

# Five Rivers Fostering - West Country

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC062487   |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 10/02/2014 |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Linda Bond |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Full       |
| <b>Provision subtype</b>       |            |

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| <b>Registered person</b>       | Five Rivers Child Care Limited                                                               |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Pauline Therese Phillips                                                                     |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Martin Ian Leitch                                                                            |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 26/05/2011                                                                                   |

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Five Rivers Fostering - Devon & Cornwall was established in 2001 and is located in the Western Region of Five Rivers Child Care Ltd. Five Rivers is a Social Enterprise and the company provides education and residential services in its other regions.

The service is an IFA providing a wide range of placements throughout Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and the unitary authorities of Torbay and Plymouth. The service works from two office locations: the Registered Office at Alphington, Exeter, and well established and busy sub office located on the outskirts of Truro.

At the time of the inspection, 93 fostering families provide 121 children and young people with placements. Offering a variety of resources; long and short term, disability and respite placements and bridging and emergency placements. In addition there is a strong service offering professional assessments of parenting. These are undertaken by experienced HCPC registered social workers in collaboration with foster carers who have undertaken a three day workshop in this field of work.

A team of social workers, fostering support workers and carers work intensively and therapeutically with children and young people with complex and diverse needs. Providing safe and nurturing care and enabling many to achieve stability and positive outcomes.

Responding to the demand of the local authorities for placements need to support children and young people with sometimes persistently challenging presentation, complex emotional needs and disabilities, the service has developed structured and responsive support to its carers to support, grow and develop them in this work.

### 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**.

This independent fostering agency has demonstrated significant growth and progress, and has been very successful in providing good quality placements that offer consistent care for children and young people. This is a result of enthusiastic and experienced staff and carers, who are managed, trained and supervised with a high level of competence. There is a strong culture of trust and participation in this service, combined with an overriding emphasis on children and young people's well-being. This helps children and young people to make good progress overall. Where placement stability is very good with few unplanned endings, and complex and challenging behaviours are supported by individualised personalised planning.

The staff, management team and foster carers are committed and strongly motivated to improving the lives of looked after children and young people. Central to all decision making there is a robust and proactive approach towards safeguarding which ensures children and young people are kept safe. Inspirational managers lead in development and training, drawing on research and experience to improve and develop the agency. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of the agency are rigorous and very effective in ensuring that high standards are maintained.

Two recommendations were made as a result of this inspection. These were to ensure foster carers complete necessary training and consultation with children and young people is further developed.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attended within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people living with foster carers supported by this agency, have good outcomes. The stability of placements is considered carefully by the service. Consistent support from both supervising social workers and fostering support workers results in long and stable foster placements, and, relationships and attachments with foster carers that are positive and secure. As a result children and young people are feeling settled, safe and involved with the foster carers family. Unplanned endings to placements are, where possible avoided, and children and young people are involved with this process. The participation of children and young people in the review process is good. For example children and young people are involved in the residential fostering to skills weekend. However, young people are not fully able to influence what is happening to them. The agency does not engage young people in more frequent and planned consultation outside of their statutory looked after child review meetings.

All children and young people attend educational establishments and attendance is high. Young people make good progress, from their starting points, in education, with active encouragement from their foster carers. They gain self confidence and learn new social skills.

Care for children and young people is highly individualised. It is based on personalised and detailed assessments, and comprehensive care plans. This enables all young people to receive appropriate care and support, challenging behaviours are effectively managed, and incidents of children placing themselves at risk are reducing. Children and young people enjoy visits with their family and friends when this is safe and appropriate to their needs. This helps them to maintain on-going relationships and promotes their sense of identity.

Children and young people are fully supported to be healthy and develop a healthy lifestyle. Of particular note is the good work that has been done in relation to routine health screening that is documented on personalised health passports. For example, almost all children and young people have had an annual health assessment, routine dental checks, and up to date immunisations. This ensures that their general health needs are identified and met. The health and well-being of children and young people are also promoted by excellent partnership working between the fostering service and a variety of agencies, such as the looked after children's nurse, psychotherapy, play therapy and the mental health service (CAMHS). These arrangements ensure that young people and foster carers have prompt access to highly effective advice and support to make sure that the physical and emotional health needs of young people are met.

There are specifically trained and assessed carers who provide parent and child placements. This makes available, for placing authorities, carers, who will both assess parents' parenting capacity and provide parenting skills advice, making sure young children have the best chance to remain with birth families, as well as keeping them safe and well cared for. Several young people have remained with their foster carers after their 18th birthday, which the service has been successful in arranging.

This results in young people gaining further chances to enhance their skills for independence at a pace to suit their specific needs.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a clear strategy, and the managers have a good understanding, of the children and young people for whom the local authorities need placements. There is a good commitment to improving and developing the services available to foster carers and staff, creating new regional posts and offices, and increasing the number of qualified posts in the team. As a result of this increase in staff together with a robust recruitment drive, the service has been successful in recruiting a number of new carer households. This increase in the number of available carers has greatly improved the ability of the service to match children and young people to the most appropriate carer. This in turn has contributed to the stability of placements, thereby benefiting children and young people.

Professional and analytical assessments of carers are completed within the recommended timescales, this minimises delays making sure that there are as many well prepared carers as possible, available to meet the diverse needs of children.

The fostering panel comprises of a very experienced chairperson, who has an extensive background and relevant knowledge of safeguarding and child protection. The central list of panel members, provides a balance of expertise and experience, constituted in accordance with regulations. The panel carries out its quality assurance function well, follows well established procedures and policies, and members of the fostering panel are well trained and regularly supervised which has lead to improvements in assessments and carers' annual reviews. Imaginative and creative training is available, for example at the induction stage foster carers and their families are involved in a residential skills to foster weekend. Foster carers are committed to developing and maintaining their knowledge and skills and they have an excellent understanding of the fostering task. A number of carers have completed the required Children's Workforce Development Council's training, support and development standards for foster care. Foster carers also have access to a wide range of training that is directly relevant to the needs of the children and young people they care for. For example, there are training days on issues such as mental health and resilience, youth and mental health, first aid, working with challenging behaviour, self-harm, child sexual exploitation and child development. The fostering service works closely with partner agencies in order to develop such training. For example, in conjunction with psychotherapists, specific training in attachment and development theory has been rolled out to all carers. Foster carers report that this training is 'excellent'. Foster carers commented that 'there's a good range of training and our own children also get

Foster carers are very positive about the service and say that they feel that they are well supported and valued. Staff take every opportunity to make sure that the achievements of carers are celebrated and rewarded. For example social groups for

foster carers and their families are organised and run frequently. There is an out-of-hours support service run by fostering social workers, carers say this provides them with a high level of support.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

There are highly effective arrangements in place which ensures that children and young people are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted. These include a sophisticated electronic recording system for checking the suitability of foster carers and staff, and the effective monitoring of training for carers and staff. The arrangements for supervising and supporting carers are well documented. Supervisory visits take place at least monthly and unannounced visits to foster carers take place twice a year. During these visits children and young people are met with alone, thereby providing opportunities for children and young people to report matters and share concerns which may worry them. Any complaints made are investigated and responded to promptly and within clear timescales. This ensures that concerns are taken seriously and responded to without delay. Further to this the agency takes swift action to safeguard young people from bullying should these situations occur. Children and young people are also supplied with information to advise them where they can go to get help in this matter.

The preparation, assessment and training of foster carers is extremely thorough with a focus on safe caring and safeguarding. Whilst some foster carers report this process to feeling 'heavy' and 'intrusive', there is an understanding that this rigorous approach ensures the safe care of children and young people. This training makes sure that carers gain a good understanding of current child protection practice and the impact of neglect and abuse on a child's behaviour and development. There is a clear process in place to deal with any allegations that children and young people may raise. This ensures that any allegations will be handled in a manner which is in the best interests of looked after children and foster carers. In addition, staff are acutely aware of their responsibilities to prioritise the safety of looked after children in foster placements.

Comprehensive care and placement plans ensure that foster carers have the information they need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children in their care. Detailed and thorough risk assessments are undertaken as part of the matching process to ensure that all possible areas of concern for children and carers are considered. In addition, foster carers prepare a safe care policy that addresses all aspects of household routines and safety.

Risk taking and challenging behaviours are reducing. For those children and young people who go missing from their foster placements, they are protected by highly effective partnership arrangements between the police, social work teams and other agencies. A return to placement meeting always takes place to establish their reasons for going missing and to monitor any patterns and trends. Prompt action is always taken to support children and young people and prevent any further

incidences.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

A significant strength of the fostering agency is its leadership and management. The agency is led by a management structure that is highly qualified with extensive experience. The quality of monitoring, notifying and reporting from the agency is excellent, and there continues a proactive commitment to improving standards. Close scrutiny regarding the delivery and performance is welcomed and responded to by a stable and cohesive management team. The service is regularly audited and monitored.

The Registered Manager leads a team that is motivated, passionate and committed to delivering and improving the agency, and ensuring the safety of children and young people is central to all plans. Regular team meetings are used innovatively to bring together staff from across the locality, providing opportunities to make use of current research and developments in fostering in order to inform future service developments. For example, the service manager is currently exploring issues around young people staying put post 18. All recommendations made at the last inspection have been fully addressed and there have been significant improvements in this agency since that time. This has resulted in the outcomes for children and young people being greatly improved.

The agency has increased the size of the fostering team, with the appointment of more qualified staff. These developments have enabled the agency to recruit and approve additional foster carers and demonstrate a clear commitment to the development of the service.

National and regional development plans for the agency have resulted from a series of audits and evaluation exercises, which reveal areas where the fostering service needs to develop. The reports are always acted upon, one of these is the development of consultation and inclusion of children and young people in the running and development of the agency. At the same time, management is proactively responding to the recent changes and developments in foster care.

High levels of support from the Registered Manager and the Responsible Individual ensure that children receive a good quality of care from well prepared foster carers who are in turn supported by highly competent supervising social workers. There is a high level of positive feedback from foster carers and staff. Indicating that foster carers and staff are valued, and feel valued as part of the team working with individual children and young people.

The Statement of Purpose is written clearly, frequently reviewed and clearly details the aims and objectives of the agency, In addition, all policies and procedures are regularly updated. A children's and young persons guide is accessible and inclusive for children of differing abilities. The premises where the fostering agency operates



from is accessible and very welcoming. There are rooms available for meetings, training events and family visits. There are books, literature and large displays in the office's communal areas highlighting the agency's ethos and practice, and the recruitment of a diverse range of foster carers. This ensures that whilst also promoting fostering, there are positive images of people from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

## 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.