

The Children's Family Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Children's Family Trust is a Registered Company Limited by Guarantee and is a Registered Charity. It acts as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and is administered by a Board of Trustees. As a Charity, the Trust is not a profit making organisation. The company head office is located in Worcester. The local north east area office comprises of a Registered Manager and three full-time qualified social workers. Appropriate administrative support is provided. The office has secure facilities to ensure that all information is maintained confidentially. The fostering panel serves two area offices, although there are plans to set up a separate panel locally in the north east region.

Summary

At this unannounced inspection all key standards were inspected.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Children are actively supported and encouraged to achieve their potential.

Staff are very well supervised and supported and this is extended to the foster carers. The careful selection of foster carers by the agency provides the children with safe and caring long-term placements. There is a passion among foster carers about their work with the children.

Safeguarding of the children's welfare is at the forefront of the work of this agency and both staff and foster carers demonstrate a professional approach to their work in this key area of responsibility.

Foster carers stated, 'from our perspective the Children's Family Trust have been a great support. We could not ask for much better and we are delighted to be a part of their team'.

The agency is efficiently managed with strong and effective leadership which promotes high professional standards.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

N/A

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The fostering agency is very proactive in ensuring that carers are aware of the specific health needs of the children. All health information is given to foster carers for each child before the placement commences. The communication between the social workers and foster carers is excellent, and they work together as a team to ensure that the children's health needs are fully met. The agency will provide specialist counselling and therapists for foster carers and children if required, at no extra cost. This is excellent practice and demonstrates a positive commitment to ensuring the health of the children and foster carers. Training is provided to enable foster carers to be competent in managing the health care needs of the children. This ensures that

they are supported and appropriately prepared to care for the children. Foster carers will be given additional training if children with special medical needs are placed with them. Particular health needs of individual children are fully assessed before a placement commences. Foster carers are given detailed health information to ensure that they are well prepared and able to provide safe high quality care for the children. The agency in partnership with foster carers has, over time, developed a robust and consistent way of working together for the benefit of the children. Effective liaison with other agencies and professionals have been developed to promote effective health care planning for the children who use the service.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The manager is responsible for all operational matters at this area office and reports directly to the organisation's head office in the Midlands.

The calibre of foster carers is high and they demonstrate a strong commitment to providing the children with long-term stable caring placements. Foster carers are well trained and safeguarding is at the forefront of their practice. The assessment process to select suitable carers is robust and thorough. Applicants are required to submit six references and four of these will be personally interviewed. In addition checks are carried with the local authority and a national child protection agency. This exceeds the national standards and reflects excellent practice. The agency ensures that those applicants who do not meet the high standards expected, are counselled out at the screening stage. Foster carers are expected to demonstrate that they are able to sustain a long-term commitment to the children placed with them.

Children are treated with respect and the matching process involves them, where appropriate, in decisions about the placement. The process is conducted at a pace to meet the child's needs. The service rarely accepts emergency placements and this ensures that the child is at the forefront of the matching activity. Records clearly indicate the detailed matching that takes place. Foster carers stated that the matching was 'very sensitive for both the child and ourselves'.

There are highly effective systems in place for ensuring that children are protected. Staff and foster carers are very well trained and safeguarding is at the forefront of practice. The service provides annual safeguarding training for all carers and this is supplemented with monthly supervision and unannounced visits to the home of carers. Detailed risk assessments are carried out on each placement that include a pet risk assessment. Foster carers have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and it is evident that these are taken seriously. The manager has established effective professional links with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for child protection. This relationship ensures that the manager is able to obtain advice and guidance in safeguarding matters. This arrangement enhances the development of the excellent practice at this agency and promotes the safety of the children.

The staff are all qualified experienced social workers. They have been appropriately trained to carry out their role as fostering social workers. Some staff have established effective links with the local university to participate in the selection of trainee social workers. This enhances their development and professional knowledge. Safeguarding is a key responsibility for staff and they demonstrate a detailed knowledge of child protection procedures. In addition, staff are positive about promoting equality and diversity. This ensures that the children are given the opportunity to develop their potential in a safe and caring environment.

The agency is currently served by a panel that is jointly shared with another office within the organisation. However, plans are at an advanced stage to establish a separate panel serving the north east. The quality of assessments reviewed by the panel is high. The membership of the panel complies with the regulations. The positive and rigorous scrutiny of reports by the panel ensures only those that meet the high standards are recommended for approval. This encourages high standards and promotes the safety of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency strongly supports equality and diversity. Staff and foster carers have a positive approach to diversity and are enthusiastic about helping the children to achieve their potential. The policies and procedures explicitly promote diversity and stress the importance of achieving a high standard of care for the children. The children are positively supported to achieve their educational potential. In addition, the agency provides the services of an educational adviser who offers excellent support for children who experience difficulties in the school setting. This support has proved invaluable for a number of children who are now attending school normally. The adviser will offer one-to-one tuition, support in the classroom setting and act as an educational advocate for children over particular issues. This service is provided at no cost to the placing local authority. This is a positive approach to equality and diversity. All children currently placed by the agency are attending full-time education. Foster parents said of the adviser, 'she helped our child to learn how to feel safe in the classroom after a lengthy absence, she is brilliant'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency actively supports and promotes family contact where it is in the best interests of the young people. This is emphasised through training and support for foster carers who feel confident in their role during contact arrangements. Children are satisfied with the way contact is carried out. The consistent support from their foster carers enables them to cope with these often sensitive situations.

The agency has well-established systems for children to participate in discussions about their placements and future plans. All children and young people are encouraged to attend their formal reviews. They are supported by the social worker to record their feelings about their placement. The agency values feedback and all foster carers and young people are sent a questionnaire annually to give their views about the service. However, this questionnaire is not suitable for children with learning difficulties or those who experience reading problems. A user-friendly children's guide is given to all young people at the time of their placement. This provides good information about how to make a complaint, and includes the provision of useful contact details. Foster carers are regularly consulted about any changes affecting the way the service is operated. A newsletter is sent out to all carers with information about the agency and good news items.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers play a crucial part in preparing young people for their independence and the agency provides training to equip carers for this role. They take part, where appropriate, in

planning meetings and liaise with other professionals involved in the leaving care process. Foster carers teach the young people about budgeting for food, electricity, heating, rent and social life skills. Training opportunities are available for foster carers to develop their role in preparing young people for adulthood. Foster carers see their role extending beyond the confines of the home once a young person leaves them. They regard the young people who leave care as part of their family and normal contact is actively maintained. This is very good practice.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The staff and foster carers have an excellent approach and commitment to achieving the potential of the children in their care. Foster carers are excellent role models for the children and they actively support them to become confident members of the community. The agency works in partnership with foster carers to ensure an inclusive culture where respect and valuing differences prevails. The promotion of individual needs enables children from diverse backgrounds to flourish. Excellent work has been achieved with children who have previously experienced difficulty in coping with full-time education.

The agency has a clear statement outlining the principles and ethos of the service. The statement, however, does not currently list the qualifications of staff.

The manager is responsible for monitoring and the development of good practice. There are very good systems in place to enable the manager to assess the performance of the staff and carers to ensure that standards are consistently maintained. The focus is on achieving positive outcomes for the children and operating an efficient service.

The staff demonstrate a highly professional commitment to their work. They are focussed on ensuring that their foster carers receive strong support and encouragement to assist them in their tasks as carers. The manager undertakes monthly formal supervision of each member of staff. It is evident that this is an efficiently managed service and staff clearly feel valued by the manager and the wider organisation. Some spoke about the manager as 'always on hand to give advice and guidance'. All workloads are controlled by the manager who ensures that staff are well trained and competent to carry out their tasks. They are supported by an efficient administrative team who carry out their tasks with positive enthusiasm supporting the professional staff.

The agency has a clear strategy working with the foster carers. There are robust arrangements in place for out of office hours support. Foster carers enjoy working with this agency and spoke positively about the staff, 'from our perspective the team have been a great support, we could not ask for much better, and we are delighted to be part of their team'. A well-established training programme enables carers to develop their skills and competences. All training takes account of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. The service has a flexible approach to training venues and times to enable all carers to participate. A system of monthly supervision and annual reviews of foster carers ensures that standards are maintained and training requirements are identified. This promotes the safety and good care of the children.

All records are kept secure and these contain relevant information about each foster carer and the children placed with them. The quality of information is excellent with evaluative analysis

of how each placement is progressing. The files are very well maintained and easy to navigate for information. The files are, however, somewhat bulky with historical information. Confidential records kept in foster homes are maintained in secure conditions.

The agency provides staff with appropriate office facilities to enable the staff to carry out their duties. In addition the agency has set up systems to enable staff to work from home and maintain a link with the office through use of up-to-date information technology. There are good security alarm systems in place.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- ensure that the Statement of Purpose includes details of the numbers and relevant qualifications of staff (NMS 1.4)
- ensure suitable means are provided, frequently, for any child with communication difficulties to make their feelings known regarding their care and treatment. (NMS 11.4)