

# Flying Colours Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspection date</b>	04/10/2012
<b>Inspector</b>	David Morgan
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	Voluntary org placing children

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<b>Registered person</b>	Flying Colours Foster Care Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Kerry Louise Renton
<b>Responsible individual</b>	James Davidson Hamil
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	12/12/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The agency is an independent fostering service whose offices are located in a rural area that has good access to transport links. The main aim of the service is to offer foster care placements to children and young people whose development has been impaired by abuse, trauma and neglect. There are currently 20 fostering households and 22 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 **inadequate**.

This service was registered in 2011 when it legally separated from the previous organisation. However, the responsible individual and manager remain the same, as do the staff and most carers. This is the first inspection of the new registration.

The overall effectiveness of the service is severely compromised by managerial shortfalls. Leadership of the service, particularly in the absence of the registered manager, is inadequate. Communication between the responsible individual and supervising social workers is of a standard that compromises safe working practices. Major matters, such as safeguarding issues, are not discussed effectively and other issues are not addressed through groups or one-to-one meetings. The lack of effective support over a protracted period means that staff are demoralised and are working in isolation.

Despite the above, the direct work with carers by supervising social workers has been completed conscientiously. This has contributed to positive outcomes for children and young people. Carers feel confident in the support they receive and children and young people feel safe. Almost all children and young people are in long term placements and benefit from continuity of care and relationships. In particular, many children and young people resolve their emotional difficulties and make significant progress educationally.

Monitoring of education and other elements of care is inadequate and does not serve

to improve standards. The registered manager and responsible individual are not using systems that alert them to shortfalls. They are not ensuring that policies and procedures are enforced or that commonly accepted practices, such as the supervision of supervising social workers, are implemented correctly. This means that supervising social workers are professionally compromised and consequently there is evidence of their practices deviating from acceptable norms. Their concerns are not recorded or addressed. Carer training is inconsistent and electronic recording is not robust. Caseloads are inequitable and panel processes are weak in places, with conflicts of interests.

## 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.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
8 (2011)	ensure that the registered provider and the registered manager carry on and manage the fostering agency with sufficient care, competence and skill. This is with regard to having effective communication, which protects children; sufficiently skilled management; equitable caseloads (Regulation 8(1))	10/12/2012
11 (2011)	ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. This is with regard to ensuring that conflicts of interest do not occur on panel and that safeguarding procedures are followed (Regulation 11(a))	10/12/2012
12 (2011)	ensure that written policies and procedures, intended to safeguard young people from abuse or neglect are fully implemented and that prompt referrals relating to allegations of abuse and neglect are promptly referred to the area authority (Regulation 12(b))	10/12/2012
17 (2011)	provide foster parents with such training and support as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. This is with regard to induction and core training, and the training of 'second' carers (Regulation 17 (1))	10/12/2012
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate training (with regard to induction, professional development, exemptions, panel members, safeguarding, information technology), supervision and appraisal (Regulation 21(4)(a))	10/12/2012
25 (2011)	ensure that the fostering panel can give advice and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it. This is with regard to routinely implementing this regulation and giving due consideration to any recommendations that panel may make	10/12/2012

	(Regulation 25(4)(c))	
35 (2011)	ensure that there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals (this is with regard to it being effective); for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency and for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster carers and their placing authorities (Regulations 35(1) and (3))	10/12/2012
36 (2011)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1))	10/12/2012

## Recommendations

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

- ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that self-help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported (NMS 21.4)
- ensure, in carer's supervision meetings, that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs (this is with regard to the needs identified in each child's placement plan), and offer support and a framework to assess every carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills (NMS 21.8)
- ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This is with regard to applying the equal opportunities policy in terms of promoting social diversity within the agency (NMS 25.1)
- ensure that the service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. This is also with regard to preventing certain electronic records being altered and devising a suitable dating protocol (NMS 26.1)
- ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them are signed and dated (NMS 26.5)
- ensure that carers are provided with a statement of payment and with the written policy and current level of payments at the end of each tax year, and that payments are applied equally to all foster carers. (NMS 28.2, 28.6 and 28.7)

## Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people benefit from good standards of care. They undertake new and exciting experiences, such as foreign holidays and engage in sports and other activities. They establish meaningful relationships with carers and their extended families. One young person said, 'I like living here and I get on well with other family members; I can talk to my carer if I am unhappy about anything'. Another said, 'My carers have done a great job of making me feel like a part of the family'. The majority of children and young people felt confident enough to contribute to this inspection and they all consider that their placements are either good or excellent.

All the children and young people feel safe and almost all are in long term placements; very few emergency placements occur. This stability means they are able to benefit substantially from the opportunities their carers provide. All are in education or training placements. One social worker noted that 'the carers have made a real difference'; a health professional reported the 'extraordinary progress' made by a child. Children and young people receive appropriate routine and specialist health services. Emotional and psychological services are used to help individuals reflect on their circumstances and overcome their negative experiences. As a result, children and young people learn how to pursue safe and healthy lifestyles.

Children and young people are consulted regularly about their placements. In addition, supervising social workers talk to them regularly about their experiences. This means that their views are quickly acted upon and consequently, that formal complaints are very few. On the other hand, systems are not in place for them to contribute to the development of the agency itself.

Children and young people mostly attend mainstream education placements. Additional classes are arranged if necessary and schools are found that best meet individuals' needs. One young person said, 'I do lots of extra education. I have lots of nice friends; I like my school very much.' As a result, behavioural difficulties reduce and in many cases educational targets are exceeded.

## Quality of service

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

Recruitment is not being actively pursued at present. However, existing carers consider that their recruitment processes were undertaken speedily and effectively. The initial training prepared them well for fostering. One couple said, 'We made the right decision about the company'. Assessments are thorough and take into account all issues relating to each carer in a household.

Matching of children and young people is of a high standard and takes into account their cultural and religious backgrounds. This is an essential contribution to the substantial stability that children and young people enjoy. However, the proportion of carers from a non-White background does not match the percentage of children and young people cared for by the agency. Moreover, although it is reflected in policies,

the promotion of social diversity with carers and children and young people is not evident in the service, for example through events, publicity and carer reviews or their supervision records. Also, there is insufficient guidance and knowledge regarding exemptions to the usual fostering limit. This leads to less local authority monitoring of children and young people's welfare than is legally required.

Carers feel justifiably pleased with the training they undertake. There is a wide range of courses, including several on-line that increase the opportunities for those who cannot attend training events. However, the undertaking of induction and core training is not sufficiently well coordinated. Also, the policy and the minimum expectations of carers are not clear. This means that the on-going competence and development of some carers, especially 'second' carers, is not being sufficiently addressed. These shortfalls have a direct potential impact on children and young people if, for example, their carer is unable to provide first aid or does not sufficiently understand behavioural management strategies.

The training of carers is supported by supervising social workers. They also provide a good level of supervision. Carer comments included the following; 'she is extremely supportive and encourages us to think around behaviours'; 'she goes over and above: she's always available'; 'she treats us all with warmth and respect, including my own children'.

Other professionals also reported extremely favourably on the effectiveness and professionalism of the supervising social workers. There is no clear guidance about the supervision of 'second' carers in a household. This is a shortfall because their needs are likely to be different to the main carers. Also, there is not an effective system for carers to receive copies of their supervision notes and these do not relate to their competencies. There are similar shortfalls in their personal development plans. These shortfalls mean that carers' skills are not developed as necessary. Carers undertake a certain amount of peer support but self-help groups are not being facilitated.

Carers receive substantial supervision regarding the care of children and young people. However, it is not clear that the specific needs agreed in reviews and reflected in placement plans are being addressed. This means that attention to children and young people's progress is less focussed than possible.

The agency's panel operates adequately in most regards. Recent improvements have seen it take on board certain quality assurance responsibilities. However, its objectivity is compromised by the involvement of the responsible individual as vice chair and being related to an assessor. Panel training is not in place and the recommendations of panel regarding improvements to its own procedures have not been addressed, for example regarding the size and content of the central list, and hearing subsequent reviews or at least every third as described in the policy.

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

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

safe.

Children and young people feel safe in their placements and unannounced visits monitor children's safety and wellbeing. As a result, children and young people are hardly ever affected by issues such as bullying and being missing from home. Complaints are also minimal and recruitment processes are satisfactory.

However, not all supervising social workers fully understand the safeguarding procedures and this has led to shortfalls in referrals to local authorities and Ofsted. Although such problems have been appropriately resolved, they demonstrate a lack of effective training of staff and managers and poor communication between them. Similar shortfalls have been identified previously. There is not a culture of openness and trust and this severely compromises effective and safe practice, including the protection of children and young people. This shortfall also relates directly to ineffective supervision of staff and ineffective monitoring.

### **Leadership and management**

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

The responsible individual has been acting as manager since June 2012. In that time there has been no staff supervision, no team meetings and other policies and procedures have not been followed. This is symptomatic of the severe communication shortfalls in the service and lack of competent leadership. This situation was replicated prior to the Registered Manager being away. The supervision and appraisal meetings between the manager and supervising social workers do not address the required matters. In some cases, records are in place of meetings that have not occurred, which calls into question the integrity and competence of the manager and the responsible individual who supervises her. The managerial arrangements are not sufficient to ensure that the service operates adequately.

Supervising social workers are undertaking training independently, but it is not part of a good quality learning and development programme. They have not undertaken induction training either. This means that staff skills have not been verified and that they are not being developed in a systematic way. This has contributed to a loss of morale and shortfalls in practice. This is exacerbated by inadequate attention to the equitable distribution of caseloads.

Monitoring by the manager does not identify issues, review all records, consult children and young people or raise standards in the agency. This contributes substantially to the organisational shortfalls identified during this inspection. It also means that childcare issues such as children and young people's behavioural difficulties are not adequately considered. The quality of record keeping is also not being monitored. This means that staff experience difficulties managing and retrieving information as would any child or young person who requires access.

Currently, paper records are being transferred to electronic files. The records are

thorough in many regards but are not part of an effective policy. For example, staff are not sufficiently familiar with the new system because there has been no training and this has led to misfiling. In addition, the vast majority of records are not signed or dated and can be altered after they have been submitted. This means that evidence is not secure. There is also no dating protocol for electronic files, which means that records are not in date order and cannot be readily re-located.

Carers are clear about the payments they are entitled to. However, there is no system for providing each carer with details of the policy and payment levels. This means the system is less transparent than necessary and is a potential source of grievance.

## 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.