



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Care Standards Act 2000

Inspection Report

Foster Care Associates North

Abergele

Type of Inspection – Full

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Summary

About the service

Foster Care Associates Cymru North is an independent fostering agency which offers a range of placements for children and young people aged 0 to 18 years of age, including parent and child placements, across North Wales. The agency is based in Abergele and at the time of the inspection there were 75 fostering households supporting 103 children and young people. The registered provider of the service is Foster Care Associates Limited and the registered manager is Anne Armstrong.

What type of inspection was carried out?

This was a planned, announced inspection and all three quality areas were considered. The inspection was carried out by 2 inspectors and took place at the Abergele office on Wednesday 7th February 2018 between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm and Thursday 8th February 2018 between 9:00 am and 4:30 pm.

The information used for this inspection was obtained by the following methods:

- We spoke with seventeen foster carers following a support group meeting and one foster carer individually;
- We spoke with the registered manager;
- We spoke with the fostering service manager;
- We spoke with a senior supervising social worker and a student social worker;
- We spoke with the therapist for the service;
- We examined seven young persons' files;
- We spoke with the senior support worker;
- We spoke with the placements manager;
- We read two foster carers' form F assessments;
- We spoke with the operations manager for the service;
- We spoke with the quality assurance and safeguarding manager for the service;
- We read the records of the last three fostering panel meetings.

We viewed a sample of the agency's paperwork including the statement of purpose, the young persons' guide, quality monitoring reports, foster carers' review reports, a sample of agency staff files, supervision records and staff team meeting minutes.

We issued questionnaires to:

Twenty three foster carer households, seven were returned;

Seventeen children and young people, five were returned;

Twelve placing local authority social workers and four were returned;

Nine panel members and one was returned;

Fourteen agency staff members returned questionnaires.

What does the service do well?

- The foster carers were very positive about the support they receive from their supervising social workers and the registered manager.
 - Foster carers reported that the quality of the training they receive is very high.

- There are effective partnerships with stakeholders as there are systems in place to share information and seek the views of foster carers, children and young people and commissioners.
- There are very good systems in place to assess and monitor the quality of the service.

What has improved since the last inspection?

- A new electronic filing system has been introduced and both the agency staff and foster carers reported that this had been positive as it has ensured that recording is easier and information is more accessible.
 - The service has developed child and young person participation and consultation and appointed a care leaver consultant.
 - A library of therapeutic books has been located at the Abergele office and some foster carers reported that they had made use of the books and this had been helpful resource.
 - Suggestions boxes have been introduced at the foster carer support groups so that foster carers can make suggestions easily and anonymously.

What needs to be done to improve the service?

There was no evidence of non-compliance with the requirements of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003. We conclude that Foster Care Associates Cymru North is providing a very good standard of care for the children and young people using the service.

We make the following recommendations to improve the service:

- To include details of the service's position regarding the Welsh language 'Active Offer' in the statement of purpose.
- To link the information supplied in the quality of care review report to outcomes for children and young people.

Well-being

Children and young people using this service are supported to be happy, healthy and safe. They know and understand what care, support and opportunities are available to them. Their rights are protected, they have a voice and as far as practicable control in making decisions about their lives.

We found that young people can be assured that the agency, through its support workers, supervising social workers and foster carers, will seek their views and to speak up so that they can influence the service and the care they receive. The views of the children were detailed in the records of the supervising social workers' visits and at annual reviews of foster carers. Young people are made aware that an independent advocate can visit them to discuss issues, and the records viewed showed that some young people had accessed this service. This evidences that children and young people are encouraged to express their views and opinions and to make choices and decisions.

Children and young people are encouraged to attend young people's forums to discuss matters relevant to them and to seek their views and suggestions. The senior support worker had invited the young people to the meetings using letters that were respectful and that provided a clear explanation for the purpose of the meetings. Matters such as the contents of the memory boxes that are provided to children and young people when they first have contact with the service had been discussed, and also suggestions for group activities for the school holidays. This evidences that children and young people can be involved, participate and feel valued.

Children and young people experience well-being and a sense of achievement because they are able to access opportunities to learn, follow interests and develop skills. This was evidenced in the records that the supervising social workers make of the visits to the foster carers to discuss the placement and also to see the young people to discuss any issues or needs with them. Placement review minutes that we viewed confirmed that children and young people had interests and hobbies and the young people who completed the questionnaires confirmed that they are able to pursue their interests while in placement. This evidences that children and young people are able to do things that matter to them.

Children and young people can be assured that their development will be assessed and monitored. Supervising social workers had completed outcomes trackers within 28 days of placement and the records had been updated every 3 months. This has enabled the service to examine each child's and young person's progress while they are in placement. We saw reports for placement reviews that showed that the children's and young people's development in all key areas such as education, physical and emotional health had been discussed. This evidences that children and young people are supported to be as healthy as they can be.

Children and young people have opportunities to develop feelings of self worth and a positive identity. The service had employed a part time care leaver consultant. This is a young adult who was formerly in foster care and is now studying at university. The consultant had attended the children and young people's forums and events in the school

holidays and had taken part in foster carer pre approval training. The service had held several events and competitions since the last inspection including an award ceremony. The organisation had also held a national choir competition and an international football tournament. The children and young people had attended these and other events with their foster carers, birth children and the staff at the agency ensuring that children and young people can feel that they belong and have positive relationships.

Children and young people have their individual identities and cultures recognised and valued. The service has eleven Welsh speaking fostering households, five members of the agency staff speak Welsh and there is a Welsh group for children and young people who speak Welsh fluently and those who are Welsh learners. The statement of purpose and children's and young people's guides are available in Welsh as are other documents. The service had nominated a member of the staff as a Welsh lead, to ensure that the Welsh language and culture is prioritised. The service had organised Welsh lessons to be offered to agency staff and foster carers. This evidences that the service is working towards the 'Active Offer' of Welsh, children and young people are able to communicate with carers and agency staff in Welsh and the Welsh language and culture is valued.

Children and young people experience enhanced well-being because their needs are understood and catered for. We saw matching documentation which is completed when a placement request is made by a local authority. The placements manager said that she rings the local authority when a referral is made in order to gain more information and have some dialogue with the social worker. Potential foster carers were logged against the referral with details of the potential foster carers such as location and distance from schools. The local authority then requests the potential foster carers' form F assessments. A local authority social worker had described the matching process as 'excellent' in a returned questionnaire. The foster carers we spoke with said that on the whole sufficient information was provided for them prior to a placement being made. This evidences that children and young people are placed with carers that can meet their needs.

Young people are supported to cope with difficult transitions, difficult events and situations. The agency had recently introduced a 'Skills for Life' programme, to assist foster carers in encouraging young people from the age of 14 years to do things for themselves and develop their individual skills including practical life skills. A workshop entitled 'Managing Friendships, Relationships and Bullying' had been attended by some young people and the feedback questionnaires were mostly positive. This evidences that young people have encouragement to maximise their independence and are supported to have safe relationships.

Leadership and Management

Users of this service can be confident that the service is effectively managed, quality is monitored and there is good communication with stakeholders.

The agency has a statement of purpose that provides information about the service it provides. There are suitable and attractive young people's guides that include all the information required so that the children and young people using the service are aware of their rights and the services available to them and included information about advocacy services. The documents were available in Welsh but there was no reference to the service's position regarding the Welsh language 'Active Offer'. There was evidence of management oversight and scrutiny of the service by the registered manager. The manager had conducted a quality of care review of the service for 2016/2017 that gave information about many areas of the service including notifiable incidents, complaints, panel activity, compliance with the regulations and feedback from foster carers and children and young people and other stakeholders. The report could be improved by providing data regarding the numbers of responses to questionnaires and information about how the service has responded to stakeholders' feedback, and data regarding what services are being provided. The report should be linked to the outcomes for children and young people to show whether the actions of the service have produced a positive result for them.

There are very good systems in place to assess and improve the quality of the service. In addition to the quality of care review report, the service had compiled quarterly regional service improvement plans using the information gathered from auditing activities. These activities had included auditing of children and young people's files and foster carer records to ensure that information held was up to date and compliant. We saw from the plans that action had been taken where outstanding paper work or information to be supplied had been identified. We saw that when complaints about the service had been made that action had been taken. We saw from the detailed notifications that had been sent to CIW that appropriate safeguarding action had been made when concerns had been raised about the safety and well-being of children and young people. We saw from early review documents that appropriate action had been taken when concerns had been raised about the quality of care provided by foster carers. This evidences that the service sets high standards for itself, is committed to quality assurance and constant improvement.

The management has a positive approach to gaining feedback from commissioners. The registered manager had met every three months with most of the local authorities who have commissioned placements. We saw reports compiled by the service so commissioners had information about how each of the children and young people in their placements were progressing, data gathered from the outcomes trackers and the details of incidents and notifiable events. The minutes of the meetings showed that discussions had taken place to identify who would take responsibility for certain tasks and what steps needed to be taken to sustain placements that were at risk of breakdown. These records showed that actions had been agreed to improve the outcomes for the children and young people. This shows that managers regularly monitor, review and track the progress of individual children and young people to assess the quality of the service and

experiences for them.

There are foster carer representatives who attend the national meetings at the organisation's head office. A representative said that these were a useful forum for raising views and discussing issues with representatives from other regions and senior management. They said that on the whole they feel that they can influence matters as the registered manager had been responsive when requests had been made, but at national level decisions can take longer to be reached. This shows that foster carers have opportunities to contribute to the development of the service.

Children and young people, foster carers and placing authorities can be assured that the agency staff are suitably recruited and vetted and their practice is monitored. They confirmed in the returned questionnaires that they have regular supervision from a line manager, annual appraisals and relevant training. A supervising social worker had undertaken training to deliver a therapeutic model of practice and another member of staff was studying to acquire a management qualification. Supervision records were thorough in their content and included discussions regarding the foster carers and the young people placed with them on each member of staff's caseload. This evidences that staff are well supported and trained and are given opportunities for professional development.

Care and Support

We found that young people, foster carers and placing authorities who use this service can be confident that the supervising social work staff are competent and skilled in their work and that placements are well supported. Children and young people are supported by skilled foster carers who provide stability in their lives and positively impact on their experience, progress and outcomes.

Foster carers know, understand and are able to meet the individual needs and abilities of children and young people. We found that foster carers experience a comprehensive assessment process and had attended 'Journey to Foster' pre-approval training. A foster carer described the post approval training as 'brilliant' and positive comments were made in the returned questionnaires. Newly assessed foster carers had attended panel meetings and panel members had interviewed the applicants and scrutinised the checks undertaken. Approved foster carers had attended a panel meeting when a concern or allegation had been raised or a change of approval had been proposed. We read the minutes of three previous panel meetings and it was clear that the panel is appropriately constituted and panel members had asked relevant questions of the foster carers and prospective foster carers. The service had undertaken reviews of the existing foster carers annually, but not at panel and the meetings had been chaired by an independent reviewing officer. We were told by the registered manager that this process had changed in January 2018 as the meetings were now chaired by a senior supervising social worker or the fostering service manager. For the reviews, the views of the foster carers, the young people placed with them, birth children and local authority social workers had been sought. The foster carers' supervising social workers complete a report on the foster carers' practice over the preceding year highlighting their strengths, any issues and the training they have attended. This shows that young people benefit from a service where foster carers are recruited, assessed and trained in a way that ensures children and young people receive the right care.

The service provides support to foster carers. On the whole, the foster carers and that we spoke with and who completed questionnaires said that they receive good support from their supervising social workers. They told us that foster carer support groups are held in three locations (Wrexham, Abergele and Anglesey) every month. The foster carers we spoke with said that this was a valuable mechanism for exchanging information and providing support for each other. The registered manager spoke with the foster carers at the end of the meeting to share information and to gain feedback and listen to views and requests. Additional 'super' support groups are every three months where the foster carers across all north Wales locations can meet together.

Additional support is available via a monthly therapy group in each of the three locations and a therapeutic phone surgery one day per week. Foster carers made very positive comments about this service, but some felt disappointed as one of the therapists had been made redundant and some foster carers who had good relationships with the therapist felt they had lost a valuable support to them.

There had been support provided to children, young people and their foster carers through a team of support workers who had taken the children and young people out on

trips if required to support carers or sustain a placement if this had been assessed as required. This was described by some foster carers as a valuable service but not always easy to access as an ongoing supportive measure. Foster carers did say the service was very responsive if needed in an emergency. The agency has an education liaison officer and we saw from placement review records that the officer had liaised with the local authorities regarding education issues, and information provided in the questionnaires returned by foster carers stated that the officer is available via telephone or at a monthly meeting. The service has an out of hours telephone facility which foster carers had said was accessible and helpful. This evidences that foster carers are well supported.

We found that young people were being placed with foster carers who were enthusiastic about and proud of their work with the young people in their care. They were motivated carers who want to make a positive difference in the lives of the children and young people in their care. We read children's and young people's files and the documentation provided for the foster carers' annual reviews, and spoke to foster carers who had children and young people placed with them. We saw that many placements were being sustained and many young people had been in placement for a number of years. Young people were being encouraged and supported to achieve their potential both in education and in their leisure time. Children and young people had made very positive comments about their foster carers in the reports for the carers' reviews that we read and also in the questionnaires that were returned. Reports completed by local authority social workers for foster carers' annual reviews made positive comments such as *'The foster carer is warm and friendly and has the child's best interests foremost'* and *'This is an excellent placement'* and *'A high level of care is provided'*. The local authority social workers that returned questionnaires also made very positive comments about the quality of the care provided by the foster carers. This provides evidence that the children and young people's individual needs are understood and receive the right care at the right time.

How we inspect and report on services

We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focused. Both consider the experience of people using services.

- **Baseline inspections** assess whether the registration of a service is justified and whether the conditions of registration are appropriate. For most services, we carry out these inspections every three years. Exceptions are registered child minders, out of school care, sessional care, crèches and open access provision, which are every four years.

At these inspections we check whether the service has a clear, effective Statement of Purpose and whether the service delivers on the commitments set out in its Statement of Purpose. In assessing whether registration is justified inspectors check that the service can demonstrate a history of compliance with regulations.

- **Focused inspections** consider the experience of people using services and we will look at compliance with regulations when poor outcomes for people using services are identified. We carry out these inspections in between baseline inspections. Focused inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focused inspections may be scheduled or carried out in response to concerns.

Inspectors use a variety of methods to gather information during inspections. These may include;

- Talking with people who use services and their representatives
- Talking to staff and the manager
- Looking at documentation
- Observation of staff interactions with people and of the environment
- Comments made within questionnaires returned from people who use services, staff and health and social care professionals

We inspect and report our findings under 'Quality Themes'. Those relevant to each type of service are referred to within our inspection reports.

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