

The Children's Family Trust

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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 1945 and first registered in accordance with the Care Standards Act 2000 on 2 June 2004. The Head office is in Worcestershire with registered offices currently in Worcestershire and County Durham. The Trust offers short term, long term, respite and parent and child placements. It undertakes recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. At the time of the inspection the Trust's West Midland Office supported 27 fostering households with 40 children and young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The fostering agency is effective and well managed. Managers and staff are committed to fostering and have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Careful and considered matching ensures children have a clear understanding of their background and identity. They are very well matched in stable placements. There are no instances of unplanned endings of placements. This is due to the excellent matching and high quality support which is provided to sustain the placements. Children and young people report that they are happy and secure in their placements and are extremely positive about the care they receive.

The ethos of the agency is 'family for life' and most children placed with carers are placed on a 'family for life' basis. This ensures children live and grow up in safe, stable families which enable them to increase in confidence and self-esteem. The support given to young people approaching adulthood and post 18 is exceptional. Young people are not expected to move on to full independence when they reach 18 but they move on at an appropriate pace which suits them; they benefit from the continued support of their foster carers and financial support from the agency. Children and young people's health and education needs are also extremely well

supported by their foster carers whose care and vigilance has resulted in some excellent outcomes being achieved. They are readily able to access education and therapeutic support when needed for the children they care for; this is contracted by and paid for by the fostering agency.

Children are safe. Managers, staff and carers work together well to ensure the safety of children. There are very low instances of children going missing and allegations are handled carefully and promptly.

As a result of this visit, there is one requirement made relating to the reviews of foster carers. There is also one recommendation made relating to the staff recruitment processes.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
28 (2011)	ensure foster carer reviews take place not more than a year after approval and thereafter whenever the fostering agency consider it necessary but at intervals of not more than a year. (Regulation 28 (2))	30/11/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure all telephone enquires made to verify written references are recorded as having been conducted. (NMS 19.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Children receive a very high level of individualised care that meets their social, emotional, psychological and physical needs. They are actively supported and enabled to share their views, wishes and feelings. They are fully involved in decisions about their care and participate in their reviews. They are able to exercise choice regarding contact with birth families and in the schools they wish to attend. Children are also encouraged to contribute to the running of the fostering agency. Recent

activity days have enabled looked after children and foster carers' birth children to share their views on how the agency should develop.

Children are very happy and settled in their foster placements and are treated as part of the family. They make excellent progress to develop a positive self-view and make and sustain strong attachments with their carers. They do not experience unplanned endings; this is a particular strength of the agency. The ethos of the agency is 'family for life' and most children placed with carers are placed on a 'family for life' basis. This ensures children live and grow up in safe, stable families which enable them to increase in confidence and self-esteem. Children compliment their foster families stating, 'I feel safe', 'happy', 'part of the family'.

The support given to young people approaching adulthood and post 18 is exceptional. The ethos of the agency is that all children have the right to a family life, for life and that the agency will support young people as far into adulthood as is needed. Young people are not expected to move on to full independence when they reach 18 but at an appropriate pace which suits them with the continued support of their foster carers and the financial support of the agency. Over recent years the agency has funded young people's child care costs and given practical help to young people to set them up in independent living accommodation. One young person stated that they are 'very supportive... they offered to be a guarantor on my flat and still provide support now.' A supervising social worker from the agency works with young people and families to provide practical support and guidance to ensure all young people, including those placed short term, are well-equipped with a range of skills to prepare them for independence. As a result young people make a very successful transition to adulthood and are engaged in education, employment and training.

Children and young people's health and education needs are extremely well supported by their foster carers whose care and vigilance has resulted in some excellent outcomes being achieved. Children are healthy and, where appropriate, take responsibility for their own health. They understand the importance of maintaining their health and do not engage in activities such as smoking and drug or alcohol use. Children are also making excellent progress in their educational attainment due to the exceptional support from their carers and from the agency. For example, children can receive one-to-one tuition if this is requested and are able to attend the school of their choice, funded if needed by the agency. One young person is in the process of considering her choice of which sixth form college to attend. The agency is prepared to pay for her to attend a private college if this is her preferred option. This is excellent practice and demonstrates a positive commitment to ensuring children's educational progress.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **outstanding**.

The fostering agency recruits a diverse range of foster carers who can effectively meet the needs of the children they care for. Recruitment plans target areas where

recruitment needs are identified. Foster carers' numbers have recently been increased to meet the growing demands of the agency and the agency has opened an office in Basingstoke in order to expand the service into that area.

The recruitment, preparation and assessment of foster carers are outstanding and lead to effective placements being made. The assessments of foster carers focus strongly on the needs of children including the birth children of prospective carers. They are thorough and analytical. Prospective foster carers are extremely well prepared prior to becoming approved. This enables them to have a clear understanding of the complexities surrounding the fostering task.

Excellent matching is taking place with considered thinking about children's needs and carers' skills. Careful and considered matching also ensures children have a clear understanding of their background and identity. Children are well matched with foster carers who can meet these needs. This is especially so in regard to planned placements, where outstanding practice can be seen in the intensive introduction and matching processes. These result in well-matched stable placements being made.

The fostering panel makes timely and child-centred recommendations. It is robust and rigorous in its scrutiny of assessments and reviews. An excellent level of quality assurance function has been developed which ensures the quality of assessments are maintained and improved. The panel membership has a high level of independency. It is well constituted with a good range of qualified and experienced professionals.

Foster carers are comprehensively trained to meet the needs of the children and young people they care for. They receive a high level of induction and mandatory and developmental training, including the Childcare Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training standards in foster care. Foster carers also actively seek on-going development and training to increase their skills and knowledge. On-going training is encouraged for the whole family and supported by the agency. One carer stated 'my birth children went on a first aid course funded by the agency.'

Foster carers have excellent working relationships with the agency and work closely with other agencies. One professional commented they work 'as part of a team' sharing responsibility with other key professionals. They are actively involved in planning for the children they care for and their views are highly regarded by managers and staff. Foster carers receive regular supervision and feel strongly supported by their supervising social workers. They are readily able to access education and therapeutic support when needed for the children they care for.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Children feel safe with their foster families. They feel their foster carers support them to feel safe from bullying and abuse and feel confident that carers know how to respond to any events where they may experience bullying. Staff and foster carers receive regular training in safeguarding which ensures they are aware of the

procedures they need to take to keep children and young people safe.

There are very low instances of children going missing. Where this occurs prompt action is taken to minimise this risks, in partnership with appropriate professionals.

Allegations are handled carefully and promptly. Managers and staff liaise closely with all relevant professionals and share information appropriately. Managers and staff work in partnership with local authorities to ensure children's needs are fully considered while at the same time prioritising the safety of children. For example, while investigations were being completed carers were supported to have daily contact with their foster children for the short time they were away from the foster home. This helped to maintain stability and minimise disruption and distress for the children.

Children's safety is given a high priority from the start of their placement. A detailed risk assessment is completed on every child which identifies the impact of any behaviours and action required to minimise their risk. Safe caring policies reflect how household practices specifically promote the safety of the young people accommodated. These are updated to reflect the needs of children placed. These procedures help to ensure the welfare and safety of children and young people remain the central focus of staff and carers.

The recruitment and vetting of staff is thorough and helps ensure the safety of children and young people. All checks and references are conducted prior to any appointment being made. Telephone enquiries are made to referees to verify references, however, they are not always being recorded as being completed. Unannounced visits are taking place regularly and, dependant on the level of risk, occur several times a year.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **good**.

This is a well-managed agency. Systems have been developed which maintain a high level of monitoring throughout the agency. Managers are fully aware of the areas of strengths of the agency and areas where improvement is needed. They continually strive for improvement in the outcomes for children and in the quality of care they provide. Complaints are dealt with promptly and appropriately. In the last 12 months there have been two complaints both of which have been upheld. All of the previous requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been met.

The Statement of Purpose and two children's guides are clear and accessible to all ages. This ensures everyone is clear about the aims and objectives of the agency.

Since the last inspection the agency has grown in numbers of both staff and foster carers. The Registered Manager and staff team are all qualified and have a good level of experience. Over the last year the agency experienced a relative unsettled period leading to several staff changes and sickness. This has resulted in a small

number of foster carers' reviews not being completed within the required timescales. The agency is now, however, fully staffed and managers have developed systems to ensure all reviews are now being held within required timescales. This demonstrates the agency has a capacity for continuing improvement.

Foster carers state they feel highly valued and supported despite these recent difficulties. They feel valued as members of the team working with children and speak highly of the agency. One foster carer stated, 'the support we receive is brilliant.' Another commented, 'we work in partnership with others involved in our children. We are heard and our views are respected.' Managers have adopted the Foster Care Charter. Staff are experienced and committed to their role. Both staff and carers are well supported and kept up-to-date with relevant training programmes. They receive a good level of supervision which is of a high quality.

Young people are beginning to influence and contribute to the development of the agency. They attend activity days and discuss how they would like the agency to develop. For example, the birth children of foster carers have stated that they would like to develop an information booklet specifically for the children of prospective foster carers.

The manager has established effective and positive working relationships with other professionals. One local authority commissioner stated that 'they are meeting the needs of the children placed with them... referrals are answered and profiles of carers are sent promptly.' Another professional stated 'the trust is so child focused, their ethos is outstanding.'

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.