

## Regional Foster Families Limited (South West)

Unit 2, 15 Frogmore Avenue, Plymouth, Devon PL6 5XH

# Assurance visit

### Information about this independent fostering agency

Regional Foster Families Limited (South West) is a national independent fostering agency with a number of branches covering England and Wales.

This service provides a range of fostering services such as short-term, long-term and emergency care for children who may have complex needs. There are currently 32 foster carers in the South West peninsula area, who look after 43 children.

The manager has been registered since 28 October 2019.

**Visit dates:** 22 to 23 February 2021

**Previous inspection date:** 8 July 2019

**Previous inspection judgement:** Requires improvement to be good

### Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Findings from the visit**

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

### **The care of children**

This assurance visit was carried out virtually. Telephone calls, video meetings and emails took place with children, young person, foster carers, staff and other professionals and documentation was scrutinised.

Children have good relationships with their foster carers. Social workers are positive about the progress that children have made and the commitment of their foster carers. Foster families receive support from the agency's therapist, who one foster carer described as a lifeline.

Nearly all children attend school and arrangements are made for those who are unable to through virtual lessons in the foster home. While a range of virtual activities and groups are provided for children and carers, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has made this more challenging for children to engage with. However, children and families have appreciated the support given to them in the form of vouchers, games and other thoughtful gestures. Foster carers commented on how children's achievements are positively reinforced through the agency's newsletters. The agency has also created a year book to help children remember the positive times and their successes.

One young person, who is now an adult but is supported by the agency to remain in her foster home, said, 'my experience has been really positive.' Foster carers spoken to or who provided written feedback could not praise the agency highly enough. They spoke of the significant improvements made by the manager and her team that have benefitted their families and children.

### **The safety of children**

The agency's ethos is to support children in a caring and therapeutic manner. When supervising social workers carry out visits to families, they ask to see children in the household privately to ensure their voices are heard and that they are safeguarded. These visits are completed within timescales and are well recorded. Any resulting issues are appropriately reported to managers.

If standards of care fall short of the agency's expectations, managers initiate procedures to investigate so that any necessary action is taken to address concerns, which are brought to the attention of the fostering panel where appropriate.

Children rarely go missing but, when they do, foster carers and the agency take this seriously and carry out necessary action, working well with other agencies to safeguard children.

When allegations or complaints are made, these are clearly recorded and effectively investigated.

Foster carers provide regular written records as well as verbal updates for social workers and parents. The manager has identified that the quality and consistency of foster carer recordings could improve and has arranged training which is due to start shortly.

Most safer care plans sampled are child specific and highlight risk and how this is managed in the foster home. However, safer care plans for three brothers and sisters in one family did not effectively identify risks and how to address these.

### **Leaders and managers**

The registered manager has good insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and she, alongside her team, has worked carefully and diligently to address the shortfalls identified at the previous inspection. Consequently, significant progress was found throughout the monitoring visit and all requirements made previously are now met.

Flexibilities allowed by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (no.2) Regulations 2020 have been used only where necessary. This refers to virtual visits which are risk assessed and assessment medicals, where the agency's medical advisor has helped inform decision making.

The fostering panel now operates effectively and has sufficient safeguards to ensure that its recommendations are robust. The chair of the panel, who is knowledgeable and experienced, praised the agency for its excellent communication and quality assurance processes, and good standards of assessments. Panel members are fully supported to carry out their roles and complete mandatory training and induction activities.

Supervision of staff is regular and professional. The manager supports staff to continue to improve upon providing challenge as well as support when supervising foster carers.

A commissioner said they are happy with the service provided and that communication is good. Social workers say they are chased for documentation that is needed for children's care.

The agency strives to understand children's feelings and wishes but this is an area that managers wish to improve. At present, children's views are not consistently reflected, or independently sought, in all aspects of care planning and service development.

Senior managers recognise the shortfalls of the current electronic recording system. They have invested in a new system which will support the agency's needs better

and will assist more in the collective evaluation of children's progress and the gathering of children's views.

Team members speak highly of the agency and are happy in their roles; their responses were unanimously positive in the Ofsted survey. Staff value the support and supervision given to them and have a child-focused approach to their work.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should ensure that children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. In particular, this involves continuing to develop work on collecting, independently ascertaining and analysing children's views and wishes so these come across clearly in all aspects of care planning and service development. (NMS 1.3)
- The registered person should ensure that foster carers understand how safer caring principles should be applied in a way which meets the needs of individual children. In particular, this includes safer care plans to ensure that they help all foster carers, and children where appropriate, to recognise individual risks and situations and how to manage them. (NMS 20.9)

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC062999

**Registered provider:** Regional Foster Families Limited

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

**Responsible individual:** Joann Catterall

**Registered manager:** Ann-Marie Baird

### **Inspectors**

Sarah Canto, Social Care Inspector  
Polly Soper, Social Care Inspector

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