

Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC036400
Inspection date	03/11/2014
Inspector	Jennifer Reed
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	2430/ 2440 The Quadrant, Aztec West, Almondsbury, BRISTOL, BS32 4AQ
Telephone number	01454 877667
Email	david.baker-price@five-rivers.org
Registered person	Five Rivers Child Care Limited
Registered manager	David Andrew Baker-Price / Jacob Johannes Strydom
Responsible individual	Martin Ian Leitch
Date of last inspection	14/12/2011

© Crown copyright 2014

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Five Rivers Child Care Limited is a national independent fostering agency operating a number of fostering services in England. The Five Rivers Bristol Fostering placement service is based in Aztec West, Bristol. The majority of its foster carers are recruited in the cities of Bristol and Bath, and in the local authorities of Swindon, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Worcestershire. The service has recruited three new fostering households in the past 12 month period, which is a lower proportion than the comparator figure of all independent fostering agencies.

The service provides a range of placements which include: emergency; short term; longer term; remand; respite; permanence placements; sibling groups; and parent and child placements. The service does not offer short-term breaks. At the time of this inspection, the fostering service provides 29 fostering households and has 34 children and young people in placement.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The fostering service has undergone major transformation since the previous Ofsted inspection in December 2011. The service has moved location from Cheltenham to Bristol and there has been a total change within the senior management team and the staffing of this service. These radical differences have resulted in some periods of

instability in staffing and on some occasions, the lowering of practice standards. These factors have hindered the development and the improvement of the service over the last three year period. However, no adverse impact on the support provided to foster carers and the stability and sound standards of care provided to the children and young people, and/or parents and children in fostering and assessment placements is evidenced. Good working relationships are embedded with local commissioners and partner agencies.

Leaders and managers within the organisation and at service level demonstrate a good understanding of this fostering service's recent history and current strengths and weaknesses. Their combined substantial experience, strong knowledge base and aspirational approach is ensuring that identified areas of the service's operation that are in need of improvement have been, or are continuing to be robustly tackled. The service is showing early signs of promising prospects for the development of exemplary practice.

Areas of practice identified at the inspection as in need of improvement relate to: the training of foster carers; attendance of foster carers at panel reviews of their approval; the inclusion of children and young peoples' views in staff appraisals; and ensuring that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is informed of the revision of the service's key documents. The evidenced shortfalls in meeting one regulation and three national minimum standards have no identified impact on the safeguarding or promotion of children, young people and parents' welfare, or on the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Children and young people are generally making good progress in their lives and in respect of the plans for their future permanence. Numbers of missing children and young people are low and placement stability and longevity are high. Children and young people are mostly very satisfied with the advice, care and support they receive. They enjoy living in their foster homes and feel very much a part of the family. They take part in personal decision-making about their futures and in the development of the fostering service.

The sound recruitment, assessment, preparation, support, training and supervision of foster carers helps children, young people and parents to enjoy and achieve positive experiences and outcomes. They are safeguarded and their wellbeing is promoted.

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
4	notify Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of any revision of the	19/12/2014

(2011)	statement of purpose and children's guide within 28 days (Regulation 4 (b))	
--------	---	--

Recommendations

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

- provide training for foster carers in the management and administration of medication (NMS 6.10)
- ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)
- ensure that where staff are working with children, their appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 24.6)
- provide approved foster carers with the opportunity to be heard in person when a panel is considering a review of their approval or other matter concerning their approval. (Volume 4, statutory guidance, paragraph 5.22)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are generally making good progress in many areas of their lives and in respect of the plans for their future permanence. They enjoy living in nurturing and comfortable foster homes and are supported to access health care to promote and meet their physical and emotional welfare needs. Children and young people feel cared for by their fostering family and they are learning to trust and form positive relationships. Their comments include, 'my foster carers do everything they can to help me' and 'I can't think of anything else they could do better.' Children and young people talk easily with their foster carers and they are confident that their carers will always try to help and support them. They are very satisfied with how they are looked after on a day-to-day basis.

The good support they receive helps their motivation and effort in learning and achieving the best they can in their education. Two young people are 'staying put' at their own request, and they are continuing to live in their foster home until they feel ready to move into independence. These factors are likely to increase their life chances of a successful move into adulthood and employment.

Children and young people take part in personal decision-making about their futures and in the development of the fostering service. These participation opportunities help them to develop their personal identity and empower them to have some ownership of their futures. Individually, they are beginning to believe in themselves and learning that their own actions can make a difference. Direct work with children

and young people carried out by foster carers and the service's family support workers helps children and young people to consider their options and take responsibility for their choices. Children and young people have hope and aspirations for their futures, moderated by a sense of realism. One young person said, 'I am in a band and I want to carry on doing this and be a rock star. I am also thinking about going to college or doing an apprenticeship.'

Children and young people are placed with their siblings if this is in their best interests. All children and young people are fully included in the fostering family which helps them to regard their placements as very much their home and family. Good placement stability gives them the security they need to increase their confidence and promote a positive self-image. They are developing their resilience and becoming more able to bounce back when faced with difficulties. These protective factors help them to risk trying out new things.

Children and young people are encouraged to take part in a wide range of leisure activities and hobbies and they are widening their horizons. They are developing their talents and abilities and becoming more able at sustaining positive contact with their birth families and maintaining sound relationships with their friends. A social worker said, 'the young person was very isolated prior to coming to their foster home. Now they are able to make friends and socialise in the community and they keep in contact with their extended family.'

Discussions and problem solving with their carers helps children, young people and parents to recognise and to avoid particularly risky situations. They are thinking through the steps and actions they need to take to positively deal with issues they encounter in their daily lives. For example, when older young people wish to stay out overnight with friends or family, and not to return home as planned, they will text their carers to let them know where they are and to let them know that they are safe and well. This improved communication and taking of responsibility results in reducing their involvement in police enquiries if this is a safe option to take. Numbers of missing children and young people are low.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The sound recruitment, assessment, preparation, support, training and supervision of foster carers contributes to providing children, young people and parents with good quality care that helps them to enjoy and achieve positive experiences and outcomes.

Numbers of missing children and young people are low and placement stability and longevity are high. Children and young people are mostly very happy living in their foster placement and they value the care and the support they receive. Foster carers help them to maintain contact with their family and friends where this is agreed in their care plans. Many young people choose to keep in contact with their foster carers after they move on to live elsewhere. This provides them with some continuity

of support during a potentially anxious transitional time.

The service recruits a diverse range of foster carers in Bristol and the surrounding local authorities to meet the identified needs children and young people in those authorities. The recruitment of carers is robustly undertaken to ensure that suitable persons are considered. This service benefits from working cooperatively with another of the organisation's fostering service in the south west, to deliver a well-established and proven residential, pre-approval training programme for prospective carers and their birth children.

The south west fostering panel provides a stable membership of suitably experienced and qualified persons. Its well-considered deliberations and recommendations help the service to identify people who are likely to provide good foster homes. The panel also reviews approved foster carers' continuing suitability to foster after their first year of work and three yearly thereafter. However, the service does not routinely invite foster carers to these reviews, nor is the supervision social worker expected to be present at panel. This is not best practice as it may adversely impact on the panel members' ability to gather additional information to supplement the written reports they receive about the foster carers' quality of care. Furthermore, foster carers do not benefit from discussion with the panel members about their professional development and the outcomes they have helped children and young people achieve.

The core training and good range of additional training completed by foster carers, panel members and staff provides them with high quality learning experiences that enrich their practice and the standard of care provided to children and young people.

Panel members have attended the service's attachment, child sexual exploitation and safeguarding training in the last year; they commend the quality of the training delivered by an external provider. The inclusion of panel members in core training helps them to update their practice and to better understand the key issues impacting on children and young people and their foster carers. Their learning augments the collective skills of the panel and contributes to improving the quality of the panel's operation and its review of the quality of foster care provided by the service.

Foster carers providing parent and child assessment placements undertake specialist training to guide them in this work. Examples of carers' practice clearly demonstrate their good understanding of how to work effectively with vulnerable adults to help them to improve their parenting abilities, and to keep the safeguarding of the child as the paramount consideration. Carers provide a balanced approach in the provision of offering good parenting advice while observing and assessing parents' abilities. A social worker said, 'they go the extra mile in the undertaking of these assessment places.' Foster carers also provide exemplary outreach work to support parents to continue to look after their children well and to be successful in their parenting within the community.

Commissioners report favourably about their high level of satisfaction with the quality of care and stability of placement provided. They recognise that this service is able to

provide sound placements that are able to meet the needs of children and young people who present complex and challenging behavioural difficulties. They said: 'the service is our preferred provider and we would like them to be able to offer more placements'; and, 'placement stability is excellent'; and, 'communication is good and they provide effective packages of care to individual young people.'

Placing social workers also commend the quality of care provided and value that foster carers are very much a part of the professional team working to support children and young people in placement. Social workers highlight the good range of skills, knowledge and past experience possessed by the service's foster carers and staff team and report that these attributes result in some excellent care being delivered to children and young people. They emphasise their appreciation of the good, collaborative working and the flexible responses of the service that contribute to achieving the best possible outcome for individual children or young during times of crises. Social workers said about foster carers: 'they provided a very good quality of care to a very difficult to place young person'; and, 'care was given at the right emotional level, very nurturing, but including challenge to the young person as appropriate'; and 'carers are very accommodating of and involved in the professional network.'

The service seeks to gain relevant information from placing authorities, to inform matching process which are systematically carried out by the dedicated placements officer and supervising social workers. Matching processes are sound, with due attention given to thinking about equality and diversity consideration that may affect the placement. Care is taken in setting up each placement to ensure that suitable packages of care, likely to meet the particular needs of the individual or sibling group or parent(s), are agreed and funded and in place to the start of the placement. This supports the stability of placements, by reducing possible disruption and longevity of placement is more likely to be secured. Planned respite care periods within other local foster homes supports some children and young people to maintain their foster homes and daily activities with minimal disruption to their lives.

Regular and good quality supervision, provided by experienced and qualified staff, alongside ready access to the service's out of hours social worker, supports foster carers to deal with the challenges they encounter in fostering and helps them to effectively implement care plans. This results in good outcomes for children, young people and parents in placement.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The safety and welfare of children, young people and parents is the central focus in all aspects of this service's operation and safeguarding practice is strong. The service works within the organisation's comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures which underpin the sound safeguarding practice identified within this fostering service. Staff and carers demonstrate a good understanding of

safeguarding issues; children and young people feel safe and are kept safe. The service implements Local Safeguarding Children Boards' protocols and procedures. Staff liaise with local authority designated officers within the geographical areas where carers live to make sure allegations are thoroughly looked into to ensure children and young people are protected.

Furthermore, the service's rigour in matching placements well, monitoring the effective implementation of individual plans and monitoring children and young people's welfare and progress at supervisory visits, translates into sound care and support being provided to children, young people and vulnerable adults in placement. This helps to minimise unnecessary hazards and risks to their wellbeing and offers protection.

The service has also obtained copies of the relevant authorities' 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care' protocols for their reference. The service has devised a missing person's checklist and uses a local police force's risk assessment process to guide staff and carers in assessing and managing the risk to children and young peoples' when they are missing from their foster homes. This recent good practice development ensures that the staff and carers know what to do to ensure that prompt action is taken to protect children and young people when any child protection concern or missing episode arises. The number of missing children and young people within the agency is low.

Staff and carers receive regular safeguarding training and they demonstrate a good understanding of the impact of past abuse and harm on children and young people. Foster carers offering parent and child placements demonstrate a good understanding of adult protection issues; they receive specialist training in the provision of parent and child arrangements. Foster carers are knowledgeable about the risk of child and vulnerable adult sexual exploitation. Practice within the service reflects the robust vigilance and consideration given by staff and carers to the meaning of children, young peoples' and parents' presenting behaviours. Good daily recording by the service informs all professionals involved in deciding what strategies and actions need to be taken to safeguard these children and young people. A placing social worker commented, 'the young person is kept very safe and I am kept up-to-date with events. The carers have contained their wobbly periods by providing gentle, straightforward help to help them gain a more realistic perspective'.

Detailed written guidance available to foster carers and staff, alongside good quality and plentiful training opportunities support them in safeguarding children and young people and protecting them from harm and abuse. Foster carers and staff, in collaboration with placing authority social workers, consider the unique risks facing children and young people as they arise. The service is not 'risk averse' and balances the consideration of children and young people enjoying ordinary childhood opportunities with safeguarding their particular vulnerabilities.

Risk assessments and safer care policies and plans are mostly regularly updated to reduce the likelihood of identified risk factors. However, not all foster carer's safer caring policies have benefited from at least an annual review of their continuing

suitability; this potentially could reduce the effective safeguarding of children and young people in those placements. The manager of the service is aware of this historic shortfall and suitable measures are being put in place to ensure that all safer care policies and plans are updated as required and so there is no negative impact on children and young people.

Furthermore, the service acknowledges that not all carers received at least one unannounced visit to their homes over the past three year period. This has now been rectified and the service has arrangements in place to undertake at least two unannounced visits to each household every year. This is a significant improvement and increases the safety and wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults in placement. However, the formatted documents used to record unannounced visits do not encourage their authors to provide sufficient evidence and evaluation of the quality of care. This deficit lessens the impact of more frequent interventions increasing the protection of children, young people and vulnerable parents. Shortfalls found in practice at this inspection have not adversely impacted on the safeguarding or promotion of children, young people and parents' welfare, or on the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

Recruitment and selection processes and vetting checks for staff, foster carers and panel members are completed in accordance with safer recruitment practice guidelines. This robust practice helps protect children and young people from contact with unsuitable persons.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Leaders and managers within the organisation and at service level, demonstrate a good understanding of this fostering service's current strength, historical weaknesses and areas for improvement. The organisations' south west regional manager is currently the registered manager of this service. However, a new service manager is in post and their registration with Ofsted is nearing completion. The manager demonstrates an excellent understanding of fostering and has substantial, prior experience of managing a fostering service.

The combined breadth of experience and strong knowledge base of leaders and managers is ensuring that identified areas in need of improvement are being robustly tackled. They are ambitious for further development and are committed to improving practice standards and outcomes for children, young people and parents.

Improvements include: a wider range of training, delivered by reputable and highly regarded trainers; increased training opportunities for panel members and a review of the panel's functioning; an increased focus on compliance monitoring and the quality of record keeping; annual appraisals completed for panel members; increased engagement and participation opportunities for foster carers and children and young people; and, increased management oversight of the service's operation. The service is continuing to embed its database into the total operation of the service, with the

aim of utilising all aspects of the database to contribute to improvement in reporting on outcomes for children and young people.

The service has satisfactorily met the three requirements and four of the five recommendations made at the previous inspection. The service has still not provided foster carers and staff with training in the management and administration of medication, to meet best practice standards.

The service monitors its operation on a monthly basis and the new manager and regional manager both demonstrate an in-depth understanding of what needs to be done to provide an exemplary service. They are visible and effective within the service at operational level and the newly established team is working well together.

Managers within the service are attempting to measure the progress and outcomes for children and young people in placement. The quality assurance approach of the organisation has a strong focus on compliance. Some checklists and formatted records used, for example, missing episodes and unannounced visits, do not readily facilitate evidenced based evaluation and the identification of the impact of care practices on the progress and outcomes for children and young people. Some recording shows that confusion exists between what is an output (processes in place) and outcomes (impact or difference made to children, young people and parents). This hinders the measurement and evaluation of children and young people's experiences and progress and the quality of care provided. Senior managers report that they understand that this is an area in need of further reflection and development.

A development plan is in place which takes account of internal and external factors. The service knows where it wants to go and which areas of practice will be developed to meet local unmet needs for children and young people. Effective working partnerships are established with commissioners, partner agencies and local services, resulting in a focused and well-resourced service that is competent in providing foster homes that can meet children, young peoples' and parents' needs.

The service provides an informative statement of purpose and children's guide which are explicit about what services and facilities the fostering service provides. However, the service has not notified HMCI when these key documents have been revised, as is required by regulation.

Staff and foster carer training opportunities are good. Staff receive a personal training budget which enables them to plan their individual learning programmes to enhance their professional knowledge and skills in supporting children and young people's placements. Staff can also attend the wide range of training opportunities provided to foster carers to help them provide good care to children and young people in placement. However, 37% of foster carers have not attained the national induction quality standards with a year of their approval. The service is aware of this shortfall and foster carers are being supported by their supervising social workers to remedy this deficit.

Staff and foster carers receive regular supervision. Staff attend regular team meetings and foster carers can choose to go to local support groups. Annual appraisals for staff and panel members, and the annual review process for foster carers monitor their performance and competencies and the quality of care provided to children and young people. These processes support staff and foster carers to reflect on the quality of their work and the impact and effectiveness of placements for children, young people and parents. The progress and wellbeing of children and young people is central in these processes and supervising social workers make sure they regularly see and speak with children and young people in placement, to monitor their welfare and safety. However, the views of children, young people and parents are not sought and taken into account in staff appraisals; this reduces the effectiveness of performance review.

Staff arrange innovative leisure activities for foster carers, birth children and children and young people fostered. The 'dadz and lads' adventure trip and the 'girls' glamping' week-end were greatly enjoyed by all participants. Such opportunities result in enriching life experiences for children and young people, improved relationships and understanding between everyone and the development of individual's skills. All of these factors contribute to children and young people gaining more confidence and self-esteem, while having fun!

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.