

# The Children's Family Trust

The Children's Family Trust

First Floor, SMS Meer UK, Henson Close, South Church Enterprise Park, Bishop Auckland, County Durham DL14 6WA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The Children's Family Trust is a charitable organisation, which operates nationally. This agency covers the north-east of England. It offers long- and short-term fostering placements, emergency placements and short breaks. The agency provides placements for 35 children and young people in 26 fostering households as of 15 January 2018. There are four placements under staying put arrangements.

**Inspection dates:** 15 to 19 January 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 3 July 2014

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- A significant number of the children and young people have a 'home for life' with their carers, which is a principle aim of the agency. The agency continues to assist those children placed with their carers throughout their adult life, if required.
- The children and young people are looked after by carers who understand their needs and receive a wide range of training to increase their knowledge and skills.
- The support and supervision package provided to carers by the agency is comprehensive, responsive and highly valued by them.
- Agency staff ensure that all risks to the children and young people are known prior to placement. Carers receive detailed information before placement to help them mitigate these risks. As a result, the children and young people are protected from harm.
- The leaders and managers place the children and young people at the heart of all their decision-making and practice. This leads to good quality care and support, and stable placements.
- The manager ably leads an extremely collaborative and committed team of staff who 'go the extra mile' for the children and young people and their carers.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- In order to inform the quality of care, the manager needs to ensure that feedback from the children and young people, their carers, professionals and any other significant people in their lives is regularly gathered and used to improve practice. Any review of the quality of care must be submitted to HMCI.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Due date</b>
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for -</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and on request to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster carers, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (1)(b) (2)(3))</p>	<p>30/08/2018</p>

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The ethos of the agency is to provide a 'family for life', and this is achieved in a number of long term placements of children and young people, some in excess of ten years. A number of the young people are able to remain in their placements under staying put arrangements. The agency goes beyond its duties in continuing to support these placements even when not contracted to do so by the placing local authority. According to its statement of purpose and business plan, the operating organisation is now also diversifying its provision to undertake emergency, short-term and short-break care, and the agency is currently providing a variety of placements.

In line with the statement of purpose, the organisation that runs the agency continues to offer assistance to those it has looked after, into their adult life. It provides rental deposits, finances driving lessons and furniture, and assists with practical tasks when requested. This excellent practice provides vulnerable people with a helping hand when they need it.

The children and young people are cared for by very committed carers who are able to build secure relationships with them quickly. Carers are helped to do this by extensive support and training from the agency. Supervising social workers ensure that carers understand the emotional needs of each child and young person and have the capacity to meet them. This enables the majority to make progress in all areas of their lives as they develop trust in their carers, and their lives are stabilised.

The agency and the carers view education as a priority and the children and young people have high attendance rates. The agency has systems in place to monitor and celebrate progress, and works closely with education providers. When necessary, the agency challenges on behalf of the children and young people and works in partnership with the virtual school. The agency funds extra tuition, when necessary, to help children and young people to reach their full potential. Some young people go on to university and others are assisted financially to undertake vocational courses.

Agency staff and the carers have a good understanding of the health needs of the children and young people and ensure that all care required is obtained. Specialist referrals are made if necessary, for example for psychological therapy. If there is a waiting time for urgent care, the organisation will fund it privately in the interim.

The children and young people enjoy numerous social and recreational activities as part of family life with their carers, such as Cubs, bowling and cheerleading. All the children and young people spoken to felt that they were part of their carer's family. The agency staff work hard to ensure that the children and young people have ample opportunity to express any worries or concerns independently, and have strong relationships with each child and young person placed. This is especially valuable to those placed away from their local area whose social workers are not readily available. Children and young people are encouraged to contribute to and attend their reviews.

The agency is very careful to ensure that the children and young people are well prepared for and welcomed into new placements. Children and young people receive informative and age-appropriate guides which include information about how they can complain. The guide is also available in Makaton.

The agency has employed the services of a worker to undertake direct work with the children and young people. He is able to engage the children and young people around areas such as motivation and self-confidence, on a level they can relate to.

Participation events for the children and young people, including the birth children of foster carers, is also an area of work, which is gathering pace. Children and young people have enjoyed making pizzas, days out and a Christmas party. These are fun opportunities for the children and young people to support each other and forge friendships.

The agency staff and carers fully support the children and young people to keep in touch with family members and others important to them. Flexible responses such as supervision of contact and transport are helping some children and young people to strengthen their relationships with their families. All the children and young people are encouraged to create memories of family life with their foster families, such as memory boxes, photo albums and videos. This is helping them to increase their sense of belonging and being valued as part of the family.

The agency has developed an 'extended family' service. When short breaks are needed, they are organised around a 'hub' carer. This carer will spend time with the children and young people in their placements so that everyone is familiar with each other prior to the break. This carer will then provide all further short-break care for that placement. This practice ensures that time away from foster carers is less stressful for the children and young people. It also enables carers to feel confident that their foster children are secure and happy when they are away.

The carers feel that they were warmly welcomed to the agency. They said that they chose to foster for this agency because the child-centred approach was evident from the outset. Assessment of potential carers is thorough and completed within statutory timescales. It has a strong focus on safeguarding. The carers feel that the assessment process was sensitively carried out and they were supported well throughout the process. One carer felt that her assessment had been, 'second to none.' There have been no referrals to the Independent Review Mechanism since the last inspection.

The support provided by the agency to carers contributes to the high quality of the care provided. The carers spoken to during the inspection feel part of the team around the child. They have nothing but praise for the support that they receive from their supervising social workers, commenting that staff 'bend over backwards to offer support', and 'nothing is too much trouble.' They believe staff are strong and active advocates for the children and young people, actively challenging placing local authorities and others if necessary.

## **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

The children and young people feel protected from harm. They say they can talk to their carers and that their homes feel like 'safe places'. The carers demonstrate a good level of understanding of the effects of trauma on children and young people, and respond to situations with skill and sensitivity. They are supported by comprehensive safeguarding training including around bullying, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. All carers receive training in de-escalation techniques.

The supervising social workers offer excellent support to carers to put effective boundaries in place for the children and young people. They are very proactive in their response to risk, ensuring that all information is gathered from placing social workers, schools and other relevant professionals. Risk assessments are thorough and shared fully with carers. Through these measures, risks for the children and young people are identified and mitigated.

There is a low incidence of children and young people going missing from their placements. Carers are knowledgeable about the agency's safeguarding policies. When children and young people have gone missing, the carer has followed the agency's missing procedure and also that of the placing local authority, as required. Carers are further supported by an out-of-hours service which they find responsive and supportive.

The recruitment and selection procedures of the agency are strong. From the point of application for both agency staff and potential carers, sound systems prevent unsuitable candidates being selected who may present a risk of harm to children and young people. The supervision of foster carers maintains a strong focus on safeguarding. All people associated with the carers who come into significant contact with the children and young people are subject to police checks. Unannounced visits to the homes of carers are made twice a year by agency staff.

The carers are made well aware of the expectations of safe practice through their foster carer agreements and a bespoke safe carer assessment. The safety of the home environment is checked thoroughly during their initial assessment, and annually thereafter.

Any allegations against carers are responded to swiftly by the agency in line with their policies and procedures. Designated officers and the placing authority are fully involved. The agency provides specific training around managing allegations which helps carers to understand the process.

In order to keep children and young people safe, the agency runs a workshop for the children and young people exploring internet safety. It also provides training for the carers about internet safety and keeps them updated about potentially risky sites or 'crazes'.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The registered manager is knowledgeable about good practice and ensures that all legal requirements are consistently met. She keeps up to date with practice issues through representing the region within national organisations, and she ensures that her learning

is shared with her staff through regular meetings. She has a good overview of the work of her staff team and of the individual placements. Staff and carers are consistent in their praise of her leadership, stating, 'Support is always there; she knows all our placements.'

The staff team works extremely collaboratively. Social workers ensure that they are familiar to carers and the children and young people, even if they are not their supervising social worker. For example, when a new member of staff started she emailed all carers with a profile of herself, and all staff take part in the participation events for children and young people. This ensures that if an emergency situation arises, the response is from someone familiar.

The fostering panel is made up of members with a wide variety of experience in health and youth work, and includes individuals who were looked after themselves as children. There are an appropriate number of members with a background in social work. The diversity of the panel is limited, but the agency is taking steps to recruit more members who reflect the make-up of the local community.

The panel has active engagement with the agency and promotes safe and secure placements through its scrutiny. The chair is very experienced, and challenges the quality of assessment or lack of information when she feels it is necessary. The panel members receive documentation in good time before meetings, which ensures that they are fully appraised of information before making their recommendations. Minutes are clear and record the reasons for decisions made. In addition, the members' views on the quality of the information presented to the panel are gathered at each meeting. These measures help the panel provide the required quality assurance function. A recommendation regarding the information presented to the panel is met.

The agency decision-maker is very experienced and has been involved in the organisation that runs the agency for a number of years.

Recommendations made at the last inspection around the detail and accuracy of recording are met. Records from staff and carers detailing the lives and achievements of the children and young people are full and well written. Supervising social workers use their supervision with carers to support this good quality record-keeping. These records will increase children and young people's understanding of their experiences if they choose to access their records in the future.

A child-centred referral and matching process is in place, which places strong emphasis on matching children and young people to the carer who can meet their needs. The needs of birth children and of sibling groups are considered before placement. Carers are clear that no pressure is placed on them to take placements. Because the support following placement is so effective, there is excellent placement stability.

The carers, staff and panel members are equipped for their roles by a comprehensive training programme offered by the agency. Courses range from the practical, such as first aid, to mental health resilience, attachment and foetal alcohol syndrome. The carers commented that if they express the need for any training to help them meet their child's needs, then the agency will source it 'no matter what'. Carers achieve the training, support and development standards required for foster carers within a year of approval.

Leaders and managers have good systems in place to actively monitor the quality of care provided in placement. Both agency staff and the carers receive regular, high-quality supervision which both supports and challenges their practice. Annual appraisals lead to personal development plans which identify the training and support required in the following year. The first annual appraisal of carers is considered by the panel and, thereafter, every five years to ensure their suitability to continue fostering.

The organisation which runs the agency undertakes an annual survey of carers, children and young people nationally, and carers regularly feed back their views through carer-only meetings. However, there is a missed opportunity to use the results of all these activities as a basis for a review of the quality of care provided by the agency. Such reviews will assist the manager to identify areas for improvement and development in the service. This review, when undertaken, must be provided to HMCI. A requirement in respect of this is raised.

Those who work in partnership with this agency emphasise its child-centred approach. Social workers say that they are excellent advocates for the children and young people and diligently monitor their care and progress. The carers spoken to are unanimous in their praise, all agreeing that 'they were glad they went with this agency'.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.



## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC402365

**Registered provider:** The Children's Family Trust

**Registered provider address:** Hanbury Court Harris Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4DJ

**Responsible individual:** Marina Mulholland

**Registered manager:** Julia Robertson

**Telephone number:** 01388 779444

**Email address:** [julia.robertson@thecft.org.uk](mailto:julia.robertson@thecft.org.uk)

## **Inspector**

Janet Black, social care inspector



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