

# Family Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC384460
<b>Inspection date</b>	11 May 2009
<b>Inspector</b>	Chris Fuller / Janet Manders
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

---

<b>Address</b>	Unit 4 Wildwood Triangle Swineswood Way Worcester WR5 2QX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01905 673349
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:martin@familyfostercare.co.uk">martin@familyfostercare.co.uk</a>
<b>Registered person</b>	Foster Family Care Ltd
<b>Registered manager</b>	Colin Groves
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Robert Martin Rae
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	19 November 2008

---

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: [www.tso.co.uk/bookshop](http://www.tso.co.uk/bookshop)

## 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**

Family Foster Care is based in Worcestershire and provides placements for young people from local authorities in the Midlands region. The agency aim to provide a wide range of placements for Looked After Children and Young People, including: long-term placements, short-term placements, emergency placements, bridging placements, respite placements, solo placements, parent and child placements, asylum seeking young people placements and sibling placements. High value is given to ensuring young people are placed with suitable families who are able to meet the needs of the young people in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, gender and age. Information sharing and working together are considered essential to the success of any placements. The agency will do their utmost to help promote the welfare of any young person placed in their care.

### **Summary**

This is the first announced full inspection of this independent fostering agency. It focuses on 21 of the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) relevant to this fostering service. Standards 14 and 32 in respect of preparing for adulthood and family and friend carers have not been addressed on this occasion. The standards relate to the outcome areas of health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of additional standards relating to the management of the agency, the supervision of foster carers, premises and financial viability.

Family Foster Care is a relatively new agency, which approved its first foster carers in March 2009. The first placement was provided in April 2009 for a young person already in placement with foster carers transferring from another agency. Family Foster Care is judged as satisfactory overall. The agency has good outcomes in being healthy, enabling young people to enjoy and achieve their potential and in encouraging young people to positively contribute to planning their care. Foster carers receive high levels of supervision and support to help them safeguard young people. The agency satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity for staff, foster carers and young people.

The inspection found shortfalls in managing effectively and efficiently, incomplete formats for foster carer agreements and fostering placement agreements and at times incomplete record keeping. Additionally, there is no robust system for monitoring the operation of the agency. There are actions and recommendations in respect of the above mentioned issues. This means it is not sufficiently robust to underpin and evidence effective systems to achieve positive outcomes for young people. However, Family Foster Care is a new service, with a strong ethos and commitment to developing a child centred service.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

This is a new fostering service with no previous actions or recommendations.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Young people's health needs are well met by their foster carers, who are supported in this task by the Fostering Service. Health care plans address any issues that arise out of the child's ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality, faith or belief. The young people's files hold comprehensive risk assessments including health issues. The foster carers are advised and supported in accessing all suitable services as highlighted in the individual care plan, such as dental, medical and optician as well as specialised services such as mental health services for children and young people.

The agency developed a Child's Health Passport. This is a record of the development, and all medical, dental and other health appointments required by a young person. It also includes a record of all accidents, allergies and illnesses. Foster carers state, 'Family foster carer ensure they receive monthly reports on each young person and also have face to face contact with them during visits.'

Foster carers receive mandatory training in health related topics including diet, nutrition and first aid. They are provided with lots of written information regarding health issues, for example, drugs awareness, healthy diet and lifestyles. Young people confirm that they are encouraged and supported in pursuing activities and exercise, such as, walking, swimming and horse riding. Foster carers have suitable safe storage of medication in lockable cupboards and the handbook for foster carers has copies of all relevant medication and health recording formats.

The agency has established access to medical and health advisors for different aspects of the service. The fostering panel has access to a medical advisor and two health care professionals sit on panel. The agency has access to specialist support of a medical advisor, who specialises in young people and a Family Counsellor, specialising in substance misuse. This ensures young people and foster carers have access to appropriate resources and a good standard of health care to achieve good health outcomes for young people.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people are kept safe by foster carers and the Fostering Service through the provision of suitable foster carers and the support of comprehensive guidance and training, however, a failure to share all information with foster carers could put young people at risk.

Family Foster Care Ltd is an independent fostering provider, it is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985. In accordance with this act it has a Board of Directors who meet on a regular basis and are responsible for the corporate governing of the agency. One of the directors is a representative on the joint fostering panel. The Responsible Individual and Registered Manager of the fostering agency both have considerable previous experience within the social care sector and more recently with an independent fostering agency. The Registered Manager has enrolled on the National Vocational Qualification Level 4 in Management. All personnel have satisfactorily completed the required checks as suitable people to be managing the service and promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young people.

The young people are placed with foster carers who have been assessed as being able to meet the child's needs, ensuring the welfare of the young person is safeguarded. A comprehensive Health and Safety assessment of the foster carer's household is completed during the foster carers assessment and it is reviewed annually. The agency has established good practice with

an informative format including actions to be taken and shows the follow up confirmation of completion of the action being recorded, signed and dated. There is a Pet questionnaire to be completed for any pets, such as, dogs and cats as part of the assessment of foster carers. The mandatory training programme for foster carer's includes safe working topics to develop foster carer's understanding of the issues.

The agency has a strong ethos which places meeting young people's needs central to the service development and delivery. The matching process is considered to be crucial for establishing sound foundations for stability and continuity in the placement. The agency supports young people transferring from other fostering services to ensure they receive all relevant information and support prior to and post placement. Initial referrals and proposed placements will only be confirmed where a suitable placement match can be made and foster carers are able to meet the needs of the young person. Foster carers state, 'the agency places a high priority on the matching of young people with appropriately skilled and experienced foster carers'.

Foster carers are given training in child protection and safe caring skills. This is supported by a range of clear and concise policies and procedures including those relating to behaviour management, child protection and safeguarding. Foster carers are asked to complete their own safe caring plans to be developed and shared with family members and young people in placement. This is very detailed and includes the agency's guidance as well as the action to be taken by the foster carer. Clear detailed risk assessments are carried out pre-placement where applicable and updated as necessary to ensure any potential risks are addressed to keep young people safe. Foster carers stated they do not use physical intervention but provide clear house rules and supervise and support young people to diffuse any difficult behaviour. Young people are familiar with a range of house rules and consider these to be fair and reasonable and help to make the household safe. The agency provides information to young people and foster carers about the prevention of bullying. Young people are given a welcome pack that includes various ways to access support and advice with useful contact details.

The foster carers transferring from other agencies and new applicants and staff all go through the same process for checks and suitability to ensure the welfare of children and young people is safeguarded. Three references are taken up for employees and two of these are personal. All are followed up with a telephone interview which is recorded. The agency take suitability seriously and ensure all checks are completed before taking an assessment to panel. Criminal bureau reference checks are completed through an umbrella organisation and administered in a safe and secure manner. The agency has a clear recruitment and selection policy and procedure for staff and foster carers.

The fostering panel can demonstrate some good outcomes for children and young people. The chairperson and members show appropriate understanding of the needs of children. Panel members are subject to the relevant checks and receive induction training. Following some initial difficulties as a new and joint panel with administration good progress is being made by an efficient and effective chairperson and administrator in implementing improvements. The business of the panel meeting was completed in a timely manner with due consideration of members comments and queries and appropriate consultation with the assessor and prospective foster carer/s. There are no formal quality assurance systems in place and management acknowledge this is an aspect of the service they are in the process of developing. Although a feedback form has been introduced to the panel members for completion at the end of panel, as yet, there is no indication how this information will be collated or used.

The panel consists of a good mix of members in terms of ethnic, cultural, religious, language, gender, experience and professional backgrounds. Insightful and reflective contributions were made to considerations of a variety of issues arising from assessments relating to culture, language, gender and educational. Foster carers who attended panel found it to be a well balanced panel which made carers feel welcome and provided a positive experience. Managers, staff and foster carers and all relevant adults are generally appropriately vetted and have sufficient skill, training and information to meet the needs of the children.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is good.

The fostering service promotes equality and values diversity. However, as the agency is new, it needs time to demonstrate that it fully embraces its equal opportunities statements. Policies and procedures should enable the agency to meet the diverse needs of young people referred for placements.

The agency have developed referral and matching documents, which will assess them to obtain all relevant information regarding a young person's needs to enable an appropriate match to be made so the specific needs of the young person's culture or ethnicity can be met. Where it is not possible to find a perfect match, provision will be put in place to support foster carers in meeting the needs of the young people. Foster carers receive training to enable them to understand how they can meet the diverse needs of young people. The foster placement agreement does not fully outline the foster carers role and where financial responsibility lies for the school costs including school uniform, school trips and school equipment.

Young people placed with foster carers are encouraged to enjoy and achieve as staff and carers are aware of the importance of promoting individual needs within the foster placement. There are examples of foster carers working effectively to build the sense of identity of young people from black minority ethnic backgrounds. Foster carers encourage young people to participate in their religion and develop a positive sense of identity. Foster carers support children and young people to access a wide range of groups, activities and resources in the community. They help them to build positive peer relationships. This enables them to develop self-esteem and social skills.

The agency promotes young people's education and puts in place strategies to enable young people to develop self-confidence and self esteem to assist them in meeting their potential. The agency has in place good policies, procedures and support to ensure that young people's educational needs are met.

Foster carers are positive about the benefits of education. They provide study facilities, equipment and assistance with homework to help young people to complete their school work. They attend parent evenings and build links in communication with teachers to effectively support young people.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

The agency encourages and supports young people to make a positive contribution to the planning of their care, including the arrangements for contact with their family and friends.

Contact arrangements are considered as part of the matching process to ensure that the carer can meet the complex needs of young people's contact arrangements; this includes a risk assessment to ensure that all arrangements are safe.

Foster carers provide good support to young people to maintain their contact with family and friends, where this is consistent with the young person's care plan. Foster carers observe and record information on the impact of contact to inform care planning for children and young people and discuss issues relating to contact in regular supervision sessions. This sound practice in supporting contact contributes to the development of emotional stability in children and young people.

The agency consults with young people and all interested parties to ensure that the agency meets the needs of the young people placed with its foster carers and continues to improve. Supervising social workers meet and talk with young people so as to offer them opportunities to raise issues about their placement or care plans. The agency is proactive in ensuring that the views of young people are taken into consideration.

Young people are aware of how to make a complaint and are provided with information as to who to contact and what support is available to them; this information is included in the Children's Guide. However, the information does not contain information about contacting the regulatory. The agency provides a help line for young people to access by telephone, operated by an independent person if they have any concerns.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The individual needs of young people are being addressed regarding personal, social and cultural issues. This is demonstrated, for example, range of health services for young people, support and inclusion of young people and their foster carers in social events and diversity in panel membership and their constructive criticism of foster carer assessments.

The Statement of Purpose provides clear basic information covering all required topics including, aims and objectives; company status and structure; Foster Carer recruitment, approval, support, review and training; Services; Complaints and foster carers and children. The agency has produced a welcome pack for young people in the form of a helpful ring binder folder. It has coloured pictorial images and useful information issued to young people upon admission to foster carer's. This includes house rules, what to do if there is a problem, complaints process, contact details of the director and Registered Manager and advisory agencies contact details.

The agency has a small management team supported by a board of directors with a membership of three. All individuals have specific experience, qualifications, skills and expertise but are new to the business and management of a fostering service. The agency has limited quality assurance systems in place this means there are no existing measures of outcomes for young people that inform the development of the service. The agency has produced a feedback sheet for foster carers comments following attendance at panel meetings and this will contribute to the quality assurance process. Consideration is being given to contacting external independent monitoring



of service delivery. The Registered Manager has been fulfilling a wide range of duties in the initial stages with no staff employed and no administration. The focus has been to set up the office, systems, policy and procedures and infrastructure for the business. Whilst some staff have been contracted specifically to complete assessments the Registered Manager has continued to complete assessments, recruitment of carers, administration and support to foster carer duties in addition to any management role. This means there is potential for a lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities which may potentially be unhelpful in working relationships with foster carers. The agency does not have a conflict of interest policy to inform and clarify agency expectations and practice in this area.

The service is gradually developing and with this the role of the manager and organisation of staff is gradually changing. The policies and procedures are in place for the supervision of staff and management demonstrate a clear commitment to supporting staff through induction and joint visits. Whilst there are no administration staff the management have established an infrastructure to support the administration functions and provide staff with technology and resources to complete their tasks. Electronic information is dealt with in a confidential manner and is password protected.

The agency has one part-time member of staff in addition to contracted workers who complete assessments of foster carers. As the agency is developing additional staff are being appointed to fulfil roles and responsibilities. Contingency plans of contracted staff have been effective in completing assessments and processing applications of foster carers. The recruitment of new foster carers has been through advertising and word of mouth. Some of the applicants have withdrawn from the recruitment and selection process. The agency has not kept the required details of an applicant where the agency decided not to pursue the application and assessment. This demonstrates a limited knowledge and understanding of the agency's responsibilities. In contrast to this there are some aspects of very good practice with second opinion visits being undertaken by the team manager after the assessor has completed the Form F. This ensures that all issues have been covered and that the prospective foster carer is fully aware of the expectations of the agency. The medical advisor provides guidance as to the suitability of applicants and indicates if there are issues that should be explored during assessments. As the service progresses comprehensive assessments are carried out by independent assessors, these include robust analysis of the applicants, skills, experience and knowledge. However, one assessment of an applicant was processed inappropriately which indicates an ineffective recruitment process with no secondary or objective monitoring of the selection and assessment systems.

The management provide good levels of supervision and support to staff and foster carers with written records of sessions being provided. The agency promotes good working relationships through social events and meetings.

The foster carers agreement is a useful and detailed document, however, there are omissions to the document that has the potential to impact on the foster carers ability to understand their duties, those of the agency and in providing the care to young people. The shortfalls are as follows: a lack of information regarding co-operation with the inspectorate; the expectation to comply with the child protection policy and measures of control policy; the requirement to inform the agency if they make a request to adopt or child mind; any legal liability arrangements, the amount of support and training to be provided to the foster carer and the terms of the foster carer's approval.

The agency makes a commitment to the training and development of staff and foster carers with in-house training and contracted training services to ensure mandatory and child care topics are covered. Foster carers stated that as they were unable to attend the skills to foster training an assessor undertook training with them on an individual level. Other carers who had not yet received training had received lots of written information and guidance, for example, drugs awareness, healthy lifestyles. The fostering panel members also receive training on their functions and responsibilities.

There are sufficient individual records for young people which contain satisfactory significant information required by regulations. However, records are not always signed by the individual and therefore it is not possible to identify who has recorded information. Some of the visits made to the foster carers by the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager had not been noted. This means the records are not truly reflective of the visits made to foster carers households and the experiences of the young people. Recording processes and systems are being reviewed with a view to establishing a computerised information system. The agency has developed a register for young people who are placed with foster carers. This covers all but one area required by Schedule 2.

The premises used as offices by the fostering agency are appropriate to the purpose. The company has a financial director who provides business advice and guidance. There is a business plan that is reviewed by the board of directors. An annual audit of accounts is completed by an external finance agency. The management have considerable experience and knowledge of children's needs and childcare services. The agency has established sound business infrastructure and systems from which to develop the fostering service and provide positive outcomes for young people.

## 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
11	ensure the foster placement agreement contains all the information which the authority considers necessary to enable the foster parent to care for the child Regulation 34(3) Schedule 6	31 July 2009
11	ensure arrangements are made for staff, foster carers, children and young people to have access to information which would enable them to contact the area authority and Ofsted regarding any concern about child welfare or safety Regulation 12(f)	31 July 2009
24	ensure that the foster carer agreement contains the information they need to know, in a comprehensible style to carry out their functions as a foster carer effectively Regulation 28(5)(b) Schedule 5	31 July 2009

25	ensure the records compiled under Regulation 30(5) shall be retained for at least three years from the refusal or withdrawal, as the case may be, of the application to become a foster parent Regulation 32 (3)	31 July 2009
25	maintain and keep up to date the records specified in Schedule 2, including the foster carer's register and the children's register. Regulation 31 and 22	31 July 2009

## Recommendations

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

- ensure all personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate recruitment and selection procedures (NMS 15.2)
- ensure the fostering panel provides a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process (NMS 30.5)
- ensure there are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance (NMS 4.1)
- ensure there are clear roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers (NMS 4.2)
- provide a conflict of interest policy (NMS 4.5)
- ensure there is a clearly set out assessment process for carers which defines the stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved (NMS 17.6)
- ensure written entries in records are legible, clearly expressed, non stigmatising, and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information. (NMS 25.9)