



Inspection Report on

The Foster Care Co-operative

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

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Description of the service

The Foster Care Co- operative (FCC) (Wales) was first registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in 2004. The registered office is in Cardiff; the registered manager is Kim Perkins and the registered provider has nominated a 'responsible individual' (RI) who oversees the provision of the service. The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a co-operative with 'Co-operatives UK' and is a non profit making organisation. Staff are members of the co-operative and foster carers are associate members. At the time of the inspection, there were 37 fostering households approved by the agency, including a small number in the mid and North Wales areas. There were 42 children in placements, including two in separate 'parent and children' placements.

Summary of our findings

1. Overall assessment

FCC had benefitted from consistent leadership with the same responsible individual since 2004 and the registered manager had been in post since 2014. There had been some staff absences and changes during the preceding 12 month period and feedback indicated that this had impacted on the quality and consistency of support received by some foster carers. At the time of this inspection, all staff vacancies had been filled and a new post of 'principal social worker post' had been established to strengthen the operation of the service. We received mostly very positive feedback from foster carers about their support and training and they highlighted the effort made by the agency to ensure children were placed in sustainable placements where their care and support needs were known and could be provided for.

We found that children achieved positive outcomes; that most remained in touch with their carers after leaving their placements and many continued to live with their carers after the age of 18. Placement stability and sustainability was good as well as school attendance and educational attainment. We found that some foster carers had not attended necessary training and most foster carers, staff and managers felt that the arrangements for providing training and support groups needed to be re evaluated.

2. Improvements

Improvements had been made to the arrangements to provide support and training to foster carers in the mid and North Wales areas; a new principal social worker post had been created and improved information had been created for prospective foster carers when attending the 'fostering panel'.

3. Requirements and recommendations

No areas of non compliance were identified and section five of this report sets out our recommendations for improvement.

1. Well-being

Summary

We saw evidence that children achieve positive well-being outcomes within stable and sustainable placements.

Our findings

Information for children is well developed. Children confirmed in questionnaires completed as part of this inspection, that they received written information about their placements and we saw that the 'children's guides to foster care' contained helpful information intended to answer their questions and clarify any uncertainties. There were information guides for children of different ages as well as 'foster carer profiles' that included information and pictures of foster carers; their families and homes and some included pictures of children's prospective bedrooms. Some carers had not produced up to date 'profiles' though the manager explained this was because they were providing long term placements and did not have any vacant places. Separate foster carer profiles had been produced to support 'expressions of interest' made to local authorities about the suitability of foster carers. The manager told us that all children received a 'welcome pack' when they arrived at their placements and that the contents of these were based on what was known about them as individuals and the things that were important to them. Children are engaged in placement making processes.

Children are placed with foster carers with the skills and experience to meet their needs. We were provided very positive feedback from a group of foster carers about the effort made to 'match' children with foster carers, with the experience and ability to meet their needs. They told us that placements were mostly planned and included pre- placement meetings and that their supervising social workers ensured that adequate information about children was made available from local authorities. We saw evidence that requests were commonly made for additional information and that referral and commissioning documentation included the reasons foster carers were considered a suitable 'match' for children. We recommend that written record is made of these reasons that include the specific elements of matching considered as well as any areas where foster carers might need additional support or training to meet their needs within foster care and or foster placement agreements. 'Memory boxes' were provided for children to gather mementos and pictures of activities and special occasions during their placements.

Children thrive in placements that promote their well –being and lead active and fulfilling lives. Evidence of consultation with children, conducted by the agency, included the following statements:

- *'I live in a lovely home'* and
- *'I live in a happy home'*

It stated that:

- 83% of children gave an overall rating of their foster home as excellent and
- 17% gave a rating of their foster home as very good.

It included feedback from children in relation to their involvement in hobbies and interests and attending activity groups which stated that:

- 47% of children attended 3 or more structured activities
- 11% attended 2 structured activities
- 21% attended 1 structured activity
- 21% did not attend regular structured activities.

The agency had organised a number of social events for children, foster carers and staff which included ice skating in the winter and an outdoor theatre and barbeque in the summer. Separate events had been arranged for children and foster carers in the mid and north Wales areas and poetry and design competitions had been organised. We conclude that children rate their placements very highly and that they are engaged in social and leisure activities to promote inclusion and have fun.

Children are treated like family members in their placements. Feedback from one child's case managing social worker included:

- *xxx has been welcomed into the family home*
- *xxx is allowed to have independence within the home*
- *xxx has been offered to have a friend stay over and*
- *xxx has continued to live with their foster carers after the age of 18.*

Children's feedback also stated that their friends were made welcome when visiting. Consultation had been undertaken with 'birth children' of foster carers including adult birth children and showed that they did not want to attend support groups specifically for birth children and that their views about living alongside children placed with their families was very positive. Children are valued and their rights are respected in their placements.

The agency monitors placement effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes. The quality of care review report included information about '*placement endings, breakdowns and disruptions*' and showed that during the 2017 and 2018 period, that 28 placements ended for the following reasons:

- 4 were time limited parent and child placements
- 4 were due to foster carers transferring, along with the children placed with them to local authority fostering services
- 1 young person moved as planned into independent living arrangements
- 5 remained with their carers after the age of eighteen
- 1 remained with their carers subject to a special guardianship order
- 2 returned as planned to live with their families
- 1 child placed in a short term placement moved as planned to a long term placement
- 10 placements broke down.

The agency's analysis of the reasons for placements breaking down included 'challenging behaviour', fear of allegations and that some children had returned to live with their families and refused to return to their placements. Placement outcomes are monitored to improve the effectiveness of matching and placement support activities.

We conclude that children experience mostly planned introductions to sustainable placements and live with foster carers with the skills and experience to meet their needs. They enjoy develop positive attachments with their foster carers and pursue hobbies and interests that support their development of friendships and community inclusion.

2. Care and Support

Summary

Children thrive in stable placements and receive care and support from foster carers with the skills and experience to meet their needs. They receive individualised care and support to fulfil their potential; socially, emotionally and educationally. Foster carers told us they mostly received robust support from the agency though some said the quality of their support had been variable as a result of staff changes and absence.

Our findings

Children live in sustainable placements where their care and support needs are known, provided for and monitored. Foster carers and their supervising social workers told us that the quality of information provided by local authorities about children was variable but the agency always sought additional information about their particular needs when making placements. We saw that care and support plans were in place and that the agency routinely completed 'Foster Placement Agreements' to make clear the purpose and objectives of children's placements. We saw that these included information about any risks associated with caring for children and that detailed 'risk management action plans' had been completed where more significant risk factors were identified. We saw that these had been subject to ongoing review and that multi agency meetings had been held to coordinate plans to safeguard them. The manager told us that the supervising social workers always consulted with children when they visited foster carers and that they monitored their well – being and that the intended outcomes of their placements were being fulfilled. We saw evidence in records of their visits that the well –being outcomes of children were being monitored and that monthly reports were completed by the fostering social workers of their progress. Foster carers told us that the children saw their supervising social workers as an additional part of their support network. Foster carers and the agency effectively safeguard and promote the welfare and well –being of children.

Children are supported to learn and develop and fulfil their potential. We met with an education adviser employed by the agency who told us that their role included liaising with education professionals; providing 'education' training to foster carers and that they provided support to individual children for instance when changing schools and if they had previously not attended regularly. They told us that they received monthly reports completed by the fostering social workers to assist them in monitoring children's attendance, attainment and progress and information in their annual report stated that:

- *96% of children of statutory school age held a PEP (personal education plan)*
- *86% of children placed with the service exceeded 95% school attendance*
- *41% achieved 100% attendance*
- *2 children sat GCSE examinations early in year 10*

- *Various children had achieved GCSE examinations*
- *All children who completed year 11 went on to higher education*
- *Several children had attended college and 1 was attending Cardiff University and remaining with their foster carers in a 'When I am Ready' placement.*

Foster carers provided very positive feedback about the support provided by the education adviser. They said this included training about their own roles in promoting children's education and in advocating for them to ensure they had opportunities to attend school and fulfil their potential. Children's feedback in questionnaires completed as part of this inspection stated that they received very good support from their foster carers with their homework. Foster carers and the agency promote children education robustly.

Therapeutic support is accessed through community based services. The agency did not provide therapeutic services though foster carers and their supervising social workers told us that they advocated strongly to ensure children accessed any services assessed as necessary to support their emotional well-being and mental health. They told us that they provided care and support for children to manage and to 'make sense' of their past and present circumstances as well as their family relationships and feelings of self worth.

Foster carers' training is of good quality but attendance needs improvement. The manager advised that the training calendar for foster carers had been further developed and that most foster carers had attended 'core training'. However, they said there had been some 'slippage' and that this had come about partly because of staff changes and because of the competing demands of some foster carers. They said their attendance at training was monitored within the annual review of their approval and that some foster carers had been 'put on hold' until training was completed. Their records showed for instance that as of March 2018; that 44 of the 57 foster carers; in 34 approved households had attended safeguarding training. These records showed that 5 carers with full time jobs had not attended the training, though their partners (main carers) had.

Foster carers told us that the range and the quality of the training available to them was good but it was sometimes difficult attending training and support groups alongside their caring responsibilities. They said it was particularly difficult for foster carers providing parent and child placements and those in full time employment. They suggested that the arrangements for attending training and support groups should be more flexible. The manager said that they were considering a range of options to make support groups and training more accessible for foster carers. They said they had started providing training courses on weekends and that some of the fostering social workers were attending 'train the trainer' courses so they could deliver foster carer training more flexibly, for instance at their homes. Notwithstanding, they acknowledged the need for all approved foster carers to fulfil training expectations.

Foster carers' support is generally robust but has not been consistent. Some foster carers told us that they had generally received very good support from the agency but the quality of their support from some temporary staff had been inconsistent. The manager said that it had been difficult maintaining the consistency of support of foster carers because of staff changes but all vacancies had since been filled and that new staff had 'fitted in well' in their roles. Newer staff we spoke with demonstrated commitment to their roles and feedback from foster carers about them was very positive. Foster carers confirmed that unannounced visits had been made by their supervising social workers and acknowledged the importance of these. Support and training available to foster carers is good and the agency is reviewing the arrangements for providing support and training.

We conclude that children experience security in their placements and attachments with their foster carers. Foster carers are supported and resilient and 'champion' the rights of children to be valued as individuals and provide opportunities for them to fulfil their potential.

3. Leadership and Management

Summary

The agency has benefitted from consistent leadership, with the same 'responsible individual' (RI) since its registration in 2004 and the registered manager has been in post since 2014. An 'operational manager' is responsible for the supervision of the social work team and the day to day activities of the service. There had been some staff changes and absence during the preceding 12 month period and feedback indicated that this had impacted on the quality of support provided for some foster carers. At the time of the inspection however, all staff vacancies had been filled and a new post of 'principal social worker post' had been established to strengthen the delivery and development of the service.

Our findings

There is a clear vision for the service that includes the objectives to be fulfilled on behalf of children. The statement of purpose, dated 2018 was clear and comprehensive and provided an accurate description of the service. It included information about the operation and resourcing of the agency and the overall aims; objectives and principles by which these were to be achieved. It did not provide details of any services provided by the service for children but could include the provision of support and advice from the agency's education and leaving care advisers. It made reference to arrangements for '*consultation and participation*' with children and others and to '*processes for monitoring quality*' though we felt it did not adequately reflect the range of processes that are already in place for consultation and the ongoing improvement of the service. The agency had compiled an '*A – Z Guide to The Fostering Cooperative*' for prospective foster carers as well as 'children's guides' which were available for different age groups. The children's guides were seen to have been updated in 2018 and included helpline numbers for 'Voices from Care' and 'a special helpline for 'Captain Pete' FCC's champion for children. We recommend that a separate information guide is produced in respect of placements where 'parents and children' are accommodated together. The statement of purpose included a website address to access a wider range of information about the service but did not make clear any intentions to provide services for people in the Welsh language.

Foster carers, panel members and staff are safely recruited. A sample of staff records showed that all necessary recruitment checks had been undertaken and the manager told us that the same checks had been undertaken for foster carers and panel members.

Staff are motivated and supported in their roles. We met with the agency's social workers based at the Cardiff office and consulted with the two social workers responsible for supporting foster carers in the mid and north Wales areas on the telephone. They all said

that they received good support to fulfil their roles and that their 'caseloads' were 'managed' to enable them to provide robust support to foster carers. Most of the fostering social workers were experienced in their roles and provided reassurance about the child centred ethos and the integrity of the agency. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to their roles and to promoting positive outcomes for children.

We did not attend the fostering panel but met with the chair and reviewed the records of the three most recent panel proceedings. We confirmed that the constitution of the panel met legislative requirements; that all members had attended 'panel training' and had been subject to annual appraisal. They showed us that they had produced information for foster carers attending panel and this included a 'guide to the fostering panel', an information sheet with the names and pictures of panel members and brief information about their experience. Discussion with the panel chair and records of panel proceedings confirmed that their meetings had only been held when quorate and that the minutes of meetings included the reasons for their recommendations. We saw that individual feedback forms had been completed by panel members about the quality of each assessment and that foster carers and fostering social workers had been consulted about their experience of attending. The manager told us that no referrals had been made to the 'Independent Review of Determinations' panel. A report had been produced dated January 2016 to March 2017 to review the activities of the panel which included their role in quality assurance. The report included information about placement durations; disruptions and endings and an analysis of referrals which was being used to target recruitment activities. The panel operates effectively and contributes to quality assurance processes.

Managers demonstrate ambition and promote the rights of children to receive high quality services. The quality of care review report; dated '2017' was seen to address most of the areas required by regulations and in most instances included an analysis and any conclusions reached or actions that had been planned to bring about improvement. The manager had established a range of systems for monitoring the effective operation of the service and for consultation with children and other stakeholders via questionnaires. There was however a lack of data or analysis in the report of the degree to which intended placement outcomes and well-being outcomes had been fulfilled on behalf of children. We recommend that systems are developed to evaluate the quality of the service in relation to the intended outcomes fulfilled for children and that more extensive feedback from children and others is included in quality assurance reports.

We conclude that temporary challenges arising from staff changes have been managed effectively. That staff and foster carers are well supported and motivated and children thrive in sustainable placements where they develop secure attachments as they prepare for adulthood.

4. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection

4.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspections

No areas of non compliance were identified at the last inspection.

4.2 Recommendations for improvement

- That written record is made of the reasons that foster carers are considered a suitable match for children placed with them; that make reference to the specific elements of matching considered when agreeing their placements; as well as any areas where foster carers might need additional support or training to meet their needs. We recommend that these records are included in foster care and or foster placement agreements.
- That arrangements are made to ensure that all foster carers fulfil training expectations.
- That the organisation and coordination of foster carer support groups is re evaluated.
- That the statement of purpose includes details of any services provided for children; for instance, the advice and support provided by the education and leaving care advisers and perhaps the coordination of social and leisure activities.
- That information in the statement of purpose about the arrangements for '*consultation and participation with children and others*' and the '*processes for monitoring quality*' is more detailed and makes reference to processes already in place for consultation and the ongoing improvement of the service.
- The statement of purpose includes information about any intentions to provide services for people in the Welsh language.
- That an information guide is made available in respect of placements where 'parents and children' are accommodated together.
- That reports of the quality of care review include evidence of the degree to which intended placement outcomes are fulfilled / complied with on behalf of children; as set out in care and support plans and foster placement agreements.
- That reports of the quality of care review include more detailed evidence of the findings and conclusions of consultation with children and other stakeholders about the quality of care provided by the agency.

5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a full scheduled inspection and took place on 15th 16th and 19th of March 2018.

Information for this report was gathered from:

- Information held by CIW; including the previous inspection report and notifications of significant events.
- Consultation with a group of nine foster carers.
- Consultation with the agency's supervising social workers.
- Consultation with the chair of the fostering panel.
- Consultation with the registered manager and the responsible individual.
- Questionnaires were completed and returned by 2 children.
- Questionnaires were completed and returned by 8 foster carers.
- Questionnaires were completed and returned by 2 staff members.
- Questionnaires were completed and returned by 2 panel members.
- Questionnaires were sent to children's local authority social workers but none were returned.
- We viewed recruitment files for 4 staff members and looked at a range of records including the statement of purpose and children's guides; foster care and foster placement agreements; risk assessments and risk management plans; foster carer training data and foster carer profiles; foster panel minutes and annual report and the annual education review and quality of care report.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website www.cssiw.org.uk

About the service

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| Type of care provided | Independent Fostering Agency |
| Registered Person | The Foster Care Co-operative Limited |
| Registered Manager | Kim Perkins |
| Date of previous CIW inspection | 6/12/2015 |
| Dates of this Inspection visits | 15/03/2018, 16/03/2018 and 19/03/2018 |
| Operating Language of the service | English |
| Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer? | No |
| Additional Information: | |