

Regional Foster Placements (South West) Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC062999
Inspection date	06/07/2011
Inspector	Michelle Oxley
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	13/05/2008

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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

Regional Foster Placements (South West) Ltd is an independent fostering agency , which provides a range of fostering services such as time limited or short term care, long-term care, emergency care and parent and baby care.

The agency is based at the registered office in Plymouth, where all core activities for the service are undertaken. The agency also has two sub-office bases in Barnstaple, Devon and in Almondsbury, Bristol.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The agency continues to offer a good overall standard of care to children placed, with some excellent aspect identified. The strengths of the service are the rigorous foster carer recruitment process and subsequent carefully considered matching process. This puts the needs and welfare of children at the forefront and is verified through the stability and longevity of placements. Foster carers report a good level of support and supervision from agency staff and children report that they feel safe and at home in their placements.

Following this inspection there is one statutory requirement made. This is to ensure that relevant significant events are reported to Ofsted. There are three good practice recommendations. One is for the creation of a development plan for the service, the other two are to broaden aspects of the service's training provision.

Improvements since the last inspection

service was asked to ensure that written records reflect the decisions made at panel. Records now provide very clear information; the recommendation is met in full.

At the time of the last inspection, foster carers reviews were not being held in line with the recommended time frame. There is currently a little delay in holding reviews within a year. This has now been addressed and all reviews are scheduled in with a clear plan to implement this in place.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency supports children's health needs well. Children are promptly registered with local medical professional such as doctor, dentist and optician when their placement begins. Additional health needs are supported by ensuring that children maintain or establish links with other relevant professionals in order to meet their needs. Foster carers ensure that they make a record of all health care appointments, recording the outcome and ongoing requirements. Each child has a health passport which records significant medical information. These can be taken with the child when they move on.

Foster carers support children to live healthy lifestyles. Physical exercise through play and sports is encouraged. Foster carers help children to understand the importance of a healthy balanced diet and older children are given support to learn about safe sex and the health implications of using legal and illegal drugs.

This year foster carers have received training to help them to develop their skills and keep children healthy. They have attended first aid training and courses linked to health promotion such as drug awareness. In addition a number of health related courses are programmed in and available to all foster carers as part of their ongoing development. These courses focus on physical health, mental health needs and promote an understanding of children's social and emotional developmental needs.

Foster carers provide good physical environments for children. All the home's visited as part of this inspection were clean, comfortable suitably furnished and provide sufficient space to accommodate those living in the home. Foster carers are aware of the agencies' policies' around health and safety and understand the necessity to assess their homes in relation to these. Health and safety hazards are identified during the assessment process and reassessed every year as part of the foster carers' review. Vehicle safety and checks related to any pets kept within the home are also checked. Unannounced visits to foster carers home's are carried out every year.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Foster carers have a good understanding of potential risk to welfare and work positively to promote children's safety. Children report that they feel safe in their foster carer's home; those spoken with said that they had good relationships and would speak to their carer's if they had any concerns or were worried. The approach to risk assessment is well balanced and takes account of children's age and needs. Foster carers demonstrate a good practical understanding of risk. They are able to identify issues and are proactive in preventing potentially harmful situations from occurring.

Foster carers receive training in safer care and are involved in drawing up safer care guidelines in relation to each child placed. The agency has developed positive relations with local authorities and child protection agencies. Foster carers work closely with other professionals including maintaining good links with schools. They are vigilant in identifying any concerns and appropriately pass these on to the agencies social workers.

Policy and procedure guidance is accessible to carers in relation to children who are missing. The policy reflects a multi agency approach to managing missing children on the basis of risk assessment. Foster carers understand the policy and know how to proceed should a child in their care go missing. In practice foster carers demonstrate effective practice in relation to missing children. They demonstrate an ability to react swiftly and with concern in order to protect children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Foster carers receive good support to help them to develop positive behaviour management strategies. Some carers can evidence considerable improvements over time in the behaviour of children placed with them. In some cases this improvement is also acknowledged by children themselves. The agency is careful to identify situations where carers may require additional support to manage behaviour. The agency seek to obtain comprehensive information in respect of behaviour from the placing authority before the placement begins, this is shared with foster carers. Supervising social workers arrange their visits in relation to the level of support required. Additional support is also provided by placement support workers who work directly with children. Training opportunities for carers are in place as part of core training in managing behaviour. In addition clear policy guidelines about behaviour management are in place and available to foster carers in their handbooks.

Children are supported to develop leisure activities in line with their wishes and interests. They are encouraged to make friendships and participate in activities consistent with their peers. Children who were visited as part of this inspection were involved in horse riding, majorettes, scouts and cubs. Children are occupied well at home; carers who were visited ensure that children have access to a range of activities. Children were observed using bikes, garden play equipment, computers and electronic games.

Foster carers encourage and support children to achieve at school. The agency sets high standards and there is an expectation that every child will attend school. Foster carers make very good links with schools in order to support and maintain children's placements. They attend parents evening and education reviews when required. Children say that they get help with homework when they need it.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There is good evidence that children are listened to during their day-to-day interactions with their foster carer's. Carers are careful to record the views of children in their daily logs and make clear their reasons if they have to turn down requests. Supervising social workers also meet with children and make a record of their views. There are good links with local authority social workers and other professionals concerned with the care of children. The agency works in conjunction with others in order to ensure that care is provided in line with the child's placement plan.

Children are provided with individualised care, they are supported to develop a positive self view and emotional resilience. Each child gets the support they need in relation to their specific needs. There are some good examples of children receiving a good level of additional support from placement support workers. They carry out regular one-to-one work with individual children. The type of support offered varies considerably and is dependent upon the support needs identified. In some cases children spent time chatting with their support worker over a meal in others some very detailed and directed work is carried out around developing specific skills, support needs around disability and supporting mother and baby placements.

Foster carers understand the importance of helping children to maintain contact with their families and significant others, subject to the limitations set out in their placement plans. They provide practical support when required such as transport and encourage the development of positive relationships where appropriate. The agency is careful to work in conjunction with the local authority to ensure that the arrangements for contact are carefully planned and carried out. Foster carers and supervising social workers provide good information to local authorities regarding the impact of contact arrangements upon the child.

The agency has a clear policy for introducing children to their foster carer's home. In the resulting practice arrangements for planned placements are very good with some excellent examples of children being incrementally introduced to their foster families, involving numerous visits and staying over night. Foster carers appreciate the careful matching of children to placements and are fully involved with the decisions making process. The agency routinely share all information obtained with foster carers. Children who were spoken with said that they were welcomed in to the home of their carers and that they felt part of the family.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency operates a rigorous assessment process in relation to selecting new foster carers. Enquiries are dealt with efficiently and promptly and a good initial insight in to what the role involves is provided. All prospective foster carers receive

realistic information, including written information and all participate in 'skills to foster training'. Recruitment checks are carried out comprehensively including obtaining Criminal Record's Bureau checks. Written reports regarding suitability to foster provide clear and detailed information for the panel. Reviews of foster carer's approvals are comprehensively carried out and very good detailed information is presented to panel. Reports are signed by the social worker carrying out the assessment.

The panel is comprised of sufficiently skilled and experienced individuals who act as quality assurers for the service. Panel members make relevant enquiries and are competent decision makers. Proceedings are professionally conducted. The panel chair effectively leads and ensures that foster carers are made aware of the panel's decisions in a timely fashion. A central list is in the process of being compiled.

Agency staff and foster carers understand the importance of ensuring that the matching process is carried out in a carefully considered manner. Careful matching of children to carers in relation to skills and needs is carried out with the best interests of the child as the central priority. The number of sustained long term placements and the decline in placement breakdown verify the success of this. Potential matches are discussed with supervising social workers and then foster carers. If the agency requires further information they will go back to the local authority to obtain this. Foster carers are routinely provided with all of the information held by the agency.

Placing authorities and other interested parties have access to the aims and objectives of the service through the Statement of Purpose. A children's guide provides good relevant information to children. It helps them to understand what to expect including the arrangements for school, contact and pocket money.

The fostering service has seen some recent changes in management. The new manager is suitably qualified, has considerable experience and demonstrates competence in effectively leading the service. She is currently not registered with Ofsted so her fitness has not yet been verified, although an application has been submitted for processing. The director of the service is very much hands on and is actively involved in the driving the service forward.

There are good system in place to monitor and quality assure the service. The monitoring of incidents and events can be used to track patterns and occurrences providing information about interventions which may be required. The agency takes a proactive approach to gathering and analysing statistical information. This helps them to recruit and train carers in response to the diverse needs of children as expressed by the local authorities. There are a number of plans and projects underway to progress the service, these have not yet been drawn up in to one overall development plan in order to inform the overall future direction of the service.

There is careful selection of staff, panel members and fostering households. All people working within and for the agency are subject to rigorous recruitment procedures in line with the regulations.

There is a good range of training available to foster carers. These comprise of an initial introduction through the skills to foster course and then a set of core training which is essential for all carers to complete. All new carers are inducted to the Children's Workforce Development Council standards. In addition to this a good range of varied training is provided which crosses a range of subjects relevant to the diverse needs of children placed (KESMITH: This (deleted) is an insubstantial point to end on.) .

On approval each foster carer is allocated a supervising social worker. The foster carer's handbook provides them with a reference guide and a full policy and procedure manual. Foster carers make a daily log of the child's progress which is overseen by the supervising social worker. They in turn report on the progress of the placement in meeting the child's needs drawing on the placement plan and the competencies of the foster carer. There are good lines of communication between agency staff, foster carers and the child's social worker. Foster carers are fully involved in the review of the placement plan.

Foster carers receive supervision from their supervising social worker at least once each month. The number of visits made is dictated by the level of support required in relation to the needs of the child. Foster carers who were spoken with expressed satisfaction with the level of supervision and the overall support received from the agency, including support out of office hours. Due to sickness there has been some staff shortages in one particular area within the region covered, however this has been rectified with the employment of two new social workers.

On the whole foster carers express satisfaction with the level of reimbursement they receive and say that payments are made in a timely fashion. When a child reaches the age of 18 foster carers receive good advice and information about other financial support they can receive should the child's placement continue.

Procedures are in place regarding the handling of allegations or suspicions of harm. Records demonstrate that where concerns have arisen, the agency has reported the matter to the Local Authority Designated Officer, the child's social worker and other relevant agencies. However notifications of these events have not been made to Ofsted. Foster carers and staff have a good knowledge of how to deal with concerns for welfare and clearly understand the requirement to pass information on. However, the knowledge of wider safeguarding processes is not as well embedded in every case. Every carer receives a copy of the services safeguarding procedures. Investigations into allegations are handled fairly and well recorded.

Agency staff receive regular support and formal supervision every month. In addition external supervision is funded for staff who have specialist qualifications, for example in transactional analysis. Staff training needs are identified through the supervision and appraisal processes. The agency is very supportive of its team's professional development, providing good opportunities for progression and financial support. However, there is currently no ongoing rolling programme of training relating to basic training or core skills.

The agency office is suitably and fit for purpose. Confidential information including online communication systems are held securely. The office is organised and records are well ordered and easy to reference.

The promotion of equality and diversity at this service is good.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

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
36 (2011)	notify the persons or bodies indicated in schedule 7 of the fostering regulations for each significant event. (Regulation 36-1)	01/09/2011

Recommendations

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

- create one overall development plan to inform the future direction of the service (NMS 18.2)
- ensure that child protection training for staff and foster carers captures the wider safeguarding processes (NMS 22.1)
- create an ongoing learning and development programme for agency staff. (NMS 23.1)