



Foster Care Services North West

**Prospectus
2005**

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FOREWORD

Foster Care Services North West was established in October 1998. Since its inception the agency has been at the forefront of innovative developments in professional practice, and continues to pre-empt and meet the challenges of an ever-changing social childcare world. We have placed the interests of the children themselves, together with their professional carers, at the centre of our operations.

We believe, too, that our reputation and our achievements are recognised by Local Authorities within the North West, and beyond. In spite of an increasing number of fostering agencies being established within the region, our referrals have always remained buoyant; the number of different Local Authorities using us has significantly increased, whilst our longstanding links with several others has continued and been strengthened. These facts have enabled us to expand our operations in a measured way to meet the need, but in such a way as to maintain our commitment to the high standards and quality of service we set out to deliver. We have a steady number of prospective carers applying to join us, and we have every reason to be optimistic about the future of our agency. The new inspection regimes are now well established and we have enjoyed two extremely positive inspection reports from The Commission. To the best of our knowledge, we continue to employ the highest number of qualified Social Workers in relation to the number of our Foster Carers and children placed with us in comparison with any other agency, either locally or nationally.

At the same time there is increasing competition and no room for complacency. We remain committed to improving what we do and to develop new partnerships and projects with Local Authorities as they too face new challenges and expectations. We welcome any further enquiries about our agency and hope that this brochure provides helpful information about our present services.

Linda Couloumbri
Tim Walker
Directors

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Mission Statement

At Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) our aim is to promote the welfare of children in the “looked after” system. We believe that all children and young people should have the opportunity to benefit from family life. For those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live within their own family, for either short or long periods of time, an appropriate alternative should be available to them.

We believe that children who have been badly affected by severe abusive and neglectful experiences can still benefit from what life in a family has to offer. In order to sustain such placements, however, it is necessary to provide 24 hour support to our Professional Carers and a flexible package of short-term breaks and other resources, including education and health support, to ensure the best possible outcome for the child or young person.

We aim to provide a wide range of placement resources for all age groups and to address the need to recruit families for children from ethnic minority groups. Placements will vary in length and aim, from emergency and short-term placements through to long-term and permanent placements. Some placements will be specifically task centred with the aim of bridging a child or young person to adoption or permanent placement. For others the aim will be a return home to their family of origin. We are committed to working together to enable children in placement to return to their own parents or other family members where this is possible and deemed to be in the child's best interests.

We understand that children and young people who must live apart from their own family have a great need to maintain close and positive links with their parents and other family members and with their friends during those periods. Our staff and Carers are committed to furthering positive family contact and will work in partnership with local authorities and with parents to enable contact to take place.

Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) does not aim to duplicate fostering services already in place within local authorities. We see ourselves fulfilling a specific role in working alongside local authorities, particularly those within the North West, to fill the gaps in provision which are needed in order to cater for a group of children and young people who remain "difficult to place."

To this end we are committed to maintaining and strengthening our already well established working relationships with local authorities within the North West. We will continue to work in partnership and in close collaboration with them both at management level and with individual social workers and their teams.

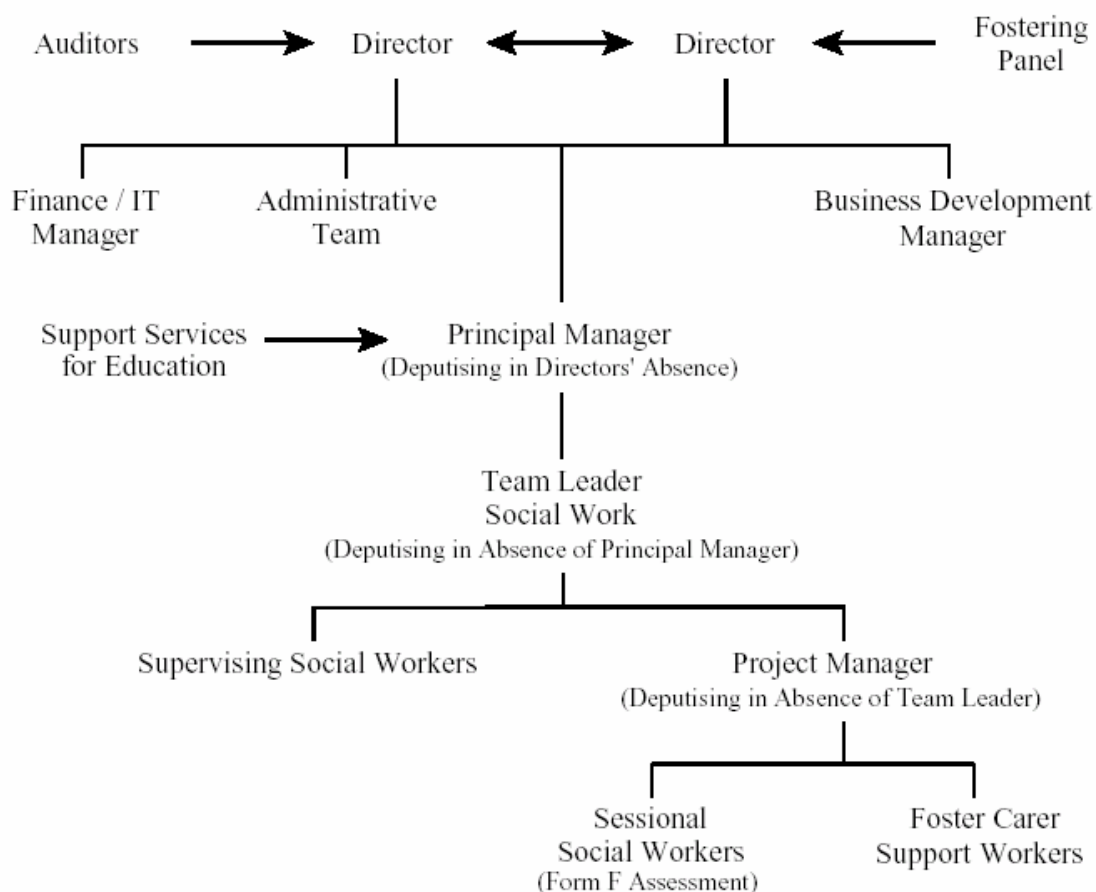
Management Structure

The agency is managed by two Directors who have the guidance and support of the Fostering Panel in all matters relating to practice issues. They also have financial and legal guidance available to them.

The Principal Manager has the responsibility for the development and overall management of the day to day running of Foster Care Services North West service provision.

The structure of the agency is illustrated below:

Foster Care Services : Internal Structure Of The Agency (Employees)



The Service

During the past six years the agency has been able to demonstrate to local authorities in the North West that the service we provide is viable and of benefit to children and young people. In order for placements to work Carers need to be :

Highly skilled and well supported

Provided with opportunities for training and development

Provided with a level of support which matches the needs and demands of the individual child or young person in placement

Other factors which contribute to the success of placements are the provision of education and health support which are described in detail later in this statement. The use of skilled support workers, often with experience and qualifications in youth work, can be of great benefit to the child and to the placement. For instance, they may undertake a specific task in helping a young person who has limited social skills to develop their ability to socialise and to develop friendships, or may be able to assist a child in developing their individual skills and thereby increase their self-esteem.

In addition the frequent monitoring and support of the placement by a qualified, experienced and suitably skilled social work team all serve to make the placements sustainable and therefore beneficial to the child.

At this time our social work team is made up of a Principal (Registered) Manager; a Team Leader and five full time and one part time Supervising Social Workers. All are qualified with either a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work or a Diploma in Social Work. All have many years experience in social work and in fostering services in particular. They are supported by a skilled administrative team.

We are committed at FCSNW to work in partnership with parents, with local authorities and other statutory and voluntary bodies to assist children and to enable them to reach their full potential. This includes promoting their physical, emotional and intellectual development; meeting their needs for health care; providing an appropriate level of discipline and control and encouraging and providing opportunities to develop independence skills appropriate to the child or young person's age and stage of development.

The children's own wishes and feelings are given full consideration in decision making regarding their care and children are encouraged to share their views themselves; via their social worker; their Carer or by an independent representative where appropriate.

The child's needs in respect of his/her racial origins, cultural background, religious persuasion and individual capacities will be met by the provision of the appropriate services.

Whilst each child is an individual and will bring their own demands and rewards to a particular placement, we believe that a range of support services need to be available from which a specific support package can be made available.

Support Services

Each Carer family is supported by a qualified and experienced Social Worker. Visits take place fortnightly, unless this has been agreed otherwise in relation to settled long term and permanent placements. In these situations visits will take place at least once in a two month period, where appropriate and agreed between the Carer, Supervising Social Worker and the Social Work Team Leader. In all instances the level of social work contact will be based on the needs of the individual placement.

The agency provides a 24 hour on-call service to Carers, staffed by the Social Work Team.

Short-term Breaks are generally provided by Carers specifically recruited to undertake this task and who cover both the two weeks annual leave which is available to Carers should they wish to take advantage of this provision, (see Policy and Procedure), and the need for short-term breaks when placements are proving particularly demanding.

Support workers are provided and allocated to each family to undertake specific activities with the child/children in placement whilst also giving the Carers some time for themselves.

Support groups for Carers, which they are expected to attend, are organised on a six weekly basis and are facilitated by the Social Work Team.

Ongoing training, both internal and external, including opportunities to study for NVQ Level 3, are provided by the agency.

Activities during school holidays are organised by the agency to enable Carers, their own children and children placed with them to meet socially and to build up a sense of belonging and support within the group.

Two holidays per year, at Easter and at the school half-term holiday in October, are provided by the agency. These again enable Carer families both to meet together socially and to strengthen their support systems. The children and young people also have the opportunity to meet with others in similar situations.

The agency, in collaboration with the allocated Carers, organise activities and meetings for the Junior Carers, whose crucial role in supporting their parents in the fostering task should, we feel, be acknowledged. In this way the children are able to meet other children in similar situations, and have an opportunity to participate in their own informal support groups.

The Education Support Service

FCSNW considers that the quality of educational opportunities afforded to children and young people should be given paramount importance. Our experience of the impact of educational failure on children in the care system generally, and on fostering services in particular, has been a major motivating factor in re-appraising the level and nature of services we provide to children and Carers. We have witnessed the damaging effect of educational failure, which is endemic in the care system, and the extent to which school breakdown and disruption lead to placement breakdowns and intolerable burdens on Foster Carers. We are mindful, too, of the retrospective concern of many adult care leavers with regard to their educational experiences whilst being looked after by local authorities.

FCSNW invests heavily from within its own resources to ensure that all children placed with us, regardless of their previous educational experiences, not only attend school regularly but realise the highest possible levels of educational achievement. To this end we have a Contract for Service with The National Teaching and Advisory Service for Looked After Children.

This contract has also been arranged as a direct consequence of our previous experience of work with this organisation and in particular the tangible benefits we have seen for our children, Carers and Social Work staff. Their services are contracted to give the sort of priority to educational issues which is invariably lacking in almost all other fostering services. These services are formulated to provide maximum support to children and Carers. By investing heavily in direct educational support to children in our care, we aim to give them as normal, as demanding and as satisfying a school experience as we can. We hope thereby to remove this area of anxiety from Carers and give them the chance to enjoy the obvious benefits which regular school attendance for children brings.

The contract with the National Teaching and Advisory Service is built around the concept of a full educational casework service. This service has several components:-

1. Every placement is supported by a qualified and experienced teacher.
2. The teacher is available to the child and the Carer(s) throughout the school year.
3. The teacher's approach is based on ensuring attendance by the child at a mainstream or other appropriate school.
4. The teacher is available to offer the school whatever support the school requires to bring this about.
5. The intensity of support will depend on the level of the child's difficulties, behavioural patterns and educational requirements. This will be determined for each individual child, in consultation between the teacher, the school, the child, the Carers and other involved parties.
6. The teacher is available to assist with all educational issues, such as admission, induction, curriculum management, examinations and assessment, homework etc. Carers will be encouraged to take a more active role in school liaison and educational issues generally with the contract providing whatever training and support is necessary for them and other professional staff working for FCSNW.
7. In the event of an unavoidable break in school attendance, the focus of the teacher's work is both to facilitate the earliest possible readmission and to minimise the impact of such a break on the child, Carers and placement.

It is important to note that the contract with the National Teaching and Advisory Service does not provide alternative educational facilities, such as separate schools or schoolrooms. We know from our experience that the provision of such facilities usually serves only to prolong the exclusion of children in the care system from mainstream schools and from normal school experiences.

Specialist Health Provision - Promotion and Monitoring of Health Care

The impact upon the health care of children as a result of their experiences prior to and during their period in the looked after system is well documented. We are mindful of the number of children and young people whose health care needs have not been sufficiently well monitored or met over the years and who have suffered in their physical development as a result of this. We are also mindful of the support young people and their Carers need to address such issues as sexual health and development of relationships, drug and alcohol abuse etc.

To this end we have appointed a Health Care Specialist to become a member of our Fostering Panel. A Health Care Specialist will also be available to provide advice and consultancy on health matters and to assist us in monitoring the level of health care provision within the agency.

The Health Care Specialist will assist the agency in providing training opportunities to Carers and staff which focus on the health care needs of children and young people in placement.

Number of Foster Carers

Foster Carers - 12th May 2004 to 12th May 2005 - Total = 40

The Agency currently has 40 registered Carers. This includes 2 Carer families who offer short term care to children placed with the Agency's full time Carers. There have been 7 Carer families recruited over the last 12 month period. There have been 3 Carer families who have withdrawn over the same period.

We are currently recruiting to meet the ongoing and increasing need for skilled Carers. Recruitment is via advertising, open days, drop in centres and other opportunities which we are able to develop in particular areas and communities.

Number of Children Placed

Between 12th May 2004 & 12th May 2005

Total = 112	
Age Group	Number
0 - 4	14
5 - 10	44
11-15	48
16+	6

As at 12th May 2005

Total = 67	
Age Group	Number
0 - 4	7
5 - 10	24
11-15	29
16+	7

Emergency and Planned Placements

During the period 12th May 2004 to 12th May 2005 the Agency has taken 56 placements, of which 29 were made on an emergency basis, working with 6 different Local Authorities. There were 27 placements which could be made in a planned way, working with 6 Local Authorities.

During the same period 39 young people left Carers in a planned way, this included 2 Mother & baby placements. There were 5 young people who left placements in an unplanned way, 3 of whom were placed with alternative Carers within the Agency.

Assessment and Approval

All applicants must attend our induction programme and a BAAF Form F, competency based assessment, is completed on each family. The agency Social Work Team or one of our Form F assessors undertakes this piece of work. All are qualified with considerable experience of this work.

All statutory checks are completed, and referees visited. Applicants are required to demonstrate their understanding of Safe Caring and to produce their own Safe Caring Policy for their family.

A Health and Safety checklist using Fostering Network's guide is completed and then updated each year at the time of the Carer's annual review.

A second opinion visit regarding the Social Worker's recommendation for acceptance and status is undertaken by the Social Work Team Manager or Principal Manager.

Applicants are asked to attend the Panel to discuss their application. The Panel members make a recommendation which is then ratified by the Directors.

Review of Approval

Systems are in place to review the appointment of FCSNW Carers on an Annual basis. Circumstances may arise to indicate the need to review at less than the twelve months interval i.e. the outcome of a complaint investigation or other significant change in the household.

The review will determine whether the household remains suitable and if there should be any change in the Carers appointment.

As part of the review process and before the review meeting is held reports are requested from the following: the Carer, the FCSNW Supervising Social Worker, the Social Worker for the child/ren in placement, and the NT&AS teacher working with the child/ren in placement. These, together with post-placement reports from the previous 12 month period are considered at the review.

Administration systems are in place to update all statutory references and medical examinations every 2 years.

The review meeting is chaired by an Independent Social Worker employed on a freelance basis by FCSNW. Currently the person fulfilling this role has over 20 years experience in Family Placement, and was previously employed by the Children's Society in a managerial role. She also undertakes independent work as a Guardian ad Litem.

The review is held at the FCSNW offices and is attended by the Carer/s, their Supervising Social Worker and the Reviews Administrator. The Chair records the outcome and makes recommendations for action and approval for the next twelve months. The first review of approval is presented to the Fostering Panel who make a recommendation as to the Carer/s approval for the next twelve months.

The Annual Review document is sent to the Carer/s and retained on the FCSNW Carer file.

Relevant Local Authorities are notified about the Carer/s approval.

The agency has a Foster Carer Appeal Procedure to follow if a Carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the Annual Review or a decision of the Fostering Panel.

As part of the agency procedures to support and supervise Carers the Supervising Social Worker visits on a regular basis, this, as previously described being no less than one visit each two months. This forms the basis of the monitoring of care. Inter-agency meetings between the FCSNW Principal Manager, Social Work Team Leader and the NT&AS Team Leader are held on a six weekly basis to ensure service delivery is maintained. Internal Planning meetings to review and plan the work being undertaken with and on behalf of the child take place on a regular basis as the need arises.

Quality Control

The quality control mechanisms adopted by FCSNW run through its strict adherence to the highest possible standards around recruitment, acceptance and on-going supervision, training and development of all professional staff, including its Foster Carers.

In addition all staff are subject to regular performance checks which include formal appraisal administered on an annual basis. In addition the FCSNW Panel receives and acts upon update reports presented to each meeting and covering agency developments and complaints (if any) against professional staff or Carers. As a matter of routine regular reports and feedback on performance are received from local authority personnel and, of course, from children and young people themselves, on a wide range of issues concerned with the effectiveness of FCSNW services.

Monitoring within the agency begins at Supervising Social Worker level in their monitoring of the foster home and the supervision they provide to Carers on a formal basis each three months. At these sessions the Carer's records are checked to ensure that all aspects of the child's care are recorded appropriately, that information which needs to be passed to others is confirmed as having taken place and that any issues which need to be pursued at a management level are taken forward.

This information is passed to the Social Work Team Leader initially, unless there is an urgent situation, a child protection issue, a formal complaint or a matter which requires notification to the Commission for Social Care Inspection, when it will be passed to the Principal Manager.

In addition, the service is monitored and examined through a range of statutory and non-statutory planning meetings and reviews which are an essential component of each individual placement within the Agency.

Each service area which comprises FCSNW i.e. the Carers, Social Work, Education and Health, currently collect a range of appropriate data/information as part of the agency's determination to demonstrate the overall success of its provision for each child or young person placed with us.

In addition we have a complaints procedure which is readily accessible to all. In the six years of our operation we have received six complaints, one of which was withdrawn, three of which resulted in such action as reviewing and adding to our policies and procedures and developing new ways of recording information. One complaint investigation is not completed at this time.

19th May 2005

EDUCATION SERVICES WITHIN FCSNW

Since the formation of FCS we have placed a high priority on the provision of an integrated education service to our children and their carers. This is delivered on our behalf through a partnership agreement with the National Teaching & Advisory Service for Looked After Children, and reflects our view that education for children and young people is central to their future prospects and life chances.

The service is staffed by qualified teachers who work alongside our foster carers and social work staff, as well as with teachers in schools and other professionals within Local Authority social work and education teams. NT & AS provide direct educational casework service to each of our children, the focus of which is to research, plan and support mainstream school placements and also to improve significantly their levels of educational achievement. Attendance and participation in mainstream schools can represent a positive and normalising experience for children whose personal circumstances have invariably been anything other than that experienced by the overwhelming majority of their peers.

We understand too, that the priority afforded to the education service is a further mechanism through which our carers themselves are supported by the agency. Children who attend school successfully are far more likely to be more settled in their home environments than those who are out of school or who experience regular turbulence in their educational lives.

It is well known that Local Authorities are under extreme and increasing pressure to demonstrate to central government that children in their care are having their educational needs met and that their standards of educational attainment are significantly improved. In this respect, we believe that the independent sector has an important role to play in not only meeting the interests of individual children placed with us, but also to acknowledge the pressures and wider agendas faced by Local Authorities.

NT & AS also assist throughout the process of recruiting and assessing prospective foster carers and provide direct training to those who join us. On a reciprocal basis, we very much encourage our foster carers too, to share their own professional experiences and skills with NT & AS teachers and our own social work staff. In this respect, we intend to do all we can to ensure that the partnership between foster carers, social workers and teachers is based on principles of mutual respect, and the value of all contributions to the success of the agency.

Further details on the nature of the NT & AS service within FCS are available from either organisation on request, or via our websites: www.ntas.org.uk & www.fcsnw.com

INSPECTION & REGISTRATION OF THE AGENCY

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care are applicable to all fostering services. Together, these regulations and standards form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services, independent fostering agencies and voluntary organisations providing fostering services.

The Care Standards Act establishes the Commission for Social Care Inspection whose task is to regulate social and health care services such as fostering services provided by the Local Authority and independent agencies. The regulations are mandatory and all fostering service providers must comply with them in order to be granted registration status. The standards must be taken into account by the Commission in making its decisions.

As with all fostering service providers Foster Care Services North West is inspected by the Commission on a regular basis, our last inspection taking place in May 2004. A copy of their report can be made available on request to the Commission. As with our previous inspection in May 2003, the inspection report was very positive and confirmed our belief in the high quality of the service we provide.

THE FOSTERING PANEL & MEMBERSHIP

The FCS Fostering Panel is constituted to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

The appointed Panel Members comprise a group of independent professional people who attend Panel Meetings on a voluntary basis, and staff employed by the Agency. They come from a variety of backgrounds with an interest in childcare and fostering, and corporately bring a wealth of skills and knowledge to the organisation.

The role and function of the Fostering Panel is to advise and make recommendations on the Approval, Review of Approval and Termination of Approval of Foster Parents registered with Foster Care Services North West, as required under regulation 26(1) and 26(2) of the Fostering Regulations 2002.

The Panel's recommendations are then considered by the Director, who is the Agency's decision maker, within 7 working days of the Panel Meeting.

Applicants for approval as Foster Carers attend the Panel Meeting, are introduced to all Panel members, and are given an opportunity to answer and ask questions.

The Panel's prime responsibility in decision recommendations is to act in the best interests of children and young people. It's aim is to ensure approved Foster Parents provide safe placements that promote the welfare and meet the needs of children and young people.

The Panel comprises the following membership:-

Chair-person - Independent Member who was formerly a Foster Parent and is now an Adoptive Parent.

Vice Chair-person - Independent Member who is currently a Foster Parent with an Independent Fostering Agency.

Independent Member who works as a Childrens' Guardian.

Independent Member who was formerly a Manager of a Social Services Family Placement Team.

Child Health Advisor - an Independent Member who is a Health Visitor and Professional Development Nurse.

Medical Advisor - an Independent Member, retired physician.

Social Work Team Member - staff member with experience of childcare and family placement social work.

Social Work Manager - staff member with overall responsibility for the Agency's Social Work operations.

Legal Advisor - Childcare Solicitor with specialist knowledge of family placement and a member of a voluntary organisation adoption panel.

Panel Manager - staff member with responsibility for assessment of Foster Carer applications.

An Agency Director.

The Panel will be regularly informed of developments within the Agency and their advice and support is sought on professional standards, childcare practice and other issues that the Directors may wish them to consider.

RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCEDURE

Prospective Carer(s) will be sent an Information Pack including a job description and Carers Handbook. To further the enquiry the prospective Carer(s) will contact the office to arrange a visit from a representative of the agency. This is an informal meeting offering the opportunity for further exchange of information. Arrangements can be made for a current carer to visit to share his/her perspective of working with FCSNW.

If it is then felt appropriate for a full application to be made, forms will be sent to carer(s) to initiate the process. These will include forms of consent to police and other statutory checks, references and medical health check, Health & Safety checks etc.

The criteria for consideration of applicants are as follows :-

1. Previous fostering experience of children and young people with significant problems would be desirable but not essential.
2. Relevant experience, e.g. working with children in a residential setting.
3. An ability to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of the children we work with.
4. A commitment to working as part of a professional team.
5. A commitment to training and support groups.

An agency social worker will be allocated to carry out a full Form F assessment. This will take up to 6 months to complete. During this assessment period, the applicants will also be visited by representatives of N.T.&A.S.. Carers will also be expected to attend the basic induction training course, during this period of time. Upon completion of the Form F, the full assessment report will be submitted to the Fostering Panel for consideration. Carers are requested to attend the Panel Meeting, and will be informed of the Panel's recommendation immediately.

TRAINING

Training forms an integral part of the service and there is an expectation that carers who join the agency will attend and participate in carers training sessions.

Each carer will keep an up to date personal training portfolio, containing certificates and documentary evidence of training attended.

It is envisaged that eventually ALL carers working with this agency will have achieved NVQ Level III (as recommended by the National Standards), and indeed, some may opt to progress to become assessors.

The agency will encourage carers (and also contribute towards the funding) to attend any courses in their area, which relate to the fostering task. Carers are also regularly invited to suggest topics and issues which they feel should be covered in future training events. This will also be addressed at individual carers' annual reviews.

There is an on-going rolling programme of training. Efforts are being made to provide sessions also at weekends or in the evening, to enable attendance by carers who have commitments on weekdays. The courses are led by the agency's social work team, and the services of external trainers are also brought in.

A comprehensive list of topics and courses currently offered is available on request from the agency office.

Referral Procedure

The initial enquiry for a placement will be received by the Duty Worker. Should a potential match be available, the Duty Worker will discuss the referral information with the Supervising Social Worker for the Carer, or in their absence, the Social Work Team Manager.

If the referral can be progressed, the Local Authority will be requested to fax detailed information about the child/young person, and in particular information as to:-

- a) the authority's arrangements for the child and the objectives of the placement in the context of its plan for the care of the child.
- b) the child's personal history, religious persuasion, cultural and linguistic background and racial origin.
- c) the child's state of health and identified health needs.
- d) the safety needs of the child, including any need for special equipment or adaptation.
- e) the child's educational needs.
- f) any needs arising from any disability the child may have.

The Carer will then be contacted, and the Supervising Social Worker will discuss the full information provided by the Local Authority.

If the Carer wishes to proceed with the referral, their permission will be sought to provide the Local Authority with the Carer's Form F. Assessment. Where the referral is for a planned placement and all parties wish to proceed further, the Supervising Social Worker will arrange for the referring Social Worker to visit the family. If all wish to proceed with the placement, arrangements will be made for the introduction and/or a schedule of introductions for the child/young person to the Carers.

Where the referral is of a less planned nature, every effort will be made to obtain as much information as possible about the child/young person to enable the above process to be followed, in terms of information sharing and decision making about the match.

Once the placement is agreed, the Supervising Social Worker will involve the National Teaching & Advisory Service.

If the Placement Agreement cannot be completed prior to the placement, a Placement Agreement Meeting will be scheduled within 14 days of a child/young person being placed.

The Supervising Social Worker will support and monitor the placement on a regular basis and will maintain a close link with the Local Authority Social Worker throughout.

Minimum National Standards For Foster Care Standard 8.1.

Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Since 2001 Foster Care Services has gained experience in working in partnership with Local Authorities across the North West, setting up projects to meet specific needs of Looked After Children. These have been time limited and task centred, for example a project was set up to identify a small number of experienced Foster Carers who were able to manage the emergency placement of up to 3 children of either gender across the age range. This project was required whilst the Local Authority reviewed its residential provision for children and young people living in their area. The Carers identified were able to accommodate the children that during this period of time might usually be referred to a residential placement.

The Agency has also undertaken longer-term project management. We have worked with a Local Authority since 2002 to recruit, assess, train and support Foster Carers for an identified group of young people. These children were typically boys and girls in the age range 12-16 years who had experienced placement breakdowns and multiple moves. This group of young people had often been waiting a significant length of time in residential placements not meeting their identified needs. All the children and young people placed during this time have made real progress in placement with the foster carers recruited.

The Project Management work the Agency has undertaken has been successful due to the consistently high quality service that Foster Care Services is able to offer. The Agency has a team of professional and dedicated Foster Carers and supervising social workers, and in addition offers wrap-around support services including National Teaching and Advisory Service, 24 hours support, Sessional Support Workers and Short-term Break Scheme.

The Agency has an interest in developing Project Management work and would welcome enquiries from Local Authorities who have identified specific needs of Looked After Children not currently being met.

SHORT-TERM BREAK SCHEME

The Agency operates an established and successful short-term break scheme which offers our full-time Carers support at times of crisis in placement as well as covering the annual leave entitlement of full-time Foster Carers. The Agency can respond to requests from Local Authorities for short-term break placements required to support children at times of crisis, either living with birth family or with Foster Carers.

COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATION PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Service Regulation National Minimum Standards require that a fostering agency shall have procedures in place to consider complaints and representations made by or on behalf of children or by any other individual who is unhappy with any aspect of the service provided by the agency or its staff.
- 1.2 The children and young people who are placed with FCSNW Carers will be “looked after” by local authorities who under legislation will have their own complaints procedure. It is important to note that these procedures are not intended to replace the complaints procedures provided by local authorities. Complainants will be consulted about which procedure it is appropriate to use, and where a child is making the complaint the Local Authority responsible for that child or young person will be consulted also.
- 1.3 These procedures are not intended to replace child protection, grievance or disciplinary procedures.
- 1.4 We encourage our Carers and staff to be receptive at all times to dissatisfaction or representation and complaints made about our service. No individual or organisation is perfect, and we can always learn from what people have to say about us. To fail to respond promptly and sympathetically to a complaint in its early stages can lead to serious problems at a later date. We therefore regard these procedures in a positive light, and see them as an important tool whereby we can monitor and evaluate the standard of services we give to our children and their families.

2. Policy

2.1 We have based our procedures on the principles listed below:

We seek to create an ethos in which a child, parent or Carer or other responsible adult can confidently make a representation or complaint knowing that it will be dealt with promptly and with fairness.

The procedure should be easily understood and made available to children, parents and Local Authority staff in pamphlets written in appropriate language.

Any complaint should be resolved as near to the point at which it arose as possible.

The level at which the complaint or representation is dealt with will reflect the seriousness of that complaint or representation.

Regardless of who made the representation or complaint, the views of the child will be sought and taken into account in the light of their age and understanding.

An independent element is seen as an essential part of the procedures.

All representation and complaints will be recorded in writing and made available to the relevant authorities.

The outcome of a complaint will be placed before the Fostering Panel, and any necessary action will be taken by them.

3. The Procedures

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 clearly envisages three stages in the procedure:

- i) Informal problem solving
- ii) Introduction of an independent element
- iii) Appeal to a Panel consisting of three persons at least, one of whom is independent of the agency.

Stage 1

4. Informal Problem Solving

4.1 Carers and staff are encouraged to pay attention at all times to those expressing dissatisfaction with the service in the foster home or, in any other area associated with their care. They are asked to seek, where possible, to resolve matters as part of their normal daily routine and duties, but where they are unable to do so, they are instructed to make the Complainant aware of these procedures and assist them in pursuing the complaint.

4.2 In the event of a Carer or other staff members receiving a complaint which they are unable to solve themselves, they are required to encourage the Complainant to pursue the complaint procedure and to ensure that the child or young person has a copy of the leaflet "Your Right to Complain". They are asked also to advise him/her of their rights to have independent advice on the issue which concerns them. If required they will assist the Complainant to put his/her complaint in writing and ensure that it reaches the Designated Officer.

Stage 2

5. Investigation by a Senior Manager

- 5.1 Not all complaints will be dealt with in the same manner. Depending on the nature of the complaint, different responses will be required. An initial screening process will be undertaken by the Designated Officer to decide which route is appropriate.
- 5.2 The majority of day to day concerns will be dealt with by those with responsibility for the management of the fostering service. Issues to do with standards of care, safety and attitude are best dealt with by the Supervising Social Worker, overseen by their Team Manager in the first instance.
- 5.3 Formal complaints made about standards of care will be investigated by a Senior Manager who is independent of those involved in content of the complaint. The Manager will interview the Complainant, ideally with 24 hours of receipt of the complaint, but if this is not possible, it should be dealt with within one week.
- 5.4 Similarly the Carer or other staff member who may be the subject of the complaint will be informed of the complaint within, ideally 24 hours of its receipt. They will be given information on how the complaint will be investigated.
- 5.5 Complaints about standards of care need a careful and prompt response from the Agency. They will be taken by the Supervising Social Worker and the Manager investigating the complaint, visiting the Carer and jointly discussing with the Carer the nature of the complaint.
- 5.6 Such meetings must be fully recorded and the outcome clearly communicated to all parties.

- 5.7 A report of the outcome of the investigation will be completed and given to the Complainant and the Foster Carer. One copy will remain on file. This report must clearly state the intended future relationship between Carers and Agency.
- 5.8 Any commitment to change, e.g. a particular way of working, or manner of care of a child etc. should be monitored and Carers informed of the outcome of the monitoring.
- 5.9 The complaint and details of its outcomes will be placed before the Fostering Panel, and any necessary action taken.
- 5.10 All papers relating to unfounded complaints will be filed separately from the Carer's main file.

Stage 3

6. Independent Investigation

- 6.1 In circumstances where the Complainant or Carer is not satisfied with the outcome of the above internal procedure, an Investigator totally independent of the Agency will be appointed to further consider the complaint.
- 6.2 Any such appointment will be discussed and agreed with all parties prior to the commencement of this independent investigation. Local Authority Social Workers will be informed of the progress of the investigation and its outcome.
- 6.3 The Independent Investigator will ensure that the Complainant is aware of his/her right to complain under various procedures and advise most suitable. Where appropriate, this will include making the Complainant aware of his right to seek advice from his Solicitor, Member of Parliament, Local Councillor, Local Government Commissioner and the various voluntary bodies such as ASC and other advocacy services who seek to represent the interests of children in care and their parents.

- 6.4 The Independent Investigator will have the right (subject to the necessary permissions) to examine any relevant documents held by FCSNW, and to interview Carers, staff and witnesses as appropriate. The method of the investigation will be at her discretion and will not be interfered with by the management of FCSNW.
- 6.5 If the Complainant chooses an alternative to the FCSNW procedure, then the Independent Investigator will assist the Complainant in making his/her complaint to the relevant authority.
- 6.6 The Independent Investigator will report to the Designated Officer in writing within 48 hours of completing her investigation. A copy of her report will be sent to the Complainant, the Social Worker, and if appropriate, other relevant parties.

7. Appeal Procedure

- 7.1 Where a Complainant remains dissatisfied with the response at Stage III, they may request that an Appeals Panel be set up to reconsider the complaint.
- 7.2 The Panel will consist of two Directors of the Agency and an independent person. The Complainant and the Independent Investigator may make representation to the Panel, who will respond in writing within 24 hours to the Complainant and the Independent Investigator.

8. Fostering Panel

- 8.1 On completion of an investigation, a report of the complaint and its outcome and any recommendations will be placed before the Fostering Panel. Panel will take any necessary action.

9 Designated Officer

The person designated as the Complaints Receiving Officer is Liz Dent, Principal Manager. Her responsibilities are:

To oversee the investigation of complaints that cannot be resolved informally.

To inform the relevant authority of any complaint made by or on behalf of a child who is "looked after" and to determine when it is more appropriate to use that authority's procedures.

To ensure that the Complainant is aware of the avenues of complaint open to him/her.

To ensure that the relevant parties receive copies of the Investigator's report.

To establish a register to record complaints and the details and results of the investigation. To collate such information as is available to incorporate in an Annual Report and the Agency Statement of Purpose.

To inform the Commission for Social Care of all complaints and their outcome.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

1. The following terms and conditions will be deemed to have been accepted, by the placing authority, upon reserving or making a placement.
2. Charges will be reviewed annually on 1st April ~ prior notification will be given.
3. All fees for services will be subject to V.A.T.
4. Placing authorities will be invoiced 4 weeks in advance, and payment is expected to be met within 30 days.
5. Overpayments will be credited within 14 days.
6. Emergency placements will be invoiced in arrears, and amended to normal payment conditions (as detailed in section 4) as soon as possible.
7. Interest may be charged on any account which remains outstanding for a period exceeding 60 days, at the prevailing base interest rate.
8. A holding fee (75% of the full fee) will be required from the date a placement has been identified until the date of admission.
9. In the event that it becomes necessary for a child to move, every endeavour will be made to give 28 days' notice, to enable a planned move.
10. Where placements are intended to exceed 3 months, and a decision is taken, by the placing authority, to remove the child or young person prior to the planned leaving date, FCS reserves the right to 28 days notice or payment in lieu.
11. Where placements are intended to be less than 3 months, and a decision is taken, by the placing authority, to remove the child or young person prior to the planned leaving date, FCS reserves the right to 7 days notice or payment in lieu.

12. Where placements have a history of arson including fire raising behaviour which is not disclosed at the point of referral, the placing authority will carry the burden of costs and liability in relation to damage caused by such behaviour.

13. The basic placement charge includes:

- a) Basic maintenance
- b) replacement clothing allowance
- c) pocket money for child/young person
- d) birthday and Christmas allowance
- e) two weeks annual respite
- f) trips and activities organised by Foster Care Services N.W.
- g) support and training of carers.
- h) educational support provided by National Teaching & Advisory Service.
(This does not include full-time education if a child is excluded from school).
- i) annual holiday expenses up to £300; contributions may be required from local authorities to supplement more expensive holidays
- j) includes up to £10 per school trip
- k) transport for child/young person within 10 mile radius of foster home.

14. The basic placement charge does **NOT** include:

- a) initial/emergency clothing allowance
- b) initial school uniform allowance
- c) costs in excess of £10 per school trip
- d) dental, ophthalmic or any other medical treatments which would not be covered by normal standard routine charges.
- e) transport for young person which exceeds the 10 mile radius of foster home.
- f) damage to property inflicted by the child inside or outside the foster carers home.

The above items will be subject to negotiation with the placing authority.

15. The terms and conditions should be read in conjunction with the current charges.

FCSNW PERSONNEL

Directors	-	Tim Walker Linda Couloumbri
Principal Manager	-	Liz Dent
Deputy Manager/Social Work Team Leader	-	Judith Staples
Deputy Team Leader/Project Manager	-	Dave Edwards
Business Development Manager	-	Kath Morris
Finance Administrator/IT Manager	-	Nick Jones
Supervising Social Workers	-	Peter Walker Tony Bray Sam Morais Lynda Hackett
Administration/Clerical Team	-	Denise Hall Carolyn Vickers Paula Roberts

ADDITIONAL FCSNW LITERATURE (available on request)

1. Policies & Procedures.
2. Placement Agreement.
3. Foster Care Services N.W. Finance Agreement.
4. Complaints Leaflets (2 age related versions).
5. Information for Young people - Your Right to See Your File.
6. Handbooks for Young People - Information for Young People whilst placed with the Agency (2 age related versions).
7. Inspection reports available from CSCI.
8. Preparation for Independence.