



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

Voluntary Adoption Agency

Families for Children

Glenn House

96 Old Tiverton Road

Exeter

Devon

EX4 6LD

14th February 2005

Commission for Social Care Inspection

Launched in April 2004, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) is the single inspectorate for social care in England.

The Commission combines the work formerly done by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI), the SSI/Audit Commission Joint Review Team and the National Care Standards Commission.

The role of CSCI is to:

- Promote improvement in social care
- Inspect all social care - for adults and children - in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- Publish annual reports to Parliament on the performance of social care and on the state of the social care market
- Inspect and assess 'Value for Money' of council social services
- Hold performance statistics on social care
- Publish the 'star ratings' for council social services
- Register and inspect services against national standards
- Host the Children's Rights Director role.

Inspection Methods & Findings

SECTION B of this report summarises key findings and evidence from this inspection. The following 4-point scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The 4-point scale ranges from:

- 4 - Standard Exceeded (Commendable)
- 3 - Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
- 2 - Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls)
- 1 - Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

'O' or blank in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

'9' in the 'Standard met?' box denotes standard not applicable.

'X' is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

VOLUNTARY ADOPTION AGENCY INFORMATION

Name of Voluntary Adoption Agency

Families for Children

Address

Glenn House, 96 Old Tiverton Road, Exeter, Devon, EX4
6LD

Tel No

01392 278 875

Fax No

Email Address

mail@christiancare.freereserve.c
o.uk

Certificate Number of Voluntary Adoption Agency

F570002108

Name of Registered Provider:

Families for Children Trust

Name of Manager:

Nicholas Goodwin

**Is this service the principal office or
a branch?**

**Is this a small principal office or
branch?**

Seven or less full-time equivalent social work
staff, excluding manager.

Principal Office

Branch

Date of registration:

30th April 2003 30th April 2003

Date of most recent certificate:

13th May 2004

Registration Conditions Apply?

Date of last inspection:

Date of Inspection Visit		14th February 2005	ID Code
Time of Inspection Visit		10:00 am	
Name of Inspector	1	Maureen Moore	125773
Name of Inspector	2	Delia Amos	
Name of Inspector	3		
Name of Inspector	4		
Name of Lay Assessor (if applicable) Lay assessors are members of the public independent of the CSCI. They accompany inspectors on some inspections and bring a different perspective to the inspection process.			
Name of Specialist e.g. Interpreter/Signer (if applicable)			
Name of Establishment Representative at the time of the inspection		Caroline Davis Nick Goodwin	

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INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND INSPECTION

Voluntary Adoption Agencies which fall within the jurisdiction of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) are subject to inspection, to establish if the service is meeting the National Minimum Standards for Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976 as amended, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 as amended, and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003.

This document summarises the inspection findings of the CSCI in respect of Families for Children. The inspection findings relate to the National Minimum Standards for Voluntary Adoption Agencies published by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 are secondary legislation, with which a service provider must comply. Service providers are expected to comply fully with the National Minimum Standards. The National Minimum standards will form the basis for judgements by the CSCI in relation to Voluntary Adoption Agencies regarding registration, the imposition and variation of registration conditions and any enforcement action.

The report follows the format of the National Minimum Standards and the numbering shown in the report corresponds to that of the standards.

The report will show the following:

- Inspection methods used
- Key findings and evidence
- Overall ratings in relation to the standards
- Compliance with the Regulations
- Required actions on the part of the provider
- Recommended good practice
- Summary of the findings
- Report of the Lay Assessor (where relevant)
- Provider's response and proposed action plan to address findings

This report is a public document.

INSPECTION VISITS

Inspections will be undertaken in line with the regulatory framework with additional visits as required. This is in accordance with the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. The inspection methods used in the production of this report are set out in Part B. Pre-inspection information, and the manager's written self-evaluation of the service, have also been taken into account. The report represents the inspector's findings from the evidence found at the specified inspection dates.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED.

Families for Children Trust is a voluntary adoption agency registered under the Care Standards Act 2000. The director, and registered responsible individual, is Caroline Davis. The registered manager is Nick Goodwin. The Trust was established in 1993 as a joint venture between Exeter Diocesan Board for Christian Care and Plymouth Diocesan Catholic Children's Society; it became a registered charity in 2003. There is a Board of Trustees which oversees the activities of the service.

The agency's head office is in Exeter, where the service has another base; it has offices also in Plymouth and Wimborne. The service employs one social worker, who works from home, to cover the Cornwall area. At the end of 2005, the lease runs out on the building which houses the head office, so the business will move to Buckfast Abbey in Devon. This move will mean the relocation of the workers who are based currently in Plymouth and Exeter.

In addition to the director and the manager, the management team comprises a practice supervisor; an administration manager (who is also the company secretary) and a fundraising and publicity manager. Families for Children employs the full-time equivalent of 7.5 social workers and 3.5 administration staff spread across the different offices. The agency also calls upon the professional services of various advisers and consultants as necessary.

The service has no statutory responsibility for the children for whom it finds adoptive families; but works in close partnership with the local authorities who do have. The agency does not provide services for inter-country adoptions.

Families for Children's stated mission is to find adoptive families for children who need them; placing high value on offering those children and families ongoing support. The services are provided within the framework of values of the Christian faith.

The agency offers the following services:

- recruitment, preparation, assessment and approval of adoptive parents
- matching adoptive parents to children
- pre-adoption support for approved adopters
- therapeutic services for children post-placement
- counselling and support for birth parents and families
- post adoption contact; both direct and indirect
- counselling services for adult adoptees
- post-adoption training
- post-adoption services as per CVAA menu of core services.

PART A SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS

INSPECTOR'S SUMMARY

(This is an overview of the inspector's findings, which includes good practice, quality issues, areas to be addressed or developed and any other concerns.)

The inspection took place between February and mid-March 2005. It was the first time that Families for Children Trust had been measured against the National Minimum Standards and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies Regulations (2003). It is commendable that all regulations were met, as were the all but two of the standards.

At the time of the inspection the agency was fully staffed, but the registered manager was on sick leave.

Families for Children impressed as having successfully emerged from a period of transition. There was evidence throughout the inspection that everyone connected with the agency had a clear sense of what its aims are; and a clear commitment to achieve them. In the year preceding the inspection, the service had 33 children placed or matched with its adopters; and approved a total of 28 applicants. 14 applicants were withdrawn during this period. A disruption occurred in one placement.

The agency is extremely child-focused in all of its activities, and although committed to taking referrals from adults with complex backgrounds, it never loses sight of the needs of the child. The support offered by this agency to children, adopters and birth families was judged to be excellent.

The following is a brief summary of how the agency fared against the National Minimum Standards and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies Regulations:

Statement of Purpose (Standard met)

The service has a clearly set out statement of purpose, which outlines its constitution and all other relevant information; and reflects accurately the work of the agency.

Securing and Promoting Children's Welfare (Standard met)

There was substantial evidence throughout the inspection that Families for Children is a very child-centred organisation. The agency has strong links with local authorities and other appropriate groups and agencies in the southwest; it is very well informed on the needs of the children waiting for adoptive families.

Prospective and Approved Adopters (1 standard exceeded; 2 met; 1 almost met)

The agency provides comprehensive written information to prospective adopters, and has a very attractive website which is kept up-to-date. Evidence from adopters indicated a very high level of satisfaction with initial responses, and subsequent written and verbal information given to them.

There was evidence of some excellent practice in relation to the assessment and preparation of applicants; but also some that was of variable standard in terms of thoroughness. Although the reports were of an adequate standard; the structure and analytical content could be improved. All adopters' files seen had evidence of CRB, health and status checks.

The agency has an explicit commitment to long-term support of their adoptive parents and families. This is an area into which research and careful reflection has been undertaken by the agency; a result of which has been several initiatives aimed at continual improvement of its support services.

Birth Parents and Birth Families (1 standard exceeded; 2 met)

The agency clearly recognise the life-long implications adoption. This was found to be a constant theme throughout the inspection. Staff go to great lengths to ensure that life-story work is undertaken with, and on behalf of, children and young people. The service operates a "forever" support policy for all who have been involved in adoption through its agency.

Adoption Panels and Agency Decisions (4 standards met)

The agency has clearly written policies and procedures governing all of the panel's business. The panel meets monthly and is properly constituted and comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people. The panel was seen to run efficiently and members were heard to be insightful and sensitive. All prospective adopters are given the opportunity to attend the panel to be heard. The minute taking was of a very high quality.

Fitness to Provide or Manage an Adoption Agency (2 standards met)

The director has a professional social work qualification; is appropriately experienced in child care social work, and is supervised by an appropriately qualified external consultant. The registered manager of the service holds a professional qualification and is also relevantly experienced. At the time of the inspection both were undertaking NVQ Management Level 5 and expected to complete it by May 2005.

The director has good strategic leadership and management skills that ensure the agency is managed generally in a way that delivers the best possible child care.

Provision and Management of the Adoption Agency (3 standards met)

There was evidence that the agency is run in an effective manner and in accordance with its statement of purpose. Its expectations in relation to meeting the holistic needs of children and young people is well documented and borne out in practice. There are systems in place to monitor and control the work of the service. There is access to apparently sound legal and medical advice, of which staff spoke positively. All specialist advisers are interviewed by the director prior to appointment and must demonstrate a good understanding of adoption as well as relevant professional qualifications and experience

Employment and Management of Staff (6 standards met)

The agency is staffed by social workers who are professionally qualified, very knowledgeable, and suitably experienced. Throughout the inspection they impressed as being open, insightful and passionate about their work. There are sound recruitment and

selection procedures in place, and there was evidence of appropriate checks being undertaken on employees. Staff spoke highly of the quality of supervision, which occurs monthly.

The administrative staff were found to be efficient and hardworking; The administration manager of the service is also a qualified accountant, she impressed as being extremely knowledgeable of all aspects of the agency's work, which ensured sound administrative processes and an integrated approach.

The service impressed as a learning organisation; research is used to inform practice and staff have access to appropriate training. There is an appropriate complaints policy and attendant procedures, in which all staff have been trained.

Records (3 standards met; 1 almost met)

There are good records in relation to adopters and children. The files are well organised and case notes are typewritten. Although there was confirmation from several sources that cases were discussed, and files examined during supervision; it was not corroborated by documentary evidence; this needs to be addressed.

The agency has a good system for the provision and safekeeping of information to appropriate parties. This was corroborated by comments in placing social workers' questionnaires.

There are well maintained files in relation to staff and panel members.

Fitness of Premises (Standard met)

The current premises are generally fit for purpose, although a move to different accommodation should occur sometime in 2005. There are efficient and robust administrative systems, which are overseen by the administration manager.

Financial Requirements (2 standards met)

Despite having faced some challenges in relation to its financial viability; the agency was secure financially at the time of this inspection. There was evidence that the financial position of the agency is carefully monitored.

Implementation of Statutory Requirements from Last Inspection

Requirements from last Inspection visit fully actioned?

NA

If No please list below the findings of this inspection on any Requirements that have not been actioned

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas not addressed from the last inspection report which indicate a non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983 and the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003.

No.	Regulation	Standard	Required actions	

Action is being taken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to monitor compliance with the above requirements.

COMPLIANCE WITH CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION (IF APPLICABLE)

Providers and managers of Voluntary Adoption Agencies must comply with statutory conditions of their registration. The conditions applying to this registration are listed below, with the inspector's assessment of compliance from the evidence at the time of this inspection.

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Condition	Compliance	
Comments		

Lead Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Second Inspector	_____	Signature	_____
Regulation Manager	_____	Signature	_____
Date	_____		

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS IDENTIFIED DURING THIS INSPECTION

Action Plan: The Registered provider and manager are requested to provide the Commission with an Action Plan, which indicates how requirements are to be addressed. This action plan is shown in Part D of this report.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which indicate non-compliance with the Care Standards Act 2000, the Adoption Act 1976, the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, the Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 or the National Minimum Standards for Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The Registered Persons are required to comply within the given time scales in order to comply with the Regulatory Requirements for Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

No.	Regulation	Standard *	Requirement	

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS INSPECTION

Identified below are areas addressed in the main body of the report which relate to the National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice issues which should be considered for implementation by the Registered Persons.

No.	Refer to Standard *	Recommendation Action
1	VA1	The agency should consider a more dynamic presentation of its statement of purpose, as the document is effectively a brochure for the services of the organisation.
2	VA4	The agency should review its monitoring of cases when child protection issues arise within a placement, to ensure that appropriate action is taken and recorded clearly. Health and safety checklist should be amended to include any weapons families might have in their homes. The agency should make more robust its quality assurance processes in relation to the whole assessment process.
3	VA12	The agency should consider formalising the quality assurance role of the panel.
4	VA14	The agency should inform the commission when the registered manager has successfully completed the NVQ Management Level 5. The agency should consider reviewing its management structure and the roles within it.
5	VA25	Social workers should proofread and sign case notes on their return from the administrative team. Managers should ensure that records of case discussions and subsequent management decisions are kept on case files, and that they are signed and dated. The pro-forma for supervision notes should be revised to include any action taken, when and by whom.
6	VA26	The agency should revise its policies and procedures on access to information, to take into account the Human Rights Act, 1998.

* Note: You may refer to the relevant standard in the remainder of the report by omitting the 2-letter prefix e.g. VA10 refers to Standard 10.

PART B**INSPECTION METHODS & FINDINGS**

The following inspection methods have been used in the production of this report

Placing authority survey	NO
Placing social worker survey	YES
Prospective adopter survey	YES
Approved adopter survey	YES
Birth parent / birth family member survey	NO
Checks with other organisations and Individuals	
• Directors of Social Services	NO
• Specialist advisor (s)	YES
Tracking Individual welfare arrangements	YES
• Interview with children	NO
• Interview with adopters and prospective adopters	YES
• Interview with birth parents	NO
• Interview with birth family members	NO
• Contact with supervising social workers	YES
• Examination of files	YES
Individual interview with manager	YES
Information from provider	YES
Individual interviews with key staff	YES
Group discussion with staff	YES
Interview with panel chair	YES
Observation of adoption panel	YES
Inspection of policy/practice documents	YES
Inspection of records (personnel, adopter, child, complaints & allegations)	YES
Additional Inspection Questions	
Certificate of registration was displayed at the time of the inspection	YES
Certificate of registration accurately reflected the situation in the service at the time of inspection	YES
Total No. of staff employed (excluding managers)	20
Date of Inspection	17/03/05
Time of Inspection	9.30
Duration Of Inspection (hrs)	75
Number of inspector days	8

The following pages summarise the key findings and evidence from this inspection, together with the CSCI assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards have been met. The following scale is used to indicate the extent to which standards have been met or not met by placing the assessed level alongside the phrase "Standard met?"

The scale ranges from:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 4 - Standard Exceeded | (Commendable) |
| 3 - Standard Met | (No Shortfalls) |
| 2 - Standard Almost Met | (Minor Shortfalls) |
| 1 - Standard Not Met | (Major Shortfalls) |

"0" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion.

"9" in the "Standard met?" box denotes standard not applicable on this occasion.

"X" is used where a percentage value or numerical value is not applicable.

Statement of Purpose

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- There is clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency and the adoption agency ensures that it meets those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 (1.1 - 1.3(partial) and 1.5 – 1.7)

There is a clear written statement of the aims and objectives of the adoption agency which describes accurately what facilities and services they provide.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Families for Children has a clearly set out statement of purpose that complies with the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and the Adoption Agencies Regulations (the regulations).

The document outlines the agency's charitable status and its constitution; as well as the organisation and control of its operation.

The drafting of the statement involved discussion between the management, staff, panel members and trustees of the agency. Staff confirmed that it reflects accurately the work of the agency. It reflects also, the policies and procedures of the organisation.

The document makes reference, on the front page, to its availability in different formats should this be required by anyone.

The inspectors advised the agency that the statement might benefit from a more dynamic presentation, as the document is effectively a brochure for the services of the organisation.

See Recommendation 1

**Has the Statement of Purpose been reviewed annually?
(Record N/A if the information is not available)**

YES

Has the Statement been formally approved by the trustees or management committee?

YES

Is there a children's guide to adoption?

NA

Does the children's guide contain all of the information required by Standard 1.4?

NA

Securing and promoting children's welfare

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process.

Standard 2 (2.1 - 2.3)

The adoption agency has written plans for the implementation and evaluation of effective strategies to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was substantial evidence throughout the inspection that Families for Children is a very child-centred organisation. It has a clearly written strategy and implementation plan for the recruitment of adoptive families, which states: "[the strategy]... should continue to reflect... children's needs as paramount". The agency has well set-out quality standards in relation to this and all other aspects of its work.

The organisation has a strategy to engage with more adopters from the black and minority ethnic communities to improve its recruitment of adopters from these groups. Discussion with managers and staff revealed them to be well informed on issues of diversity; and where a transracial placement (in this case, dual heritage children with white European adopters) had been made, there was evidence on file of appropriate assistance and training for adopters, including direct links with black adopters and appropriate support groups.

Families for Children has forged strong links with local authorities and other appropriate groups and agencies in the southwest; it is very well informed on the needs of the children waiting for adoptive families. This knowledge underpins the agency's approach to recruitment.

In the last 12 months, how many children were matched with families which reflected their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language?

31

What percentage of children matched with the agency's adopters does this represent?

95

%

How many sibling groups were matched in the last 12 months?

6

How many allegations of abuse or neglect were made, in the last 12 months, about adopters approved by the agency?

0

Prospective and approved adopters

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The adoption agency recruits and supports sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, who can offer children a stable and permanent home to achieve a successful and lasting placement.

Standard 3. (3.1 – 3.6)

Plans for recruitment will specify that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents will be welcomed without prejudice, will be given clear written information about the preparation, assessment and approval procedure and that they will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>Families for Children’s own quality standards relating to its work with prospective adopters state “...the agency has a responsibility to provide an informative, sympathetic and helpful service to all who enquire about adoption.” The inspectors found confirmation that this responsibility is taken seriously. The agency provides comprehensive written information to prospective adopters, and has a very attractive website which is kept up-to-date.</p> <p>Evidence from adopters indicated a very high level of satisfaction with initial responses, and subsequent written and verbal information from Families for Children. Comments included “...prompt response”; “All stages well explained”; “Thorough information and very quick” and “...all info (sic) frank and honest”.</p> <p>The agency has clear written eligibility criteria of which staff and adopters are aware. People who do not meet the criteria are advised of other agencies who might be able to process their applications.</p> <p>Families for Children is committed to providing adoptive placements to children who are most in need (i.e. children who have been traditionally hardest to place) and the inspectors saw evidence of prioritisation to fulfil this aim.</p> <p>The agency traditionally has taken some referrals from applicants who would not necessarily be viewed as a priority by local authorities, or other agencies; or might have even been turned down elsewhere (without ever losing sight of the pre-eminence of the child’s welfare). Evidence was found during the inspection of adopters being approved and going on to have successful placements, who had been a challenge to the service in terms of their complex backgrounds. It is commendable that the agency is prepared to commit the time and resources to these difficult cases; but it should also be mindful of the cost effectiveness of this area of work.</p>	<p>Standard met?</p>	<p>3</p>

At the time of the inspection, Families for Children did not accept referrals from co-habiting heterosexual or same sex couples. This aspect of the policy has been the subject of ongoing discussion within the agency, and managers had produced a consultation document for the trustees' consideration. There is a plan to develop the debate in the coming year, after which the issue should be resolved once and for all. The inspectors believe that this review is timely, as the agency should reflect on whether its philosophy on eligibility conflicts with its commitment to provide suitable adopters from a diverse range of backgrounds, for children most in need of permanent families. Consideration also needs to be given to the possibility of losing out on revenue; as there was some evidence that the current policy risks alienating potentially suitable adopters, including those that meet the present criteria.

The agency does not undertake inter-country assessments.

Standard 4. (4.1 – 4.9)

Prospective adopters are involved in a formal, thorough and comprehensive assessment, preparation and approval process.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

2

Families for Children runs a two day preparation programme for adoptive applicants. At the time of the inspection the programme was under review following its annual evaluation.

The inspection revealed some excellent practice in relation to the assessment and preparation of applicants; but also some that was of variable standard in terms of thoroughness. The inspectors highlighted these issues as they arose during the inspection and were extremely reassured by the prompt response of the managers.

The agency uses the BAAF Form F model of assessment. Although the reports were of an adequate standard, the inspectors advised the agency that the structure and analytical content could be improved. It is commendable that by the time the inspection was completed, specialist refresher training had been commissioned for the social workers.

The organisation has a clearly set out, appropriate child protection policy which the agency confirmed is reviewed annually, and on which the social workers receive training. However the agency should review its monitoring of cases when child protection issues arise within a placement to ensure that appropriate action is taken and recorded clearly; and that management decisions are in evidence on file. Health and safety checklist should be amended to include any weapons families might have in their homes.

There was evidence that Families for Children operates within an anti-discriminatory framework when assessing applicants who meet its eligibility criteria. The agency promotes an ethos of caring and respect for the dignity of the individual which was seen to run through its practice. The organisation places a high priority in addressing issues relating to diversity; for example there is the opportunity for applicants to meet with experienced adopters in order to learn from them the rewards and challenges of adopting older children or children who have a disability.

Families for Children has a vast geographical catchment area which sometimes presents a difficulty in the timing and location of the preparation training. Sometimes participants are requested to travel some distance to attend the groups; but the agency provides funding for travel if necessary. Families for Children had piloted two group assessments which although found to be labour intensive were viewed as positive by participants and staff.

Comments from adopters regarding the preparation and assessment process were very positive and included the following: "...a positive experience"; "Excellent all round!"; "...very thorough...did not feel rushed or pressured at any time" and "...fantastic support and guidance throughout...".

All adopters' files seen had evidence of CRB, health and status checks. There was one instance whereby the inspectors advised further checks in the case of one application; which was promptly acted upon. It is recommended that the agency makes more robust its quality assurance processes in relation to the whole assessment process.

See Recommendation 2

Standard 5 (5.1 – 5.4)

Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process, as well as any support to facilitate this they may need. This will include the role of the Adoption Register for England and Wales.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Discussion with and questionnaires from adopters confirmed that the agency provides prospective and approved adopters with clear information about the matching process. This is done in writing and verbally throughout the preparation and approval process. On approval, adopters are told about the adoption register and encouraged to complete the forms.

There were several examples of adopters experiencing difficulties in obtaining full and accurate information on children for whom they were being considered as potential parents. However, in every case, Families for Children had pursued the local authorities in question to get the relevant facts, and had recorded the efforts made. Adopters were unanimous in their praise of the agency's workers at times when they were very frustrated with the children's local authorities.

The agency has a policy regarding the issues listed under 5.3 of the National Minimum Standards.

Approved adopters provide appropriate information on themselves and their families for children for whom they might provide a home.

Does the VAA have written procedures for the use of the Adoption Register?

YES

Standard 6 (6.1 – 6.7)

Adoptive parents are helped and supported to provide stable and permanent homes for the children placed with them.

Key findings and evidence**Standard met?**

4

The inspection revealed some excellent practice in relation to this standard. Families for Children has an explicit commitment to long-term support of their adoptive parents and families. This is an area into which research and careful reflection has been undertaken by the agency; a result of which has been several initiatives aimed at continual improvement of its support services.

The service has split its family finding and post placement/adoption support work. One worker is employed to support families who have had children placed, this worker also does individual work with children of prospective adopters. The agency has set up an adoption support programme with psychologists from a local consultancy which is aimed at helping families gain further understanding and more practical insight to help them overcome particular challenges at any stage of a placement. It is noted, however, that the future of this project is dependent on extra funding being made available. The inspectors believe that it would be a pity to have to close a programme that has proved so successful with, and valuable to, children and their adoptive families.

Adopters unanimously cited the support received from their social workers as a highlight of their experience of the adoption process. Comments included: "...marvellous. The support...first class"; "Received fantastic support..."; "Can't fault [them]..."; "...support is excellent"; and "...the service is always very personal and friendly – we feel well supported".

There was evidence that the agency is committed to tackling issues of racism and other forms of discrimination. These matters are addressed throughout the preparation and approval process, and at the time of the inspection a working group was looking to develop an additional training package for adopters, the staff team, panel members and the trustees.

Families for Children insists that all of its adopters must be willing to consider some form of contact between their children and their birth families (as appropriate). The agency works with adopters from the beginning of the process through to post-placement to ensure that a child's heritage is upheld, and for the child to develop and maintain a positive self-identity.

Number of adopter applications started in the last 12 months

25

Number of adopters approved in the last 12 months

29

Number of children matched with the agency's adopters in the last 12 months

32

Number of adopters approved but not matched

14

Number of adopters referred to the Adoption Register

6

How many placements disrupted, between placement and adoption, in the last 12 months?

2

Birth Parents and Birth Families

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- **Birth parents are entitled to services that recognise the lifelong implications of adoption. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the adoption process.**

Standard 7 (7.1 – 7.3 and 7.5)

The service to birth parents recognises the lifelong implications of adoption.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Families for Children does recognise the life-long implications of adoption. The inspectors found this to be a constant theme throughout the inspection. There are clearly set out policies and procedures in relation to work with birth parents; and the agency's leaflet on adult post-adoption counselling sensitively acknowledges their needs. There was evidence during the inspection of long-term involvement with several birth families.

Standard 8 (8.1 – 8.2)

Birth parents and birth families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence during the inspection of how Families for Children tries to ensure that birth parents and families are enabled to contribute to the maintenance of their child's heritage. Discussion with staff and adopters showed that staff go to great lengths to ensure that life-story work is undertaken with, and on behalf of children and young people; even if this means the agency's social workers becoming directly involved.

Standard 9 (9.1)

The adoption agency has a clear strategy for working with and supporting birth parents and birth families (including siblings) both before and after adoption. This includes providing information about local and national support groups and services and helping birth parents to fulfil agreed plans for contact.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

4

Families for Children has what it describes as a “forever” support policy for all who have been involved in adoption process through its agency. There was evidence throughout the inspection that this policy was upheld in the spirit as well as the letter of its intentions.

Adoption Panels and Agency decisions

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- Each adoption agency has an adoption panel which is organised efficiently and is effective in making quality and appropriate recommendations about children suitable for adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the matching of children and approved adopters.
- The adoption agency's decisions are made to promote and safeguard the welfare of children.

Standard 10 (10.1 – 10.3)

Adoption panels have clear written policies and procedures about the handling of their functions and ensure that they are implemented.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
<p>The adoption panel was observed and the chair was interviewed as part of the inspection process. Families for Children has clearly written policies and procedures relating to the functions of the panel and all points under 10.2 of the National Minimum Standards are covered. All prospective adopters are given the opportunity to attend the panel to be heard; but panel members had decided that they did not want prior notice of those attending, to ensure equity in considering all cases.</p>		

Standard 11 (11.1 – 11.4)

The adoption agency shall ensure that each adoption panel is properly constituted, that panel members have suitable qualities and experience to be a panel member and have regular training to allow them to keep up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Where the adoption agency is involved in inter-country adoption, each member of the panel understands the implications of being adopted from overseas and seeks advice, when necessary, on the laws and eligibility criteria for the overseas country.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Families for Children's adoption panel is properly constituted and comprises relevantly qualified and experienced people. The trustees monitor the panel membership in order to maintain balance when vacancies occur. The panel that was observed as part of the inspection was quorate.

All prospective panel members are interviewed and new members observe the panel before joining proper. All panel members had current CRB clearance. Induction training is available via the agency's membership of the Devon Care Training Consortium. The panel has access to appropriate training and development sessions, some of which include social work staff.

Does the adoption panel membership meet all of the statutory requirements?

YES

Standard 12 (12.1 – 12.3)

Adoption panels are efficiently organised and conducted and are convened regularly to avoid delays in the consideration of prospective adopters and matching children and adopters.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

The adoption panel meets monthly, and panel members receive the papers one week prior to the panel date. The panel has clearly set out administration procedures which appear to work very well; the panel chair and social workers confirmed that the organisation of the panel business is conducted efficiently.

The agenda for the panel observed during the inspection was well structured; the meeting was extremely well chaired and very clearly focused. It was clear that all papers had been carefully considered by each panel member; discussion was heard to be extremely child-focused and very sensitive to all involved. Questions were insightful and comprehensively thought out.

The minute taking was seen to be accurate, informative and of a very high quality.

It is recommended that the quality assurance role of the panel be reviewed and formalised.

See Recommendation 3

Standard 13 (13.1 – 13.3)

The adoption agency's decision is made without delay after taking into account the recommendation of the adoption panel and promotes and safeguards the welfare of the child.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The director of Families for Children is the agency decision maker. There was evidence to suggest that the director reads all papers to do with a case before reaching a conclusion (she sometimes sits as a non-contributing observer of the panel). Decisions are made within five working days of the panel meeting. Panel recommendations are communicated verbally to applicants "as soon as it is practicable", as is the decision and written confirmation.

Although there was no evidence of delay, It is recommended that the agency considers setting itself targets for when recommendations and decisions are to be relayed, so that practice can be monitored and efficiency gauged.

See Recommendation 4

Fitness to provide or manage an adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is provided and managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience to do so efficiently and effectively and by those who are suitable to work with children.

Standard 14 (14.1 – 14.6)

The people involved in carrying on and managing the adoption agency:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and adoption law and practice and
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively and
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

At the time of the inspection the registered manager was on sick leave, and it was uncertain as to when he would return. The practice manager had resumed his duties and the director confirmed that the situation was under constant review.

The director of Families for Children has a professional social work qualification and is appropriately experienced in child care social work. She is supervised by an appropriately qualified external consultant. The registered manager of the service holds a professional qualification and is also relevantly experienced. At the time of the inspection both were undertaking NVQ Management Level 5 and expected to complete it by May 2005.

Social work staff stated that they felt extremely supported by their management team, which includes a practice supervisor, who has supervisory responsibility for some staff. They were very positive about the approachability of the managers, and of the support and quality of supervision afforded to them.

The practice supervisor post was created to free the director from direct casework supervision, which was subsequently split between the registered manager and the practice supervisor. The inspectors believe that there is an imbalance within the management structure, which might benefit from a review of the manager's strategic and practice responsibilities, in relation to the role of the practice supervisor.

It was evident during the inspection that the director has good strategic leadership and management skills that ensure the agency is managed generally in a way that delivers the best possible child care.

See Recommendation 5

Does the manager have Management NVQ4 or equivalent?

NO

Does the manager have at least 2 years experience of working in a childcare setting in last 5 years?

YES

Standard 15 (15.1 – 15.4)

Any person carrying on or managing the adoption agency are suitable people to run a

voluntary organisation or business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

At the time of the inspection the director was registered with the General Social Care Council and all other staff were awaiting a formal response. The director and the registered manager have CRB clearance and written references are followed up by telephone. CRB checks are renewed every three years.

Provision and management of the adoption agency

The intended outcomes for the following set of standards are:

- The adoption agency is organised and managed efficiently, delivering a good quality service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 16 (16.1 – 16.7)

The adoption agency is managed effectively and efficiently.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

There was evidence during the inspection that the Families for Children is run in an effective manner and in accordance with the statement of purpose.

Roles are clearly defined, communication within the service is good, and accountability clear. Discussion with staff confirmed this. The director and manager meet regularly with the trustees, and staff have the opportunity to meet with trustees and are regularly updated on agency developments.

The agency's expectations in relation to meeting the holistic needs of children and young people is well documented and borne out in practice.

The agency has written procedures covering the use of the National Adoption Register.

Number of statutory notifications made to CSCI in last 12 months:

0

Death of a child placed for adoption by the agency.

0

Referral to Secretary of State of a person working for the agency. (s2(1) of Protection of Children Act 1999)

0

Serious illness or accident of a child.

0

Serious complaint about an approved prospective adopter (no child placed).

0

Serious complaint about an approved prospective adopter (child placed by agency).

0

Serious complaint about an approved prospective adopter (child placed by another agency).

0

Instigation of child protection enquiry involving a child placed by the agency.	0

Standard 17 (17.1 – 17.3)

There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the adoption agency and ensuring quality performance.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

There was evidence of Families for Children monitoring and controlling its activities through supervision of staff, reports to the trustees and its annual business plan. The work of the adoption panel is evaluated and reported on annually. The service also has various sub-committees which consider different aspects of the organisation's work which report accordingly.

It is commendable that the agency seeks the views of all of its stakeholders regularly and uses the findings to inform practice development.

The service provides appropriate written information to purchasers as stated under 17.2 of the NMS. Families for Children is a member of the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies on whose policy its charges are based.

How frequently does the management committee receive written reports on the work of the VAA?

Monthly?

Quarterly?

Less than Quarterly?

YES

Standard 18 (18.1 – 18.5)

The adoption agency has access to specialist advisers and services appropriate to its needs.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Families for Children has access to apparently sound legal, medical and education advice. Social workers reported that the contribution from the specialist advisers was of a high standard and that they were approachable for consultation. Other specialist advice is sought appropriately as needed.

The agency has clearly set out protocols governing the role of the specialist advisers, who are all suitably qualified and experienced.

Employment and management of staff

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The people who work in the adoption agency are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children waiting to be adopted or who have been adopted. The number of staff and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the adoption agency.

Standard 19 (19.1 – 19.14)

Anyone working in or for the adoption agency is suitable to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Families for Children is staffed by social workers who are professionally qualified, very knowledgeable, and suitably experienced. Throughout the inspection they impressed as being open, insightful and passionate about their work.

The agency has apparently sound recruitment and selection procedures of which managers have a clear understanding. All employees are interviewed prior to appointment and written references are followed-up with telephone calls. The inspection found that all staff have CRB clearance, without which no one would be allowed to commence work. CRB checks are renewed every three years.

There was evidence during the inspection that social work staff have access to training, both internal and external, in all matters to do with adoption. Discussion with staff and managers confirmed that they are kept up-to-date regarding changes in law and policy surrounding adoption and child care. Social workers not only share their own expertise with colleagues but also have access to other specialist areas such as CAMHS with whom they have forged very strong links over time.

Birth records counselling is undertaken, in the main, by one extremely informed and practised worker. The agency has a service level agreement with a local authority in respect of section 51 work.

All specialist advisers are interviewed by the director prior to appointment and must demonstrate a good understanding of adoption as well as relevant professional qualifications and experience.

Do all of the agency's social workers have DipSW or equivalent?

YES

What % of the agency's social workers have a PQ award?

10

%

Standard 20 (20.1 – 20.12)

Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

There was evidence throughout the inspection that staff are managed and supervised by people with appropriate skills and qualifications, and in a way that delivers an effective service. The level of management delegation is clearly set out and understood by staff. The agency has a clear system of monthly supervision of which staff spoke very highly; these sessions are used to monitor and prioritise workloads.

Families for Children is committed to accepting referrals from some quite challenging applicants, many of whom go on to achieve successful adoptive placements. Evidence was found however, that some of those who went on to be unsuccessful with their applications could have been ruled out earlier in the process; thereby saving on resources. Social workers and supervisors should be mindful of this.

The recording of supervision and case discussion is covered in standard 25.

The inspectors found the administrative staff to be efficient and hardworking; evidence from adopters indicated that their initial response to enquiries and subsequent contact was very good. The administration manager of the service is also a qualified accountant, she impressed as being extremely knowledgeable of all aspects of the agency's work, which ensured sound administrative processes and an integrated approach.

Standard 21 (21.1 – 21.4)

There is an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff to meet the needs of the adoption agency and they are appropriately supported and assisted in providing a service.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

At the time of the inspection, Families for Children appeared to have had an adequate number of staff to fulfil its aims as set out in the statement of purpose. The staffing levels are reviewed annually by the director and administration manager, with support from the manager and the treasurer. A report is presented to the Fundraising, Finance and Human Resources Committee prior to full discussion with the Board of Trustees. There was evidence that this system worked well for the service; the trustees have proved to be adaptable, and appreciative of the challenges that arise at different times; and to the changing needs of the agency as the service develops.

Total number of social work staff of the agency	14	Number of staff who have left the agency in the past 12 months	2
Number of social work posts vacant	0		

Standard 22 (22.1 – 22.3)

The adoption agency is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Staff across the agency confirmed that Families for Children is a fair and flexible employer; they spoke of feeling very highly valued, and very well supported by the management team. The service has a stable, complementary team of social workers who are loyal to the agency, but also able to challenge and be challenged on issues. This was borne out throughout the inspection.

Families for Children has public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

Standard 23 (23.1 – 23.6)

There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?****3**

Families for Children impressed the inspectors as a learning organisation. Staff use research to inform service development and are generous to colleagues in the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Individual training needs are monitored through supervision and staff appraisal, and the service produces an appropriate annual training plan.

At the time of the inspection 5 social workers were undertaking PQ training, and 3 managers NVQ Management Level 5.

Standard 24 (24.1 – 24.9)

Complaints are resolved quickly and handled in a sensitive, thorough and non-biased manner.

Key Findings and Evidence**Standard met?**

3

Families for Children has an appropriate complaints policy and attendant procedures, in which all staff have been trained, and of which staff and adopters confirmed their understanding. The complaints procedure meets the National Minimum Standard.

There was evidence during the inspection of complaints being taken seriously by the agency, with timely and sensitive responses.

Number of complaints made by, or on behalf of a child, in the last year?

0

Number of the above complaints which were substantiated

0

Records

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- All appropriate records are maintained securely, kept and are accessible when required.

Standard 25 (25.1 – 25.5)

The adoption agency ensures comprehensive and accurate case records are maintained for each child, prospective and approved adopter with whom the agency has worked.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	2
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Families for Children keeps good records in relation to adopters and children. The files are well organised and case notes are typewritten. The agency was advised of the importance of social workers proofreading and signing records on their return from the administrative team.

Although there was confirmation from several sources that cases were discussed, and files examined during supervision; it was not corroborated by documentary evidence. Managers should ensure that records of case discussions and subsequent management decisions are kept on case files, and that they are signed and dated.

The pro-forma for supervision notes should be revised to include any action taken, when and by whom, to ensure continuity and consistency in the quality assurance of work.

The agency has clearly set out policies and procedures that cover all the points listed under 25.2 of the National Minimum Standards. There are manual and computerised indexes and case records for children and adopters; the manual register is stored in a safe, and the computerised database is backed up twice daily.

See Recommendation 6

Standard 26 (26.1 – 26.2)
The adoption agency provides all relevant information from its case files, in a timely way, to other adoption agencies and local authorities with whom it is working to effect the placement of a child.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Families for Children has well written policies and procedures governing the access to its records. However, these should be revised to take into account the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998.

The agency has a good system for the provision and safekeeping of information to appropriate parties. This was corroborated by comments in placing social workers' questionnaires. The agency keeps a record of all Forms F that leave the agency. All requests for access to adoption files are dealt with by a manager.

At the time of the inspection archived records were not stored in a manner that would minimise the risk of damage from fire or water. The agency asserted that this would be addressed by the move to different premises.

See Recommendation 7

Standard 27 (27.1 – 27.6)
There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format, confidentiality and contents of files, including secure storage and access to case files in line with regulations.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Families for Children has clearly set out policies and procedures to govern case recording which meet this standard. The agency keeps separate records for all staff; complaints and allegations. There is a system to monitor files which, as alluded to elsewhere in this report, requires tightening up. Records are stored securely and there is a written policy on access. Recording seen during the inspection was typewritten and clear. The agency has a system for storing complaints and allegations on the appropriate file in accordance with 27.6 of the National Minimum Standards.

Standard 28 (28.1 – 28.2)
Up-to-date, comprehensive personnel files are maintained for each member of staff and member of the adoption panel.

Key Findings and Evidence	Standard met?	3
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Families for Children maintains appropriate files for members of staff and the adoption panel, which meet the NMS and the regulations. The agency was seen to take a thorough approach to recruitment, with good safeguarding processes.

Fitness of Premises

The intended outcome for the following standard is:

- The premises used by the adoption agency are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 29 (29.1 – 29.5)

Premises used by the adoption agency are appropriate for the purpose.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

The premises from which Families for Children conducts its business are generally fit for purpose; and a move to different accommodation is envisaged sometime in 2005. The administration manager, who is also the health and safety officer, checks the functioning of all offices regularly. Each office has someone who is qualified in first aid.

The agency has efficient and robust administrative systems, which are overseen by the administration manager, who impressed during the inspection as being extremely proficient. All offices have facilities for the secure retention of records and there are appropriate safeguards for the IT systems.

The service has appropriate insurance and a disaster recovery plan.

Financial Requirements

The intended outcome for the following set of standards is:

- The Voluntary Adoption Agency is non-profit making and is financially viable.

Standard 30 (30.1 - 30.2)

The adoption agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Families for Children is apparently financially viable. Since receiving its charitable status, the agency has faced some challenges in relation to its financial viability; however at the time of this inspection the honorary treasurer of the Trust and the director, reported that the position was secure. There was evidence that the financial position of the agency is carefully monitored.

There are clearly written procedures to deal with potential situations of financial crisis.

Standard 31 (31.1 – 31.5)

The financial processes/systems are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

Key Findings and Evidence

Standard met?

3

Families for Children has apparently sound policies, procedures and records regarding all of its financial matters. The agency accounts are maintained and audited by a firm of chartered accountants. The annual audit had been undertaken just prior to this inspection and the service was awaiting the report.

The Fundraising, Finance and Human Resources sub-committee meets regularly with key personnel, and reports to the trustees.

The service has clearly written procedures to govern its financial management and the responsibility of the agency.

PART C

LAY ASSESSOR'S SUMMARY

(where applicable)

Lay Assessor _____ **Signature** _____
Date _____

D.1 Registered Person's comments/confirmation relating to the content and accuracy of the report for the above inspection.

We would welcome comments on the content of this report relating to the Inspection conducted on 14th February 2005 and any factual inaccuracies:

Please limit your comments to one side of A4 if possible

We are working on the best way to include provider responses in the published report. In the meantime responses received are available on request.

Action taken by the CSCI in response to the provider's comments:

Amendments to the report were necessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments were received from the provider	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments/factual amendments were incorporated into the final inspection report	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider comments are available on file at the Area Office but have not been incorporated into the final inspection report. The inspector believes the report to be factually accurate	<input type="checkbox"/>

Note:

In instances where there is a major difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider, both views will be made available on request to the Area Office.

D.2 Please provide the Commission with a written Action Plan by 27th May 2005 , which indicates how statutory requirements and recommendations are to be addressed and stating a clear timescale for completion. This will be kept on file and made available on request.

Status of the Provider's Action Plan at time of publication of the final inspection report:

Action plan was required	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan was received at the point of publication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan covers all the statutory requirements in a timely fashion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Action plan did not cover all the statutory requirements and required further discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provider has declined to provide an action plan	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <enter details here>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Public reports

It should be noted that all CSCI inspection reports are public documents.

D.3 PROVIDER'S AGREEMENT

Registered Person's statement of agreement/comments: Please complete the relevant section that applies.

D.3.1 I Caroline Davis of Families for Children Trust confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) and that I agree with the statutory requirements made and will seek to comply with these.

Print Name Caroline Davis
Signature _____
Designation Director
Date 26th May 2005

Or

D.3.2 I _____ of _____ am unable to confirm that the contents of this report are a fair and accurate representation of the facts relating to the inspection conducted on the above date(s) for the following reasons:

Print Name _____
Signature _____
Designation _____
Date _____

Note: In instance where there is a profound difference of view between the Inspector and the Registered Provider both views will be reported. Please attach any extra pages, as applicable.

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