

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

**Inspection report
Fostering services**

The Foster Care Co-operative

**15-17 Harrowby Street
Cardiff
CF10 5GA**

Date of publication – 10 November 2010

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Dates of this inspection episode:	21 st , 22 nd and 23 rd September 2010
Dates of other relevant contact since last report:	None
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Other regions contributing to this report:	None

Introduction

This report has been compiled following an inspection of the fostering service undertaken by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000 and associated regulations.

The primary focus of the report is to comment on the quality of life and quality of care experienced by service users (foster carers and children in placement).

The report contains information on how we inspect and what we find. This inspection focuses specifically on the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 but also takes into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The report is divided into nine sections reflecting the broad areas covered by the inspection:

1. Summary of findings
2. Policies and procedures / information
3. Management and staffing of the service, (including premises and finance)
4. Provision of foster carers (including fostering panel)
5. Quality of care and safety for children placed
6. Placement of children, parts v & vi of the regulations
7. Records
8. Short term placements
9. Family and friends as carers

CSSIW inspectors are authorised to enter and inspect fostering services at any time. Inspection enables CSSIW to satisfy itself that the service should continue to operate, and for IFAs this will include satisfaction that continued registration is justified. It also ensures that all fostering services are compliant with:

- Care Standards Act 2000 and The Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, whilst taking into account the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- The service's own statement of purpose.

At each inspection episode there are visits to the service during which CSSIW may adopt a range of different methods in its attempt to capture service user's and their relatives'/representatives' experiences. Such methods may for example include self-assessment, discussion groups, case tracking, visits to carers' homes, observation, interviews, and the use of questionnaires. At any other time throughout the year visits may also be made to the service to investigate complaints and to respond to any changes in the service.

Readers must be aware that a report is intended to reflect the findings of the inspector at a specific period in time. Readers should not conclude that the circumstances of the service will be the same at all times.

The registered/responsible person/s is/are responsible for ensuring that the fostering service operates in a way which complies with the service specific regulations. CSSIW will comment in the general text of the inspection report on their compliance. For those regulations which CSSIW believes to be key in bringing about change in the particular service, they will be separately and clearly identified in the requirement section.

As well as listing these key requirements from the current inspection, requirements made by CSSIW since the last inspection, which have been met and those which remain outstanding are included in this report. The reader should note that requirements made in last year's report which are not listed as outstanding have been appropriately complied with.

Where key requirements have been identified, the provider is required under regulation 42B, (Compliance Notification), to advise, in writing, the appropriate regional office of the completion of any action required by CSSIW.

The regulated service is also responsible for having in place a clear, effective and fair complaints procedure which promotes local resolution between the parties in a swift and satisfactory manner, wherever possible. The annual inspection report will include a summary of the numbers of complaints dealt with locally and their outcome.

CSSIW may also be involved in the investigation of a complaint. Where this is the case CSSIW makes publicly available a summary of that complaint. CSSIW will also include within the annual inspection report a summary of any matters it has been involved in together with any action taken by CSSIW.

Should you have concerns about anything arising from the Inspector's findings, you may discuss these with CSSIW or with the registered person.

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales is required to make reports on regulated services available to the public. The report is a public document and will be available on the CSSIW web site, www.cssiw.org.uk

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Section one: Summary of findings

The Foster Care Co-operative (the Agency hereafter) was founded in 1999 in Malvern, to provide a service to local authorities. The Agency became established in Wales in 2003 and was registered as a fostering Agency by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate (CSSIW) in 2005. The "Welsh branch" (registered in its own right) of the Agency is situated in Cardiff. The statement of purpose asserts that the Agency is registered as a Co-operative under common ownership and the registration is listed with Co-operatives UK, National Clearing House and Representative Body for Co-operatives'. The Agency is also a limited company.

The Director of Childcare (Wales), who is also the Registered Manager (RM) completed the self-assessment form (known as the SAF hereafter) in the required time. Other information for this inspection was gathered from the following sources:

- Meetings with the RM and responsible individual (RI);
- Attendance at Panel;
- Questionnaires completed by young people fostered, foster carers, staff and Panel Members;
- Viewing of case files;
- Viewing of policies and procedures;
- Viewing of the premises;
- Viewing of a staff personnel files.

The statement of purpose (SOP) sets out what services are provided to children and young people by the Agency. The statement includes details in respect of the Agency's management, its aims and objectives, the numbers of staff and their qualifications, the procedures for recruitment, reviewing carers and arrangements to monitor quality. However, the document needs to be reviewed to accurately reflect references to the legislation in Wales and the correct name of the regulating body. Details of staff qualifications should also be explicit.

The Agency's current conditions of registration states that;

1. The agency will recruit, assess, train and support foster carers in a variety of locations throughout Wales.
2. The agency will provide foster carers who can provide the following types of placement for children between the ages of 0 to 18 years:
3. Emergency placements
4. Short term placements for up to 2 years duration
5. Permanent family placements
6. Placements for sibling groups

The RM reports that all Agency policies and procedures have been reviewed within the past six months and are in the process of additional checks prior to them being uploaded on to the Agency's web site. The Agency's Child Protection Policy has been reviewed and refers to Safeguarding Children: Working Together. Between inspections there has been one ongoing child protection case and no complaints made about the Agency. The Agency has a short breaks policy pledging to support

children to live with their birth families. At the time of inspection there were no short break placements.

The RM supported the inspectors through the two days spent at the Agency's offices in Cardiff. The RM proved to be very knowledgeable of the service area and demonstrated a commitment to delivering a high quality service. Both the RM and RI gave a clear account of any setbacks and progress of made between inspection periods and set out the plans for the Agency's future development.

The ethos of the service is clearly reflected in the Agency's policies and practices and the Agency is committed to ensuring that there are robust systems in place that allow for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of services provided to children and young people. A regional manager was appointed in August 2010, it is intended that he will act as deputy to the RM. An office manager has also been appointed between inspection periods.

The Agency provides an Education Liaison Officer.

The Agency report that they continue to be financially viable; accounts were last audited on 31 December 2009, no recommendations were made. The premises has been refurbished, there are various offices available and a large training room. Security measures are in place to ensure the confidentiality of information.

Via the SAF the Agency report to have thirty six "sets" of approved carers in Wales, ten applicants are subject to assessment and awaiting approval, with a total of seventy five places. Further information obtained during the process indicates that between inspection periods six prospective carers were taken to Panel and approved, five additional approvals were completed for "schedule 3" carers and no carers were turned down. However, two carers were discontinued under Agency quality control standards.

Via consultation, carers are suitably trained and well supported in their roles. In terms of supporting foster carers out of hours, the Agency have reported that all carers are issued with the mobile telephone number for their individual supervising social worker and the contact numbers of all Agency social workers; including those of the Directors, Deputies and Executive Director. Carers are reviewed annually; the reviews are presented to the Panel for consideration.

Three CSSIW questionnaires were completed by Panel members. All agreed that they receive annual training. Via the CSSIW questionnaires Panel members comments regarding the management included; "from my perspective it all seems excellent", "I'm very impressed with the standard of carers that have been recruited while I have been on the Panel" and "the assessment seems very thorough".

The required records were found to be largely in place and there are systems to ensure that their procurement and maintenance is in place. However, with regard to essential Looked After Children's documentation, where this has not been procured prior to placement, the Agency's processes allow a lapse of two weeks before the first letter to the holder of the information is issued.

Via the SAF, the Agency has listed the last ten placement breakdowns. The reasons for the breakdowns are varied and include matters such as the Parent and Children

Together (PACT) assessment process being unsuccessful, carers leaving the Agency and moves to adoption.

Records kept under schedules one, two and three were found to be largely in place.

Requirements

- The registered persons must ensure that essential documentation has been procured prior to a placement being made.

Other issues highlighted

- While "Foster Track" has many virtues the inspectors found that a sample of electronic documentation remained without the necessary signatures. The registered persons should consider this issue in line with their own quality assurance procedures.
- The placement agreement sampled failed to strictly include the requirements of regulation 34.3

The inspectors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this inspection report in particular young people looked after, carers, social workers, panel members and the RM.

Section two: Policies and procedures / information

Inspector's findings:

The statement of purpose (SOP) sets out what services are provided to children and young people who are placed by the Agency. The SOP includes details in respect of the Agency's management, its aims and objectives, the numbers of staff and their qualifications, the procedures for recruitment, reviewing carers and arrangements to monitor quality. However, the document needs to be reviewed to accurately reflect references to the legislation in Wales and the correct name of the regulating body. Details of staff qualifications should also be explicit.

The Agency forwarded a number of policies and procedures to CSSIW, those sampled have been well thought through and largely reflect the regulations and national minimum standards. The RM reports that all Agency policies and procedures have been reviewed within the past six months and are in the process of additional checks prior to them being uploaded on to the Agency's web site. The Agency's Child Protection Policy has been reviewed and refers to Safeguarding Children: Working Together. In terms of ensuring that policies and procedures are readily accessible to staff and carers the Agency has reported that they are developing a new website: they state that electronic (or downloadable) reports, claims and documentation for carers and supervising social workers will be available. The "Foster Track" computer soft wear system is used also by the Agency for monitoring and quality assurance.

While "Foster Track" has many virtues the inspectors found that a sample of electronic documentation remained without the necessary signatures. The registered persons should consider this issue in line with their own quality assurance procedures.

The Agency has a short breaks policy pledging to support children to live with their birth families. The policy states that where the Agency has suitably trained and experienced carers to undertake the task of offering short term breaks, these are available to the local authorities. At the time of inspection there were no short break placements.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

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Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section three: Management and staffing of the services, (including premises and finance)

Inspector's findings:

A regional manager was appointed in August 2010, it is intended that he will act as deputy to the RM. An office manager has also been appointed between inspection periods. The SAF indicates that the Agency continues to be financially viable; accounts were last audited on 31 December 2009 with no recommendations.

The premises has been refurbished, there are various offices and a large training room available. Security measures are in place to ensure the confidentiality of information.

Three CSSIW questionnaires were completed by Panel members. All agreed that they receive annual training. Via the CSSIW questionnaires Panel members comments regarding the management included "from my perspective it all seems excellent", "I'm very impressed with the standard of carers that have been recruited while I have been on the Panel" and "the assessment seems very thorough".

Three staff completed the CSSIW questionnaires. All agreed that;

- They had been shown a copy of the fostering Agency's Statement of Purpose;
- The Statement of Purpose is routinely made available to foster carers;
- They think the Statement of Purpose accurately describes the service's provided and
- All have seen the fostering Agency's Children's Guide.

Further to this,

- All agreed that the guide is child friendly;
- Two agreed that the guide is routinely made available to young people fostered while one disagreed;
- All agreed that they have a comprehensive and accessible set of policies and procedures to support their work;
- All agreed that they are clear about the roles of management and that there is effective communication between management and staff;
- All agreed that there are satisfactory arrangements when the manager is absent, they were provided with induction training, receive regular supervision and appraisal, feel that staffing levels are adequate to support foster carers routinely and in a crisis and agree that regular staff meetings are held;
- Two staff members stated that they have received child protection training this year. Training listed as received by staff in past year includes Assessment using form F, Safeguarding, Fostering VASM, Child Development, Attachment, De-escalation strategies, physical intervention, therapeutic strategies, Cyber bullying and BIPS model of working with children.

A CSSIW questionnaire was completed by a staff member who is not a social worker. The questionnaire indicated that the service is run as it should be.

The Agency is committed to ensuring that there are robust systems in place, which allow

for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of services provided to children and young people. The Agency's provision for quality assurance includes the Deputy Director of Child Care (England) and the Director of Child Care (Wales) (RM) collating statistics on performance. Statistics are collected on a quarterly basis and a report is produced partly based on these statistics, on an annual basis. Young people can attend their reviews and comment on their care and their reviews are considered as part of the reviews of the Agency. There is a formal process for consulting young people and carers, parents, supervising social worker and local authorities and this information is presented to panel as part of the annual review.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section four: Provision of foster carers (including panel)

Inspector's findings:

At the time of inspection the SAF indicated that there were thirty six approved "sets" of carers in Wales, ten applicants subject to assessment awaiting approval and a total of number of seventy five places.

The Agency utilises the BAAF F1 assessment form and each worker is supervised during this process. In conjunction with the assessing social worker the RM makes the final decision, as to whether a Form F assessment should be initiated. In terms of policies and procedures to enable staff to do their job, there is guidance written to support the assessing social worker in identifying all the main issues to be considered during the assessment of potential carers. Social workers supervise up to eight carers and have two Form F assessments at any given time. If it is anticipated that numbers of carers and assessments are likely to increase, it is the Agency's policy that further staff are appointed to ensure that these ratios do not change. There is a buddy system between social worker staff, which ensures that the Agency's work is not disrupted should a social worker be absent.

Of five distributed, three completed CSSIW questionnaires were received from sets of or single foster carers (FC). All FC's agreed that they have;

- Seen the organisation's statement of purpose and that it accurately reflects the Agency;
- An up to date "foster carer agreement";
- Received the "foster carer handbook";
- A supervising social worker allocated to them;
- Staff who have the necessary skills and experience to carry out their supervisory and support role:
- Out of hours support to respond to their needs and they have not had any period without a supervising social worker.

Two agreed that they had received foster care training during their assessment and three had attended Panel. All had received an unannounced visit from the Agency in the last 12 months, received an annual review which considers the needs of the young person placed, know how to make a complaint and have received training in the last three years. Training listed included Child Protection, First Aid, Safe Care, Attachment, Challenging Behaviour, Equality and Diversity and Transition to Adulthood. Both FC's attend regular support meetings throughout the year. Regarding contact one FC stated that arrangements are made via LAC reviews, social work visits or telephone.

In terms of appointment to Panel it is the Agency's policy to interview the prospective Panel members and Criminal Record Bureau Checks are undertaken. If approved, Panel members receive a "Panel Procedures Pack". The Agency confirmed that six prospective carers had been taken to Panel for approval; five additional approvals were also completed for "schedule 3" carers. No carers were turned down at Panel but two prospective carers were discontinued under agency quality control standards. Prior to

acceptance, it is the policy of the Agency that all prospective carers attend the "Skills to Foster" weekend course.

The appointment of the chair complies with regulation 24(2). The RM confirmed that the (joint) fostering Panel does not consist of more than eleven members and the appointment of members is in compliance with the regulations. Four Panel members completed the CSSIW questionnaires; all agreed that the function of the Panel includes assessments and applications for approval, recommending terms of approval for approved carers, termination and changes of approval. All agreed that their functions includes the overseeing of the quality of assessments carried out by the Agency, considering reports and requirements made following a CSSIW inspection, quality assurance, complaints and annual reviews. All agreed that the Panel meetings adequately reflect the discussions and recommendations made by Panel members. Three members agreed that they make suitable provision for Panel information to be kept confidential and one member stated that they do keep any Panel information at their home.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section five: Quality of care and safety for children placed

Inspector's findings:

As identified in the SOP and conditions of registration the Agency provides for "short term" and "long term placements". "Short term" is not used as defined in regulation 37 but for a placement where for example no "end dates" are known at the point of placement. The SOP indicates that a proportion of "short term" placements commence as emergency referrals from the local authorities. The RM stated that the Agency does not provide emergency placements "out of hours". Although a child may be placed out of hours but subject to the usual placement processes.

The Agency has a policy in place for short term breaks (identified as "short term placements" in regulation 37), which identifies that no single placement is to last for more than four weeks; and the total duration of the placements is not to exceed 120 days in any period of 12 months. Children from Wales are not placed by the Agency outside of Wales.

The Agency states that they have a robust system to ensure the best possible fit of foster carer with a young person and carers are only ever put forward as a possible match if the Agency considers the both to be compatible. Foster carers who completed the CSSIW questionnaires agreed that the agency provides and shares enough information with them regarding the matching process prior to a child being placed. They also agreed that they have their views sought about the appropriateness of the placements, think the Agency values the uniqueness of children referred to them, write separate records for each child in the placement and have a lockable facility for the secure storage of information.

The placement agreement sampled failed to strictly include the requirements of regulation 34.3. The registered persons should review this in line with their quality assurance procedures.

Under Regulation 11 the registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times; and before making any decision affecting a child placed or to be placed with foster parents due consideration is given to the child's wishes and feelings in the light of the child's age and understanding; and the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background. Much of this information is to be found in Looked After Children's (LAC) Essential Information Parts 1&2 and Placements Plans Parts 1&2 and the Care Plan. Via case tracking it was found that the receipt of essential LAC documentation had been delayed. The Agency does have a procedure in place where if the required information has not been received within two weeks a letter is sent to the holder of the information and at a later date there is a director's letter issued. However, the registered persons must ensure that essential documentation has been procured prior to a placement being made.

Via the SAF the Agency has listed the last ten placement breakdowns, with various reasons for the breakdowns as the PACT assessment process being unsuccessful, carers left agency and moved to adoption.

Two young people fostered (YPF) responded to the CSSIW questionnaires. One YPF agreed that they had received the children's guide but had not been given information regarding how to make a complaint and had not been given information regarding their foster family before they moved in, "I didn't know anything about them, only their names".

Conversely, another YPF agreed that they had not seen the children's guide but they had been given information on how to make a complaint and they were given information about the foster family before moving in. Both YPF agreed that they are asked by the Agency what they think about living with their foster family. One agreed that this is the right placement while the other YPF commented "not sure". Both YPF agreed that they can continue to do the activities at their foster placement that they like doing. Both FYP agreed that that they can go to their doctor, dentist and optician when they want to and are given enough information about how to stay healthy. Both FYP have an educational placement. Examples of rules given while at the foster placement included "make sure my room is tidy", "do dishes" and "do all my chores".

Via the CSSIW questionnaires staff commented that there is an education officer who responds to any educational issues and a leaving care support worker. There is also a regular looked after children medical undertaken and the Agency considers matching.

The Agency's Child Protection Policy has been reviewed and refers to Safeguarding Children: Working Together.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number
The registered persons must evidence that children's welfare is safeguarded and promoted by ensuring that they have received and taken account of all the required information available from the responsible authority before a placement is made.	31/10/10	11 (a)

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source

Section six: Placement of children parts v & vi of the regulations

N.B. Use of this section of the report will apply primarily to inspections of local authority fostering services and the duties and responsibilities covered in Parts 5 and

6 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 only. It may need to be used for inspections of independent agencies where a local authority delegates certain duties to them under Regulation 40.

Inspector's findings:

The SAF indicates that the Agency has a copy of the delegation agreement where a Local Authority has delegated their responsibilities under regulation 40 to the registered person. The Agency also reports that a sample of a regulation 40(5) contract (specific to a child placed) between a LA and an IFA, copies of the policy guidance for selecting placements (including placements with other fostering Agency providers) and the policy or procedural framework for the supervision of children in foster placements are held at the Agency. The SAF indicates that there is a procedural framework for terminating placements.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section seven: Records

Inspector's findings:

Of the sample selected, information required under Regulation 20, schedule 1, to be kept in respect of persons working for the Agency such as positive proof of identity including a recent photograph, a CRB check, two written references including a reference from the

person's most recent employer and documentary evidence of any relevant qualification was largely in place. Missing from two files was a full employment history, together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment. This was brought to the RI's attention.

Of the sample selected, records to be kept by fostering Agency providers under Regulation 22, Schedule 2 such as the date of the young person fostered placement; the name and address of the foster carer and the date on which the young person fostered ceased to be placed there were evident. The recording of the young person fostered address on leaving the placement was not evident in files sampled. This was discussed with the RM who stated that this information often wasn't available but that she would make a point of requesting it henceforth.

Records sampled pertaining to Regulation 27, schedule 3 such as the prospective foster carer's full name, address and date of birth, particulars of any other adult members of that person's household, particulars of that person's accommodation, the person's past and present employment or occupation, and his or her standard of living and leisure activities and interests, the person's previous experience (if any) of caring for his or her own and other children and the names and addresses of two persons who provided personal references for the prospective foster carer were found to be in place.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section eight: Short term placements

Inspector's findings:
The Agency has a policy for short term placements known as "short term breaks", as is required it stipulates that no single placement is to last for more than four weeks; and the total duration of the placements is not to exceed 120 days in any period of 12 months. There are currently no young people placed at the Agency on this basis.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	

Section nine: Family and friends as carers

Inspector's findings:

Family and friends as carers are assessed in the same way as foster carers. The information regarding their assessments was found to be satisfactory and in compliance.

Requirements made since the last inspection report which have been met:

Action required	When completed	Regulation number

Requirements which remain outstanding:

Action required (previous outstanding requirements)	Original timescale for completion	Regulation number

New requirements from this inspection:

Action required	Timescale for completion	Regulation number

Good practice recommendations:	NMS or other source
None	