



# Inspection Report

## **Foster Care Group Wales CYF**

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## **Description of the service**

Foster Care Group Wales CYF is registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as an Independent Fostering Agency. The registered manager is Sarah Morgan and the company has nominated a responsible individual to oversee the management of the agency. The service provides a range of placements including long term, short term, respite, shared care, short breaks and parent and child placements. At the time of the inspection, there were 43 fostering households providing placements for 74 children.

## **Summary of our findings**

### **1. Overall assessment**

Children in stable placements are cared by foster carers who provide children with good experiences and opportunities and are committed to supporting them achieve positive outcomes. Foster carers work in close collaboration with other professionals and make valid contributions to planning and decision-making for children and young people. They receive a good level of support from their supervising social workers, management and staff team who are skilled and knowledgeable in their role. Staff work effectively with external partners to ensure services meet the needs of children and they receive safe care. The agency is developing a more therapeutic direction for the service with the aim of supporting carers to sustain children in their long term foster placements.

### **2. Improvements**

The agency's fostering panel is well organised, efficient and effective in driving improvements in the consistency and quality of foster carer assessments and reviews. The process of matching children to foster carers has been developed and the agency has reflected and identified further improvements to ensure that children are appropriately matched to foster carers who are able to meet their individual needs. Improvements have also been made to improve consultation processes with children to inform the quality of care review.

### **3. Requirements and recommendations**

Section five of this report sets out areas where the registered provider is not meeting legal requirements. These include:

- Monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster carers.
- Notifying CIW of events or incidents within a reasonable timescale.

# 1. Well-being

## Summary

Children are able to develop positive attachments to their foster carers who understand their needs and aim to provide a caring and nurturing environment for them to live and thrive. They are encouraged and supported to participate in a range of social and leisure activities independently and with their carers to promote their overall well-being. Children are supported to express their views and opinions in relation to their day to day lives and in the plans for their care.

## Our findings

Children are able to develop positive and secure attachments with foster carers who promote and support them to develop interests and skills to advance their overall development. We found that outcomes for children were mostly very good. Foster carers were committed to the children in their care and were motivated to ensure they had good experiences. Children's consultation documents, which had been gathered by the agency and completed by children via an electronic survey tool, included comments from children about their experiences such as:

- *'I feel happy, gained confidence.'*
- *'My carer understands me'*
- *'Very happy.'*
- *'It's my first time I've been in foster care and I like it.'*
- *'I love them.'*
- *'They treat us like their boys'*

From our review of documentation and our discussion with foster carers and staff, we found that children had access to opportunities which supported their well-being. In the consultation documents we viewed, all children participated in an activity or interest such as football, rugby, cricket, swimming and also art clubs, guides, choir and dancing. Children had also been on holidays with their carers and these included regular trips to foster carer's caravans and chalets in local holiday parks to holidays abroad to Spain and Florida. We heard from foster carers of their commitment to caring for children beyond their eighteenth birthday and the manager told us that two children had remained with their foster carers under the 'When I am Ready' arrangement and another child and foster carer were in the process of preparing a plan. This information indicates that children experience warmth, attachment and belonging and are supported to develop interests which promotes their self esteem and contributes to their overall well-being.

Children have a voice and are encouraged to express their views and opinions in relation to their care. Foster carers told us that their supervising social workers took time to develop relationships with the children in their care and routinely met with them during visits and had a good understanding of their needs. Some cited examples of occasions when children had been consulted outside of their foster placement and supervising social workers had made great efforts to understand and support children. Children were encouraged by their foster carers and their supervising social workers to attend and contribute to their looked after reviews of their care plan. Children also had access to an advocate and had been referred by their social worker or by the agency's supervising social worker. We saw an example of a child who had been supported to write a letter to their family via their advocate.

In addition, children's views regarding their care had been formally captured by the agency. We saw that consultation documents and questionnaires had been completed by children which contributed to the annual review of their foster carers and also as part of the agency's quality assurance mechanisms. The agency had also held a consultation day for children which had been well attended by younger children and focused on healthy eating. Feedback from children was positive and they had enjoyed the activity, however, there was little evidence that this had been used as an opportunity to 'consult' with children. The responsible individual and manager acknowledged that this could have been utilised more effectively. Further plans for an activity day with older children would be more focused on providing a platform for consultation with them about their care. Overall, from this information we conclude that children are supported and have opportunities to convey their views and make their voice heard.

## **2. Care and Support**

### **Summary**

Children's health and educational needs are well supported by their foster carers and they have access to a range of experiences to support their overall development. Children are able to feel safe and can be confident that the agency will take steps to safeguard their needs.

### **Our findings**

Children's physical and emotional health needs are supported and promoted. We saw from our review of foster carer's supervision records that their supervising social workers ensured children were registered with health professionals and attended routine health check ups. We saw that discussions also took place with foster carers in relation to promoting a healthy lifestyle and that appropriate liaison with other professionals was taking place, for example with psychologists and health visitors, to support and address children's individual health needs. Foster carers who cared for children with more complex emotional needs received additional support from the agency's senior social work practitioner to help develop strategies to support their behaviour. This had included supporting carers to seek referrals to Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and advice from an experienced clinical psychologist. From our review of records and feedback from one foster carer we spoke with, this support had helped them better understand and provide appropriate responses to the child in their care and helped sustain their foster placement. From this information, we conclude that children's physical and emotional health needs are effectively met.

Children are encouraged and supported to achieve their educational potential; taking into account their attainment and progress from the beginning of their placement. The agency maintained some information in relation to the educational arrangements for children which included whether children attended mainstream school, special school and whether they were supported by a statement of special educational needs. They were also able to identify a very small number of children who were not currently in education or training. Supervising social workers provided information and accounted for the reasons for this which was mainly due to them transitioning to other courses or training providers. We saw evidence from some children's school reports of where they had achieved well academically and had excellent school attendance.

Furthermore, foster carers told us there was a clear expectation for them to attend 'parent' evenings and Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings. The agency had developed guidance for foster carers on promoting children's education at home with practical help on how to achieve this which was being shared at support groups. An 'Annual Education

Monitoring and Achievement' form to be completed by foster carers had been recently developed although had not been distributed at the time of our inspection visit. Whilst we found that education was well promoted by the agency; a system to collate information in relation to children's educational progress, attendance and academic attainment had not been established. This information is a legal requirement which requires the agency to demonstrate the effectiveness of the service in promoting the educational progress and outcomes for children. Overall, this information indicates that children are well supported to succeed in education, however, the agency needs to develop a system to evidence the educational outcomes for children who use the service.

Children are protected from abuse. Staff and foster carers we spoke with were familiar with the agency safeguarding policy and evidenced that they knew what action to take if they had concerns. Foster carers were provided with a portfolio file which included the agency's policies and guidelines, including the complaints and allegation procedures. We were told by staff and foster carers and we saw in foster carers' records that they had attended safeguarding training which was updated as required. Feedback from foster carers was that they had access to a range of training to develop their knowledge and understanding of safe care practices and the protection of children from harm and exploitation. We saw that where safeguarding issues were identified; the agency responded and took appropriate action to investigate these concerns. Where an allegation or concern had been raised in relation to a foster carer, a review of their approval had been conducted and this had been presented to the agency foster panel for consideration. From our review of documentation, we identified there had been one occasion when there had been a delay in CIW receiving a notification. This had been a significant event which had raised safeguarding concerns. We discussed with the registered manager and team manager their legal responsibility to ensure that notifiable incidents were reported to CIW promptly. We also advised that where a child had been reported missing from their home or, where police had needed to attend a foster carer's home in relation to a child, that this could be considered a 'significant event' under the regulation and CIW should be notified. We conclude from this information that children are protected because the service, foster carers and staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures. However, the agency needs to ensure that reporting systems are robust to ensure that information is reported in accordance with legal requirements.

### **3. Leadership and Management**

#### **Summary**

The service is efficiently and competently managed and promotes a positive ethos and culture whereby carers and staff feel valued. Children's needs are effectively met by the agency as foster carers are subject of robust assessment processes and are well supported through regular supervision and training. Supervising social workers, in turn, benefit from regular supervision, have access to relevant training and receive annual appraisals to ensure that they are appropriately supported and effective in their role.

#### **Our findings**

People using the service are clear about what it sets out to provide. The agency had a comprehensive statement of purpose which provided an accurate reflection of the service offered. However, it would benefit from being dated as it was unclear as to when the document had been last reviewed. Information in relation to the agency's ability to provide an 'active offer' of the Welsh language should also be included in this document. We saw that a separate children's guide and a young person's guide had been produced by the agency, which provided information about the fostering service. Foster carers we spoke with said that the children placed with them had received a copy of the guide and that the agency also provided a memory box at the start of the placement for them to store information, mementos and photographs of their time with their carers. Children receive a service as described in the statement of purpose.

A system has been established by the agency to monitor, review and improve the quality of care provided. A report completed for 2017 evidenced consultation with carers, children and stakeholders about their experiences of the service. Whilst this provided some analysis of information, it did not provide information about the progress and outcomes of children to demonstrate whether the objectives of their care plans had been achieved. We suggested that the agency could include information, within the period reviewed, on how many placements had ended, the number of mother and baby placements, children moved to adoption or when I'm ready arrangements. This would give the agency a clearer understanding of its effectiveness in meeting its statement of purpose.

Foster carers and their families value the support provided by the agency which helps them with the demands of fostering on their family life. We heard that, due to the size of the agency, carers and children were well known to the fostering team and this enhanced communication and prevented foster carers unnecessarily duplicating and repeating information. The out of hours support was efficient and carers reported they were able to access support, advice or guidance promptly when this was requested. Foster carers told us that their supervising social worker visited them fortnightly, although this may be

less frequent if the carer required less support, and received at least one unannounced visit annually. Comments we heard about the agency and staff included:

- *'Welcoming and supportive.'*
- *'Staff are 100% reliable.'*
- *'You don't need to worry about anything and can just focus on your role.'*
- *'They're amazing'.*

Support groups were held quarterly and in two different geographical locations. These were facilitated by the registered manager and had been developed to include guest speakers and practice focused workshops. We suggested that the agency could develop a newsletter to help improve communication and engagement with foster carers and provide information in relation to support groups, training, new initiatives, events and staff news. Foster carers are well supported to care for children.

Children are able to feel confident in the care they receive because their foster carers are competent in meeting their needs. Mandatory training was facilitated by the manager and the placements officer which included safeguarding, attachment, recording and reporting and safe caring. Training had also been provided to foster carers by external facilitators in relation to caring for traumatised children, contact and long term and permanence care. Some foster carers had also attended, alongside supervising social workers, specialist training in relation to attunement and relationships with children which had been facilitated by a therapeutic clinical advisor to the agency. Following our last inspection, ten foster carers had completed 'confidence in care' training which was a 12 week programme to support carers in their role. The agency advised us that 13 of the foster carers were qualified to QCF level 3 and three foster carers were in the process of completing this qualification. We viewed the agency's training schedule for 2017 and saw that courses had been scheduled on a range of issues including child protection, allegations and first aid. We were told that further training would be offered to carers once post approval training was released by the Fostering Network. Carers receive appropriate training to support and promote the well-being of children in their care.

Children and their carers receive a good standard of care from a staff team who are efficient and skilled in their role. Recruitment and vetting of staff is robust and follows safe and timely recruitment processes. Information in staff files evidenced that appropriate recruitment processes were in place. All information and checks had been completed; although we noted on one file that there was no job description in relation to a member of staff's role or details of their probation period. A job description and contract was also not seen on a file for a new member of staff but we were told by the registered manager that this had been provided. Performance management processes were in place to identify and address where staff did not meet the agency's expectations of working practices. Staff reported that they received regular supervision. We saw from our review of staff records that supervision was mostly held monthly and covered appropriate reflection and discussion

on work loads as well as professional development. Appraisals were also seen to be held annually. In addition, team meetings took place regularly and were well attended. Staff told us that they saw these as an opportunity to come together, share information and keep each other updated on information in relation to children, carers and developments within the agency. We heard that staff had access to training to enable them to develop their skills and knowledge. They each had an individual budget and were able to access training arranged by external providers, including courses provided by local authorities. Staff had attended training to develop their understanding of the therapeutic direction of the agency and also in relation to child sexual exploitation and caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. From this information, we conclude that staff receive appropriate levels of support and training to assist their development and support them in their role.

The fostering panel promotes safe, secure placements through robust decision making and quality assurance. The constitution of the panel met legislative requirements and the agency monitored the individual panel member's attendance to ensure they complied with their legal responsibilities. The manager confirmed that panel members were subject of annual appraisal in relation to their role. Feedback from panel members we consulted was that the panel '*functions well*'. There had been an improvement in the quality of assessments and that their views were sought following panel meeting to ensure that the level of work was consistent and to improve practice. We heard that there were occasionally some inconsistencies in the information available to panel, such as information from placing social workers. The quality of assessments provided to panel had been part of the agency's improvement plan and new forms had been created to ensure all information required was provided to panel members in advance of the panel meeting.

From our examination of panel minutes, we saw that there was one occurrence when the agency had not fully acted on the recommendations of the panel. The agency needs to ensure that if recommendations are not actioned then a record is made to why this has not taken place or has been delayed. This would ensure children are consistently safeguarded. The agency decision maker evidenced that they had taken account of recommendations of the panel and signed and dated their decision. We saw that foster carers were sent notices confirming their approval. Where decisions had been taken to terminate an approval, appropriate action had been taken to notify the foster carer and relevant authorities. We conclude that the panel has demonstrated its effectiveness as a mechanism to ensure safe care for children.

Foster carer's annual reviews are completed within timescale. We saw that the agency had completed an analysis of the annual reviews undertaken in 2017 which identified each review and the information obtained to inform the review. This included the supervising social worker report and the foster carer's, local authority social worker, birth children and children looked after comments. All had included a health and safety report and pet assessment. The agency could consider adding end of placement evaluation forms from children and the placing social worker to this analysis to inform the annual review. From our

review of documentation we saw comments in consultation documents from local authority social workers such as:

- *'The placement is excellent. The foster carer and their family do everything they can to ensure (child) has a good experience and promotes her well-being.'*
- *'...(the foster carers) fully supported (child) and at times have gone over their remit in order to support (their) well-being.'*
- *'(child) is very much part of the family. S/he has a very respectful and close relationship with (their) carers.... (who) have been supportive of their return to birth family.'*

We saw evidence that foster carers were provided with a letter outlining the outcome of their review. Where there had been significant changes in the fostering household or following a concern or allegation, we saw that reviews of foster carers were presented to the fostering panel for their consideration. The agency involves others in reviews to support the well-being of children.

Children are mostly placed with suitable foster carers. Pen pictures had been compiled to profile foster carers and provide some basic information and photographs of the foster carers, their families and homes. However, the agency was not clear if this had been completed for all foster carers and there was a lack of clarity on whether this information was directed at children or their social workers. We recommended that 'pen pictures' are quality assured to ensure that the information they contain is relevant and appropriate.

In addition, monthly placement meetings had been implemented to consider any vacancies, newly approved carers or those carers returning after a break to ensure that the placements team had a good understanding of each fostering household awaiting the placement of a child. However, formal meetings had not been held as frequently as scheduled. The placements officer told us that information sharing was effective and monthly meetings were scheduled for the forthcoming year and that this process would be better executed. Individual Placement Matching (IPM) forms had been introduced as a mechanism to gather information. However, we saw in a copy of minutes of a team meeting that, following an agency audit, of 28 children placed in 2017, only 8 had completed IPMs. This had been raised and identified as requiring completion by supervising social workers. We consider that further efforts should be undertaken by the agency to monitor the effectiveness of completing this information to ensure compliance with its statement of purpose. The record of matching meetings should also provide sufficient detail to evidence sound decision-making; including the potential impact of the placement on any existing children in the fostering household. Where there are identified 'gaps' in terms of matching; the agency should record how it intends to address these, for example, by way of training. Despite some planned improvements to the matching process, there had been occasions where a placement had resulted in an unplanned ending. A review of the information and 'lessons learnt' approach had been used to inform the agency's practice and processes. These

systems would benefit from being embedded in practice to ensure consistency and evidence of robust matching of children with their carers.

## **4. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection**

### **4.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspections**

There were no areas of non compliance identified at the previous inspection.

### **4.2 Areas of non compliance identified at this inspection**

During this inspection, we identified areas where the registered agency is not fully meeting legal requirements. We advised the registered persons that improvements are needed in relation to:

- Monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster carers (Regulation 16(2)(a)).
- Notifying CIW of any of the events listed in Schedule 8 without delay (Regulation 43(1)).

A non compliance notice has not been issued as we did not identify any immediate or significant impact for people using the service. We expect the registered persons to take action to address these shortfalls to meet legal requirements. This will be followed up at the next inspection.

### **4.3 Recommendations for improvement:**

- The agency should consider the Welsh Government's 'More Than Just Words: follow on strategic guidance for Welsh language in social care' and include information on their ability to make an 'active offer' of the Welsh language in its statement of purpose and children's guide.
- The statement of purpose should be dated as a record of when it was last reviewed.
- Quality assurance processes should continue to be developed and include quantitative data in relation to the outcomes for children using the service.
- All staff employed by the agency are subject to a satisfactory completion of a period of probation and are provided with a job description outlining their responsibilities.
- A training matrix for foster carers should be developed to provide an overview and enhance the monitoring of carer's attendance at mandatory and additional training courses.
- The information contained within 'pen pictures' of foster carers should be reviewed to ensure that the information and language is suitable.
- The process of matching children with foster carers should be further embedded into practice to evidence robust decision making.

- The introduction of a foster carer 'newsletter' to enhance communication and sharing of information between the agency and foster carers.

## 5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a full scheduled announced inspection undertaken in accordance with the CIW inspection framework.

The following sources of information were used to inform this report:

- Pre arranged Inspection visits to the agency on 6, 7 and 8 March 2018.
- Information held by CIW. This included the previous inspection report and notifications.
- Discussions with the registered manager.
- Discussion with three supervising social workers and the placement/quality assurance officer.
- Group discussion with five foster carers.
- Meeting with two members of the fostering panel.
- We viewed recruitment and personnel files for three staff members.
- Questionnaires were sent out to 12 foster carers, three were returned.
- Consideration of agency records including the statement of purpose, quality of care review, records relating to foster carers and children.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website [www.ciw.org.uk](http://www.ciw.org.uk)

## About the service

Type of care provided	Independent Fostering Agency
Registered Person	Foster Care Group Wales CYP
Registered Manager	Sarah Morgan
Date of previous CSSIW inspection	10/02/2016
Dates of visits for this inspection	05/03/2018; 06/03/2018; 07/03/2018
Operating Language of the service	English
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	No
<p><b>This is a service that does not provide an 'active offer' of the Welsh language. It does not anticipate, identify or meet the Welsh language needs of people who use, or intend to use their service. We recommend that the service provider considers Welsh Government's 'More Than Just Words: Follow-on Strategic Framework for Welsh Language services in Health, Social Services and Social Care'.</b></p>	