



Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Independent Foster Care Services

Rumney

Type of Inspection – Focussed

Dates of inspection – 2nd and 3rd November 2015

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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 Ltd; the registered manager is Gail Tobin and a responsible individual has been nominated.

IFCS provides placements for children mostly from South Wales' local authorities, with foster carers across the South and South West Wales areas.

At the time of the inspection 162 children were in placement with 135 fostering households.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This routine focussed inspection was undertaken on an announced basis, between 10am and 1.30pm on 2 November and 9.30am and 6.30pm on 3 November 2015. The following methodology was employed;

- consultation with a group of foster carers at the Cardiff office and with staff and managers at the Swansea and Cardiff offices
- consultation with the registered manager
- review of a sample of records

What does the service do well?

The ethos of the agency appeared to be characterised by a desire to improve the lives of the children as well as its own ability to safeguard and promote their welfare.

What has improved since the last inspection?

Evidence indicated that these are some of the improvements made since the last inspection;

- the agency's arrangements for coordinating, monitoring and further developing their work in safeguarding the children
- staff and foster carer training and development
- contact facilities at the Cardiff office

What needs to be done to improve the service?

The agency's own systems for monitoring, reviewing and improving its effectiveness were very well developed. No recommendations are made for improvement.

Quality of life

Evidence indicated that the agency had been effective in safeguarding and promoting the welfare and quality of life of the children.

We (the CSSIW) met with a group of foster carers who indicated that a rigorous and consistent approach had been taken by the agency, in supporting their role in safeguarding and promoting the rights of the children. They confirmed that their supervision and their review processes were intrinsically linked with the progress made by the children and that their focus on children's developmental outcomes underpinned all aspects of their work.

The agency had a well developed referral and placement team to ensure children were only placed with carers able to meet their needs. We saw written records that demonstrated the reasons for 'matching' children with particular carers and they said they were assisted and supported; and not pressured when considering the suitability of any children to be placed, in order to improve placement sustainability. Information made available for the children was good and included young person's guides and foster carer profiles. A welcome box was also provided which included items to make children feel welcomed. The inclusion of a stamped addressed envelope to write to the agency with any concerns or complaints was evidence of their wish to hear 'the voice of the children' and they were provided details of the agency's website where they could also share any thoughts or concerns about their care or their welfare. We sampled a range of records which included children's care plans and reviews which indicated they were mostly settled in placement and making good progress. The reports of their reviews showed that children had been encouraged to attend or to contribute to their review meetings and that written reports of their progress had been provided by the agency.

Some children had been placed as a result of known vulnerability and or engagement in risk taking behaviours and the agency's arrangements to safeguard and protect them were well developed. Their approach to safeguarding was a central aspect of their efforts to care for the children and the range of expertise within the agency was considerable. This included very experienced staff and managers and well developed systems to identify and manage any risks associated with caring for the children. We saw written risk assessments and risk management plans held at the agency and copies of those that were provided to foster carers. The agency adopted a stringent multi agency approach to information sharing and risk management in safeguarding the children.

Feedback from carers indicated that the agency was determined in its approach to ensuring children had access to appropriate education and said that they were expected to attend school meetings, including any reviews of the children's personal education plans. We were told about additional tuition being provided for some children when preparing for GCSEs.

Some children were in shared care placements and we saw evidence in records of effective 'partnership' between the carers and the children's parents, in meeting their care needs.

The efforts made by the agency to promote children's involvement in activities and social relationships were very good. Youth clubs and arts and crafts activities were provided at each of the agency's offices and despite staffing increases, there were waiting lists for children to attend. The agency said that the value of getting to know the children when engaging with them through activities had been invaluable and helped them better understand their perspective and their wishes and feelings. The agency's commitment

and investment in providing these activities reflected good practice. Financial allowances were made available to support children to pursue hobbies and interests.

The agency had further developed its contact facilities since the last inspection which now included a range of outdoor play equipment to improve the experience of children during contact visits.

Carers and staff said that access to 'specialist' support for the children, such as counselling or play therapy was not good; for instance to help them understand or make sense of earlier life experiences. We were assured however that carers and staff responded to these needs within their roles and advocated for the children to access such services. The agency was supporting a staff member to undertake specialist training in direct work with children, including play therapy to improve their ability to meet these needs.

Workshops were being developed to improve engagement with the children about areas such as child sexual exploitation and managing relationships.

Carers told us of various children they maintained contact with after they had left their placements and the manager said that they actively supported any opportunities for children to continue to live with their carers as young adults.

Quality of staffing

The focus of this inspection was on the quality of life and the quality of care of the children. The quality of the staffing of the agency was not considered in detail.

Feedback from foster carers however, indicated that all staff employed by the agency were dedicated to their roles and to assisting and supporting them in caring for the children.

Consultation with staff at both the Swansea and Cardiff offices indicated that appropriate staffing levels had been maintained. All staff were suitably qualified and they remained enthusiastic and positively motivated in their roles.

Many of the Social Work staff were pursuing post qualifying training and qualifications to further develop their expertise. This included specific qualifications in play therapy and undertaking direct work with children.

Quality of leadership and management

The focus of this inspection was on the quality of life and the quality of care of the children. The quality of the leadership and management of the agency was not considered in detail.

The ownership of the agency had changed just prior to this inspection and a new responsible individual had been nominated. The manager told us that the statement of purpose was being updated to reflect any changes and feedback from foster carers, staff and managers indicated that communication about the change had been well managed to provide assurance of the stability and further development of the service.

The management structure had otherwise been maintained, including the registered manager who had managed the agency since its registration in 2004. The manager of the Swansea office had been designated as lead safeguarding manager since the last inspection to coordinate and support the ongoing development of the safeguarding work undertaken by the agency. Feedback from foster carers and staff indicated that there was considerable regard for the managers of the agency and in particular for their ongoing commitment to improving the ability of the agency to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children.

Quality of Foster Carers

Overall, evidence indicated that the quality of foster care provided by the agency had been very good.

Managers said that all foster carers had received unannounced visits by their supervising Social Workers and that their reviews had been undertaken as necessary. Records of foster carer visits and foster carer reviews showed them to be focussed on the quality of life of the children as well as the quality of their care.

The agency's carers were mostly an experienced and well established group and the implementation of an outcome based framework to underpin their supervision and development, ensured that the welfare of the children was paramount.

The carers we met confirmed they were involved in assessing and planning how children's needs were to be met and in monitoring their progress. They said they felt valued by the agency and motivated in their roles but also that the expectations made of them by the agency were to achieve standards of good practice.

They spoke with confidence about their efforts to improve the lives of the children they cared for. They told us they had received excellent support and training from the agency to equip them to understand and provide for the sometimes complex needs and behaviours of the children. Records showed that the carers had attended a comprehensive range of training for their roles, in general and if providing any particular placements, such as for parents and children. The agency's commitment to training foster carers and staff supported their stated aim to continually improve the lives of the children.

The carers said they had all received safeguarding training and that the systems employed by the agency to assess and manage risks associated with caring for the children were well developed; promoted transparency and a multi agency approach.

How we inspect and report on services

We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focused. 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.

- **Focused 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. Focused inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focused 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.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.