

The Children's Family Trust

The Children's Family Trust

1A Brindley Way, Wakefield Business Park, Wakefield WF2 0XQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The Children's Family Trust independent fostering agency is a registered charity. This is one of four regional agencies that are currently registered with Ofsted. The agency provides short-term, emergency, long-term and respite placements. The agency also supports children on 'staying put' arrangements.

At the time of the inspection, the agency had 21 approved fostering households and 38 children living with foster carers.

The registered manager has been registered with Ofsted since August 2020 and is currently working towards the level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 July 2022

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: 17 September 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Foster carers make children feel that they are part of a family. The agency's ethos of 'family for life' is echoed in the careful matching and forward planning for children. In addition, foster carers support children through the adoption process to help promote permanency for children.

The agency focuses on providing stability for children. Support is put in place for foster carers experiencing difficulties, either in their personal lives or in how they can support children. For example, the agency liaised with the local authority to ensure that therapeutic support was put in place for a child to help them and their foster carers. If children move from their foster carers, the agency tries to ensure that this is done in a planned way. The agency advocates on behalf of the children at all times to ensure that their needs are met, including when they leave the agency.

Foster carers whose children have significant health conditions feel they are well supported. They receive training through the agency and other professionals to be able to meet the children's needs. The agency recognises that respite is needed for foster carers and has purposefully recruited a respite foster carer to provide this. The foster carers appreciate the support and children benefit from experiencing care from others who can meet their needs.

Children's health needs are assessed and plans put in place to ensure their needs are met. This includes younger children, when foster carers observed possible developmental delays in their speech. Foster carers followed this up and the agency advocated for checks to be undertaken, and speech and language therapy to be put in place. As a result, the children's speech has significantly improved.

Children receive support to engage and attend education. Most school-age children have high attendance and foster carers encourage children with their homework. The agency recognises the achievements of children who sit exams, regardless of result, and rewards are in place for children who complete their studies. Children participate in extra-curricular activities such as swimming, music and gymnastics. The agency celebrates and recognises children's participation.

During the restrictions of COVID-19, the agency adapted how it worked but kept the focus on children's involvement. For example, weekly dance fitness classes on Zoom with professional dance teachers were put in place. Competitions for children took place and virtual events, such as the Christmas party, meant that children were able to join in fun activities. As the restrictions have eased, the manager has been quick to restore face-to-face meetings and activities, recognising this works best for foster carers and the children they care for.

The manager has recognised that support groups for children and foster carers were not well attended. She has sought feedback from children and foster carers about what they would like from the groups. As a result, a youth group now exists for

children and they want to attend. A group for birth children has been renamed to 'sons and daughters' to capture the voice of those children who are adopted or cared for on special guardianship orders.

The manager identified the need for a support worker to help enhance the experiences of children further. Part of this role has included the introduction of a new 'stay and play' group for younger children. This is proving successful to help children interact with one another and for foster carers to meet and talk to each other, thereby creating wider social circles for all.

Foster carers actively promote a positive relationship with children's birth families and their friends. Children have rebuilt these relationships, with some children returning to the family home as a result following planning with their local authorities.

The agency continues to offer to support children after they have moved out of the foster carers' homes and have become adults in their own right. This includes paying for driving lessons, helping financially and giving advice.

As an agency, meaningful consultation with foster carers takes place regularly and the manager has sought additional feedback as to how to improve services. Although the response was low, she has responded to the feedback. However, the foster carers are not always consulted on policy decisions and how these would impact on the way they run their own homes and how they care for children.

The agency uses outcome trackers to capture the progress of children and these are updated yearly. Relevant, known information is not recorded accurately on the trackers at other times. This means that this method does not capture or measure children's progress in a timely way.

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

Children have good relationships with their foster carers and are able to go to them for advice and support. Children's views and wishes are listened to and acted on when appropriate. When this is not appropriate or not achievable, they are helped to understand why.

Foster carers know and understand the risks associated with children in their care and respond well to them to reduce the risk of harm. However, risk assessments and safer caring plans are not consistently up to date or provide detailed guidance of how to support children.

Children rarely go missing from home. When they do, foster carers are proactive in trying to locate children and understand the need to report this to the police. Staff ensure that all professionals are updated and work towards the safe return of the child. Foster carers also advocate for changes to plans to reduce the risk of children going missing, such as arranging for planned overnight stays with friends. Return

home interviews take place to ensure that the child's voice is captured and any concerns are followed up.

Supervising social workers and foster carers help children understand how to treat each other with respect. The agency focuses on ensuring they work in a non-discriminatory way and is mindful of the language used when referring to children. The agency is also part of an anti-discriminatory working party. This further helps to show children how to be respectful of others.

Foster carers put in place clear boundaries and routines for children, taking into account their age and level of understanding. Foster carers think about things that may upset children and how to help them with this. Children are generally settled with minimal incidents.

The agency is aware that online safety for children is an area of concern, and that the social media that children use changes frequently. Children have received training from the agency, and foster carers continue this work alongside school. The manager is in the process of implementing further training for the staff. Young children's access to technology is often overlooked in their care plans.

The manager responds quickly to complaints and allegations, and works with other professionals to resolve issues while putting plans in place to safeguard children. Any outcomes from complaints and allegations are followed up and captured in an early review for the foster carers, or, if they leave the agency, in the panel meeting that follows.

Assessments of future foster carers are detailed and evidence if they are suitable for approval. Some assessments have not been completed within the eight months the agency aims for. However, these delays are either due to COVID-19, or the agency needing to gather further evidence to ensure that all areas have been covered, and to assure itself that the foster carers are suitable.

Recruitment processes for new panel members, supervising social workers and independent assessing social workers are detailed and thorough. This ensures that all safe checks take place, which reduces the likelihood of children being at risk of harm from unsafe adults. In addition, children have been involved in the recruitment of supervising social workers, asking them questions that matter to them.

Foster carers are skilled to calm children when they are upset, and physical interventions are rarely used. Reports of when children have been held are reviewed and plans put in place to reduce the chances of a reoccurrence. The manager identifies and addresses concerns in practice to avoid the hold happening again. This includes providing additional training for the foster carers. It is not always clear on records that children are spoken to about the reason for holding them.

The agency ensures that health and safety guidance and checklists are in place in foster carers' homes. However, where very young children are placed with foster

carers, guidance and checks are not individualised, detailed and monitored sufficiently to ensure safety.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager registered with Ofsted in August 2020, but had been managing the agency prior to this. She quickly adapted to the restrictions in place from COVID-19 and ensured that the staff team, foster carers and children continued to be supported.

The manager is motivated and ambitious. She wants to continue to improve the quality of care children receive and has identified some of the changes needed. This includes implementing changes to the team structure to enable clearer oversight and accountability. In addition, some changes to paperwork have been identified to help capture the work the agency is doing, including evidencing the thorough matching processes that are in place. This is a recent change to be implemented.

New approaches to working with children, including being part of a trial programme on reflective mentalisation, have been identified. The manager is keen to embed this knowledge and understanding in the staff and foster carers, and further training is planned.

Supervising social workers feel valued, supported and receive the training they need. They have completed the same training as foster carers, which enables them to understand the role of a foster carer and, therefore, how they can support them.

The fostering panel is diverse and has the required mix of expertise. The minutes capture the conversations well and the inquisitiveness of the panel members. The panel chair is effective in leading the conversations with a clear focus on the role of panel. The recommendations and actions provided by the panel enable the agency decision-maker to make an informed decision.

The recordings viewed during the inspection that relate to children's day-to-day care are not always child friendly. The manager has recognised this and has put a plan in place to address this. However, this training will not be in place until 2023 and, therefore, is not effective in addressing the current issues quickly.

The manager is not monitoring the quality of documents, such as risk assessments and safer care plans. These plans are out of date, lack information and do not support foster carers or other supervising social workers to be aware of risks. There is no clear system in place to prompt the manager to check these, and there is a reliance on supervising social workers requesting these to be reviewed.

The manager undertakes regular audits, including three-month reviews which provide data and analysis to identify themes. However, some areas for potential improvement of the service are not included in the resulting action plan and are a missed opportunity for the development of the service.

The agency supports a number of younger children, including babies and toddlers. The manager has failed to ensure that all supervising social workers and relevant foster carers have additional training and guidance to support this age group. The processes and paperwork that would support safe practice in such placements have not been reviewed or amended. The documents offer no prompts to those completing them or recognise the need to review them more frequently in these circumstances.

Foster carers receive monthly supervisions, although these vary in quality. The supervising social workers do not always follow the agency's planned themes for supervision and recordings are, at times, brief. However, in the feedback that foster carers gave, they said that they are well supported and observations during the inspection evidenced the high level of support and guidance foster carers receive.

The agency is not always clear on some of the policies in place and which it has not addressed when foster carers have breached these. The manager was unaware of one of these situations and was quick to respond to try and rectify this. The agency recognises a need to be more flexible in its approach to meet the individual needs of children.

The statement of purpose is not up to date and does not capture what this individual agency does. This does not enable professionals to fully understand what services are available and what the practice is within the agency. Some supervising social workers have only achieved one unannounced visit a year with foster carers, despite the statement of purpose saying they will have two. The manager has put a new system in place to address this shortfall.

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

Statutory requirements

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

Requirement	Due date
<p>The fostering service provider must compile a written statement in relation to the fostering service ("the statement of purpose") which consists of—</p> <p>a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and</p> <p>a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must provide a copy of the statement of purpose to the Chief Inspector, place a copy on their website (if they have one). (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 3(1)(a)(b) (2))</p>	5 December 2022
<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 17(1))</p>	5 December 2022

Recommendations

- The registered person should 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. Specifically, that children's risk assessments, safe foster carer assessments and outcome trackers contain accurate and sufficient detail and are regularly reviewed and updated. (National Minimum Standards, page 50, paragraph 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that any information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files,

other than necessarily confidential or third-party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. Specifically, that recordings about the child's life are child friendly and provide sufficient detail. (National Minimum Standards, page 52, paragraph 26.6)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC477734

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: Anne-Marie Shields

Telephone number: 01924 802176

Email address: marina@thecft.org.uk

Inspectors

Debra Boldy, Social Care Inspector
Sadie Mulkeen, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022