

# Findings - Families@FamilyCare Ltd Foster Carer Questionnaire – issued July 2009

## Introduction

Thank you very much to those of you who have completed the questionnaire that I sent out to you at the start of July. I have received 15 responses out of a possible total of 25 which I think means that as well as being very helpful we can also regard it as statistically valid (a 60% return is certainly better than many published 'polls and surveys' rely on and almost certainly a higher percentage of the 'population that will vote in our next Government!'). I have allowed about 6 weeks for responses which seems reasonable to me. Some respondents chose to complete the questionnaire anonymously which is absolutely fine whilst others elected to identify themselves.

In trying to feed back to all of our carers and the team in this brief report I have chosen not to identify any respondents. There is no particular reason for this but I would rather not do anything that could possibly be divisive.

In the first part of the feedback I am simply going to include all of the information that I received in the exact words it was given - I have edited only where a specific name was used that could identify a carer or child.

After doing so I will offer some interpretation but I fully accept that this does not mean that what I say is true - it's my version of the truth based on what I have read.

This report will be going out to foster carers, team members and our Panel at the same time. All are warmly invited to come back to me with any comments, observations or criticisms as they see fit.

Exercises like this one are always tinged with a little anxiety based on the premise that you might not like the answers when you ask the questions! However if we are to progress as a service then we must remain committed to seeking the views of our colleague foster carers. There are a number of forums in which these views can be given - supervision, meetings, reviews and soon our AGM's. This questionnaire is just another forum and hopefully one where there is less likelihood of respondents feeling that they have to conform to expectations because of the relatively public nature of the other options. I would like to think that we will conduct an exercise like this one on an annual basis. However given my memory I would be more than grateful for any member of our service to remind me! As one of those who completed the questionnaire indicated by a subtle use of the exclamation mark I am perhaps not always as 'Responsible Individual' (!) as I might be.

## Question 1

### Why did you choose to apply to Families@FamilyCare Ltd rather than another Independent Fostering Agency or Local Authority?

We are aware of various possibilities but feel free to either circle one or more of these and/or add your own reasons if they are not covered below:

- Word of mouth recommendation, e.g. from current Families@FamilyCare Ltd foster carers; a testimonial that our service will provide the support that is needed for foster carers to do a good job 4
- We liked the responses that we received and the approach of the first person that we spoke to when we first enquired 8
- We researched a number of possible agencies and chose Families@FamilyCare Ltd because it is a small agency 4
- Families@FamilyCare Ltd was in the right location for us 1
- The fees paid are more generous than other agencies 1
- The training packages sounded appropriate and relevant to the task 3
- Other - please specify
  1. *"We wanted to go with a smaller more caring agency"*
  2. *"I researched other agencies and 'Families@FamilyCare Ltd.' were on the ball, they replied quickly and were personable, likeable people"*
  3. *"To help our daughter with her foster child, so we done respite carer"*
  4. *"Recommended by X (Named foster carer). When we had both looked at several agencies we decided to change agencies"*
  5. *"Worked with Local Authority and found support very inadequate"*

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Please note some carers 'ticked' more than one box (as they were invited to do) and therefore numbers do not necessarily equate to total numbers of returns received

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**Question 2**

Families@FamilyCare Ltd **have/have not** lived up to my initial expectations - please circle whichever applies.

Have	Have not
13	2
87%	13%

**Question 3**

If your answer to the last question is 'have not' can you please tell us how and perhaps in your view why we have failed to live up to expectations?

*"The support and holiday do not live up to our expectations and lack of communication"*

*"Lack of support from both social worker and support worker also training difficult to access"*

**Question 4**

The support from Families@FamilyCare Ltd is: (Please tick as appropriate)  
%

Poor	2	13%
Acceptable		
Satisfactory		
Good	2	13%
Very good	11	74%

**Question 5**

The 'out of hours service' that I receive from Families@FamilyCare Ltd is: (Please tick as appropriate)

%

Poor		
Acceptable		
Satisfactory		
Good		
Very good	6	40%
Never needed to use it	9	60%

### Question 6

I/We feel that Families@FamilyCare Ltd personnel listen to me if I have a problem or complaint?  
(Please tick as appropriate)

Never		
Sometimes	2	14.5%
Most of the time	4	28.5%
Always	8	57%

**(One return indicated that they could not answer as they had not had problems or complaints)**

### Question 7

I **have/have not** had significant problems with payments from Families@FamilyCare Ltd - please circle whichever applies.

Have	Have not
0	15 (100%)

**One set of carers did say 'have not ish'**

### Question 8

If your answer to the last question is 'have' can you please tell us what the problems were and why the problem was not resolved to your satisfaction.

*"We were overpaid one month by a day. This extra day was included on the remittance slip so it looked like we were still only being paid for 28 days as usual. Still unsure why the error was made and now we are having to pay that money back"*

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**Question 9**

The training that I/we have been offered by Families@FamilyCare Ltd is (Please tick all that apply)  
%

Poor	1	7%
Acceptable		
Satisfactory		
Good	4	31%
Very good	10	77%
Sufficiently flexible in respect of times offered	3 plus "Sometimes"	31%
Too simple		
Too complex	1	7%
Relevant to my job	8	62%
Irrelevant to my job		

**(N.b. only 13 responses to this one and totals cannot add up to 100 %.)**

**Question 10**

I/we **would/would not** recommend Families@FamilyCare Ltd to a friend or relative who is interested in fostering (please circle whichever applies)

Would	Would not	Left blank
14		1
93.5%		6.5%

## Question 11

The worst thing about Families@FamilyCare Ltd is:

*"Lack of support, holidays only 2 weeks other agency offer 3 - 4 weeks"*

*"Having our social worker changed when a relationship has just been made with a previous one"*

*"2nd carer training is OTT and cost us £500 in wages last year. Sometimes the course should be just available if required not compulsory"*

*"Nothing PERFECT for all our needs"*

*"Location in the Midlands"*

*"They are always friendly and there" (Nb This is not a mistake it was put in this section, Ed)*

*"Cannot think of anything "Doing a very good job"*

*"I sometimes feel that having a support worker and a supervising social worker leads to confusion, as I sometimes forget who I have told what"*

*"Lack of support. Inflexible training times. Lack of encouragement to engage foster carer/child to meet other foster carers/children"*

*"N/A"*

*"Inconsistency i.e. in health and safety, respite, approach to training"*

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## Question 12

The best thing about Families@FamilyCare Ltd is:

*"They are all very friendly and we feel that if we need anything there is always someone at the end of phone"*

*"The support we receive and being known by staff- I am concerned that as the firm grows this may not be as good"*

*"For us its having a social worker and support staff listen to you and give help when needed"*

*"When courses are running and I can get to them I find them interesting and helpful"*

*"Staff are accessible, knowledgeable and have a realistic attitude to what is possible"*

*"they are always there for you"*

*"They smile and have a sense of humour"*

*"The people/staff are so friendly"*

*"Very approachable and understanding staff. It is nice to feel valued and respected for the job that we do"*

*"Support. 100% always there for us and help and encourage us fully. Very happy and enjoys everyone's company and visits and they give us strength in hard situations and advise"*

*"People on the other end of the phone usually know who you are. Large enough to count, small enough to care!"*

*"Overall we are listened to as an individual and support is always there"*

*"Training"*

*"Very approachable, very friendly, we feel very supported in our role of foster carers"*

*"Small team, personal feel"*

## Question 13

Please use the space below to make any other comments that you wish about any aspect(s) of the service that this questionnaire has not allowed you to comment on.

*"Whenever support is needed whatever package you may have support should be given to help the placement"*

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*"FANTASTIC TEAM!"*

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*"I appreciate the amount of training and the work behind it but some has been spoiled by having so many students in which affected (sic.) group dynamics and venues. I felt this devalued my training"*

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12 blank

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## Ed's Comments on responses

### Question 1

- a) There are some clear messages for us as a service here.
- b) First impressions are very important
- c) We need to remember our roots. We are a small agency and need to remain so whilst growing sufficiently to ensure our viability. I guess that 'small' is not just about size but about approach and making everyone feel that they are important and part of what we are doing is vital.
- d) Word of mouth recommendations are by far the best way to recruit carers

### Question 2

Clearly the vast majority of our carers (87%) feel that we have done what we said we would. It is I would suggest vitally important that those (13%) who don't are able to tell us why they feel this and what we can or could have done about this. Frankly we make mistakes but we can't always know that we have if our carers aren't prepared to tell us how we can put it right - or perhaps at least have the conversation to check if it is just a misunderstanding - which seems at least possible given the breakdown of responses here. Support Worker.

### Question 3

I know that comments were offered concerning 'support', holidays, communication and training but once again given other apparently contradictory comments elsewhere in this questionnaire about each of these elements of the service I do feel it's worth these particular carers talking to Cliff, me or perhaps Mike La-Borde (The Agency Decision Maker) if they feel unable or unwilling to discuss it with their Supervising Social Worker or Family Placement Support Worker

### Question 4

Happily 87% of all of our carers feel that the support is either good or very good. This leads me backwards, in a sense, to my comments above. Clearly something is wrong for such a disparity to be perceived. We will discuss this in the team but given that those carers who expressed a view that support was poor (13%) are the same two carers who felt that we have not lived up to expectations then I really feel that we need to find a way to open up a line of communication

### Question 5

Thankfully we may very little use of our 'Out of Hours' service. I suggest that there are good reasons for this including:

- We work with very competent and well trained foster carers who manage the inevitable concerns that arise out of hours very well
- Our team do not leave carers 'in crisis' as is sometimes the case with other fostering services
- We all work very hard to communicate well and share information to make good plans for the children that we care for and this means that 'crises' rarely occur.

All of this having been said it is gratifying for us to know that (100%) of those who have had to use the service think it to be 'Very Good'.

We will need to look at this services as we grow but 'Families@FamilyCare Ltd.' must ensure that whatever replaces the current arrangement is at least as good, accessible and credible as what we have now.

## Question 6

'Families@FamilyCare Ltd.' need to work on this one. The outcomes are by no means bad but they could be better. We should be in a position that we always listen if there is a problem or complaint. This does not mean that the problem will necessarily be accepted as such or that the complaint will automatically be upheld but all of our carers must feel that they will be listened to. We expect this for 'our' children and nothing less is acceptable for those caring for them. Effectively 39% of our carers do not feel that they are **'Always'** listened to on these matters

## Question 7

Good news and so it should be - well done to not only the Finance section but also the Family Placement team for making sure that communication to Finance is good enough.

## Question 8

See above

## Question 9

I find it a little difficult to extrapolate from this return. Clearly as Carers were invited to add as many comments as they wished there can be no accurate breakdown in terms of percentages. However, it does seem clear that the vast majority of carers who commented feel that training is 'good' or 'very good' and relevant. A tiny proportion consider it to be poor but we do need to see if we can be even more flexible on how we offer training times -though I accept that - to borrow from Abraham Lincoln - "You can't please all of the people all of the time"

## Question 10

I guess that from the responses to this question we can assume that we are getting much of what we are doing right. Given my earlier comment about 'word of mouth' I take it as a pretty ringing endorsement that 93.5% of our carers would recommend us and the other carer presumably is undecided. Any organisation with such a testimonial should be both pleased and determined to sustain this level of 'satisfaction'

## Question 11

Of the 11 comments offered 4 were 'in praise' of the service - which is pretty good to hear if this is the worse thing!

That having been said let me specifically address the other comments:

["Lack of support, holidays only 2 weeks other agency offer 3 - 4 weeks"](#)

Our scheme is and has always been very clear about the holiday arrangements and is priced to Local Authorities on this basis. This will not change and unfortunately if this is insufficient for any particular carers personal needs I can offer no prospect of change.

In terms of support I must return to my earlier comments. Firstly please tell us where, in your view we are getting this wrong. Secondly as a service unless we can discuss this on an individual basis then I don't know where to go given that 87% of carers believe 'support' to be 'good' or 'very good'.

["Having our social worker changed when a relationship has just been made with a previous one"](#)

I am in sympathy with this. I fully appreciate as do we all that continuity is really important and it is regrettable when for operational reasons changes have to be made. I hope that a plausible explanation for the change was given and I think I can speak on behalf of the whole service in saying that we would seek to avoid this if at all possible. One of our difficulties thus far has been that

as we have grown we have to make the very best use of our growing team. We now have a structure in place that will hopefully preclude the need for such changes except in totally unavoidable circumstances.

*"2nd carer training is OTT and cost us £500 in wages last year. Sometimes the course should be just available if required not compulsory"*

Again I have some sympathy with this point of view. The difficulty that we have is that we approve foster carers as 'an entity' when there are two carers and Standards require that training is given to both carers. That having been said we have been able to introduce some greater flexibility of late in certain training without impacting on progression through the 'fee scales' which as we know are based in part on training undertaken. Whilst we (in common with all Fostering Agencies) must continue to work to the Standards and Regulations that govern our activity we will show such flexibility as we are able.

*"Location in the Midlands"*

Obviously there are a number of possible meanings for this statement. We accept that the Midlands office is not ideally located and we are working on this. It is at an early stage but I hope that by the time of the AGM we will be able to announce a new location that will be more convenient for most of our carers. As ever with a service that is geographically spread convenient for some will mean less convenient for others but we will do what we can to minimise inconvenience

*"I sometimes feel that having a support worker and a supervising social worker leads to confusion, as I sometimes forget who I have told what"*

Another fair point. I accept that perhaps there are times when we have too many people for some purposes. We will continue to work hard on our communication systems to eliminate any confusion

*"Lack of support. Inflexible training times. Lack of encouragement to engage foster carer/child to meet other foster carers/children"*

I can't say anything different to what I have already about 'Lack of support and training times' when the same respondent made a very similar comment to an earlier question. In terms of the apparent lack of encouragement to engage with others I am a little confused. I assume that carers are more than able to engage with each other and I know that a number of groups of carers already do so. I am also conscious that efforts have been made to support 'children's groups' to be formed though accept that this has not always been successful. Once again I would earnestly invite this carer to talk to us; if we can help further please tell us how.

*"Inconsistency i.e. in health and safety, respite, approach to training"*

We take all of the comments received in this questionnaire very seriously none more so than this. Health and safety is a vital area. Please help us out here. This respondent also indicated that they are listened to 'most of the time' if they have a problem etc., that the training is 'good' and support is 'very good', so please help us to understand our inconsistency and improve on it.

## **Question 12**

I don't wish to be self congratulatory on behalf of the service so I will not dwell on the many kind and appreciative comments save to say 'thank you' and that we will try to continue to meet those needs that we do at present and address others that perhaps we fall a little short on.

## **Question 13**

Again one very pleasing unsolicited comment and another that is more critical along with a third that is perhaps more challenging. We are a training organisation and actually feel that at times a diverse

group adds to the training. Certainly there is no intention to "devalue" foster carers training, on the contrary we feel that at times we can enhance the training by encouraging different perspectives on child care in a range of environments. Perhaps this is something that could be taken up with the training section when looking at PDP's? In respect of the various packages and their relation to levels of support we do need to be cogniscent that ultimately we have to be able to afford what we deliver. We actually have an exceptional record of delivering services for which we are not paid in an effort to support placements but there has to be a limit if the service is not to risk becoming bankrupt. As I think all of our Carers are aware 'Families@FamilyCare Ltd.' is operated on a 'Not for Profit' basis and there are therefore no 'reserves' on which we can draw save the back up of Family Care Associates Ltd. which itself is not a cash rich organisation. There will be times when, if a Local Authority is not prepared to fund a placement appropriately then we have to consider if we can sustain it.

## **Conclusion**

From my perspective this has been a really useful and good exercise but that is not sufficient reason for doing it. I hope that it has offered another opportunity for carers to express themselves without any sense of patronisation or even threat. I hope that it will inform our inaugural AGM's which I can only hope are really well attended. 'Families@FamilyCare Ltd.' has only been in existence for about 5 years and we (that's the 'Royal we', very much including our Foster Carers) have created a service that offers a great deal to be proud of and some challenges that remain to be met. The service will continue to grow (slowly) without losing the sense of belonging and approachability that seems so highly valued by many of the carers who have responded to this questionnaire. Its down to all of us to maintain the standards that we have achieved well in and to improve those where we may be lacking.

**Ed Nixon**  
**Responsible Individual**

**12th August 2009.**