

# Caldecott Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Paul Clark
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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<b>Registered person</b>	Caldecott Fostering Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Joan Elizabeth Manze
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Christopher James Manze
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	11/01/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Caldecott Fostering Limited is an Independent Fostering Agency which was registered in July 2012 following the merger between Stone Soup Cares, a registered Independent Fostering Agency, and The Caldecott Foundation, a registered charity involved in children's social care provision for over a century. The Foundation provides residential care and educational services, and prior to the merger, also had a registered Independent Fostering Agency included within its range of services. The two organisations retain supportive links which includes the sharing of training resources and inter staffing deployment.

The statement of purpose states that the company works to not for profit principles and its work is overseen by a board of directors.

The registered office of Caldecott Fostering Limited is located within the premises of the headquarters of The Caldecott Foundation. There are two full time social workers who are managed by a registered manager, who also acts as panel advisor, and there is one full time administrator. The company employs sessional workers who carry out assessments of prospective foster carers. There is a part-time quality assurance social worker who conducts the monitoring of these assessment reports. There is part-time counselling psychologist who offers therapeutic services to children and young people, carers, and provides consultancy to agency social workers.

There is an independently chaired panel who meet monthly. There is an Agency Decision Maker who is a member of the board of directors. At the time of the inspection there were 18 approved fostering households, 12 of whom are active and who are caring for 15 young people.

### 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 **good**.

This was the first full inspection of this Independent Fostering Agency following its registration in July 2012. Children and carers are well matched and placements are generally stable and long term. Children have good access to education and their educational progress is well supported. Young people's behaviour and social

development is well supported by a clear therapeutic programme supported by professional supervision. Carer assessments are well monitored for quality and analytical depth. Social workers and carers are well supervised and managed and receive good training. Managers rigorously monitor the quality of the service and clear action plans are in place for service development.

The panel function needs to be supported by the identification of a person to provide legal expertise.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice as required. NMS 14.6

### Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people generally benefit from stable placements where they feel secure and made to feel part of the fostering family household. One young person commented, 'For me it's the perfect fit.'

The majority of children's placements are long term. There have been three fostering placement breakdowns in the past 12 months. These have been appropriately reviewed, sometimes by holding a disruption meeting to ascertain the reasons behind the breakdown. Learning points were learned from each of these breakdowns and these are being applied to practice.

Children and young people are able to actively participate in the complex decision-making about their lives, including all aspects of their individual care planning. Whenever possible, they attend their care plan review meetings. Birth parents are generally invited to attend the initial and review meetings of care plans unless this is otherwise thought to be detrimental. Supervising social workers will always attend children's Looked After Children's Review meetings. This collaborative working ensures that children and families are actively involved in all aspects of children's care planning.

Children are consulted about their proposed placement to ensure that the placement is of their choice. Children say they are given all the information they need about their proposed foster carers both verbally and in writing. Carers construct written and photographic personal profiles about themselves and their households which helps both children and placing authorities to decide if the placement is right for them. The agency attempts to ensure that all young people and carers are appropriately matched by lengthy team discussions at the time of referral. There is a good balance in the numbers of children and carers from the same cultural and ethnic groups.

Carers show consideration and awareness of the religious and cultural beliefs of the young people in their care. Young people stated that they have access to an advocacy service provided by their placing authority if they wish to have support with their involvement in care planning. Young people are provided with good avenues of support and representation whilst they are being looked after.

Since their registration in July 2012, the agency are still developing their support services for children. They do provide regular forum meetings and are developing newsletters and a webpage specifically for looked after children. These developments will allow children to further communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support and about the development of the service.

Young people confirm that they receive pocket money and are encouraged to open savings accounts. They confirm that they are taken on holiday with their carers and that they have experienced a wide range of activities and weekend events whilst in their foster placements. Several young people spoken to were members of social or sporting clubs. These measures promote children's enjoyment, life experiences and helps them to integrate into their local community and improves their self-confidence.

Children and young people with disabilities are well supported by the agency. There are a number of fostering households with skills in caring for children with disabilities. The agency will ensure that carers receive specialist training which is specifically related to the children that they are caring for. The agency has a commitment to the provision of therapeutic services based on the 'Mentalization' model. There is a counselling psychologist who provides direct work with children, a monthly consultation meeting with carers and who acts as part of the staff team by offering staff consultancy and attending staff meetings. These various therapeutic services ensure that children with complex emotional and behavioural needs have access to a high level of care provided by well trained professionals and carers.

Young people's health care is supported by the provision of a children's 'Health Record' which children may keep and which contains a record of their full medical histories and which carers have a responsibility for updating. The agency has a system for chasing up the Looked After Child's Health Record if the placing authority have not provided this at the time of placement. Children placed receive an initial medical examination from the medical practitioners attached to their placing authority and the agency have a system for chasing this if it has not been done. All children have had routine dental and sight check-ups and are registered with local general practitioners and dentists. Carers link well with the Looked After Children's nurses from the placing authorities. All carers receive mandatory training in first aid. Foster carers receive training in assisting young people with smoking cessation, addressing drug and alcohol misuse, promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyle programmes. Children's health needs are supported by being given an excellent welcome pack containing a wealth of written contact information about a range of helping agencies.

Children receive good support in making educational progress and in preparing for

independent living. The agency have strong links to the educational provision of the Caldecott Foundation and can access places to their school facility. All of the young people fostered by the agency attend school or college. Many of these young people were previously non-school attenders, or were failing to make educational progress. There have been no long term school exclusions in the past 12 months. All young people have personal education plans in place and these plans are appropriately reviewed. Supervising social workers attend all personal education plan reviews. Older young people are being prepared for independence through supervising social workers conducting an independent living skills programme with them and carers are included in this work. The programme is based on helping young people cope with the practical issues of everyday living.

Young people are supported by carers in maintaining contact with their birth relatives as directed by their care plans. Carers help with transport arrangements to allow children to meet with their parents. There are approved carers specifically trained in supervising contact and there are facilities available in the office premises to provide a safe and comfortable venue for such contact.

### **Quality of service**

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

Children benefit from being placed with carers who are well trained and prepared for the fostering task and who are focused on the needs of children and young people. Carers are recruited, prepared, assessed, trained and supervised to a high level. Carers come from a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences and include single carers, same sex carers and carer couples who are dedicated to the fostering task. Assessments are rigorous and the preparation training and ongoing training are of a high standard.

Since the time of the merger and new registration carers' assessments are now being completed within recommended timescales and the service has appointed an experienced practitioner to undertake the quality monitoring of social workers assessments to ensure that these are of a high standard and that placements will be secure and stable as a result. Carers undertake the Children's Workforce Development Council qualification immediately after approval and are encouraged by financial incentive to complete this within one year. The majority of approved carers have achieved this award. The ongoing support of carers through forum meetings and supervision is of a high standard and includes clinical supervision from a counselling psychologist. The levels of supervision that carers report indicates that it is regular and supportive. Carers are provided with free membership of an organisation that gives them personal advice and guidance about fostering and this further enhances their knowledge and understanding of the fostering task.

The fostering panel has an experienced chair and decisions made by panel adhere to clear policies and procedures. The composition of the panel is generally appropriate in terms of personal experience although there are some shortcomings in terms of necessary professional expertise. There are no panel members from black or minority

ethnic groups. The panel has access to medical expertise from a general practitioner who will view proposed carers medical assessments but who does not attend panel meetings. There is no identified person with legal expertise and no panel representative with expertise in children's educational provision. There is a central list of members in place in accordance with regulations. Panel members are well trained and supervised with an annual performance appraisal being undertaken. Minutes of panel meetings record clearly the detail of the discussions of issues raised by panel members and give evidence that there is due rigour in the considerations of foster carer's approval. Recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker are responded to in a timely manner.

Foster carers have good access to a range of education services and to the therapeutic services available from the agency with whom they are linked. Foster carers have good working relationships with the fostering service. There is an excellent 'out-of-hours' support service provided by the supervising social workers which carers say provides them with an excellent level of support. Carers support young people in maintaining family contact and in helping them with transport to attend contact meetings. This further enhances the support given to birth families and to children in maintaining these important links.

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

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

Children and young people feel safe and are safe. Staff and carers are trained in safeguarding children. Young people comment that if they are unhappy about any element of their care they know how to complain and how to talk to people to express any concerns. A policy is in place to address any incidents of bullying experienced by looked after children and children are given information leaflets to advise them where they can go to get help in this regard. Children felt confident that any bullying incidents reported to the agency would be dealt with effectively. Young people can also access an independent advocacy service provided by their placing authority. There is a policy in place to ensure that any complaints about the service will be investigated and responded to within determined timescales. No complaints have been received since the time of registration. Foster carers' preparation training includes a focus on safeguarding, safe caring and current child protection practice. This training is refreshed over time and takes place before and after approval. Foster carers also receive training on the effects of attachment and loss and birth trauma on children. This ensures that carers have a clear understanding of safeguarding. Carers demonstrate an awareness of current theoretical knowledge and the impact of abuse on a child's behaviour and development.

There are good systems in place to check that the care of young people is safe. Unannounced visits to foster carers' homes take place more than once a year and there is a system in place to record this. Children are always seen alone by placing social workers and asked if they feel safe in placement. Any concerns about foster carers' care practice which is identified by supervising social workers is shared with management and this can result in the reconsideration of carers' approval. Staff and

carers' recruitment and vetting is thorough and organised to ensure that staff appointed and carers approved are vetted correctly and are aware of their responsibilities to keep looked after children safe. Staff and carers files are subject to periodic audit to ensure that vetting practice is kept up to date.

There are no incidences of children going missing within the past 12 months and foster carers are aware of their responsibilities to report children missing from their care and the procedures to be followed should this occur. The manager of the service states there is a good collaborative relationship with the local police in place and that they take seriously the safety of looked after children who go missing and will actively search for looked after children who have gone missing.

### **Leadership and management**

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

Since the time of registration the performance and delivery of the fostering service has been well monitored by the registered manager and is formally reported on to the board of directors at least every two months. This ensures that the level of care that fostered children receive within this agency is constantly being scrutinized by senior people within the organisation. There are action plans in place which identify areas of necessary service development including the proposed dedicated website, newsletters for carers and young people and the plans to conduct a recruitment campaign. The agency has taken active steps to improve services by monitoring practice. This had involved reviewing placements disruptions, identifying necessary improvements and putting these in action.

In order to help to make sure that fostered children's needs are properly attended to and practice is professionally applied, social work staff in the fostering service are appointed with relevant child protection knowledge, experience, qualifications and are registered with the national social work body for practitioners. Social workers do not at present have a higher post qualifying award in child care work. There is an extensive induction process for new staff which acquaints them with the necessary core skills. Appraisals of social workers and managers competency take place at least annually. There is mandatory updated training for social work staff in safeguarding children and all core areas of practice. The agency has its own internal training provision and an extensive training programme is in place which all staff can access. Fortnightly staff supervision takes place and there are weekly team meetings which include an element of clinical supervision provided by a counselling psychologist. The manager of the service is a professionally qualified social worker who is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council and who has many years experience in child care management and has an appropriate management qualification. On going staff training and high quality supervision ensures that children receive good quality care from carers whose work is supervised by skilled professionals.

Foster carers support group meetings and on going training and information events are available to carers and this further ensures that children are cared for by informed and professional carers who contribute to the development of the service.



The manager of the service have developed a working relationship with other agencies including the placing authorities, police, education and health services to ensure that there is a joint approach when assessing and meeting looked after children's needs.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guides are clearly written, frequently reviewed and describe the service aims and objectives. There are social events held for young people and carers which is enjoyed by all and these also provide carers and young people with an opportunity to express their opinions about the service.

Since this is the first inspection since registration there were no action requirements or recommendations to be followed up. One recommendation has been made as a result of this inspection.

## 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.