

# Family Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspection date</b>	18/06/2012
<b>Inspector</b>	David Morgan
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	Domestic adoption

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<b>Registered person</b>	Family Foster Care Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Adrian Vaughan
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Robert Martin Rae
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	17/11/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Family Foster Care is a privately owned independent fostering agency with a Midlands office base that also supports operations in two other parts of the country. The agency provides a wide range of placements for children. Currently, there are 39 households with a total of 71 carers. Throughout the organisation there are currently 32 children and young people in placements.

### The inspection judgements and what they mean

**Outstanding:** a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

**Good:** a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

**Adequate:** a service that only meets minimum requirements

**Inadequate:** a service that does not meet minimum requirements

## Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **adequate**.

The last inspection was in November 2011 and found that the service was inadequate. The manager was registered with Ofsted in March this year. He has implemented a series of steps to thoroughly assess the service and make improvements. A major consequence of the inadequate judgement has been a reduction in both the referral of new children and in the recruitment and assessment of new carers.

The service provides an adequate quality of care, and the outcomes for children and young people are at least adequate in all cases. In addition, there is evidence of very thorough practice by staff and carers in several areas. Children and young people make significant progress in many cases. They receive personalised care that meets their individual needs and they are kept safe. Only very few children and young people have additional needs arising from their disabilities or culture, and these needs are being met appropriately. There are minimal unplanned changes, and children and young people are fully involved in decision making.

Supervising social workers and foster carers work to each child's placement plan. However, written copies are not always available. This is an area for improvement so that work with individual children and young people can be as effective as possible. Work is also required to ensure that the deregistration of foster carers is appropriately managed. However, monitoring is now strong, and shortfalls in the

service are being addressed as a priority. There is a particularly high level of enthusiasm among staff and carers. Communication and consultation with stakeholders are noticeably better for all concerned. Also, managers are now effectively sharing their ideas and skills with each other.

Consolidation is in its early stages and the service is also expanding into two other geographical areas. Other requirements and recommendations are made in this report to ensure ongoing improvement.

## Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

<b>Reg.</b>	<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
17 (2011)	provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them (Regulation 17(1))	24/09/2012
17 (2011)	ensure that the foster parent is given such information as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations (Regulation 17(3))	24/09/2012
28 (2011)	ensure that, if, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, the fostering service provider is no longer satisfied that the foster parent or the foster parent's household continue to be suitable, or that the terms of approval are appropriate, they must follow the instructions in this regulation regarding the provision of written notice and advice. (Regulation 28 (7))	23/07/2012

### Recommendations

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

- support foster carers to make reasonable and appropriate decisions within the authority delegated to them, without having to seek consent unnecessarily (NMS 7.4)
- ensure the service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood (NMS 12.4)
- identify a named medical adviser and health adviser to the panel (Volume 4,

statutory guidance, paragraph 5.24)

- provide, where a child requires it, the children's guide through suitable alternative methods of communication, e.g. Makaton, pictures, tape recording, translation into another language (NMS 16.6)
- ensure there is a good quality learning and development programme for staff, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training (NMS 23.1)
- ensure that the assessment and appraisal of all staff involved in fostering work take account of identified skills needed for particular roles and is used to identify individuals' learning and development needs (NMS 23.5)
- ensure that staff are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff. This is with regard to all staff. (NMS 24.4)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **adequate**.

Children and young people benefit from sound care practices. There are minimal disruptions. In a significant proportion of cases, children and young people have the security of knowing how long their placements will last. Children and young people say that their views are routinely taken into account and they are always helped to contribute to any meetings about them. As a result they feel secure, safe and looked after. One young person indicated that his self-esteem and sense of personal identity had improved substantially: 'I'm me now'. They establish strong and effective relationships with their carers and their families. Another young person said: 'These are the best years of my life.' Foster carers contribute to substantial progress in children and young people's health, for example, regarding their emotional welfare and healthy diets. Foster carers also noted large reductions in negative behaviours, such as swearing and being absent without authority, which enabled children and young people to focus on positive activities.

Not all children and young people benefit from the clear coordination of their care that written placement plans provide. Efforts by the service to obtain these from local authorities are ongoing; additional means are being applied. Although this remains a significant gap in documentation, foster carers are fully aware of the main issues for their foster children. This means, for example, that children and young people's needs arising from their disabilities are properly addressed through consultation with other professionals and training of carers. Almost all children and young people are from a white English background and have either a Christian religious affiliation or none.

Children and young people are helped to understand the circumstances causing them to be in foster care. They are routinely spoken with about their feelings and wishes and any obstacles are explained. Critically, they maintain as good contact with their families as is possible in their individual circumstances. Children and young people are effectively protected in the large majority of cases from unplanned endings, and the misuse of substances is rare.

All children and young people (and their social workers) feel they are fully integrated into their foster households. This is an important part of supporting children and young people to become more independent. Children and young people feel that they are taught skills that will prepare them for adulthood, both in and outside their foster homes. While some older young people have been effectively supported into their own accommodation, there is no policy on how the service supports young people to remain with foster carers into legal adulthood.

Children and young people develop confidence by trying many new sports and activities. One child was particularly pleased with the large number of animals the carers kept and the outdoor space she had access to. Another received funding from the service for a season ticket to his favourite football team. In a small proportion of cases, carers have not been delegated sufficient authority to make certain day-to-day decisions. Written medical consents are also missing from some files, despite efforts to obtain them. This creates unnecessary difficulties and delays for carers, children and young people.

Carers and social workers reported good progress in education; one child represented many when he went from the bottom to the top of his class in a short space of time. Education is actively promoted by carers; attendance is very high overall and exclusions are minimal.

## Quality of service

The quality of the service is **adequate**.

The quality of service provided to children and young people is inevitably influenced by the management and staffing arrangements, which have been unsettled over a protracted period. However, these are now resolved. Also, because of the improved monitoring processes that have been introduced recently, managers are now able to identify shortfalls promptly and address them on an ongoing basis.

Carer recruitment has nearly stopped because of the inadequate judgement of the service at the last inspection, which led to referrals from local authorities almost ceasing. In the meantime, however, improvements have been made to the recruitment strategy so that new carers are only sought in defined geographical areas. This will facilitate effective and efficient support. It will also permit greater cultural and religious diversity of the carer group even though they are currently representative of the children and young people they look after. Previously, the assessment processes were a cause for concern, partly because temporary staff were used. Staffing arrangements have now been stabilised, albeit very recently. In addition, monitoring procedures are better and ensure, for example, that reports are sufficiently robust before they reach panel.

The fostering panel itself is properly constituted and operated and has suitable decision-making processes. Appropriate arrangements are made to meet the needs of panel members and carers who have disabilities, for example, by installing a loop

system for those who have hearing difficulties. Much of the panel's recent work has involved making recommendations for deregistration of carers who have resigned due to the lack of placements. Procedures in this area do not ensure that the reasons for the decision are shown in letters. This is particularly important for those carers who resign when there are concerns about their performance. It is also insufficiently clear how the panel itself obtains legal and health advice.

Panel members receive ongoing training and appraisals. However, the training expectations for each foster parent in a household are not clear, particularly for those who are not the main carer. Also, work on induction standards is incomplete for a significant proportion of carers. On the other hand, carers are extremely positive about the training they have undertaken and a full programme of future courses is now in place. They are sufficiently well trained to be confident about how to deal with any safeguarding issues and the individual behavioural difficulties of their foster children. Similarly, they are very positive about the support provided by their supervising social workers. Comments included, 'We feel really comfortable with them and that means a lot', and, 'They get stuck-in for us'. They appreciate the piloting of events to support their sons and daughters, too.

Foster carers are energetic and keen to do their best for children and young people. They provide excellent male and female role models for children and young people. They are appropriately matched with children and establish effective relationships with them. Despite a lack of written placement plans, foster carers ensure that specialist services, such as psychological and advocacy services, are provided to help children and young people progress as much as possible.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

The service is **adequate** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Children, young people and carers know how to complain and feel able to do so. Children and young people feel protected by their foster carers, who have independent access to professional advice. Managers are fully conversant with safeguarding procedures and consult promptly with other agencies, including regulatory bodies. Complaints and allegations are investigated with due consideration to impartiality. Notifiable incidents and other concerning events are carefully monitored.

Strategy meetings are called with other professionals if young people are at risk when they are missing. As a result of this, young people make progress in reducing such behaviours. Carers are sensitive to the backgrounds of children and young people and the resultant effect on their behaviours and emotional well-being. The manager ensures that any shortfalls in the level of protection provided by other agencies is highlighted with that organisation. Other risks to children and young people, such as bullying, are effectively minimised, although children and young people are helped to undertake appropriately challenging activities.

Recruitment procedures are now robust and show close attention to detail. This is a

substantial contribution towards ensuring that safe care practices prevail. Safe caring policies are being adhered to in each household. Supervising social workers undertake unannounced checks on households to ensure that safe and appropriate care is underway.

## **Leadership and management**

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **adequate**.

Since the last inspection, a substantial amount of work has been undertaken to plan and implement changes. This has been based on internal audits as well as the requirements and recommendations set by Ofsted and three other external audits. Thorough attention to the large number of shortfalls has led to significant improvements, with all the requirements and nearly all the recommendations being addressed. In particular, there is now appropriate attention paid to safeguarding issues, including the safe recruitment of new personnel. Consequently, the safety of children and young people is improved. Various administrative matters have also been improved so the service operates in line with regulations and the national minimum standards. Staff and carers also benefit from improved training, which has a positive impact on the care they provide to children and young people. Of particular significance to children and young people are the improvements to the assessment process of new carers. These ensure that any shortfalls in awareness or skill are identified and addressed as early as possible.

The last inspection noted that turbulent and inconsistent management was the main reason for the shortfalls. This has been resolved in most regards although there has been a further change in responsible person. This has created additional uncertainty but has also served to appropriately streamline the management structure. One carer said, 'There had been too many errors but now the personal touch has returned.' In addition, two experienced managers have been recruited to develop the service in two other regions. They provide the capacity and experience of fostering necessary to take the service forward.

Equally important is the improvement in internal monitoring by managers. The directors themselves are personally involved in the operation of the service and in regularly meeting foster carers at forums. This allows the managers and directors to consult carers and quickly identify any shortfalls in meeting individual children's needs.

The service meets its aims and objectives and is growing in line with its business plan. An appropriate Statement of Purpose is available to local authorities and carers. A guide is also available to children and young people describing how the service operates. However, it is not yet available in formats suitable for those who require alternative methods of communication. This means that some children and young people are less likely to receive important information.

Staff and carers receive adequate training overall. The policy and programme do not

identify or address the induction, post-qualifying and in-service training needs of all members of staff. This means that although relevant, high quality training is underway, it is inconsistently applied. For example, there are gaps in the induction and in-service training of support staff. This is partly because the learning and development needs of all staff are not appraised. Recent improvements have included inviting the police to training on reducing risks for children and young people who go missing.

Staff have good access to support and advice but not all of them are provided with regular supervision, notably some support staff. This reduction in effective leadership is particularly unsettling during this period of change. On the other hand, children's social workers, staff and carers are aware of a significant improvement in communication and consultation via email and at forums. A professional from outside the organisation said, 'In recent months there has definitely been a move to improve the services provided; still some room for improvement, but lots better.'

## 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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.