the children tracked was attending for play therapy.

Health related training for carers includes First Aid, Sex and Sexuality, Management of Nits, Bedwetting and Asthma. The Agency recently held a First

Aid for Kids course for children placed and birth children. Ten children attended and reported having a very good time.

The children visited enjoyed a range of healthy activities and outings. Children in questionnaires commented 'My carers make sure I am fit and proper healthy'. 'It's better to be healthy than unhealthy'. 'I want to grow up and be a healthy person'. 'We eat healthy food because we don't want to get fat'. 'She gives us good food and we like it all'.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The Agency works hard to ensure that children and young people are well matched to safe placements.

EVIDENCE:

The Agency makes very good and considered use of risk assessment processes to cover all areas of potential placement risk at time of placement. In addition to the carer and placement risk assessments that cover all aspects of Safe Care, there is an individualised Staying Safe care plan for each child, detailed within the Initial Placement Agreement and reviewed at least annually. Other safety documents include Fire Plans with Special Fire instructions included for children, Seat Belt information and Mobile and Internet guidance.

Health and Safety checks are being carried out at the time of Carer reviews. There was evidence of Staying Safe issues being routinely discussed at carer supervision. The Carer's Handbook contained information about Safety and Safe Caring. The Carer training programme includes Impact of Abuse, Team Teach (behaviour strategies) and Safe Caring. The Managers confirmed that it

is planned for the Safe Caring course to become compulsory. The Agency also plans to run a Safe Care training session for children in placement. Very good systems for the careful matching of children to placement were evidenced through Matching reports and Placement Meetings, where consideration as to how children's needs would be met and how shortfalls would be addressed were detailed. One placement tracked provided good evidence of a carer and the Agency managing a cultural shortfall successfully. In the other placement the children were very well matched to the family they lived with. Overall the Agency demonstrated a good record of placement stability as a result of good initial matching processes.

Personnel files looked at confirmed that required checks and references were being appropriately taken up at time of recruitment.

Backup carers are now subject to an assessment process and are brought to the Fostering Panel.

There are good systems in place for the monitoring, recording and reviewing of notifiable incidents. These are also clearly logged on carer files. The Agency's Allegation procedures have recently been reviewed and strengthened, and additional Child Protection training for staff and carers is being incorporated into the new training programme.

No complaints have been registered with regard to the Agency since the last Inspection.

The Fostering Panel was not observed on this occasion, but was observed at the last Inspection in November 2005 when the Standard was exceeded. The Inspector read minutes for the last four Fostering Panel meetings and discussed Panel arrangements and training with the Registered Managers.

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

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children receive a very good level of support from carers and the Agency to achieve educationally and enjoy leisure activities.

EVIDENCE:

Nene Valley Fostering Agency has recently targeted their recruitment campaigns to increase the diversity of the core group of carers, and currently have African Caribbean, and other European applicants coming to Fostering Panel. One of the cases tracked for Inspection was that provided to two young people who were seeking Asylum in this country. The Agency translated their Young People's Guides into their respective languages. Placement Meetings are now designed to actively address Equality and Diversity and in this instance the young people's religious and cultural needs were fully discussed. Placement Meetings and supervision sessions demonstrated that the Agency and carer had gone to commendable lengths to respond to the needs of the young people, especially given the lack of appropriate support from the Placing Authority. Health support for both had been actively sought, and one of the young people placed the longer of the two, is now very well integrated into the local community and enjoying sports activities.

There was good evidence to confirm that individual carers who look after children with special or different needs are offered training to improve the

outcomes for children in placement. This included carers currently providing children with disability, therapeutic or cultural needs.

The newly revised Equality Policy in the Carer's Handbook provides fuller cover on issues of Diversity. The Registered Managers said that all training incorporates Equal Opportunities.

A part time resource worker who has considerable experience and working knowledge in the field of Education has now been confirmed as the Agency's Educational Advisor. The Advisor has implemented good monitoring systems to assist in the promotion, tracking and reviewing of children's educational progress. The Advisor pursues the completion of Personal Education Plans, provides training on Education Awareness and supports carers to support children in school. The Advisor is now completing with each child a simple colourful questionnaire 'About me and my School' to ascertain their experience of school and homework expectations. The Agency gives positive recognition to children's achievements generally, by sending out cards and rewarding them with e.g. book tokens

The children visited during the Inspection were making good progress in local schools and with the encouragement of their carers undertook homework routinely after school. They were proud of individual achievements in their Brownies and Scouts groups and had gained in confidence through these experiences.

The Education Policy in the Carer's Handbook has been updated to clarify procedures for when children are excluded from school.

Children's comments in Questionnaires included 'I have homework help'. 'If I'm stuck with schoolwork I get help'. 'We get a lot of help with school', and 'I am doing really really well at school, if it wasn't for the fact that people supported me, I would not be doing so well'. 'I always help to fill in my educational plans'.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

10, 11

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Children are well supported to have contact with their family and friends where appropriate.

The fostering service and carers work well with children and young people to ensure that they are consulted and to ensure that their views and wishes are taken into account.

EVIDENCE:

Contact arrangements are clearly discussed, risk assessed, and recorded at the time of initial placement. These were seen on files tracked and detailed in Placement Meetings and Agreements. On occasions where carers or resource workers are involved in supervising or supporting Contact arrangements, the Registered Managers confirmed that the Agency would monitor the arrangement and ensure all individuals are clear about the level and purpose of Contact. Resource workers are provided with training prior to supervising Contact. In one of the placements tracked the arrangements for Contact were complex and challenging, involving siblings and several family members. The carers were managing the Contact arrangements, and the impact of these on the children, in a professional manner, with insight care and support.

There was very good evidence in files and in other key documents that the Agency gives priority to consulting with children and young people, and that birth children are included in these processes. A range of child-friendly

consultation and satisfaction sheets were seen for use at LAC and carer reviews, in addition to their views being sought about activities and outings. All children are provided with a simple illustrated 'Speak to me' stamped addressed postcard, which can be forwarded to the Agency at any time by the child. This is an excellent initiative. There is also an Agency website that offers access for children to make comments or requests.

The Carer Handbook now includes details about the role of Local Authority Children's Rights Officers, and provides details about the Commission for Social Care Inspection Children's Rights website.

Children said about being listened to 'My carers ask me what is on my mind'. 'She listens to me straight away'. 'We discuss things'. 'My carers talks things through with me'.

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

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

14, 29

Quality in this outcome area is **good**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

Young people are supported to learn independence skills. Carer allowances are paid promptly, and some additional allowances are made available on occasions.

EVIDENCE:

Children and young people tracked were being encouraged to do things for themselves and to learn independence skills. This ranged from keeping bedrooms tidy, undertaking small domestic chores, to learning about meal preparation. One young man aged seventeen, who had only lived in this country for two years, had learned English and achieved a distinction foundation certificate in brickwork, and had gained part time work.

The Agency utilises a booklet/questionnaire called 'All about me' to assess the kind of help and support carer leavers might need.

Records of carer payments are maintained on their files. The Carer Handbook details good advice on fostering rates, different allowances, and tax and insurance issues.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, 24 and 32 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

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

1, 4, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25,

Quality in this outcome area is **excellent**. This judgement has been made using available evidence including a visit to this service.

The service is efficiently managed, and carers are provided with very good levels of support and training to respond to the needs of children in placement. The care provided to children is very well accounted for in case records, which are maintained to a high standard.

EVIDENCE:

The service offered by Nene Valley Fostering Agency is clearly detailed in the Statement of Purpose. Two good Children's Guides are made available to Children and Young People according to their age.

Excellent systems are in place and are being developed to monitor the performance of the Agency. The Registered Managers have utilised electronic formats for specific management information purposes and to track key performance indicators. The Inspector was provided with a Quality Assurance audit plan that detailed key quality assurance activities, frequencies and respective responsibilities of Directors and Managers.

Nene Valley has a good team of support/resource workers in place who have significant knowledge and experience of work with children and young people, and who are provided with very good induction training and support mechanisms. With regard to qualified social workers the Managers indicated that it had been very difficult to recruit another social worker to the team, however a full time supervising social worker, and a new sessional worker has now been recruited. In addition to the new posts, two sessional workers, one part time worker and the two Registered Managers will support and supervise twenty-three carers. The recent social work appointments should release the Registered Managers to focus on management tasks. Thirteen carer applications are currently going through the assessment process, and acknowledgement was made for ongoing contingency plans to ensure that the staff team could appropriately support an increase in carers.

Carers are provided with very good support from the Agency. A good training programme is provided, three courses now being mandatory following Approval, i.e. First Aid, Team Teach/Managing Challenging Behaviour, and Impact of Abuse. Some carers have achieved NVQ level 3.

Carers reported positively in Questionnaires about the out of hour's support provided by the Agency and about financial support for children's activities. Carer Annual reviews all go to the Fostering Panel. These are very well detailed and include care provided to children under the five headings. The Inspector suggested that reviews could conclude with a more evaluative appraisal of carer's strengths and training needs, and also make reference to the annual unannounced visit.

Carer's comments in questionnaires included 'The support they give is great, at the end of a phone day or night'. 'They provide the best possible support'. 'They are interested in how children achieve'. 'The support we get is second to

none'. 'We love fostering which we feel is partly to do with NVFA being professional, supportive and friendly'. 'We are more than happy with the service they give'. All questionnaires provided good or excellent feedback.

Children's and Carer records were organised and maintained to an excellent standard. Recording was clear and focussed. An excellent range of standard headings and formats were being used to systematically plan care, assess placement risk, and record outcomes. Records are securely stored and locked away. Carer's spoken to were aware of their responsibility to record appropriate information about children placed, and were provided with training to assist with this in addition to guidance in the Carer's Handbook. There was good evidence that supervising social workers check carer logs.

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	4
8	4
9	3
15	3
30	X

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

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	3
11	4

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

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

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

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