

# Regional Foster Families Ltd (South West)

Regional Foster Families Ltd

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

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is a national independent fostering agency with offices based in England and Wales.

The agency's south-west office 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 33 foster carers, who look after 46 children.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since 28 October 2019.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 7 to 11 March 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 8 July 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## **Inspection judgements**

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

This is a child-focused agency. Foster carers reported that it feels like belonging to a big family. The foster carers, managers and the staff demonstrate that they have high aspirations for children and are committed to supporting children to succeed. Children build trusting relationships with their foster carers, who advocate effectively for them. Children often remain with their foster carers as part of the family beyond 18 years old, until they are ready to leave and live independently.

Foster carers reported that they feel valued by the agency. The agency's supervising social workers and the family support worker offer the foster carers effective and comprehensive 24-hour support and advice. The foster carers and the children benefit from the respite care that is available for them with other foster carers in the agency, if they need a break.

Children's views are gained in a variety of ways, to inform reviews of the quality of care provided by their foster carers and the agency. This is undertaken, for example, at reviews and unannounced visits by the supervising social workers, and through surveys. One child expressed a wish to remain living in their home area. It was difficult to find a foster carer for them in this area, so an advert for prospective foster carers in the area was posted on social media and staff posted flyers through doors. Consequently, a prospective foster carer for the child has now been recruited.

All children are making progress in educational placements that meet their needs. Supervising social workers liaise with the children's schools, attend educational reviews and advocate for the children if their educational needs are not being met. The agency has introduced an award scheme and children can gain qualifications for achievements in subjects such as independent living skills.

The health needs of children are met. Foster carers provide good-quality care for children who often have very complex health needs. All children are up to date with necessary vaccinations, and dental and optician appointments. The agency's therapist supports foster carers to meet the children's emotional health needs through offering the foster carers behavioural strategies and training.

Foster carers benefit from a range of support groups, which continued online during the COVID-19 restrictions. Foster carers generally remain with the agency for many years. Unplanned endings for children are rare. This is achieved through careful matching with foster carers, who are very much involved in the matching process.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Children report that they feel safe living with their foster carers. The agency provides a strong and proactive response when there are safeguarding concerns about a foster carer or a child. The agency has effective links with safeguarding

professionals. If any safeguarding incidents do occur, the incident is comprehensively evaluated for learning and promptly implemented.

Incidents of children going missing are rare. If there is an incident of a child going missing, the agency ensures a prompt multi-agency response. The agency also ensures that the child is spoken to on their return by an independent person, so that information can be gained about where they were, who they were with and whether they have any concerns about their foster carer.

Expectations of foster carers are clear. They are expected by the agency to provide high-quality care for children. Standards of care concerns and allegations investigations are thorough and appropriate safeguarding action taken. Foster carers are promptly brought back to panel for reapproval, and are deregistered if necessary, following the conclusion of an investigation.

Foster carers do have all the information that they need to provide them with individualised behaviour management strategies for the children in their care and how to manage identified risks. However, this information is often contained in multiple documents and on occasion is difficult to find. This means that the safer caring plans are sometimes too generic and do not contain the individualised guidance for foster carers in one, easy to find document.

Recruitment processes and checks obtained for staff are rigorous, and ensure that only suitable people are employed by the agency. Foster carers are subject to robust checks prior to their approval. Health and safety checks of foster carers' homes are comprehensive, to ensure that they can provide a safe and suitable environment for children.

The agency has recently implemented an improved range of safeguarding training opportunities for foster carers and staff. There are plans to provide adult safeguarding training for foster carers who provide staying put arrangements. However, this training has not yet been put in place to ensure that these foster carers are aware of adult safeguarding arrangements when a child reaches 18 years old.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders and managers have worked effectively to improve the quality of care being provided by the agency. Policies and procedures have been strengthened and implemented in line with the agency's development plan. The positive impact of the management team is evident. Foster carers and the staff praised the improvements in the agency, agreed that they are for the better and were positive about the support that they have received from leaders and managers throughout these changes.

Effective management oversight of the agency is apparent. Serious incidents are generally notified to the necessary authorities. However, on two occasions, serious incidents were not notified to Ofsted in a timely manner.

Supervising social workers' visits to foster carers, including unannounced visits, are timely and evidence professional curiosity, safeguarding vigilance, challenge and scrutiny. Reports of the visits, along with the foster carer logs, are documented on the agency's recording systems to aid management oversight.

The staff benefit from good-quality reflective supervision from managers. Staff training is focused on children's experiences, care needs and plans, and is comprehensively recorded.

The recruitment of foster carers is in line with the agency's statement of purpose. The agency recruits a diverse range of carers who can meet the needs of the children in the area who need a foster home. Foster carers undertake a wide range of training courses which ensure that they can meet the needs of the children in their care. Foster carers' mandatory training and completion of workbooks are up to date.

The fostering panel meets regularly and provides an effective quality-monitoring function. The quality of foster carer assessments is very good. The assessments provide the panel with the information that it needs in order to make a recommendation. Clear panel recommendations and the reasons for the recommendations are comprehensively documented. There is evidence of safe and suitable decisions being made by the agency decision-maker.

# 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
The registered person should ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to the 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))	31 March 2022

## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children. (NMS 4.2)

This particularly refers to ensuring that foster carers attend adult safeguarding training if they are caring for a young person over 18 years old.

- The registered person should ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. (NMS 3.9)

This particularly refers to ensuring that all behaviour management strategies and control measures to manage identified risks are contained in one easy-to-reference document, such as the safer caring plan, that provides the foster carer with the information they need.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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 Families Ltd

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

**Responsible individual:** Joann Catterall

**Registered manager:** Ann-Marie Baird

**Telephone number:** 01752 220 109

**Email address:** jo.catterall@rfp.care

## **Inspectors**

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector

Louise Bacon, Social Care Inspector

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