



Inspection Report on

**The National Fostering Agency
Cardiff
CF24 2SA**

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Description of the service

The National Fostering Agency – Cymru was registered by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as an Independent Fostering Agency in 2006 and the registered office is in Cardiff. The company have a named responsible individual (RI) who oversees the management of the agency on behalf of the company. The registered manager is Alison Douglas
At the time of inspection, there were 141 fostering households providing placements for 201 children.

Summary of our findings

1. Overall assessment

The National Fostering Agency provides stable placements where children achieve positive outcomes with support from foster carers who are committed to supporting them. We received positive responses from foster carers about the support and training opportunities provided. We found that the agency had good systems in place to capture the views of children and all stakeholders of the service. There were robust quality assurance systems in place. The service is led by a manager who has a clear vision of the service. The staff team had a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in achieving this.

2. Improvements

The agency has developed the 'active offer' of the Welsh language and a system to identify the language needs of children and carers/staff.. The Welsh language plan was embedded in the agency's annual strategic plan and there were clear targets identified to achieve this.

3. Requirements and recommendations

We did not make any recommendations following this inspection.

1. Well-being

Summary

We found that positive well-being outcomes were being achieved for children who live in stable placements. Children are consulted about their care. Foster carers receive up to date documentation when children are placed which enables them to provide care based on the specific needs of children. Family contact is encouraged and supported, where appropriate, which enables children to maintain relationships with people significant in their lives.

Our findings

Children and young people live and thrive in safe and stable placements, in which they develop secure and sound relationships with their family, friends and foster carers. Foster carers spoke with respect about the children in their care; they were committed to providing positive outcomes for the children and spoke candidly of their experiences. All the foster carers we spoke with talked about the importance of children feeling “*safe and have a sense of belonging*” whilst living with them. Case records evidenced that foster carers were regularly supervised and discussions relating to the progress of children were evident. Children were encouraged to take part in community and leisure facilities which promoted friendship groups and their well-being. From this information, we conclude that children are settled and comfortable with carers who provide continuous care which promotes their confidence and self esteem.

Children are listened to and are encouraged to be involved in making decisions about the care they receive. There were good arrangements in place for ensuring that children were consulted which ensures that their well being is promoted and protected. Formal processes were in place to obtain views at looked after children (LAC) reviews. In one file sampled we saw that a child had asked to contribute to their review and the agency had provided an advocate to support them to achieve this. Records also reflected that children’s views were sought during announced and unannounced home visits. The service actively sought the views of children as part of the foster carer’s annual review which gave them an opportunity to voice their opinions on the care they received. Children also completed ‘Have your say’ feedback forms and we saw examples of completed questionnaires used by the agency to collate information from the children. The questionnaires reflected positive comments from children including “*I’m very happy and feel part of the family*”; “*I talk to my foster carer all the time if I’m feeling upset*” and “*I like it where I live*”. We saw many examples of how the agency ensured that they were able to evidence outcomes for children recorded in a range of documentation. For example, monthly progress reports, local authority social worker comment forms, and annual performance reports. Evidence of permanency was reflected in the number of children who remained with foster carers post 18 years or via adoption and Special Guardianship Orders. The agency had supported foster carers in moving 16 children successfully onto adoption placements and 26 children had returned home

between April 2017 and February 2018. Foster carers told us that the experience of moving children had been generally positive. Carers told us that their supervising social worker's had given them *"lots of support"* and one told us *"We knew from the start what the arrangements were so we could support x during the move"*. This indicates that children are listened to and are encouraged to speak out and express themselves. The agency proactively ensures that children experience positive outcomes to ensure that children receive a service which meets their needs.

Children and young people receive proactive support, with their wide range of needs being anticipated. Foster carers were provided with the full range of information which provided safe and individualised care. We sampled a range of foster carer files and spoke with ten foster carers. We heard that care planning was good and looked after children reviews had been regularly completed. The foster carers we spoke with were generally complimentary about the advice and support they received commented:

- *"They (the agency) try to get it right first time."*
- *"Our supervising social worker is always there to support us."*
- *"The information is really good as long as the placing authority have shared i.t"*
- *"I feel that I had all the information I needed before x was placed with us."*

One of the foster carers we spoke with told us of their experience of providing placements to unaccompanied asylum seeking children. They explained that due to timescales they did not have all the information available prior to the placement commencing, however, the agency had ensured that children and foster carers had access to interpreters and additional support was provided. Files sampled evidenced that delegated authority agreements were in place and the foster carers we met with were clear about the permissions in relation to children's needs including health and medical procedures. We saw good examples of risk assessments which reflected both historical and current risks. They had been updated to highlight changing needs and strategies were in place to reduce risk taking behaviour. For one child the risks identified related to self harm, and sexually harmful behaviour; documents clearly evidenced that these were regularly updated and reviewed, known triggers had been identified and actions had been agreed with the foster carers. Records indicated that supervising social workers made regular announced and unannounced visits. Foster carers benefitted from regular contact with their supervising social workers and records reflected good discussions relating to how the placement was progressing and issues arising were dealt with promptly. Foster carers are able to provide proactive support to children as they have appropriate information and support to meet their needs.

Children are supported by their foster carers to maintain contact with family and friends. We heard examples from supervising social workers where some foster carers had taken the initiative to arrange and supervise contact due to the late notification by the placing social

worker of arrangements. This had helped the child prepare to see their family and manage situations where this had been unable to proceed. Foster carers we consulted showed a clear understanding of the importance of contact for children they cared for and the need to remain positive and offer reassurance to children during situations which were sometimes difficult and stressful for them. In one case file viewed we saw a good example of guidelines for unsupervised access with a family member. This document clearly set out agreed behaviour guidelines in relation to the family member; Records indicated that contact was regularly monitored and the agreed guidelines were being adhered to, resulting in the child maintaining regular contact with their family. We concluded that where appropriate, foster carers enabled children in their care to maintain relationships with parents and other significant adults in their lives.

2. Care and Support

Summary

Overall we found that children experienced positive outcomes in stable placements. The foster carers we met demonstrated a commitment to supporting children to achieve good outcomes. Views of foster carers were consistent in relation to the support they received from the agency.

Our findings

Foster carers value the support provided by the agency which helps them to cope with the additional demands of fostering on their family life. Foster carers told us that they were able to access support from a member of the team at all times, including out of hours, and it was evident that this was a valued service. They were notified on a Friday of who would be on-call during the weekend. Feedback from the foster carers group regarding the support they received was unanimously positive. We heard comments such as:

- *“You can always get in touch with your supervising social worker.”*
- *“There is always someone at the end of the phone.”*
- *“We get a text to let us know who is on call.”*

A sample of foster carer files we viewed also evidenced regular visits by their supervising social workers and, in all but one file, monthly formal supervision and support was provided. Supervision included a discussion of how the placement was progressing, including contact with family members, education and activities. Foster carers were able to discuss ongoing support they required including training needs and attendance at meetings were reviewed and agreed. Supervising social workers told us that the rota system to cover weekends and evenings was fairly distributed and gave them an opportunity to “*get to know each other’s caseload*” as any issues arising from calls were recorded and discussed the following working day . They also told us that the manager was available to offer support and advice.

Children are encouraged and supported to achieve their educational potential; have opportunities to learn and develop as the service promotes educational attainment and success. We saw that children regularly attended school and achieved positive educational outcomes. One young person had achieved 100% attendance and was on course to achieve good grades at GCSE. The agency maintained an analysis of information in relation to the educational arrangements for children. Care files evidenced that children had personal education plans (PEP) in place. Children of school age currently attended education either full time, on a reduced timetable, or took part in vocational studies; pre school children were accessing a nursery provision. A placing authority social worker commented as part of the quality review “*...the placement has ensured that the child continues to attend their education, although this does involve some travelling each day.*”

Foster carers told us that they regularly attended school parent evenings and a number of carers told us of the positive relationships they had with the children's teachers. They considered that having regular contact with the child's school enabled them to appropriately support children through their education. Children can fulfil their educational potential with support and encouragement from their foster carers.

Children are safe because the agency, staff and foster carers implement effective and safe practice which safeguards their needs. We looked at care files where there had been two significant incidents which had arisen within the agency during the last inspection period. This had been followed up appropriately and action had been taken to investigate concerns which had led to a review and presentation to panel for recommendation. For example, in one file we saw detailed records of actions taken to safeguard a child following concerns; a report held details of the event, background, outcome of discussion and further action to be taken. There was good evidence that the local authority social workers and supervising social workers worked together to safeguard the child; whilst the agency conducted a full investigation the foster carers were provided with additional support from 'Foster Talk'. Records also indicated that the supervising social workers had completed additional announced and unannounced visits to monitor the placement and support the foster carers. Some foster carers told us of their experience of being the subject of complaints or allegations. They told us that although it was "*a difficult time*" they generally felt that the agency provided "*strong support*" including additional visits and phone-calls. They also told us that they were advised of the process for investigating concerns and felt that their supervising social worker "*kept us informed during a difficult time*". From this, we conclude that children are safe because the agency ensures that there is effective practice in place to safeguard them.

3. Leadership and Management

Summary

The service has clear aims and policies that are focused on children and young people's needs which are understood and implemented by all staff. There is a robust system in place to recruit staff. There have been few changes to the team and all the staff we met with told us that caseloads were "*manageable*" and they felt that the team and manager were "*very supportive*". Foster carers told us of the good support they received from the manager and supervising social workers. Children were at the centre of the service; quality assurance and monitoring systems were designed to identify and capture how the agency achieved positive outcomes for children.

Our findings

Foster carers, panel members and staff are recruited safely. The provider had robust systems to recruit and induct new staff. The sample of staff records viewed showed that good attention was given to ensure that an appropriate vetting process was undertaken. This included the completion of an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before appointment, proof of identity with photograph, application form with employment history, interview record, references and record of verification of references. We found that the agency vets and assesses carers appropriately. The registered manager monitors the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks of foster carers, which should be undertaken every three years. All foster carers who had children placed with them at the time of the inspection had up-to-date checks. The manager told us that the agency had changed direction in recruiting foster carers from two years previously; As a result the agency were recruiting less foster carers; however the manager felt that those recruited were of good calibre and able to deal with the associated challenging behaviours of the children. The agency recruited seventeen foster carers in 2017. We conclude that children are safe as there are robust systems in place to ensure that carers and staff are appropriately assessed and vetted prior to working with the agency.

The fostering panel promotes safe, secure placements through rigorous quality assurance; and promotes thorough assessment, support and training for foster carers. The constitution of the panel met legislative requirements, including the inclusion of a former looked after child. We looked at a number of assessments which were completed following the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F assessment process with all necessary checks being completed prior to approval. Skills to Foster training assessment reports had also been completed. Documents evidenced that recommendations were sound and reviews were taken to panel. The agency decision maker evidenced that they had taken account of recommendations of the panel and signed and dated their decision. Foster carers told us of their positive experience of the panel; they felt that supervising social worker's were supportive of the process and they felt that they had been "*well*

'prepared for our first panel'. One told us *"it makes us feel professional and keeps us on our toes"*. Panel members we spoke with told us that the *"quality of the assessments were good"*; our review of assessments and panel minutes supported this. We saw that foster carers were sent notices confirming their approval. Where decisions had been made to terminate an approval, appropriate action had been taken to notify the foster carer and relevant authorities. Representatives of the panel told us that they were given opportunities to attend relevant training to ensure that their knowledge was updated. We conclude that children are safely placed with carers who have undergone rigorous assessments, training and support prior to commencing their placements.

Foster carers receive effective training, supervision and support and placements are stable as a result. We found that the agency promoted safe practice and a culture of safety. Foster carers were required to complete all mandatory training within agreed timescales and additional training was provided to support the needs of the children in placements. We saw a training matrix which detailed all training attended by foster carers and the manager monitored when and how many training events had been attended since approval. Examples of training included safer caring, first aid, child protection and understanding behaviour. Foster carers told us that they were asked to evaluate training and felt that their comments were taken on board by the manager. We saw an evaluation document which supported this where carers had commented on a number of training sessions relating to Internet safety, parents protect and sexual harmful behaviour. The agency had also provided training relating to working in partnership to meet the needs of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. We were told that one of the supervising social worker's had recently qualified at Theraplay® foundation level and completed a level 2 course that can be offered to the agency's foster carers. The course is used for foster carer and child therapy, which allows foster carers to reconnect to a child in a 'here and now' moment by creating opportunities to build on self esteem and trust in adults through engagement. We saw positive feedback from foster carers and their supervising social worker s following attendance at recent sessions. The agency has a library of therapeutic books relating to understanding trauma and development, and children's books for direct work focussing on trauma related behaviour which carers can access. We were told that the agency had also developed an online 'hub' to support foster carers. The group of foster carers we met with told us that they felt 'very' supported by the agency and that the support group was also a good source of information and support; especially for new foster carers and those who were experiencing periods of challenge. We concluded that children experience stable placements with foster carers who receive effective training, supervision and support.

There are robust, transparent monitoring systems in place to assess the quality of the service in relation to the outcomes for children; which includes feedback from children using the service and their representatives. We saw good management information systems in place that enabled the agency to monitor and review service outcomes. We saw a 'development plan' which was devised following completion of the quality of care review; this was used to identify service areas that required further work and to monitor progress in achieving the plan. For example, the plan identified the need to evaluate the training needs

of panel members, and a new programme of learning was required; this had been achieved, panel members had completed additional training which they told us had contributed to their learning and the skills required for their role. During our discussion with staff it was evident that they had a good understanding of their roles in relation to fulfilling the agency's aims and targets for the year ahead; they were aware of the priorities and improvements identified during the review process. We conclude that children achieve positive outcomes because the agency has good systems in place to monitor and collaborate with others to communicate their vision for the service.

There is evidence of the service working towards the delivery of the 'active offer' in relation to the Welsh language. We saw a comprehensive Welsh language strategy which outlined aims in relation to this and to date the agency had completed:

- Training on the Active offer for the registered manager, staff and panel members.
- Staff answer the telephone with a bilingual greeting/all voice mails have a bilingual greeting.
- Public documents are available in English and Welsh.
- Identified Welsh 'champions' within the team.
- Explored a framework for providing Welsh language lessons for staff.

The agency had also mapped the skill set of the team relating to levels of ability in spoken Welsh. They had also completed a review of the languages used by children and their foster cares. This enabled the agency to identify Welsh speaking households so that future consideration could be given when placing children who preferred to communicate in Welsh and/or were attending Welsh medium schools. The manager told us that the strategy would continue to be developed to reflect the Active Offer.

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

There were no areas of non compliance identified at this inspection.

4.3 Recommendations for improvement:

There were no recommendations for improvement following this inspection.

5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a full scheduled announced inspection 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 27 February and 6 March 2018.
- Information held by CIW. This included the previous inspection report and notifications.
- Discussions with the registered manager.
- Meeting with a group of 10 foster carers.
- Group meeting with nine supervising social workers.
- Discussion with senior managers within the organisation.
- We viewed recruitment and personnel files for five staff members.
- We looked at a wide range of records including the statement of purpose, quality of care review, an action plan, foster carers' training, records relating to foster carers and children placed.

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

About the service

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| Type of care provided | National Fostering Agency- Cymru |
| Registered Person | National Fostering Agency - UK |
| Registered Manager | Alison Douglas |
| Date of previous CIW inspection | 18 and 19 February 2015 |
| Dates of these Inspection visits | 27 February and 6 March 2018 |
| Operating Language of the service | Both |
| Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer? | This is a service that is working towards providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language and intends to become a bilingual service. |
| Additional Information: | |