

# Families@Familycare Limited

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	05/10/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

### 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. The agency recruits, assesses and approves foster carers who provide emergency, short term and long term placements to looked after children referred by local authorities.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced inspection covered all the key standards under every outcome area. The inspector found that this is a good service with outstanding outcomes achieved in the areas of enjoying and achieving and positive contribution.

Families @ Family Care ensures children are cared for safely by a range of policies, practices and procedures implemented by the agency. The service works well with other agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded. Its fostering panel serves children well and can demonstrate good outcomes for children.

Children are placed with foster carers who can meet their needs. The progress of placements are 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 and children 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. However, the agency procedures for monitoring the activities and performance of the agency are not sufficiently robust.

### Improvements since the last inspection

The last full inspection was carried out in October 2007 and resulted in three recommendations being made, which related to three key outcome areas, staying safe, positive contribution and organisation. At the time of this inspection, the agency had effectively addressed these matters and all the recommendations had been met.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health and developmental needs of children and young people are well met by the agency. Policies and procedures, such as the core group system, support good practice in this area and ensure health matters are taken seriously. There are good working relationships with key professionals and other agencies to promote the health of young people.

Children and young people are registered with health professionals and attend health appointments as appropriate. Those requiring specialist support, for example, from the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are supported by foster carers and the agency is proactive in making sure that these appointments are met. Foster carers are well-trained and knowledgeable about health issues. They are confident in taking action where they become aware that children need health treatments. Children and young people are aware about living a healthy lifestyle and are encouraged and supported by their foster carers. Foster carers are well supported by the agency who will discuss health matters with them. They keep the agency up to date regarding children and young people's health, including any medication administered. Risk assessments are in place where there is a specific health concern. Foster carers provide the agency with details of serious accidents and illnesses that young people may experience and the action taken. This information is carefully monitored by the manager. Consents for medical treatment are obtained and held on file with foster carers. This ensures 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.

The agency's management staff have the necessary qualifications, experience and knowledge to ensure that the agency is managed effectively. The recruitment policy and procedure ensures that there are robust and effective systems in place for appropriate vetting of all staff. Staff are requested for a full employment history and where gaps in employment have been identified these are explored. References are sought and further confirmation of references is followed up with confirmation by telephone. All staff have appropriate enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures in place and these are updated every three years in line with good practice. Personnel files examined contained all the required information to demonstrate that staff are suitable to work with children.

The recruitment and selection of foster carers also follows robust systems, including CRB enhanced disclosures. There is a renewal process of these in line with staff who work for the agency. References for carers are in place and the agency ensures that the views gained from prospective foster carer's own children, both adult children and those still living at home, are clearly recorded. In addition, the views from previous partners are also gathered to ensure a holistic assessment is undertaken.

Health and safety checks, including pet assessments, are completed and updated annually in each foster home, including vehicle checks. There is safe caring guidance written by foster carers and agreed with their supervising social workers. Children's 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. Accident forms are completed by foster carers and monitored by the agency. Training includes health and safety and fire safety. Unannounced visits are taking place and are fully recorded.

The agency ensures foster carers provide a healthy, clean, safe and nurturing environment. This was also confirmed by comments made in the returned surveys and the children and young people spoken with, who stated that they feel safe in their foster homes and part of the family.

The agency places the needs of the child at the forefront when making matching decisions and works hard to ensure that all appropriate matching documentation is obtained from the placing authority. Matching decisions are made in consultation with placing social workers and foster carers. This ensures children and young people are placed with carers, who are assessed as able to meet their needs. Foster placement agreements contain all the required information. Visits made to carers and the children placed with them demonstrated that good matching procedures are in place.

The agency strives to ensure children and young people are effectively safeguarded. It has a good safeguarding policy and procedures. These procedures cover protecting children, bullying, absence without authority and behaviour management and are fully available to carers. Carers are provided with clear guidance about complaints. All staff and carers have undertaken recent safeguarding training. To ensure that safeguarding remains high on the agency's agenda, senior managers meet four times a year as part of the safeguarding board where any issues of safeguarding or amendments to the policies and procedures are discussed and agreed.

The fostering service works well with other agencies to ensure that children are safeguarded. Children are fully 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. No incidents of bullying were reported by children and young people spoken with or in the returned surveys. All children and young people are provided with information about the complaints procedures. 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.

All carers have safe care policies for their households that are personalised for each young person placed. These are kept under review, any changes are clearly recorded and amended copies are maintained on individual files. Foster carers are fully involved in the development and updating of these policies.

Foster carers have access to a psychologist, who is employed by the agency. Carers generally found this a particularly helpful and responsive service, when supporting children and young people with complex needs or behavioural issues.

The agency has informed social workers and Ofsted of significant events and can demonstrate that child protection issues have been dealt with appropriately to safeguard children.

The fostering panel is child focused and organised to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval, review or de-registration of foster carers. The panel chair and members have a wide variety and range of relevant experience which contributes to the decision making process. The panel exercises robust scrutiny of information presented and has a quality assurance function, which informs the agency's improvement agenda. Foster carers attending panel are supported effectively by their supervising social workers and recommendations made by the panel are clearly explained.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The agency greatly values and actively promotes equality and diversity for all children and young people. This is clearly reflected in the agency's policies, procedures and practice. Foster carers are recruited to meet the diverse needs of children requiring a foster placement. They are well trained and supported to ensure children's needs are met in relation to religious, cultural, ethnic and disability factors. Foster carers demonstrate a very good understanding of their role in promoting equality and diversity. They work very hard with children and young people to promote self-worth and encourage them in any interests or talents.

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. The agency provides carers with training and support to ensure that education is greatly valued. Foster carers are fully aware of their responsibilities in meeting the educational needs of children. They are assisted by supervising social workers to take any actions required to support children in placement. Foster carers initiate and take action, such as transporting children to school, where it is in their best interests.

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 extra support can be provided where needed. The fostering service uses available resources, such as their school and therapist, to encourage the educational achievement of children.

The agency's foster carers actively advocate on behalf of children and young people and provide consistent care, where there are changes to local authority social workers. The agency ensures the educational and leisure needs of children and

young people are actively promoted with opportunities in these aspects of their life fully maximised.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

— The provision is outstanding.

— The agency promotes contact to meet the needs of children and young people. It ensures that placement information is obtained from local authorities at the time of referral and that contact arrangements are fully identified. Placement plans identify the tasks and responsibilities of carers in promoting and supporting children's contact.

The agency's foster carers are totally committed to supporting these contact arrangements with a view to maintaining relationships with friends and family members. In a number of situations, foster carers are involved in maintaining complex and frequent contact arrangements. The agency's social workers and foster carers give practical support to ensure such contact arrangements are effectively maintained. Foster carers are fully able to understand the significance and impact for contact on children through the training and support received. Contact arrangements are effectively monitored and records kept on the impact of contact on children. These arrangements are also reviewed through the core group and statutory reviewing process. This ensures 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 views, where appropriate, are fully taken into account and recorded by carers. Children's involvement in the care they receive and planning for their future is effectively supported by carers, who take action on their behalf, wherever this is required.

The agency fully consults with children and young people and ensures that they have opportunities to raise any concerns or complaints. Details of the agency complaints' procedure and agencies, which children and young people can access directly, are in the children and young people's guides and supervising social workers routinely meet with them on home visits.

Children and young people visited during the inspection and in the information obtained in the returned surveys confirmed that they feel consulted about their care and the support that they receive. They also indicated that they were aware of who to contact if they have any concerns or problems. Should any complaint be made, they indicated that they would be actively listened to and that their complaint would be followed up and resolved.

## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are well supported by this agency 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. This was also confirmed by foster carers visited and in the information received in the returned surveys.

## Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The agency values and promotes equality and diversity, which is clearly reflected in their policies, procedures and practice. All staff and carers who work for the agency have undertaken equality and diversity training. Examples were given which demonstrate children and young people's religious, ethnic and special needs are being met and foster carers are active in equipping themselves with relevant information through a variety of sources. Foster carers ensure that children have mementos, photographs and life story work to take with them when they move on. The views of children and young people are sought to ensure that they have an opportunity to voice their views and opinions. Children whose parents foster are also able to share their views and opinions through consultation with agency staff.

Children and foster carers are well supported by the management practices of the agency. The agency has a Statement of Purpose which outlines its aims and objectives and services provided. Children's interests are the primary consideration of the agency. Its policies, practices and procedures inform the work of the agency and are implemented by qualified and experienced staff who themselves are well trained and supported to maintain their focus on child centred practice.

The manager and responsible individual are suitable people to run an agency and have considerable experience and skills in the field of social work and fostering.

However the agency's procedures for monitoring the activities and performance of the agency are not sufficiently robust.

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 at its disposal. Children's needs are effectively 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.

There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for case recording. 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. Case records are well organised, legible and non-stigmatising. These records are organised and in a consistent format to enable the effective monitoring of children and young people's progress. However not all records demonstrated robust managerial oversight. All agency records were stored securely and in accordance with the fostering national minimum standards.

The agency's premises are well resourced. There is space, storage, good information technology and communication equipment. The premises are compliant with disability legislation, accessible and fit for purpose. All the necessary insurance policies are in place.

There is a clearly written set of financial policies and procedures governing the agency's financial management, which are properly operated.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

## Recommendations

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

- ensure the agency's procedures for monitoring the activities and performance of the agency are strengthened. (NMS 4).