

Families@Familycare Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Jeffrey Banham
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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

Families @Family Care is a private fostering agency. It is part of an organisation that also provides residential child care and a range of training and support services to child care providers. The main business office is based near Preston, and foster carers are located in both the North West and in the Midlands. Families @ Family Care recruits, assesses and approves foster carers who provide emergency, short term and long term placements to looked after children referred by local authorities.

Summary

Families @ Family Care is a small fostering service provider. At the time of the inspection ten children and young people were in placement with foster carers in the North West and in the Midlands. The service offers high levels of support to foster carers and children. Children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs. The progress of placements is well monitored through the "core group" process. This involves all significant professionals, children, carers and, where appropriate, families in the review of a child's progress. Foster carers receive high levels of support from a range of staff. The organisation has a number of systems in place to review its own practice and ensure its continued development.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Families@Family Care has addressed a number of practices that were identified at the last inspection as being in need of improvement. The key areas for improvement were the implementation of management systems where greater consistency was required, the way in which the fostering panel carried out its functions and the monitoring of the activities of social workers in supporting carers. All placements now have a written foster placement agreement. These agreements describe the specific needs of children and the tasks of the foster carer in meeting those needs. The agreements demonstrate that children are appropriately matched with carers who can look after them. The service has improved its systems for obtaining necessary documentation from local authorities on children placed with foster carers. This means that carers know as much as possible about children's backgrounds and care needs. The agency is able to demonstrate the attempts it makes to obtain all the relevant information from placing authorities. All qualified and unqualified staff are properly supervised. Their practice is monitored so that they fulfil their responsibilities in ensuring children are cared for and foster carers are effectively supported. The functioning of the panel has improved. It has undertaken training to enable it to develop the level of service it provides. It has strengthened its membership and now has a qualified social worker as a regular member. Medical information on all applicants is now seen by the panel's medical adviser. This ensures that the panel is better able to carry out all its functions in monitoring the practice of the agency.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children are well cared for by the fostering service. Their health needs are identified before placement through the information that the service requests from local authorities who refer children. The service ensures that carers have as much information as possible by initiating

contact with local authority social workers. Progress in meeting children's health care needs is regularly monitored through a range of procedures such as the 'core group' process, initiated and implemented by the service. Supervising social workers provide support to carers, such as attending hospital appointments with them, in those cases where local authority social workers are not available. Foster carers are well trained in health issues and are confident in taking action where they become aware that children need health treatments. The service uses available resources to promote and secure good health outcomes and supports carers in achieving good standards of health care for children. It is developing links with specialist services to ensure that a range of resources is available to support children's health and emotional well being. Consents for medical treatment are obtained and held on file with foster carers. These consents are not always effectively and clearly established. This potentially compromises any health care treatment that children may need. The manager is planning to review the obtaining and recording of consent so that foster carers have the authority to provide all necessary medical treatment.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children are cared for safely by a range of policies, practices and procedures implemented by Families@Family Care. The service works well with other agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded. Children are placed with carers who are assessed as able to meet their needs. Children's safety is ensured through detailed assessments and reviews of carers' homes. Their behavioural needs are taken into account through risk assessments and behaviour plans that are regularly monitored to ensure they support carers in meeting safe care requirements. The monitoring of the appropriateness of matches is potentially compromised by the use of different formats of foster placements agreements, some of which do not contain all the necessary information about children's needs and the support to be provided by foster carers. Children are supported by foster carers who are aware of their responsibilities. They take action, such as working with schools to address bullying, where they become aware children need support. Foster carers are well supported by supervising social workers who can compensate for situations where local authority social workers are not available. Children are given information, support and advice by foster carers to ensure they are able to take responsibility for their own safety where this is in line with their abilities and wishes. The fostering panel serves children well and can demonstrate good outcomes for children. The panel is able to maintain independent scrutiny of the operations of the fostering service. The membership of the panel ensures that the service maintains its primary focus on meeting the needs of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The service recruits carers that can meet the diversity needs of children. Children are supported by policies and procedures that value diversity and equality and that recognise the significance of these issues in supporting children. Foster carers are trained and supported to ensure children's needs are met in relation to religious, cultural, ethnic and disability factors. Children's educational needs are identified at the time of placement and they are placed with carers who are able to provide the care that is required. Families@Family Care provides carers with training and support to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities in meeting the educational needs of children. Carers initiate and take action, such as transporting children to school, where this is in the best interests of children. They advocate on behalf of children and provide consistent care where there are changes to local authority social workers. Carers are assisted

by supervising social workers to take the actions that are required to support children in placement. Children are well supported by carers who respond to specific issues as they arise, such as problems with school placements. Children's educational progress is regularly and effectively monitored through the procedures implemented by the fostering service. These procedures, such as the 'core group' process, ensure that the educational progress of all children is regularly checked so that extra support can be provided wherever it is needed. The fostering service uses available resources to encourage the educational achievement of children. The service provides guidance to carers on promoting educational achievement and provides additional resources, such as the agency's Creative Therapist, where the need for this support has been identified.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children's needs for contact with people significant to them is promoted through the support provided by Families@Family Care. Contact issues are established through the placement information obtained from placing authorities at the time of referral. Placement plans identify the tasks and responsibilities of carers in promoting and supporting children's contact. Foster carers monitor and record the impact of contact on children. Foster carers are able to understand the significance and impact for contact on children through the training and support they themselves receive. Contact arrangements are reviewed through the core group and statutory reviewing progress. These actions ensure that changes to contact can be made to meet children's changing needs. Foster carers are supported by the agency's social workers, particularly where local authority social workers are not able to assist in meeting planned contact arrangements. Children's care is potentially compromised by the lack of legal documentation held by foster carers defining any restrictions on contact that may exist. Children's views are taken into account and recorded by carers where appropriate. Children's involvement in the care they receive and planning for their future is supported by carers who take action on their behalf wherever this is required.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are well supported by Families@family Care to develop the skills to move into adulthood. The advice and guidance children receive from the foster carers and the agency's social workers complements the support provided by the placing authorities. Children's specific needs are identified in the agency's own 'Pathway plans'. The progress of these plans is regularly reviewed through the core group process. Children feel involved in the process and are able to influence the support they receive. Foster carers are supported and equipped to understand their role in helping children develop independence skills. The agency advocates for placements to continue past 18 where this is identified as being in the best interests of children. There is a clear structure for foster carer payment. The rates are published in the foster carer handbook and are reviewed each year. The payment structure reinforces training and experience. The fee structure enables local authorities to tailor service provision to meet the needs of the child. The rates of payment are clear and consistently applied. They provide foster carers with sufficient finance to support children to pursue educational and leisure interests and participate fully in the community. Payments are made regularly and on time.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children and foster carers are well supported by the management practices of the agency. The objectives of the agency in working to meet children's needs are clearly set out in the statement of purpose that is provided for children and carers. Children's interests are the primary consideration of the agency. Its policies, practices and procedures are implemented by qualified and experienced staff who themselves are well trained and supported to maintain their focus on child centred practice. Children are well cared for by foster carers who appreciate the support and training they receive from staff and the resources that the agency has its disposal. Children's needs are well met by foster carers who are able to take the initiative in meeting their needs and advocating on children's behalf. Foster carers are well supported by all the staff of the agency. They ensure that advice, guidance and assistance are available to carers. Children are well matched with carers and settled in their placements. Staff and carers demonstrate their commitment to achieving the best outcomes for children in their daily behaviour and actions. A particular strength of the agency is the actions it takes to work directly for and with children where placing authorities are unable to fulfil their responsibilities. The core group process promotes effective monitoring of the progress in meeting children's needs. Staff are involved in the development of the agency through continuous review of practices and structured supervision and training that gives them the skills to focus on meeting children's needs. Children's care needs are identified, monitored and reviewed through a range of practices carried out by staff and carers. Records are kept on children in placement to provide information and evidence of the work that is undertaken by the agency to meet their needs. These records are not organised in a consistent format and this potentially makes the monitoring of progress less effective.

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
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Recommendations

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

- review the systems for monitoring the content and accuracy of children's files to ensure they are effective working tools for supporting children (NMS 25)
- ensure that foster carers have copies of all legal orders relating to restrictions of contact (NMS 10)
- review the format of the foster placement agreement to ensure they provide the information set out in Schedule 6 of the Fostering Services Regulations (NMS 8)

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.