

Families First (SW) Independent Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Inspector | Romana Young |
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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| Outstanding: | this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality |
| Good: | this aspect of the provision is strong |
| Satisfactory: | this aspect of the provision is sound |
| Inadequate: | this aspect of the provision is not good enough |

Service information

Brief description of the service

Families First (South West) Ltd is an independent fostering agency owned by the Pathway Care Ltd. The service operates from an office base in Newton Abbot, Devon and provides a range of fostering services, such as short-term or time limited care, long-term care, short break care for disabled children and specialist parent and child care. The service employs 14 full-time or part-time members of staff, including the Registered Manager, in managerial, social work or administrative positions. At 31 March 2007 there were 47 fostering households approved with this service, providing five parent and child placements and long-term, time-limited or short break care to 38 children and young people.

Summary

This statutory inspection visit was undertaken as an announced key inspection. All key National Minimum Standards were inspected and judged as met. The inspector found that the service is operating to an excellent standard overall. Since the last inspection in March 2006, there has been a company restructure with significant changes to the senior management team. However, leadership of the service has been steady and consistent during this time of change. There are a number of areas of practice and operation of the service which were found to be outstanding. These included the training and support provided to foster carers; placement planning and matching, particularly in relation to parent and child placements; support for and promotion of children and young people's healthy development and educational attainment; and a strong commitment to team working and multi-professional problem-solving. One recommendation has been made at this inspection relating to foster carer review reports. It is recommended that the foster carer review reports record the full date that the review was held and, where appropriate, the full date that the previous review was held. This will more easily evidence that foster carer reviews are being undertaken within the statutory interval of not more than a year.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were five statutory requirements and six recommendations made at the previous inspection visit relating to outcomes in Staying Safe and Organisation. The Registered Person was asked to ensure that foster carer case files contained all the required documentation, including an accurate and up-to-date foster carer agreement. The Registered Person was also asked to ensure that reviews of a foster carer's approval are undertaken within the statutory interval. This is to ensure that children and young people are placed with foster carers who are able to meet their needs. The Registered Person was asked to ensure that staff records contained all the required information to ensure that people working for the fostering service are suitable to be working with children and young people. The service implemented an action plan and has now met all of the statutory requirements. Every foster carer's approval was scheduled to be reviewed by the fostering panel over the course of this year and their case records updated. Examination of foster carer case records and discussions with foster carers evidenced that this was being done. Records are now being stored electronically on the 'Fostertrack' database system, including the foster carer and children placed registers. Checks of these registers confirmed that all current placements are within the scope of the foster carers' approval. As the full date was not recorded in the foster carer review report, it was difficult to judge whether

or not the review had been undertaken within a year of the approval or a previous review. A recommendation has been made. Recruitment practice has been reviewed. Staff files checked contained evidence of a robust checking procedure and held all the required information.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent systems in place to ensure that children and young people placed with the service are receiving health care, advice and guidance, which meets their individual needs and promotes and supports healthy development and emotional and physical well-being. Children and young people are registered with local primary health care services such as a G.P or dentist. Children's and young people's health needs, and how these are being met, are well recorded in the individual 'health passports' and 'daily living plans' used. These detail all health professionals involved with the child or young person's health care and any treatment received. The agency contracts the services of a local consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, a child and adolescent psychotherapist and a specialist in drug and alcohol abuse to provide specialist medical and health expertise, particularly in relation to parent & child assessment placements. Children and young people are provided with specialist therapeutic support to promote and assist their emotional and psychological development and wellbeing, if there is an assessed need for this. Children and young people benefit from advice and guidance on healthy eating and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, provided to them by their foster carers and the fostering service. Placing social workers report that both the agency and its foster carers are very good at ensuring that children and young people placed with the service receive good care and support to ensure their healthy physical, emotional and social development. The agency provides very good health related training for foster carers, for example, first aid training, training in caring for children with hepatitis B, HIV, autistic spectrum disorders or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and attachment issues.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There are clear and robust systems in place to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm, their welfare promoted and that care and accommodation provided for children and young people is safe and suitable for their needs. Children and young people are being well-cared for by suitably trained and skilled foster carers who provide them with a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Children and young people feel well cared for and that their foster carers are caring and supportive. The agency takes good care in matching children and young people with foster carers. Records show that the agency declines referrals where it cannot make a good match that will meet a child's or young person's needs well. The process of matching and setting up parent & child assessment placements is particularly thorough and skilled. These are generally high risk placements subject to court proceedings and are very well-planned and supported. Placements are usually planned. Introductory visits take place whenever possible. Some foster carers can accommodate children and young people at short notice in an emergency situation. Foster carers rated the service as 'outstanding' at ensuring that they can meet the needs of children and young people placed with them. They report that they were given good information about a child or young person before they were placed with them. Foster carers feel that the service gives them outstanding support to maintain placement stability and provide good continuity of care for children and young people. Foster carers are provided with very good advice and training on safeguarding children and young people's

welfare. They can also access support and guidance from the service, by telephone, at any time. Children and young people know who to speak to if they are not happy or have a personal problem. They are aware of how to make a complaint if they need to. The agency operates safe and suitable recruitment and vetting procedures to ensure that people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people. There are thorough procedures for the assessment and preparation of prospective foster carers and the reviewing of approved fostering households. The fostering panel operates effectively to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers so that children and young people placed with the service receive high quality care which meets their needs.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people feel that they are respected and treated equally by their foster carers and that they are being well cared for in their foster homes. Foster carers feel that the service is outstanding at addressing issues of equality and diversity and that they are provided with 'excellent' training in this area. Foster carers feel that they receive good help from the service in supporting the children and young people they care for in undertaking activities in the community. The service places a high priority on ensuring that children and young people are able to attend suitable educational placements and promoting their educational attainment. When necessary, young people are provided with individual tuition by the service so that they can achieve educationally. Young people say that they are receiving the right help so that they can be successful in their education and gain qualifications. Foster carers report that they receive good help from their supervising social worker in supporting the education of the children and young people they care for.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The service makes good efforts to ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions about their day-to-day lives and are encouraged and supported to participate in care planning reviews. Children and young people confirmed that they are encouraged and supported to express their views about how they are cared for and what they would like to happen in the future. Children and young people feel that their foster carers listen to what they have to say and take notice of their opinions. Placing social workers feel that the agency's staff are very good at communicating with them and consulting them about issues that are likely to affect the child's or young person's daily life and their progress and needs. Children and young people are encouraged and supported to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships in line with their care plan and the foster placement agreement. Foster carers are aware of their responsibilities in promoting and supporting contact arrangements.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Children and young people reported that their foster carers help and encourage them to think about and discuss their plans for their future. Placing social workers said that foster carers provide very good encouragement and assistance to young people to obtain part-time jobs to help them prepare for adulthood. Foster carers reported that the service is outstanding at enabling them to provide an environment for a child to prosper. The agency has produced an excellent guide to independent living for young people to assist them with and prepare them

for leaving care. Young people also benefit from a grant from the agency when they leave care. Foster carers are supported to care for children and young people placed with them through the payment of a specified allowance and agreed expenses. Payments are made at the agreed time and allowances are reviewed annually.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose has been updated to reflect the recent company restructure. All policies and procedures are currently being reviewed and updated also. There have been substantial changes to the structure and management of the company since the last inspection visit. Service delivery has remained child-focused and of a high quality during this transitional period. Staff and foster carers are well-motivated and skilled and work as a strong team to support and promote good outcomes for children and young people placed with the service. The senior management team had provided capable and effective leadership of the service despite the current gaps in the management structure with the two social work team manager posts still vacant. Senior managers are covering these roles as well as their own at present which has increased their workload. Some management tasks, for example, supervision of staff are not occurring as regularly. However, staff feel that senior managers are still accessible to them when they need them. The agency is aware that this situation needs a speedy resolution and is taking steps to appoint suitable team managers. Staff hold suitable professional qualifications for their role and are supported to undertake continuous professional development requirements for these. Both staff and foster carers feel well supported, for example, through access to comprehensive policies and procedures, regular supportive supervision and good access to relevant training to update and expand their knowledge base and skills. Foster carers say that they were attracted to the service as it is a small, local service with an excellent reputation for supporting foster carers and valuing their role. Case records for children and young people and foster carers are comprehensive and stored securely. However, the full date was not recorded in the foster carer review report, which made it difficult to judge whether or not reviews had been undertaken within a year of approval, or a previous review. A recommendation has been made regarding this. The 'Fostertrack' database system the agency has introduced allows managers to more easily and efficiently monitor the operation of the service.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action | Due date |
|----------|--------|----------|
|----------|--------|----------|

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carer review reports include the full date, that is the day, month and year, when the review was held and, after the first review, the full date the previous review

was held, to evidence that annual reviews are being undertaken at intervals of not more than a year (NMS 21, Regulation 29 of The Fostering Services Regulations 2002).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

Annex A

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.