

# Regional Foster Placements (South West)

Regional Foster Placements Limited

3 Moorside Court, Yelverton Business Park, Crapstone, Yelverton, Devon PL20 7PE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Regional Foster Placements is a national independent fostering agency with a number of branches covering England and Wales. Regional Foster Placements (South West) is one of these branches, and is based in Yelverton. This branch also has a small office in Exeter.

This service provides a range of fostering services such as short-term, long-term and emergency care for children and young people who may have complex needs. There are currently 37 foster carers in the South West peninsula area, looking after 59 children.

**Inspection dates:** 21 to 25 May 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,** taking into account

**requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of last inspection:** 3 July 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The agency has failed to meet a requirement from the last inspection. This was to ensure that staff recruitment files contain all the information required by regulation. The staff files still have major shortfalls in regard to information. Also, when newly appointed staff are about to start work, but their recruitment checks have not all been received, the agency does not risk-assess the appointment. This means that children and young people are not fully protected.
- The agency does not always complete or update risk assessments on individual children and young people in a timely manner. Staff and foster carers do have a good working understanding of these risks. There is insufficient written information to provide foster carers with clear strategies to help them manage risks.
- There are a number of other documents missing from some children's electronic file records. This means that there is incomplete written information on children and young people, who may need to access this in the future.
- When the registered manager was absent for two months between November 2017 and January 2018, the agency did not inform Ofsted of either his departure or his return. This is contrary to regulation.
- During the period when the agency was short of staff, the registered manager was not always able to quality-assure reports before they went to the fostering panel. This lack of information caused the agency decision maker to defer a number of decisions, which could cause delays.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Children and young people receive, individually tailored care from skilled and experienced foster carers. They feel safe and secure in their foster placements. Consequently, children and young people make good progress.
- Children, young people and foster carers feel very well supported by the agency's friendly, personal approach. Many commented that the agency's small size and strong, child-centred leadership mean that there is a 'family' atmosphere. As a result, everyone involved with the agency feels valued and supported.
- Leaders and managers have responded very positively to some serious challenges over the past six months. As a result of their leadership and vision, the agency is now emerging from this difficult period.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>11: Independent fostering agencies—duty to secure welfare</p> <p>The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. In particular, ensure that there is a risk assessment in place for every child, which is regularly updated to reflect the child's current needs. (Regulation 11(1)(a))</p>	15/07/2018
<p>20: Fitness of workers</p> <p>The registered person must ensure that there is full and satisfactory information available in relation to persons working for the fostering service in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1.</p> <p>In particular, ensure that each staff or panel member has a full employment history. When it has not been possible to obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service certificate for this employment prior to the start date; that a risk assessment is carried out on the prospective employee. Ensure that identity information is kept on file. (Regulation 20(3)(c) and Schedule 1)</p>	15/07/2018
<p>38: Notice of absence</p> <p>Ensure that where the absence arises as a result of an emergency, the registered person must give notice of the absence within one week of its occurrence, specifying the matters mentioned in subparagraphs (a) to (e) of paragraph (2).</p> <p>Where the registered manager has been absent from the fostering agency for a continuous period of 28 days or more, and the Chief Inspector has not been given notice of the absence, the registered person must without delay give</p>	15/07/2018

notice in writing to the Chief Inspector specifying the matters mentioned in paragraph (2).

The registered person must notify the Chief Inspector of the return to duty of the registered manager not later than 7 days after the date of return. (Regulation 38(3)(4) and (5))

## Recommendations

- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams. In particular, ensure that the fostering service manager receives reports for the panel in good time to enable him to carry out an effective quality assurance process. (NMS 13.7)
- Ensure that the written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (NMS 14.7)
- Ensure that the registered person's system for recruiting staff and others includes an effective system for reaching decisions as to who is to be appointed and the circumstances in which an application should be refused in the light of any criminal convictions or other concerns about suitability that are declared or discovered through the recruitment process. In particular, carry out a risk assessment on any member of staff who starts in post without full employment checks in place. (NMS 19.5)
- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

The fostering service provides good day-to-day care for children and young people. However, the agency's failure to action requirements from the previous inspection has the potential to affect the quality of care provided.

Training, individual supervision and group support help foster carers to weather the more difficult phases in their children's lives. As a result, very few children and young people have to move from their foster carers at short notice because their placements are not sustainable.

One young person said, '[The agency is] really caring and friendly... I would say that [the agency] is a much better option for children in care, you don't get moved around all the time.'

The agency ensures that foster carers and staff work from a consistent, well-established therapeutic parenting model. Training is provided to educate foster carers about the importance of acknowledging the impact of previous trauma on a child's behaviour.

The children, young people and foster carers also have ready access to individually tailored therapy when they need it. The agency contracts in psychological services from a registered adoption support agency which is rated outstanding by Ofsted. The agency also employs its own fully qualified therapist. The children and young people also receive excellent support from their foster carers' supervising social workers.

This high level of support helps children and young people to work through past trauma. They may then be able to develop strategies that help them to manage their own behaviour.

The children and young people participate in the many inclusive agency-run events. One young person commented that it was good that activities include children who have disabilities and also the foster carers' and social workers' own children. The agency also provides activities solely for children who are looked after. This helps the children and young people to meet with others in a similar situation, to share experiences.

The agency involves children and young people in decision making whenever possible. Some young people talked about how they had taken part in the interviews for prospective new staff. They said that they felt listened to and that their views are considered on an equal basis to the adults. This approach values the children and young people's views and gives them a direct voice in appointing staff who will be working with them.

Children and young people benefit from their fostering families' continuing support after the age of 18. They may stay with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements, while undertaking further education or starting work.

The agency recruits foster carers very well. Prospective foster carers say that the agency is welcoming and accessible. They like its small size and friendly, child-centred approach. Foster carers praised the administrator's swift response to any queries. This helps to ensure that prospective foster carers are helped and made to feel valued.

Foster carers found their assessing social workers to be reliable and efficient. The panel is rigorous, but fair. The agency's warm and positive approach helps to ensure that foster carers build confidence and trusting professional relationships before they have a child placed with them.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Historical staff shortages over the last six months and consequent pressures on management time have led to a backlog of management monitoring work. This has affected the quality and quantity of care planning documents. There have also been shortfalls in the quality of reports submitted to the fostering panel.

The agency has well-established electronic recording system. However, some important documents are missing or have not yet been uploaded. Some of these are the local authority's responsibility, such as review notes, chronologies and personal education plans. As a result of an audit in March 2018, these have all been requested from the local authorities.

Some internal agency documents are also missing. For some children, there are no up-to-date risk assessments, agency placement plans and safer care plans. This is cause for concern as foster carers are not provided with the information they need to care safely for children.

The formulaic style of some electronic documents makes it difficult for staff to record in a way that is meaningful to the child. For example, risk assessment forms contain a generic list of possible risks. The questions on the risk assessment are geared to behavioural difficulties and, as a result, are not always appropriate for children who have physical or learning disabilities.

The consequence of this is that risk assessments do not always include clear strategies for reducing risk and responding to incidents. If there were to be a serious incident, this leaves the child, foster carers and agency staff at risk of poor decision making and potential harm.

In March 2018, the administrator carried out a full audit of each child's record and

requested the missing documents from the staff concerned. This means that the situation has already started to improve.

At the last inspection, a requirement was made about staff recruitment. This has still not been met. There are major deficits in staff-file information, including files for new employees.

No files seen during the present inspection fully complied with Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. In the case of one panel member, the only information on their file was their application form. A number of files have significant gaps in employment history.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks for recently appointed staff are always applied for, but do not always come through before the employees start in post. Staff who have worked overseas do not always have certificates of good conduct to check for any offences while they lived in other countries. This means that there is the potential to expose children to risks from adults with incomplete recruitment checks. In addition, when staff start in post before all the results of checks are back, there is no risk assessment to justify why the appointment decision has been made.

Foster carers receive good levels of support. They have access to a highly responsive, 24-hour service from experienced, well-qualified supervising social workers. This helps foster carers to respond sensitively to some very difficult situations.

A small number of children have gone missing and have found themselves in risky situations. The registered manager monitors each incident rigorously. He requests professionals' meetings to review the safety of any children who are deemed to be at risk. This helps to keep vulnerable young people safe.

The registered manager refers any child protection concerns to the designated officer (DO), in line with statutory requirements. The agency investigates any standards-of-care enquiries referred back to it by the DO.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The agency's leaders and managers show a commitment to providing a high-quality service to children and young people. They are well qualified, ambitious and resourceful.

The registered manager qualified in social work in 2005. He achieved his level 5 diploma in leadership and management in October 2015. He has many years' experience in fostering-service management.

When the registered manager was absent for two months between November 2017

and January 2018, the agency did not inform Ofsted of either his departure or his return. This is contrary to regulation.

The deficits found during this inspection arose during a difficult period in the agency's history. Over the past six months, the agency has suffered a series of traumatic events from which they are now recovering.

The present responsible individual is an experienced, qualified social worker. She has taken on a very active role in monitoring and supporting the agency's work. The registered manager, staff and foster carers responded bravely and positively to these unexpected events. Staff described how everyone pulled together to make sure that the work with children continued. One young person said, 'You could feel that the social workers were under pressure, but the agency was really good at not letting it affect us.'

The new responsible individual has a good recognition of the agency's strengths and areas for development. Her strategic decisions provide a firm foundation on which to build the agency's future development. However, there has been insufficient time for these positive management developments to be fully effective.

The responsible individual appointed a highly experienced regional manager from another area to undertake the role of agency decision maker. Part of the new agency decision maker's job is to lead developments on all of the agency's fostering panels. She is already has identified a number of areas for improvement.

The other major challenge during the past six months occurred when a number of long-established staff left the agency. This considerably increased the pressure on the remaining staff and on the registered manager.

Staff recruitment took place and has been successful. The social work team is now almost fully staffed. The responsible individual's vision is that the agency will now undergo a period of consolidation before embarking on any new initiatives.

Leaders and managers provide a highly supportive environment for their staff. Supervision is regular and thorough. Leaders and managers also receive good supervision from external supervisors who provide appropriate challenge, scrutiny and the opportunity to reflect on practice.

Induction and training programmes equip new and experienced staff with all the skills they need to work with individual children, young people and foster carers. As a result, the staff feel secure and very well supported.

There is considerable mutual respect and trust between managers and staff. In



particular, the staff value their leaders and managers' visibility and accessibility.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC062999

**Registered provider:** Regional Foster Placements Limited

**Registered provider address:** Old Auster, The Causeway, Mark, Highbridge,  
Somerset TA9 4QF

**Responsible individual:** Joann Catterall

**Registered manager:** Mark Breeze

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## **Inspector**

Heather Chaplin: social care inspector



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