



Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Independent Foster Care Services

Spring Meadow Business Park
Wentloog Road
Rumney
CF3 2ES

Type of Inspection – Announced and baseline
Dates of inspection – 28th and 29th January 2014
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Summary

About the service

IFCS was first registered as an independent fostering agency in 2004 and has offices in Cardiff and Swansea. The registered provider is IFCS and the registered manager is Gail Tobin.

It provides placements mostly to South Wales' local authorities with foster carers across the South and South West Wales area.

At the time the self assessment was completed in July 2013 they were able to provide placements for up to 287 children with 114 approved foster carers. 153 children were in placements.

What type of inspection was carried out?

The inspection was a routine annual inspection.

The following methodology was employed and informed the findings of this report;

- review of the self assessment, statement of purpose, report on the review of the quality of care provided and selected other documentation
- discussion with foster carers, staff and managers within the Swansea and Cardiff offices and the owner / director of the company

What does the service do well?

Evidence indicated that;

- the quality of all aspects of service were good
- that agency's ability to evaluate and improve its services for children had continuously improved and
- their ability to respond constructively to the demands faced by the agency had strengthened

What has improved since the last inspection?

The agency has sharpened its focus on safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and has improved its ability to make evidence based judgements about the degree to which their developmental needs are met.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

Evidence indicated that the agency's systems for monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality of the services provided for children will support the ongoing improvement of the agency.

Quality of life

Documentation stated that the ethos of the agency is that children's welfare and positive outcomes is their paramount consideration. Evidence indicated that considerable commitment had been made to fulfilling this ethos and to ensure that the quality of life and the experience of children positively supported their personal and social development.

The agency had implemented an outcomes assessment process which was completed at each visit and included consultation with children in regard to their;

- health
- education
- family and social relationships
- emotional and behavioural well being
- positive identity
- social presentation
- self care skills
- safeguarding

The completed assessments were used to inform review processes for children, their foster carers and the overall performance of the agency.

Their report on the quality of care provided to children in 2013 stated that 99% of all children placed were attending an educational programme (the 1% representing a young person recently placed without a current school placement). It stated that school attendance for all children was 96%; that 21 children achieved A to C grades at GCSE level and 14 achieved BTEC pass grades. The full report of their review is available upon request from the agency.

Examples of the agency supporting children's positive development included their commitment to financing hobbies and leisure activities and the provision of a weekly youth club and arts and crafts group at both of its offices. These facilities have operated for about two years and we heard that they have provided a valuable means for listening to children; for them to meet with other children, to learn new skills and simply to have fun. A range of musical instruments and recording equipment was provided as well arts and crafts materials; a minibus and driver.

They have created an online facility for children to ask questions or to provide feedback about things that are important to them. This is one of many systems for consulting with and listening to children and is indicative of their approach to safeguarding and promoting their welfare. They have a designated safeguarding manager who coordinates and oversees the agency's safeguarding arrangements and provides training for foster carers and staff. As with other aspects of practice, they had undertaken a review of their safeguarding practices to inform their ongoing improvement which included consultation about self harming, discrimination and bullying and harassment.

Risk assessment processes have been continuously improved in response to the high risks associated with their role.

Quality of staffing

Evidence indicated that the quality of the Social Workers and other staff employed by the agency was very good.

They employed about twenty qualified Social Workers plus business support and other staff. They had access to a range of specialist advisers in relation to legal matters and children's education, health and behavioural support needs.

Consultation with a group of foster carers indicated that the quality of staff employed by the agency was very good. They said that the Social Workers that had undertaken their assessments; that had provided them ongoing support and had reviewed their ongoing approval had demonstrated commitment, skill and professionalism within their roles.

Consultation with Social Workers indicated there were sufficient staff to fulfil their respective responsibilities and that independent Social Workers were available to undertake assessments if necessary. They said that managers carefully allocated and monitored workloads to ensure the high standards of professional practice they expected were achievable. They said they received positive encouragement and support in their career development and that opportunities for promotion within the agency were good.

Social Workers from the 'placements team' demonstrated a detailed understanding of their role and of its significance for children and foster carers. Evidence indicated that placement making and matching processes were well developed and effective in placing children with carers able to meet their needs. Statistics gathered by the agency indicated that placement sustainability was good and that placement disruption and breakdown rates were low.

Consultation indicated that staff received good support to achieve and maintain high standards of competence but also that their performance was monitored and reviewed within consultation, supervision and appraisal processes. Evidence was seen that the agency had sought and used feedback about the competence and performance of staff to inform their continuing development.

It was confirmed that staff providing the youth club and arts and crafts facilities had been vetted and provided training, including safeguarding training in fulfilling their roles with children.

Quality of leadership and management

Evidence indicated that the quality of the leadership and management was very good.

The registered manager had been in post since the agency was registered in 2004 and along with the registered provider, has consistently demonstrated effective management of the services it provides.

The management structure has developed proportionately as the service has grown with middle managers having particular areas of responsibility including the oversight of placement making, placement support and safeguarding.

The agency's second office which is located in Swansea opened in 2012 to better support foster carers in the South West Wales area. The services provided from this office are not subject to separate registration but operate as an integrated part of IFCS, albeit with its own management, social work and business support staff. Evidence indicated that the quality of services provided from the Swansea office were consistent with the standards generally achieved by the agency.

Feedback from foster carers and Social Workers at both offices said that the quality of leadership and management had been consistently good. They said that managers were very clear about their expectations and aspirations and provided high levels of support to enable high standards of practice.

The statement of purpose clearly set out the operation and resourcing of the agency and had been updated as services had developed. Foster carers said that the range of information in the statement of purpose had been helpful when they were making application to become foster carers and staff said it had been used as part of their induction. The information in the document was unambiguous and provided a 'blueprint' of the service and assisted managers in evaluating its effectiveness.

Systems to monitor, review and improve the quality services provided by the agency were well established and increasingly informed by consultation with children, foster carers, staff and other stakeholders. The agency had introduced an outcomes framework to monitor and measure progress made by children against the aims and objectives of their care plans and fostering agreements. They had also developed their data base to assist in the gathering and analysis of this information to inform their review of the quality of care provided to children and to make plans for its continuous improvement.

The fostering panel was not attended or considered at this inspection.

Quality of Foster Carers

Evidence indicated that considerable commitment had been made to ensure that foster carers were supported and trained to meet the particular needs of children placed with them.

At the time the self assessment was completed in July 2013 the agency had 114 approved foster carers providing placements for 153 children.

Consultation with a group of foster carers indicated that the systems in place for their vetting, training and support were comprehensive and well developed. They said the information made available at the time of their recruitment had been clear about the operation and resourcing of the agency and also about its ethos. They said their pre approval training and assessments had been thorough and managed professionally by the Social Workers involved.

They said that adequate information about children was provided when considering prospective placements and that they were central to the decision making process. They said they received good support from the agency when children were introduced and that written plans and agreements made clear the expectations of the placement and the objectives to be achieved on behalf of children.

They said their Social Workers had provided the guidance and advice they needed about the needs and behaviours of children and that a duty Social Worker and manager were available at all times including 'out of hours'.

The commitment from the agency to the training and development of foster carers was very good with an increase of 45% in post approval training provided in 2013.

Managers held regular consultation meetings with foster carers to inform the ongoing improvement of the agency.

The outcomes assessment implemented by the agency assisted in the evaluation of foster carers' ability to meet the developmental needs of children.

How we inspect and report on services We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focussed inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focussed inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

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