

# Families For Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	27 November 2006

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

Families For Children is an independent fostering agency which is registered in West Sussex. The registered manager is experienced, well qualified and well equipped for the role. The service has seven centres from which the supervision of carers is undertaken. Each centre is managed by a qualified social worker with a team of social workers and support staff. A wide range of placements are provided, which include short term, long term, parent and child and disability short breaks.

### **Summary**

The announced key inspection looked at all key national minimum standards. Enjoying and Achieving has not been inspected. All individual outcomes are outstanding and overall this is an exceptionally good service. A strong senior management team ensures the agency is innovative and forward looking. Child protection and safeguarding are a real strength of the agency. The health needs and education of all children are prioritised. Children are actively encouraged to participate and their views are always taken into consideration. Carers undergo extremely stringent recruitment, assessment, approval and review processes. There are excellent training opportunities, supervision and support mechanisms. Carers enjoy fostering for the agency and value being treated as professionals. A thorough matching process ensures children are placed with carers who can meet their needs. Each child, carer and staff member is valued and treated individually. All carers and staff are committed to providing the best possible care for children. The agency has extremely closely controlled systems in place. Policies, procedures and practices are kept under review to ensure they are undertaken to a particularly high standard and are consistent across the service. This results in excellent outcomes for children and young people, with great satisfaction by carers and staff.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Recruitment checks and records are completed before staff come to work at the agency. This includes ensuring references from employers are on company headed paper and telephoned for verification. No more than three children are in a foster placement unless they are siblings, or unless an exemption has been obtained.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The service keeps comprehensive records showing pre placement health information that enables plans to be put into place and health needs met. All records are very comprehensive and maintained to a high standard, as well as being very well organised. There is a strong emphasis of promoting health across the company and with foster families. Health and health promotion are seen as a priority. Systems are in place to ensure children's health needs are monitored and reviewed very regularly; from carers supervision to placement reviews and annual health checks by looked after children nurses. The service has excellent links with other related health professionals such as Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, therapists and looked after children designated nurses employed by the local National Health Service trusts. Access to specialist health professionals is good with staff very well informed of the services

they can access. Training for both staff and foster carers around health issues and health promotion is excellent with a high percentage of carers completing training courses. The training on offer is vast and expectations for foster carers to access the training are high. The movement of children's files from placement to placement enables carers to have a real understanding of a child's ongoing health needs and promotes consistency in care. Information to carers about health and safety issues is of a very high standard. Access to the foster carer's handbook, which provides clear details about the importance of providing a safe and caring environment is easy; on line or in paper format. Annual reviews cover this area and are seen as a priority. All records around health and safety relating to children and foster carers are of a very high standard, very well maintained and up to date. The monitoring systems in use are very effective. Carers are required to notify the service of any significant events, such as illnesses and accidents of children placed with them. The standard of management across the centres is consistently high with centre managers very clear of their responsibilities relating to health provision. The social workers and support workers have in depth knowledge of each of the children their carers are looking after. The excellent relationships social workers and support workers have with foster carers and children is clear when speaking with foster carers. The high level of support given to foster carers ensures communication is of a high standard.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Families For Children is led by a competent and experienced management team who prioritise the safety of children and young people. All staff involved in the management of the service are professional, committed and appropriately qualified. The robust recruitment procedure is an important means of ensuring children are kept safe. Systems are in place to ensure the vital recruitment information and checks are in place before staff, carers and all other adults involved in the service are appointed. These checks are updated every three years. All staff are qualified and experienced to undertake their work. Managers, staff and carers are safe and suitable to work with children. The regular supervision and annual reviews of carers are mechanisms for safeguarding the children and young people in placement. The agency is consistent in accurately applying the child protection and safeguarding procedures. The procedures are understood by staff and carers, with training and regular updates being mandatory. All concerns or referrals are managed well and actions taken as necessary to implement learning across the agency. This ensures best practice in keeping children safe is prioritised. Foster carers are given appropriate support in the event of an allegation being made and membership of the Fostering Network is provided. The agency is commended for the way all child protection and safeguarding matters are handled and also of the swift reporting of notifications to external agencies. The notifications made to Ofsted are of an extremely high quality. Bullying is taken seriously and the policy and procedures are clear. The careful handling and monitoring of children being bullied and children who bully enables the agency to put appropriate safeguards in place. Any solutions to bullying are agreed in consultation with the child concerned. The behaviour management policy and procedures provide clear information to staff and carers which include techniques, acceptable sanctions and unacceptable methods of control. Some carers are trained in methods of physical intervention, but it is considered to be a last resort within the context of de-escalation and behaviour management techniques. Restraints are uncommon and only used to prevent a young person from harming themselves or other people, or causing significant damage to property. Care plans identify whether physical restraint might ever be appropriate in managing behaviour and what methods of physical restraint can be used. Carers are fully informed about the children who are placed with them to enable them to provide safe care. All fostering households have

their own safe care policies which are subject to ongoing review and are tailored to meet the needs of each child or young person in placement. Matching processes are very good. A designated placements team very carefully researches the skills and experiences of foster carers before a placement is considered. Referrals are turned down if a suitable placement cannot be found, even though the agency may have households with vacancies. Children are placed with carers who have been thoroughly assessed as being able to meet the child's needs, including cultural, ethnic, and religious identity needs. The fostering panel is efficient and effective, with excellent management. The diverse membership encompasses a broad range of skills and experiences amongst the independent members, who have been through the same robust recruitment process as other staff. Clear panel procedures are followed accurately. Members receive annual training on relevant and up to date matters. Panel members are well prepared, having received the necessary reports well in advance of the meetings. Fostering assessments, annual reviews and minutes of panel meetings are of excellent quality. The records demonstrate the panel provides a clear quality assurance role. Appropriate questions are asked to prospective carers, carers and assessors. Carers and applicants are invited to ask questions and make any comments. At the June panel, a carer attending the first annual review was praised for working extremely well with a young person. The carer was asked if the agency could provide anything more, and the carer replied, 'No, everyone is doing plenty and there is no more possible. Staff are very respectful, they listen and also to the young person...'. An annual report is produced by the panel chair to provide an overview of the work undertaken, for example training attended, the range of carers and placements made. A guide to the panel is given to prospective carers, to provide essential information about the process and includes panel members profiles. Carers confirm the guide helps to put them at ease about attending panel. Feedback is expected following attendance at panel by assessors, carers and panel members. At the end of each panel a short feedback meeting is held amongst panel members to reflect on the session. Carers are assessed very well and careful matching, training and supervision ensures appropriate placements are made and maintained. Unannounced visits are carried out at least once a year and records of these visits are clearly marked in the case records, as well as being monitored on a database. All children are placed with carers who have been thoroughly assessed as being able to keep children safe for the duration of the planned placement. Carers are fully informed about children who are placed with them to enable them to provide safe care; including full information about health, behaviour and family background.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Issues of diversity are carried through from the assessment, approval and review of carers, to the training and supervision of them. Diversity is considered with children when making placements and in supporting placements. Good training is provided on diversity. Excellent individual support is provided to children and carers. Equality and diversity is embedded into Families For Children. The commitment the agency has shown over the last few inspections in ensuring all individual aspects of children's lives are met, continues to be strong. Anti discriminatory practice is evident throughout the agency. Policies and documents relating to equality, trans-racial and trans-cultural placements provide written support and show the commitment the agency has in ensuring each child's placement is appropriate to their individual needs. Guidance packs are available on working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The agency has evidenced many success stories for these children. Families for Children is proactive in identifying, matching and meeting the needs of children from different backgrounds as well as those with special needs. Any special needs are taken into account during the matching

process with on going support given to carers. The needs of children are taken into account at company events, for example ensuring appropriate access for disabled children and providing vegetarian, Kosher and Halal foods. Numerous and excellent examples of valuing diversity were seen and heard during the inspection. The company will go that extra mile to ensure children receive the level of care they have the right to receive. Work with asylum seeking children, parent and child placements and respite for disabled children, as well as developing a 16 plus scheme, show the company is responding to the needs of the local councils and to ever changing legislation. Support is given to children to ensure they receive appropriate education and language development skills to enable them to enter mainstream education. Education provision is a real strength. The Southways School, which is registered with Ofsted, and gained a good rating at the last education focused inspection, is an alternative to mainstream education. The registered school's staff and workers in individual centres have excellent relationships with the children. They are very focused in achieving the best educational placement for each child. Support on offer for children excluded temporarily or other wise is excellent. The agency is proactive in ensuring that full time education is resumed at the earliest opportunity. There are excellent monitoring procedures for school attendance levels. Personal Education Plans are in place that are up to date. Excellent in house magazines entitled "The Bizz and The Buzz" are ways in which children's achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. The service has developed a project in conjunction with the neighbouring local authorities to provide short break foster care for children with disabilities. Clear policies and procedures are in place which are implemented in practice to meet the complex needs of these children. Specialised training is provided for carers who look after such children on short breaks.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Contact is promoted and actively supported, if recorded in children's care plans. Carers are kept informed of their responsibilities regarding contact. Trained support workers can supervise contact if necessary. Contact can be held at the agency's centres in designated comfortable and child-friendly rooms. All recordings relating to contact are clear and detailed. Foster carers are fully engaged in decisions about children placed with them and are treated by the agency as professionals. Systems are in place for carers to make suggestions and to participate in discussions and decision making about the service. Wherever possible, the service works in partnership with parents. With short breaks, the agency ensures that it compliments the roles and responsibilities of parents. Children and parents' needs are met and parents feel fully informed and listened to. Short break placements proceed gradually and only where the child is happy and their needs are met. The service demonstrates that systems for children's participation in discussions and decision-making about their futures are embedded into service policy and planning. The service has developed some imaginative methods of ensuring children's participation and new methods are being put into place. The participation project involves children and young people in decision making and policy making. The group will also be involved in the recruitment of staff and as preparation, they have recently met with personnel staff. The agency is to be commended on taking a proactive approach in developing ways to involve children in the running of the service. The importance of consulting with children runs through the work of the agency. Children can attend tailor made training, for example on first aid and attachment. Some children have requested and enjoy supervision meetings with their carer's social workers. Children are consulted as preparation for their own statutory reviews and carers' annual reviews with relevant, age appropriate and child friendly feedback forms. Children are always encouraged to attend their statutory reviews. Relevant policies and procedures emphasise

consulting with foster children. For example, the "Adults who Stay with Foster Carers" policy and procedure states, '... social workers should always seek the opinions of any foster child when such proposals are under discussion and give due weight to their views'. A group of children enjoyed a trip to London as part of the Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) consultation day. A return visit by a CWDC representative to the agency, involved consulting with the children about the skills and qualities they thought social workers should have. There is a children's guide issued to all children at the time of placement (Infomag), which gives information on how to access the agency children's advisor as well as independent advocates. A senior member of staff is the children's advisor, who is contactable by children on a dedicated telephone number. An effective representation system for children is in place to ensure children are listened to, with action taken to address any problems. Clear and age appropriate written guidance for children and young people assists with this.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is not judged.

#### **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose is accurate and clearly sets out the agency's core values, which are evident throughout service delivery and in day to day practice. A basic children's guide is produced in a number of different languages in a child friendly format. The agency is working on producing a guide for children with complex needs. Practice is up to date and influenced by current legislation and policy. The management team adopts a solid leadership style. All managers are available and approachable by children, staff and carers. Managers ensure that working practices, processes and systems are comprehensive and support good practice. There is a clear system in place to cover managers' absences. Staff are confident that they know who to contact in specific situations. The service has robust policies in place to support all aspects of the employment of staff and carers. Staff have manageable caseloads and they possess the skills needed to fulfil their roles. The organisation and management of staff is carried out extremely well. All staff are enthusiastic about their roles and of maintaining the high standards of the agency. A new database is effective, efficient and valued by staff. All staff confirm they are provided with the resources and time they need to complete their work to a good standard. First-rate policies and procedures are held, which are regularly reviewed. All files are securely held and contain the required information. Records are in an excellent format, clear and comprehensive. There are accurate, up to date and clear individual records for children which contain all significant information required by regulations. Foster carers receive excellent supervision, support and training. All foster carers benefit from being supervised by qualified social workers. The handbook is produced in paper format and is also accessible online by using a secure password. Foster carers value the support provided and think the training is very good. Career progression for foster carers and staff is encouraged. Comprehensive training programmes are in place for foster carers, social workers, management, administrators and support staff. Families For Children is commended on meeting the training needs of all staff and carers. There is strong management commitment to the continuous development of staff and carers. This is evident through policies, records of meetings and supervision. The agency has embraced the CWDC fostering standards and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training. Foster carers are able to study for an agency qualification in fostering which is accredited by the Open College Network. The training team also runs a variety of short training courses, which tend to be held in a central place. With the wide geographic spread of carers, some training sessions are held

in other locations. The impact of training on service quality is regularly evaluated. Families For Children is innovative and does not stand still; it strives for excellence. Systems are in place to constantly review the effectiveness of the agency. Placing authorities, staff, carers and children receive an outstanding service. Importantly, the agency is committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people. National minimum standard 32, although a key standard, does not apply to this agency and has therefore not been assessed.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Statutory requirements**

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Due date</b>
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### **Recommendations**

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for independent fostering agency

#### Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes the health and development of children (NMS 12)

**Ofsted considers 12 the key standard to be inspected.**

#### Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable (NMS 3)
- the fostering service provides suitable foster carers (NMS 6)
- the service matches children to carers appropriately (NMS 8)
- the fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect (NMS 9)
- the people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people (NMS 15)
- fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively (NMS 30)

**Ofsted considers 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service values diversity (NMS 7)
- the fostering service promotes educational achievement (NMS 13)
- when foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child (NMS 31)

**Ofsted considers 7, 13 and 31 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person (NMS 10)
- the fostering service promotes consultation (NMS 11)

**Ofsted considers 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the fostering service prepares young people for adulthood (NMS 14)
- the fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified (NMS 29)

**Ofsted considers none of the above to be key standards to be inspected.**

#### Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- there is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives (NMS 1)
- the fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience (NMS 2)
- the fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified (NMS 4)

**Annex A**

- the fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently (NMS 5)
- staff are organised and managed effectively (NMS 16)
- the fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff (NMS 17)
- the fostering service is a fair and competent employer (NMS 18)
- there is a good quality training programme (NMS 19)
- all staff are properly accountable and supported (NMS 20)
- the fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers (NMS 21)
- foster carers are provided with supervision and support (NMS 22)
- foster carers are appropriately trained (NMS 23)
- case records for children are comprehensive (NMS 24)
- the administrative records are maintained as required (NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose (NMS 26)
- the fostering service is financially viable (NMS 27)
- the fostering service has robust financial processes (NMS 28)
- local authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers (NMS 32)

**Ofsted considers 1, 16, 17, 21, 24, 25 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**