



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Fostering Solutions Ltd

Wrexham

Type of Inspection – Baseline

Date(s) of inspection – 21 August 2017 to 25 August 2017

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Summary

About the service

Fostering Solutions is an independent fostering agency which offers a range of placements for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years of age, including parent and child placements, across North Wales. The agency is based in Wrexham and at the time of the inspection there were 35 fostering households supporting 39 children and young people. Of these, there were six sibling groups placed together and two parent and child placements. Formerly a part of the Acorn group of services, Fostering Solutions has recently been acquired by the National Fostering Agency. The registered manager is Julie Grant.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This was a planned announced inspection we carried out at the Wrexham office on Monday 21/08/17 between 09:00 and 17:00, Tuesday 22/08/17 between 08:40 and 17:00, Wednesday 23/08/17 between 08:40 and 16:45, and Thursday 24/08/17 between 08:30 and 16:30. We gave initial feedback to the responsible individual and registered manager on Friday 25/08/17 between 09:00 and 12:00.

The information used for this inspection was obtained by the following methods:

- We spoke with seven foster carers during support groups, lunch activity, by telephone and at a home visit.
- Spoke to three supervising social workers.
- Spoke with the assessing social worker for prospective foster carers.
- Spent time with the regional operations manager who assisted our navigation of the computer system.
- Reviewed three archived paper files which had been computerised.
- Met the 'helping hands' and 'buddying' support groups.
- Had lunch with carers and children.
- Spoke with the participation officer for the service.
- Attended a panel meeting and spoke with members of the fostering panel.
- Met with the chair of the fostering panel.
- Reviewed the records of the last three fostering panel meetings.

We viewed a sample of the agency's paperwork including the statement of purpose, the young person's welcome guide, quality monitoring reports and notifications. We looked at what we already knew about the service and what it provided to us for this inspection.

We received completed questionnaires from:

Six (6) foster carer households;
Seven (7) children and young people;
Three (3) agency social workers;
Two (2) placing local authority social workers;
Four (4) panel members.

We viewed a sample of ten (10) young people's electronic records including safer caring agreements, delegated authority agreements, observation records and outcome

measures. We also viewed a sample of ten (10) foster carers' electronic records.

What does the service do well?

Overall assessment

Children, young people and foster carers receive a good service from this agency which is committed to quality assurance and constant improvement. The agency know the children and young people well and there is regular contact with foster carers who spoke highly about the support they received saying staff were excellent and 'there is always someone at the end of the phone if needed.'

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The service has developed a 'helping hands' support group of existing foster carers to help new foster carers after they had been approved.
 - The service has developed a parent and child training package in response to some lessons learned. This is being implemented.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

We did not find any areas where the service was not meeting its legal requirements. We recommend the following to improve the service further:

- The statement of purpose should include the way in which the service is moving towards the 'active offer' of the Welsh language for foster carers and children and young people.
- The inclusion of the details of the registered manager in the statement of purpose would enhance the unique identify of the service within the larger group and give people reading it a point of reference.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) should be referenced in young people's guides so children and young people know of the importance of their rights.
- The service should consider the ways in which they can measure the well-being outcomes for children and young people on an annual basis and from the beginning of their placement.
- A child / young person's pen picture should be compiled with the child and foster carers and up-dated at periodic intervals so they have an easy read document of their progress they can add to their memory boxes.

Well-being

Summary

Children and young people are happy, healthy and safe. They know and understand what care, support and opportunities are available to them and their rights are protected, they have a voice and, as far as practical, control on making decisions about their lives.

Findings

Children and young people benefit from a robust recruitment process to ensure they are kept safe. We found foster carers' experience a comprehensive assessment process which included attendance at Skills to Foster pre-approval training. A regional assessment social worker carried out the assessment process and told us how they had been able to develop consistency in the assessment process including feedback on the pre-approval training. A questionnaire from newly approved respite foster carers described the experience of being assessed as "*very challenging and far superior*" to what they had experienced previously when being assessed by their local authority and an inexperienced assessing social worker. Post approval training included child protection, keeping children safe and first aid training. We saw from the supervising social worker records they discussed the safety of children and young people with the foster carer signposting them to materials to help a child keep themselves safe and also talking to the child to assess their awareness of danger. Children and young people are kept safe through a detailed assessment and vetting of their foster carers and by regular monitoring by their foster carers and supervising social workers.

Children and young people have a voice and know how to express their concerns. We saw from the children and young people's guides their rights are explained and they are informed of the ways they are consulted about decisions affecting their life. The explanation of rights would benefit from a brief reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to highlight the importance given to their rights. We saw from the guides for children and young people they were encouraged to express their views and concerns and the young person's comments and complaints form showed how easy this was to do. A simple form invited children and young people to write down their worry, problem or complaint and had contact details for children's commissioners across the United Kingdom. It gives young people alternative ways to get in touch and invites them to get in touch in other ways including through their own dedicated area of the Fostering Solutions web-site called 'kidzone'. There have been no complaints or concerns in the reporting year to 31/03/17 and none in the last five months. We saw evidence in young people's electronic record they had been given the documentation they required and were spoken with in private by the foster carers' supervising social workers. The majority of children and young people's questionnaires showed they knew how to complain and had received information about having a say. Children and young people are able to express their views and opinions and are able to voice their concerns.

Children and young people are encouraged to try new things by accessing group and individual activities. Photographs of them involved in activities organised by the service adorned the walls of the offices in Wrexham. The service arranges activities for children

and young people who are in placement and the birth children of foster carers if they are of an appropriate age. We saw notes and photographs of a craft club and gardening event held in March 2017 and a separate craft club for 'children who foster' the next month. Informal get-togethers of foster carers and children meant support was readily available and a young person had joined the services' youth council to represent the voice of young people. The annual summer event was held at the beginning of August 2017 and further events were planned over the rest of the summer school holidays. The notes of these events and photographs show the extent to which they were well attended and enjoyed. We saw from the child record cards a number of regular activities were enjoyed by children and young people and notes of the supervising social worker' visits demonstrated children and young people were trying out new activities such as sailing lessons, swimming, trampolining, youth clubs, holidays, foster family weddings, singing, art, cooking, cinema, and attending the library and sports centres. Children and young people can be involved, participate and feel valued.

Children and young people are involved in discussions about their lives and where practical can influence what will happen. We saw an example of a young person being asked for their views in planning for their future and influencing whether or not they attended a residential college. They viewed their looked after child review negatively and was supported and encouraged to look for the alternatives that suited them, their passion and personality. All the child records we viewed recorded the views of the child and young person and one we looked at demonstrated the young person had decided they wanted to remain with their foster carers when their sibling group moved. This had been agreed with as it was in the child's best interest and, as a result they were making considerable progress and achieving above average in school. Children and young people are able to have influence in their lives and, where possible, some degree of control.

Overall, children and young people are happy, healthy and safe. They have opportunities to try new things and are able to make their views known. They are helped to exercise their rights.

Care and Support

Summary

Children and young people receive the right care at the right time in the way they want. They are supported by skilled foster carers who provide stability in their lives and positively impact on their experience, progress and outcomes.

Findings

Foster carers understand and demonstrate the child / young person they are fostering feel a part of their family. We saw records where children and young people in longer term placements called their foster carers 'mum and dad' and the young person we visited in their foster placement was clearly 'at home' with their carer and politely acknowledged our presence but went about their routine only coming in the room to ask their 'mum' something. We heard from foster carers they regarded the child or young person were a part of their family and they consulted with them before they accepted a new respite foster placement. One foster carer told us their young person had said they were looking forward to having a guest when they had not had a respite placement for a short while. In this home there was evidence of the young person with the family in photographs of them together and on activities. Another foster carer told us they did not use the term 'looked after' child and referred to the young person they had with them just by name or 'my child'. Children and young people recorded in their questionnaires; *"It's good"*, *"I like everything"* and *"we do fun things and go on family outings"*. Children and young people feel they belong and have safe positive relationships.

Foster carers and staff promote the education of children and young people through good communication with the school, attendance at parents' evenings and support with homework encouraging children to be ambitious. The agency's child and young person outcomes card for a young person showed school attendance and any issues with how well they were doing was recorded, and fosters carers had identified a young person had difficulties with their ability to concentrate. The foster carers had advocated for a young person to ensure their educational needs were being met in both schools they attended and the carers were helping both the children placed with them with homework and reading. They were working with external professionals to increase their understanding of a young person's difficulties and how they could help. Other records we sampled provided evidence of foster carers supporting children and young peoples' attendance at school and college sometimes at some distance away to maintain consistency in the short term. One record showed the relationship a young person had with a particular teacher was important to a young person, and the foster carers were supporting them to enable them to continue at the same school as they prepared for exams. The importance of education is promoted by the agency's foster carers who encourage and support children and young people to learn and develop their academic ability.

Children and young people are given support regarding their physical, emotional and psychological health needs. The evidence from the children and young people's electronic records show these needs are identified at the matching stage of a child's placement and these are tracked by the foster carer and the supervising social worker as well as at statutory reviews and by their placing social workers. We saw from the observations made by the supervising social workers that registration with a G.P. dentist

and optician was checked. Whether a child was regularly engaged in physical activity and eating a healthy and nutritious diet was noted and any health appointments were recorded. We saw from notifications to us that incidents requiring a child or young person's health had been appropriately managed with attendance at hospital as needed. There was evidence of health advice about smoking and alcohol had been given by foster carers. We found one incident of a child falling and cutting their leg while playing which had not been notified to us because it had not affected their health and well-being. We discussed this with the registered manager as the child had attended the accident department of the local hospital and they agreed to seek advice for future incidents if in doubt. There was evidence a young person's psychological and mental health was closely monitored by their foster carers who attended appointments with the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) for the young person and stayed with them during a period of self harm. Other foster carers were working with the Child and Adolescent learning disability service (CALDS). Foster carers reported they had access to the agency's psychologist when they needed. A safer caring policy was in place for all children and young people and included any risks to their physical, emotional and psychological well being. Associated risk assessments were in place. A placing social worker recorded *"The children are well matched in respect that the foster carers are also physically active and are able to keep up with the children, they often all go out cycling together"*. Children and young people can be confident attention is given by the agency to ensure their physical and mental well being is maintained and enhanced.

Overall, Fostering Solutions provides care and support to children and young people in families where they can feel nurtured and at home and where they receive the right care at the right time.

Quality Of Leadership and Management

Summary

Children and young people receive good quality care from a service which provides good information to children, young people and foster carers. It sets high standards for itself, is committed to quality assurance and constant improvement. Children, young people, foster carers, panel members and staff are able to have a say and contribute to the development of the service

Findings

Children and young people know and understand what care, support and opportunities are available to them. The statement of purpose is comprehensive though difficult to read because of the size and colour of the print. As it covers all the fostering services provided by the group with the addresses of the regional offices it is not easy to distinguish the two offices comprising the Wales region and it does not include the name and detail of the registered manager and responsible individual of the service. It is available in both English and Welsh and we were given both versions at the same time. A young person's welcome guide and a children's welcome guide are available in easy read format with drawings by young people which is relevant to the different age ranges covered. The back page alerts children and young people to the availability of the guides in other languages and these include the Welsh language. This demonstrates the services' commitment to the communication needs of children and young people and shows the information children and young people need is readily available to them so they can understand the care, support and opportunities available.

Children and young people benefit from a service where the foster carers receive supervision and support on a regular basis so they know their carers are well equipped and emotionally resilient in meeting their needs. The foster carers we spoke with and the questionnaires we received from them were all appreciative of the support from the agency. Comments we received included *"we know that full support, information, help, assistance and training is fully available. Our supervising social worker is usually available to discuss any aspect of fostering we may need assistance with. If unavailable there is always another social worker available"* and *"we are very happy with the support from senior managers as well as our supervising social worker. They're a good team"*. Another foster carer told us the support they received from their supervising social worker was *"Excellent"*. We saw there were very positive comments about the support given by the fostering team in the foster carer annual reviews in the records we looked at and how accommodating, responsive and approachable they found their supervising social workers had been. One fostering family recorded in their questionnaire they found the administrative response to have been excellent and as *"a friendly point of contact [who] has always addressed any queries and has always returned my calls or referred me to others"*. Three foster family households recorded they had been without a supervising social worker for a couple of months last year and the role had been taken on by the registered manager. We saw fostering households had received a visit from their supervising social worker at least monthly and some of the visits were unannounced. The visits always included time talking with the child or young person. Foster carers valued the meetings of regional foster carer support groups which were held across the North Wales region. They told us they appreciated sharing experiences,

receiving advice and “*tips and ideas*” and supporting each other. Additionally the agency has developed a ‘helping hands’ group of experienced foster carers who were on hand to support and help newly approved foster carers. Children and young people benefit from a service where the well-being of foster carers and staff is given high priority and staff are well led, supported and trained.

Foster carers can be confident they will receive a full annual appraisal of their role on an annual basis by the fostering panel with their views recorded and included feedback received from children and young people placed with them, birth children and local authority social workers. Their supervising social workers had completed a report on their practice over the previous year highlighting their strengths, any issues, training they have attended and support groups they are involved with. We attended a panel meeting and we read the minutes of the last three panel meetings all of which were properly constituted and quorate. We saw panel members had prepared beforehand and had identified areas for further clarification. These were discussed before meeting with the assessing social worker and applicants with the most relevant questions from a list compiled by the provider from children who were looked after. The analysis of applications by panel members was, we saw, thoughtful and searching and they used the discussion they engaged in after they had made their recommendation to quality assess the quality of reports presented and any issues or themes the agency should be aware of. The presenting social worker was asked to quality assess their experience of panel functioning. The analysis of applications was equally applied to post allegation review (PAR) reports being presented. These occur if and when any allegation is made against foster carers to ensure the allegation had been made to safeguarding teams and properly investigated. Any lessons learned and training needs were identified and we saw the parent and child training had been reviewed and revised as a result of an allegation. Foster carers, children and young people can be assured the way in which the service’s fostering panel operates contributes to the quality of the foster carers and the service provided.

Foster carers can be confident they will continue to receive training relevant to the needs of children and young people after they were approved. 29 carers in total had completed their NVQ or QCF awards and of these nine carers had attended a more advanced twelve week Fostering Changes training course. More specialised training, in addition to core training such as education, safeguarding, attachment, first aid and challenging behaviour, was provided between January 2017 and August 2017 and included de-escalation, child sexual exploitation, and foetal alcohol training. Training planned for the last three months of the year included the revised parent and child training over two days and responding to challenging behaviour using de-escalation techniques and emotional support at level two. Children and young people benefit from a service which gives high priority to ensuring their foster carers are knowledgeable and well trained to support them.

Children and young people benefit from good quality care from a service which regularly monitors, reviews and tracks their progress. It regularly assesses the quality of the service and experiences of children and young people. We saw evidence of young people being asked their views and contributing to discussions about their future. They are asked for their views of the placement and the quality of their foster carers for the annual appraisal of their carers. The annual quality of care review for 2016 to 2017 demonstrates how ‘soft data’ from children, young people and foster carers views and

opinions is collated and used to develop an action plan for improvement. In the previous year the agency had introduced more robust 'memory boxes for children and young people so they have all the information they may need to ensure their rights are being observed and their needs met in foster care. An age appropriate present or gift voucher special to the child as well as a savings tin, photo frame and photo album is in the box to welcome them and help them feel special. The results of the monitoring and quality assurance systems used by the agency are brought together in an action plan for the following twelve months and we saw an emphasis on the continued development of the service. Children and young people benefit from a service which proactively monitors the quality of the service they provide and by so doing achieve continuous improvement.

Overall, Fostering Solutions is an agency which, through the level of support, training and monitoring, provides children and young people with the confidence their needs will be met and where they will be able to achieve a sense of well being and emotional contentment.

Type of care provided	Fostering
Registered Person	John Keane
Registered Manager(s)	Julie Grant
Registered maximum number of places	N/A
Date of previous CSSIW inspection	23,24, 25, 26 November 2015 Published 03/02/2016
Dates of this Inspection visit(s)	21/08/2017 to 25/08/2017
Operating Language of the service	English
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	The service is working towards providing the 'Active Offer' of the Welsh Language.
Additional Information:	
Statement of purpose, young person's guide and questionnaires are available in Welsh or are bi-lingual/	