

The Children`s Family Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC034804
Inspection date	5 March 2008
Inspector	Jacqueline Dunster
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	30 October 2006

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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

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

The Children's Family Trust (hereinafter the Trust) is a charitable organisation operating as an independent fostering agency. It is governed by a board of trustees. The Trust was established in 1946 with the guiding philosophy that looked after children and young people had the right to live a 'natural family life' which would endure beyond the age when they left the care system. The Trust has had a successful history of providing permanent homes for children and young people fostered through it. The Trust was first registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on 2 June 2004. It currently has a registered office in Droitwich, Worcestershire where its head office staff are based. A social work team which supports foster carers recruited in the Midlands operates from this office. The Trust has a subsidiary office near Darlington in the north east with a social work team to support foster carers in that region. It has one foster carer in Surrey and another foster family in Wales who are supported by different arrangements. Team managers are based in the Midlands and North East teams. All social work provision is managed by the professional services manager who holds the post of registered manager within the Trust. While maintaining its core philosophy The Trust has, in recent years, expanded the placements it offers to include short-term and respite provision. Its stated aim is to provide stable family lives for children and young people placed. The Trust offers short term, long term, respite and parent and child placements. It undertakes recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. Foster placements are supported by sessional education workers and therapists. At the time of the inspection The Trust supported 23 fostering households with 33 children and young people in placement.

Summary

This is a full, key inspection which was announced. It focuses on the 18 key standards relevant to this agency. These include standards relating to health, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and organisation. National Minimum Standard 14 was also inspected in relation to helping young people to prepare for adulthood. Two additional standards relating to training and support of foster carers were also inspected. The inspection finds The Trust to be satisfactory overall with outstanding practice in helping children and young people to be healthy, to achieve and enjoy what they do, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic wellbeing. Organisational practices are good. Most practice relating to keeping children and young people safe is of a good standard. Improvement is required in one aspect of practice.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Following the last inspection The Trust was recommended to ensure that the Statement of Purpose included greater detail on the services provided by the Trust. This has been achieved. The Trust was further recommended to retain the entire CRB document until it had been seen by the regulator. This has also been achieved.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The outstanding practice of The Trust promotes improved outcomes for children and young people's health and the development of healthy lifestyles to sustain good health into adulthood. The Trust ensures sufficient information is gathered about health needs prior to placement. It uses this information to place children and young people with foster carers who have the capacity to meet identified health needs. The Trust does not make placements which prevent a child or young person continuing with health provision already in place. The foster carers ensure that children and young people are registered with health professionals without delay. The foster placement agreement clearly outlines the role of the foster carer in providing for the needs of specific children and young people. It is consistent with the care plan's assessment of health needs. Arrangements for medical consent are recorded and consistent. The Trust ensures that foster carers maintain a comprehensive, ongoing record of all medical and health interventions through use of their 'Child Health Monitoring Form'. Excellent information systems ensure consistency and accuracy of information relating to health. Children and young people are encouraged to be involved in the maintenance of their health record. This encourages them to begin to take responsibility for their health. The Trust includes the development of skills for maintaining good health in preparing young people for adulthood. The Trust trains foster carers to promote health. Further training includes working with attachment difficulties and developing resilience, an introduction to the principles of neuro-linguistic programming and the safe handling and administration of medicines. Policies and procedures provide additional guidance on healthy eating, exercise, personal hygiene and health promotion. The foster carers are aware of their role in accessing and advocating for health services for children and young people. They are effective advocates. The Trust provides training and supervision for foster carers to increase their skills and knowledge in dealing with the health needs of this particularly vulnerable group of children and young people. The Trust encourages children and young people to develop active leisure pursuits. This has positive outcomes for their physical health. At the same time The Trust seeks to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people. It employs therapists on a sessional basis who are able to work with children and young people and their foster carers to address therapeutic needs. This work to support challenging placements contributes to the high levels of placement stability achieved by the Trust. The Trust understands that looked after children and young people generally have greater health deficits and poorer outcomes than those in the wider population. Their practices, policies and provision help children and young people to improve their health, develop healthy lifestyles and achieve improved mental wellbeing.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Generally good practices and procedures at The Trust help to keep children and young people safe. However, these could be compromised by some confusion about the operation of the child protection procedures. The Trust has sound practices in recruitment and staff vetting to ensure that everyone who works for the purposes of The Trust is suitable to do so and has the required competences and qualifications to undertake their role. Records indicate that staff are subject to transparent recruitment and vetting procedures. They are provided with induction, probation and appraisal to ensure they remain suitable to work with children and young people. The Trust has recently introduced the acquisition of references from overseas where an applicant to foster or work has previously lived abroad, increasing safeguards. The social work team is suitably qualified, has a wide range of expertise and a sound knowledge of child development. The Trust ensures that foster homes are suitable for children and young people placed in them. It undertakes regular health and safety checks and provides relevant training for foster carers.

The Trust exceeds the required number of unannounced visits in its north east region. Some foster carers do not keep medication locked away within their homes. This has the potential to place children and young people at risk. Foster carers' homes are warm and welcoming. Children and young people have personalised their rooms and their presence is evident throughout the homes. Children and young people feel safe in their homes and surroundings. This contributes to the high levels of placement stability achieved by the Trust. The Trust has outstanding practice in matching foster carers and children and young people. Historically, The Trust has offered long-term placements on a 'family for life' basis. This is akin to adoption placement but continues to actively support the child or young person's relationship with their birth family. This has allowed The Trust to develop excellent practice in planning for placements and introductions. Foster carers, children and young people are supported through intensive introduction and matching processes. These result in excellent matching of foster carers' skills to children and young people's needs and a smooth transition for the child or young person into the fostering household. The whole foster family contributes to a book which describes the people in the household, their home and their lives to children and young people who may be placed. Introductions are taken slowly and involve short meetings through to overnight stays over many weeks to prepare the child or young person for moving permanently into the home. The matching process is supported by excellent matching documents and risk assessments. The process of matching and preparing children and young people for permanency has contributed to The Trust's negligible rate of placement breakdown over many years. As The Trust increases the types of placements it offers, it is ensuring that the matching process remains fit for the task. Every effort is taken to ensure that children and young people on short-term placements are afforded the opportunity for introductions. The 'Book About Us' prepared by prospective foster families helps children or young people to get to know the foster family before they arrive. The matching process is continuing to prove effective. A number of short-term placements are proving so well matched that they are considered suitable for conversion to long-term placements. The Trust has a number of practices which reduce the risk to the safety of children. These include comprehensive risk assessments, safer caring policies and procedures, training and supervision. Children and young people placed with The Trust's foster carers feel safe in their placements. Foster carers are skilled in behaviour management techniques. Physical intervention is rarely and appropriately used and recorded. The one significant shortfall in relation to helping children and young people to remain safe is The Trust's confusion in the application of its child protection procedure. The procedure is fit for purpose and correctly outlines the action to be taken in the case of an allegation by a child or young person. However, The Trust has not followed the procedure closely in relation to allegations of historical abuse. The area authority has not been informed sufficiently quickly or as the lead agency for child protection. The responsible authority has been the first line of recourse, resulting in delays in the information reaching the area authority. The Trust has not notified Ofsted of these matters as required. These failures could compromise the effectiveness of child protection procedures and could, potentially, result in risk to other children and young people. The Trust has taken action to ensure that all staff have been reminded of the child protection protocols. The Trust continues to undertake thorough assessments of prospective foster carers. These are completed by independent assessors who are experienced and trained in this work. The assessments involve six references about the applicant's suitability in line with other permanency procedures. They are rigorously reviewed by the fostering panel. The fostering panel is well-managed by the independent chair who ensures that it adheres to policies and procedures. It has a diverse blend of backgrounds and skills. Panel members are appropriately vetted. Their continuation for a second term is subjected to assessment of continued suitability.

and performance. The fostering panel is effective in testing the suitability of applicants and through the annual review process, their suitability to continue to foster. Generally The Trust provides effective protection to children and young people. It does so by ensuring foster homes are safe, staff and foster carers are fully vetted and that prospective foster carers are only approved after thorough assessment. It ensures that children and young people are prepared for their placements and protected by safer caring practices and risk management. Failure to refer historical child protection allegations correctly compromises the security of these safeguards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The Trust achieves outstanding outcomes in enabling children and young people to enjoy and achieve, to develop confidence and to meet their educational potential. The Trust identifies gaps in matching at the outset of the placement. A plan to address the gaps is outlined. Specialist input is provided to placements where a child or young person is placed with a foster carer who does not share their cultural identity. In the past year The Trust has been successful in recruiting foster carers with backgrounds which can reflect those of children and young people needing placements. In matching children and young people with these foster carers The Trust has been able to increase the self-esteem and sense of identity of the children and young people. The Trust ensures that children and young people are able to access leisure pursuits which meet their needs and interests. Children and young people placed are involved in an extensive range of activities. They are actively encouraged by foster carers and The Trust to develop friendships with their peer group. Wherever possible they are encouraged to have their friends visit their home. The Trust works actively to assist children and young people to be able to stay overnight with their friends and family where it is appropriate. Most children and young people placed with The Trust's carers are placed on a 'family for life' basis. The permanency of this status allows children and young people to build long-term links within their communities and to fully engage with the life of those communities. The Trust considers the suitability of foster carers to meet children and young people's educational needs at the point of assessing their suitability to foster. An excellent toolkit is employed to identify their knowledge of the current education system and areas where they require training. An assessment is made of the area in which they live to identify the particular resources it has available to meet the needs of children and young people placed. This enables The Trust to place children and young people with foster carers who can meet their educational needs. It helps to limit the amount of time children and young people spend travelling to educational establishments. The Trust provides foster carers with excellent guidance on education. It makes its expectations of foster carers clear. Respite foster carers are expected to meet educational arrangements in the same way as the main foster carer. This reduces the risk of disruption to the child or young person's education. The Trust employs educational advisers to work with supervising social workers and the education authorities to ensure that children and young people's needs are met. They are able to attend appeals, write reports and acquire outstanding statutory educational assessments. No children or young people placed with The Trust were excluded from school in the academic year 2006-2007. In the last year 100% of young people sitting their GCSEs achieved six passes at A*- C. Children and young people are fully involved in extracurricular education. Those placed with The Trust achieve high levels of stability in their educational placements. With the support of the education workers, supervising social workers and foster carers children and young people are achieving excellent outcomes in education.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The Trust expects foster carers to support contact between children and young people and their families. It trains foster carers to manage contact, provide emotional support to children and young people and monitor and record the outcomes of contact. The Trust clarifies the arrangements for contact at the outset of the placement. These arrangements are clearly recorded on the case files. The Trust identifies foster carers who are able to meet the contact requirements of the children and young people being referred. Staff within The Trust assist foster carers in meeting the arrangements for contact where they are onerous. Foster carers have a positive attitude to the benefits of contact for children and young people. They assist children and young people to access the complaints and advocacy services to ensure their concerns about contact arrangements are taken into account by the local authority. The Trust seeks to have siblings who cannot be placed together placed with different foster carers within the Trust. This allows high levels of contact and communication to take place between children and young people which might otherwise be difficult. Until recently The Trust had a relatively small number of foster carers and placements. This enabled it to maintain direct and meaningful relationships with all the children and young people placed with its foster carers. As The Trust has expanded it has sought to maintain the high levels of direct contact supervising social workers have with children and young people. Children and young people trust their foster carers' social workers. Children and young people have a high quality guide which includes information on advocacy services and the complaints system. It also provides each child and young person with an S.O.S. card. This postage paid card can simply be posted by the child or young person and alerts The Trust to the need to contact them without delay. The Trust does so. Children and young people feel confident that they are listened to and that their views are taken into account. Birth children are fully involved in fostering. Their views are sought at each stage of the process. They complete a workbook with the assessing social worker when their family is being assessed as foster carers. They are involved in the completion of the 'Book About Us' which provides an introduction to prospective placements about the family they will be joining. The Trust seeks the views of all children and young people in the fostering household for foster carers' annual reviews. Through systems provided to consult with children and young people and the expectation that foster carers involve them in decision-making, The Trust provides excellent opportunities for children and young people to influence their day to day care while in foster placement.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The guiding ethos of The Trust is that children and young people have the right to a family life, for life. The Trust, with charitable resources, supports young people as far into adulthood as necessary. Foster carers do not expect young people to move on to full independence on their 18th birthdays. This has resulted in a community within The Trust which includes adults who were fostered by The Trust's foster carers some time ago. The Trust allows young people to move on at an appropriate pace and to continue to have the support of their foster carers and The Trust after leaving care. As The Trust has developed its work to include short-term as well as long-term placements, it has sought to ensure that foster carers are still committed to preparing young people for the future. Foster carers equip young people with the skills they need to survive in the adult world. They are provided with good guidance on relevant legislation. The Trust trains and supports them to meet the developmental needs of young people. The

Trust performs exceptionally well in preparing young people for adulthood and in managing the transition to independence. It seeks to prepare young people both practically and emotionally while offering significant levels of support beyond the transition.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Trust's practices in management and organisation are generally sound. Staff and foster carers understand the aims and objectives of the Trust. These are reinforced by the Statement of Purpose, policies, procedures, the foster carers' handbook, supervision and training. They understand their role in achieving the aims and objectives and their different roles within the agency. The children's guide is accessible for all age groups of children and young people. It provides children and young people with a clear sense of what their life with The Trust will be like. Supervising social workers go through the guide with children and young people to ensure they understand what it says. The Trust delivers an effective and efficient service. It recruits sufficient numbers of competent staff to meet the needs of the service. It provides them with effective supervision and professional development. As The Trust has expanded over the last two years it has identified gaps in the types of foster carers it has available. The Trust has been successful in recruiting foster carers who can reflect the different backgrounds of children and young people placed. Foster carers are aware of the different types of support available to them and access it appropriately. They are satisfied with the levels of support and supervision they receive from the Trust. They participate well in training, support and self-help groups. Foster carers are supported by effective arrangements and competent staff. This assists them in working effectively with children and young people placed. The continued suitability of foster carers is tested through annual reviews. These are sufficient to test the competence of the foster carers. The Trust trains foster carers in a wide range of areas relevant to fostering and to specific children and young people they have in placement. The foster care agreement makes expectations of attendance at training explicit. The agency has made preparations to introduce the Children's Workforce Development Council training programme for foster carers. Foster carers are expected to undertake National Vocational Qualification Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People. Foster carers are equipped with sufficient knowledge for their role. The Trust encourages them to continually develop their understanding of matters relating to children and young people in their care. There are some shortfalls in the records which The Trust is expected to maintain. The record of placement on the foster carers' record does not include the sex of the child placed. The separate records of allegations and other incidents do not always reflect the content of the day-to-day recordings. This reduces the consistency of records maintained and could compromise the quality assurance and monitoring functions of the Trust. The social work teams are supported by excellent administration. Administrative staff have a good understanding of the role of The Trust and the task of fostering. Records maintained by social workers and foster carers are well-organised. They are subject to regular audit. Foster carers maintain records securely, encourage children and young people to participate in completing their records and ensure they keep memorabilia of the children and young people's lives. A comprehensive and complete record of the children and young people's lives in foster care is maintained. The Trust supports the fostering task with good organisational and management practices. The maintenance of good quality records assists care planning and decision-making. Shortfalls in the central incident records do not support the monitoring and controlling functions of The Trust at present.

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
9	ensure that the agency implements its written policy on the arrangements for the protection of children. Specifically, the agency must make prompt referral to the area authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting any child placed with the agency (Regulation 12)	31 March 2008
9	ensure the agency notifies Ofsted without delay of the instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with the agency (Regulation 43)	31 March 2008
25	ensure that the record of each placement with a foster carer includes the sex of the child placed (Regulation 30)	31 March 2008
25	ensure that the separate record which brings together data on allegations includes the details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken for every allegation so that the agency may monitor these matters at appropriate intervals (Regulation 42).	31 March 2008

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster homes are free of avoidable hazards in relation to the storage of medication (National Minimum Standard 6).

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.