

# The Children's Family Trust

The Children's Family Trust

Unit 4, The Briars, Waterberry Drive, Waterloooville PO7 7YH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

The Children's Family Trust (the Trust) is a charitable organisation, which operates four independent fostering agency branches from a head office in Bromsgrove. It is governed by a board of trustees. This agency, known as the South East branch and registered in June 2014, supports short-term, long-term and respite placements.

At the time of this inspection, it had 24 fostering households with 34 children and young people placed.

**Inspection dates:** 25 February to 1 March 2019

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

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

**Date of last inspection:** 7 March 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children make good progress while living with carers. They feel safe and build secure relationships.
- Leaders, managers and staff respond swiftly to concerns and allegations that arise. Appropriate referrals are made to other agencies and related records are detailed.
- All children are engaged in education, training or employment and make progress within their individual capabilities.
- Staff and carers demonstrate a very good understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of children placed with the agency. They use this knowledge to manage risks to children effectively, taking their age and ability into account.
- Foster carers support children well to address their physical and mental health needs.
- Staff and foster carers work effectively and collaboratively with those in a child's network and children benefit from this approach.
- Prospective carers are welcomed to the agency and they feel valued for their skills and what they bring to the agency.
- Foster carers benefit from good-quality, comprehensive support, guidance and training. This enables them to develop their skills and provide a high standard of care for children.
- Leaders are clear about the agency's strengths and weaknesses, and they have developed appropriate plans for improvement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some documents relating to risk consideration and management do not evidence that risk is explored and considered, nor do they detail how risk will be managed and minimised.
- The children's guide is not available in forms that are accessible or meaningful for all ages or abilities.
- Some children's plans do not provide the specific, individual approaches and strategies to be followed and implemented to support foster carers to manage and reduce risk-taking behaviours.
- Staff do not routinely ensure that they receive all the information required prior to placing a child or following meetings and reviews.
- The panel has recently been formed, and currently there are variations in the quality of panel minutes, as the minutes do not all provide a robust evidence trail of matters raised, explored and discussed to enable conclusions and recommendations to be properly followed through.

- Systems and processes for safer recruitment lack the thoroughness and the level of detail that are required.
- The new system for staff appraisals does not clearly detail areas of development or how staff performance has been assessed.

## 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.

Requirement	Due date
<p>Fitness of workers</p> <p>The fostering service provider must not employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit do so and full and satisfactory information is available to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (3) Schedule 1 (4))</p>	01/06/2019

### Recommendations

- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5).
- Ensure that the panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation (NMS 14.7).
- Ensure that prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe (NMS 15.2).
- Ensure that, subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible (NMS 16.3).
- Ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 24.6).

- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS 25.2). In particular, ensure that there is evidence of monitoring of significant events within case records.

## Inspection judgements

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

Children make good progress while living with their foster families. They benefit from good relationships and trust that they develop with their carers. Foster carers provide consistency and stability to children. Children remain settled with carers in the majority of cases. Foster carers support and enable children to develop a wide variety of essential life skills and positive routines, which promote their future opportunities and equip them for adulthood.

Children are prepared and supported to transition well into foster care. They are often able to meet carers and get to know them prior to moving in. When possible, children are also positively supported to move on. Those preparing for adulthood are informed of their choices and options, and many foster carers offer 'staying put' arrangements to children.

Staff can evidence their considerations and rationale for matching, although these processes are variable in quality and some do not explore all the needs, risks and identified gaps.

Children enjoy good support from foster carers, who ensure that their health needs are met. Carers explore support offered to promote children's physical and emotional well-being.

Children attend education, training or employment. They achieve their full potential and develop essential skills. Children are supported and encouraged to develop their interests and hobbies and to maintain friendships. Staff offer a variety of activities, clubs and experiences during school holidays, which children attend, enjoy and use to socialise with friends.

Each child is treated with respect and dignity and they are supported to celebrate their diversity and make choices about how they wish to express themselves. Foster carers can access additional services and activities that enable children to explore their faith, culture, sexuality, disability and beliefs.

Staff and foster carers talk frequently with children to gain their views, thoughts and feelings about their care. However, staff do not routinely record this. The children's guide is in the form of a pack of cards. Each card tells you something different about the experience of being a foster child. This is an inventive way of presenting this information, although the information is not available in a format which is accessible to all ages and abilities.

The recruitment and assessment journey for prospective carers is timely and sensitive, and applicants report it being a positive and thorough experience.

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

Children can seek support and guidance from either their foster carer or the supervising social worker. This helps children should they feel worried, upset or anxious.

Staff and foster carers have good knowledge and understanding of risk factors and what is needed to manage and minimise risk. All staff and foster carers regularly complete safeguarding training. The agency's safeguarding policy and procedure reflects current safeguarding legislation and guidance.

Safeguarding concerns and allegations are reported and referred promptly to safeguarding agencies. Internal investigations completed are thorough and detailed with recommendations and lessons learned acted on and shared with others.

Staff complete individual risk assessments for each child prior to placement. These are updated as and when required, though some documents viewed were poor in quality and did not reflect current needs and risks.

Foster carers respond well to episodes of missing. Carers report and refer to others when needed. Foster carers welcome children home and explore with them reasons for missing or being absent. Return home interviews are requested and staff and managers request review meetings when needed.

Foster carers are well supported by the agency to manage difficult situations, conflicts and negative behaviours. They access training and support through regular and effective supervision. This encourages them to explore and consider positive strategies and approaches. Children are well supported by foster carers to de-escalate and manage their behaviour. However, risk assessments and plans lack information to consistently guide foster carers to agreed approaches.

The assessment, preparation and training of foster carers is thorough, explorative and detailed. Carers are prepared well for their role and they access necessary training through the assessment process.

Leaders and managers have altered processes to improve the information they gain as part of the safer recruitment process. However, they continue to not evidence that they have, as far as reasonably practicable, gained a reason why an applicant's previous employment or positions ended.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The suitably experienced manager leads the agency effectively. She has acted on the majority of requirements and recommendations set at the previous inspection.

The ethos of the agency as described in the agency's statement of purpose is reflected in the work, support and care provided to children and foster carers. Its

aim is to provide homes for life and most children remain placed for a significant period. Those who have previously resided with the trust's foster carers continue to return and access support from carers and the agency.

There is a current staff vacancy, which leaders have recently recruited to. There has been a low-level negative impact on managers and staff due to this vacancy. The agency is small, and the one vacancy represents a third of the supervising social work team. Staff have continued to provide and maintain the provision and support they provide to children and foster carers in this period, though the impact of demand is more apparent in records not being updated or reflecting a child's current need and risk.

Staff receive regular effective supervision that enables them to review and reflect on their practice. The organisation has implemented a new system for the appraisal process. However, it currently lacks clarity, detail and information about developmental objectives and targets. It is not clear how staff practice is assessed. The previous appraisal process was detailed and sought information and feedback from a variety of sources with clear objectives and development targets set by the employer and employee.

Staff and foster carers access a wide variety of training, with all being supported and encouraged to develop further professionally. Staff are all enrolled in additional specialist training courses that promote their practice and knowledge, which they share with colleagues.

Foster carers report feeling very well supported and assisted when concerns arise. They have good relationships with staff who are responsive and who will visit more regularly if beneficial and needed to support foster carers and children.

The panel is newly formed and is establishing and embedding its practices. Previously the panel was shared with another region in the organisation. Panel minutes do not currently consistently record all of the discussions that take place. They vary in quality and lack the required evidence trail of the panel's quality assurance role and exploration processes. The panel chair's post-panel evaluation summary does reflect all the panel discussions, explorations and comments, though this is not available with the minutes. The agency decision-maker provides challenge and further questioning that supports his decision-making process.

The manager has several daily, weekly and monthly systems that support her in how she monitors and evaluates the quality of care provided. However, the individual comments and her oversight are not recorded, evidenced or reflected in children's and foster carers' records.

Leaders, managers, staff and foster carers collectively celebrate and recognise children's achievements. Managers and staff request reviews when they are concerned that a child's needs are not being met or concerns arise.

Leaders, managers and staff advocate on behalf of children and foster carers. They challenge others when needed, though they have not done this consistently and



ensured that they have gained all required documentation and reports from others.

Managers and staff have developed positive working relationships with commissioners, who report that the agency applies careful consideration before accepting new referrals.

## **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:** SC477622

**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

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## **Inspector**

Amanda Maxwell, social care inspector



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