

# Five Rivers Child Care Ltd.

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Responsible individual</b>	Richard Marshall Cross
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	10/12/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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**

Five Rivers Family Placement Scheme in Devon and Cornwall is an independent fostering service providing the following range of foster care services: long-term or permanent care; time-limited or temporary care, emergency care; and parent and child care.

The service is part of Five Rivers Family Placement Service, which is a national independent provider of residential childcare services. It aims to provide professional, sustained and suitable fostering and residential placements, and other supporting services. These include education, supervision of contact, or initial therapeutic assessments, for children and young people with needs that require a specialist service.

The service is based in Exeter, with a recently opened sub-office in Truro.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced full inspection which focused on the national minimum standards for foster care and progress made in implementing the recommendations arising from the previous inspection. This service operates across a large geographical area and has two office locations located some considerable distance apart.

The service is judged as satisfactory, however, the service has many good features and in some areas, practice is outstanding. Young people achieve good outcomes and are kept safe by the service. Young people's health and education are promoted by the agency and they are well supported in maintaining family and community contacts, which help them develop a good understanding of their background and identity. Clear strengths of the service are the quality of supervision and training provided for carers, and the expansion of the therapeutic focus on work with young people since the last inspection is highly valued by most foster carers. The quality of relationships between children and foster carers is very good, and most carers feel valued by the service. There are sound policies and procedures in place to support good childcare practice. Foster carers and agency staff advocate strongly on behalf of children. The quality of foster carer assessments is rigorous and there are good systems in place for matching children with carers.

The Registered Manager provides good leadership and clear direction, however, this service operates from two offices located approximately 90 miles apart and covers a very wide area of the West Country. All of the records used by the sub-office are held in the main office, leading to lengthy journeys in order to maintain and regularly

audit records. The agency is aware of the difficulties this structure causes and is seeking to address management structures and sufficiency of administrative staff, however, this work is not yet completed. As a result there are a number of weaknesses in the quality of record keeping, and regular auditing of records. As a result organisation has been judged as satisfactory. Despite these shortfalls the quality of outcomes for children and young people remains good.

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

At the previous inspection three recommendations were made.

The service provider has implemented the following changes to address these recommendations. The first was to review that the office accommodation was suitable to meet the needs of the service. One of the two offices has moved into new accommodation since the last inspection.

The second was to ensure that all staff receive a performance appraisal each year. The agency has recently introduced a programme of annual appraisals and this recommendation is now met.

The final recommendation was to review the number of staff available to administer the service. Since the last inspection the numbers were initially reduced; recently there has been an agreement to increase administrative hours, however, these are not yet in place and the recommendation is repeated.

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

The provision is good.

Young people's physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted by the provision of placements with carers who are aware of their role in the promotion of all aspects of young people's health. Young people say that they are offered good advice on how to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles. All young people are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician. Young people may retain their existing health professional or are able to choose a doctor within a new practice of their preference, if that is not possible. Carers have good links with other health professionals, such as looked after children nurses, child and adolescent mental health services or specialist counsellors or therapists, ensuring that the physical, emotional and psychological needs of young people can be met. Specialist health services are available to all young people should they be necessary. Foster carers say that the introduction of networks of carers and training in more therapeutic approaches to managing behaviour helps them become more skilled in meeting complex needs.

Foster carers are provided with as much information on the health needs of young people to enable them to be able to meet any identified need. Any shortfall in information is sought prior to placement or as soon as is possible. Some foster carers say there can be some delay in gaining the information, but they have access to all

the information held by the agency and communication between supervising social workers and themselves is very good. Appropriate medical consents are obtained as part of the placement planning process which reduces any delay in gaining emergency treatment. Most young people's health needs are well recorded, however, not all young people have personal health plans in place. All carers receive training in first aid, and any accidents, injuries or medical interventions are recorded by carers along with any medicines taken by young people.

Robust assessments of carers and good matching ensure that the foster home is able to meet young people's physical needs. Any specialist adaptations that may be required or specialist training for carers are considered at the time a placement is being considered. Regular health and safety checks are carried out to reduce any risk to young people; some visits are unannounced.

Foster carers' supervising social workers regularly monitor developments in children's placements, including any health needs.

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

The provision is good.

Young people say that they feel safe and that foster carers help to support them in developing strategies to keep themselves safe. Relationships between carers and young people are generally very good, and carers are able to encourage open discussion about any issues that may be causing concern to young people, such as personal relationships, issues about culture and identity and any health concerns. Foster carers work with young people to address any concerns young people may have about bullying, including keeping themselves safe when accessing the internet and using mobile telephones. All carers are trained in safeguarding awareness and have a family safe-care policy, which is understood by all people living in the family. This is regularly monitored by their social workers in supervision. Foster carers work effectively as part of a network of professionals in promoting the safety of children and young people.

Foster carers are aware of the protocols to be followed if a young person is missing from home and are clear about the limits of their powers to prevent a young person from leaving the home without consent. All foster carers spoken with report good on-call support by the agency in and out of office hours. They are confident that they know what action to take if a young person is missing from home. The agency provides clear information, advice and support to carers, should a young person be missing from home. The agency ensures that all appropriate agencies are notified of the absence of any child.

## Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are very well supported in developing positive behaviours, by carers who set high, but realistic expectations of children, that take into account their personal development and previous experiences. Foster carers say that they are provided with excellent training and supervision, which enables them to work effectively with young people. The agency is continuing to develop a series of localised 'hub' groups of six to eight carers which meet regularly with a therapeutic practitioner, play therapist and are managed by a therapeutic consultant. Foster carers say that this is an excellent development and provides them with a more therapeutic focus to their work with children who display complex behaviours. Foster carers' skills are further increased by a comprehensive post-approval training programme which enables carers to develop a wider knowledge of the causation of specific behaviours enabling them to work with young people in an open and positive manner to address behavioural and emotional issues. Young people's behaviours are managed in a manner that is age appropriate. Practice in this area is excellent and a strength of the service. Feedback from some placing social workers indicates that the skills of foster carers and levels of support and supervision of carers enable highly successful outcomes for young people.

Foster carers display a thorough knowledge of young people's backgrounds and say that they are always given all of the information that the agency has in order to ensure that they are able to meet children's needs. Carers support young people in challenging any discrimination they may face and will liaise with other agencies such as schools and will act as advocates on behalf of young people.

Young people are encouraged to participate in a range of leisure activities both within the home and the community that will develop social skills and increase confidence and self-esteem. Any existing hobbies or interests are supported where possible and foster carers recognise and celebrate achievements by young people. All activities are risk assessed and agreed with placing social workers. The agency promotes young people being taken on holiday by carers in accordance with the plan for the care of each young person.

Young people's education is promoted by foster carers who take a proactive role in liaising with schools, colleges and other agencies in order for young people to achieve their educational potential. They are supported in this by their supervising social workers. Foster carers are fully involved in monitoring young people's progress at school and this is monitored regularly by the agency. Carers attend school events such as open evenings, concerts and will attend parents' evenings. Young people say that they are provided with suitable facilities at home to complete school work or projects and are supported by carers in doing so. If any young people are excluded from school, foster carers liaise directly with schools to re-establish school placements; if necessary the agency will also negotiate with schools on young people's behalf. Additional support is offered to foster carers by the agency if children are excluded from school; this support is highly valued by foster carers.

All young people are looked after in homes that are suitable to meet their needs. The agency sets clear expectations that the homes of prospective carers are of sufficient size, have adequate safety measures in place and are suitable to accommodate young people prior to commencing an assessment. Throughout the assessment and pre-approval training, assessing social workers ensure that prospective carers are fully aware and provided with guidance on health and safety. Minutes of the fostering panel provide evidence of regular discussion concerning health and safety and risk management within foster carers' homes. All foster carers have annual health and safety checks including at least one unannounced visit each year. Risk assessments cover the premises, the environment, activities and equipment or any animals kept by the foster carers. Any notified concerns are appropriately followed up by supervising social workers. Feedback from young people confirms that most young people enjoy where they are living and say that their privacy is respected.

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

The provision is good.

Young people are given information in the young person's guide about how to make a complaint if they wish and staff and carers will provide support to young people should they wish to raise a complaint. Most young people say they know who to speak with if they wish to make a complaint.

All young people are provided with highly individualised packages of care that consider their individual needs and circumstances. Foster carers and staff receive training in valuing diversity. The agency challenges attitudes and prejudices robustly during the assessment of carers, at approval panel and in ongoing supervision and training. Foster carers are supported in working closely with young people and their families in promoting and exploring young people's religious, cultural and ethnic needs along with issues of personal choice such as lifestyles and sexuality. Young people are actively supported in maintaining local community contacts through involvement with groups such as religious and community groups. For example, some young people say that foster carers support them in maintaining cultural links and that they seek appropriate support in areas where they lack knowledge or experience. Young people are encouraged to develop personal and social skills that will enable them to live within the wider community and make a smooth transition from childhood to more independent living.

Young people are placed with foster carers who are best able to meet their needs through a rigorous matching process. The agency also monitors the ability of existing carers to meet placement needs, which informs the recruitment strategy, and the ability to recruit carers that are able to meet local placement need.



## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people are supported in developing good life and social skills, in order to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood. This is largely achieved by an informal programme of encouraging young people to take increasing individual responsibility and involvement in decision making and planning for their futures in accordance with their age and ability. The agency has developed a life skills workbook for foster carers to use with young people as they prepare to move on from care. Foster carers receive training and are supported by supervising social workers in promoting greater independence for young people. Foster carers liaise and work in partnership with leaving care workers to ensure that pathway plans are developed and maintained. The agency is proactive in ensuring that placing authorities continue to provide guidance and support to young people through their transition to adulthood.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency seeks the views and wishes of young people and their families by the use of questionnaires and involvement in the annual review of carers. Supervising social workers also seek the views of young people as part of their supervisory visits to foster carers. Any concerns or views expressed by young people about the quality of their care are discussed at the time and reported to senior managers. Wherever possible young people are invited to visit foster carers prior to the placement being made and their views about the suitability of placements are sought. Young people are also invited to attend placement reviews and say that their views and wishes are taken into consideration. They may also be provided with an advocate or mentor if the placing authority is in agreement. However, despite this process, not all young people feel fully consulted on the day-to-day running of the agency. Young people say that they are kept fully informed of any decisions made about their placement and that they are always told the reasons why their views cannot always be implemented. The agency also considers the views and wishes of the children of foster carers, and will provide additional support to foster families if required.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people's individual needs are clearly identified and foster carers demonstrate a good understanding of young people's backgrounds, histories and how those individual needs will be met. Young people are supported and encouraged to maintain or develop new community links in order to maintain their cultural heritage. A strength of the agency is in providing individually tailored packages of care to meet the diverse needs of young people.

All prospective foster carers undergo a rigorous assessment and training programme prior to presentation to approval panel. This includes a residential weekend for foster carers and their families. Assessments are detailed and identify specific competencies held by carers in order to meet the needs of children and young people. Foster

carers say that the assessment and approval process can be intrusive and challenging, however, they fully understand the need for the agency to challenge personal views and attitudes. All statutory checks are completed prior to prospective carers being referred to panel. The panel which is used to approve and review foster carers from this branch is held some considerable distance away. All carers are invited to attend the approval panel, but because of the significant distances involved, neither the foster carers nor supervising social workers attend panel for subsequent reviews or changes of approval. Not all foster carer agreements hold accurate information, nor do they accord with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The functioning of the fostering panel was not inspected on this occasion; the panel was visited by an Ofsted inspector from the area in which the panel meets, and no recommendations were made with regard to the functioning of that panel. The minutes of three panel meetings were made available for this inspection. These showed that the panel was appropriately established on those dates and thorough in the business conducted. Appropriate minutes are maintained.

Young people benefit from a thorough matching process that carefully assesses their needs and links them to carers who have the skills to meet those needs. Any shortfalls in experience or skills can be met by additional training or support provided for carers. Foster carers say that while some information may not always be provided by placing social workers, they are given access to all information held by the agency. All young people have an individual risk assessment, which is linked to foster carers' skills and competencies. Young people are usually given the opportunity to visit prior to placement.

The Registered Manager has substantial experience in family placement work and provides very clear leadership and direction for the staff. The manager is suitably qualified and is currently registered with the General Social Care Council. There have been a number of changes recently to the senior management team and plans are in place to redevelop the service. However, the branch consists of two offices, one of which is regarded as a sub-office and as such does not hold any of the files and records held in the main office. This means that staff have to travel some considerable distance to maintain and audit those records. As a result numerous records are not well maintained, and not effectively monitored. The Registered Manager has insufficient time to work equally across both locations.

The main office has moved to a new location since the last inspection and is now suitable for the purposes of providing the service. There are adequate electronic systems in place to safely store and back up all electronically held data. All manual records for both offices are securely held and the premises are adequately secure. The sub-office remains in the same location as previously, The office accommodation is on the first floor and does not provide easy access for people with restricted mobility. This office also shares two rooms on the same floor with another service; this compromises privacy and security, for example, if supervised contact is taking place, a client or provider of a completely unrelated service could observe or gain access to confidential information. Both services have developed and expanded since

the last inspection; some staff have commented that the service now has insufficient administrative time across the two locations.

The financial viability of the service is monitored by the manager and senior managers, against cost and volume targets and by regular contract monitoring meetings with commissioning agents. The quality of the service is regularly monitored by the Registered Manager and regular monitoring reports are produced for senior managers. To date no reports identifying patterns and trends and management action taken have been provided for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

Young people's safety is promoted by robust recruitment systems for foster carers and staff. All staff and carers receive regular supervision and there are good systems in place for foster carer development. Foster carers say that the training offered to them by the company is comprehensive and there is a high level of satisfaction in the training and development programme offered to carers. Most staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal scheme is being introduced for all staff. The agency has appointed a new staff development team; however, this work is still being progressed and at present not all staff have access to a comprehensive training strategy.

Most carers say that payments are made regularly and on time, however, some say there is a lack of clarity regarding how the payments are made up and what it is that carers are being paid for.

All foster carers receive regular training in safeguarding awareness; this is regularly renewed and supported by regular supervision and ongoing training. Carers understand the need to report any significant incident to the agency on-call service. The agency has a safeguarding policy which is known to staff and carers. All safeguarding concerns or allegations are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer and all staff and managers display a sound knowledge of safeguarding procedures. There is a system for notifying appropriate agencies of any significant events in a timely manner.

Young people and foster carers are invited to attend placement planning meetings and placement reviews. Young people confirm that their views and wishes are considered in meetings and that foster carers and agency staff will ensure that their views are expressed at meetings. Any meetings that become overdue are chased by carers and their supervising social workers. There are good links between fostering agency staff and independent reviewing officers.

Young people's case records are generally well constructed, however, they do not all hold all of the information required, for example personal education plans, signed placement agreements and health plans. Monthly file audits are not always completed.

## **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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
27 (2011)	ensure that all foster carer agreements fully accord with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, and specifically accurately record the date of approval (Regulation 27 (5))	31/07/2011
35 (2011)	ensure that the registered person provides the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review of the quality of care at regular intervals. (Regulation 35 (2))	01/10/2011

## Recommendations

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

- ensure that all young people have a personal health care plan in order to ensure that identified health needs are met in accordance with their placement plan (NMS 6.5)
- review the responsibilities and duties of the manager, particularly in relation to effective monitoring of the service across both sites (NMS 17.4)
- ensure that all entries in records are legible, clearly expressed, signed and dated by the person making the entry and hold all essential information (NMS 26.5)
- ensure that there is a good quality learning and development programme available to all staff, which keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments (NMS 23.1)
- ensure that the payments information provided for carers sets out clearly the criteria for making payments (NMS 28.5)
- ensure that the fostering service is organised and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care. Namely that it has sufficient administrative staff to support local managers and staff effectively. (NMS 17.5)