Inspection Report on

1st Affinity Fostering Agency’s

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Description of the agency

1st Affinity Fostering Agency Limited is registered with the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) as a fostering agency. It is a small agency registered to provide a general fostering for children and young people aged 0-18 years of age. The registered manager is Colin Tucker with the responsible individual being Adrian Lindesay.

Summary of our findings

1. Overall assessment

The fostering agency negotiates and maintains highly successful and stable foster care placements. Unplanned endings are extremely rare and children and young people are safe and have a strong sense of belonging. They thrive in secure placements and share strong attachments with their foster carers. The recruitment and preparation of foster carers is robust and thorough. The fostering agency approves skilled, experienced foster carers who are able to offer quality placements that meet the diverse needs of looked after children.

Foster carers work in close collaboration with other professionals and make valid contributions to planning and decision-making for children and young people. They benefit from professional, supportive and challenging relationships with the fostering agency and local authority social workers. Staff work effectively with external partners to ensure the agency meet the needs of children and young people and that they receive safe care.

2. Improvements

The breaches in regulations identified at the previous inspection had been successfully addressed. The good practice recommendations had also been accomplished.

3. Requirements and recommendations

There were no breaches of the Regulations identified at this inspection. We made one recommendation that related to the leadership and management of the agency and can be found at the back of this report.
1. Well-being

Summary

Children and young people have all of the information required to be informed about the agency. They have stable relationships with their carers and make good progress in their development. Their wellbeing, health and safety is considered and protected.

Our findings

Children and young people receive information about their prospective foster carers prior to moving into the placement. We read that the agency provided easy-read, age-appropriate information about the service they delivered. This was supplemented by individual foster carer profiles, so children and young people had a sense of the family they were about to join. As a result, this helps settle children into their foster home and understand how their foster carers will look after them.

Generally, children and young people feel safe and secure and develop strong, healthy attachments with their foster caring. One young person wrote on the questionnaire that they loved their foster family and knew they were loved back and this had resulted in the placement being secure with few or no incidents. The staff of the fostering agency were skilled in supporting and nurturing stable, long-term placements and had an excellent record of providing children and young people with successful permanent placements. This included supporting three foster carers with Special Guardianship Orders and this demonstrated that they were child focussed in ensuring that children’s outcomes and needs came first rather than the agency’s importance. Placing authorities were appreciative of this and one social worker stated in their feedback to the agency that carers could not have welcomed the child into the family any more than if they were a blood relation. Staff ensure that children and young people are provided with safe and stable placements and their overall goals in life in terms of having a family are prioritised.

Children and young people make very good progress from their starting points. They experienced a wide range of opportunities to support and help them maximise their achievements and goals and promote their general development and understanding. For example, a child had expressed an interest at the beginning of their placement with the agency that they wished to have the experience of attending a premier league football match. We read within records that not only had this transpired once, the young person had had the opportunity to attend a few times. We also read that young person had been supported and encouraged to undertake swimming as they had expressed an interest in the activity. This was a clear strength of the agency and members of staff had excellent knowledge and insight of individual children and young people and their progress. Where progress had been slow, staff and foster carers were proactive in taking remedial action and this was particularly evident in relation to children and young people’s health and education. For example, we read and were told by members of staff that at the beginning of one of the young people’s placement, their education attendance had been low. Once they had settled into life with their new foster carers and having been supported and encouraged by staff in attending education, the young person’s attendance had improved over time. Children and young people’s progress in terms of their behaviours were recorded to evidence and show them how they had developed over time. An overview of
the statistics of information was also available within the annual quality of care report. Children and young people have a clear audit trail of how their behaviours had changed with the level of support and understanding of their situation by carer and staff.

Children and young people’s educational and learning outcomes are positive. The fostering agency’s education lead ensured children and young people’s educational needs were met fully. We read from records and were told by staff that the agency’s education lead attended education meetings for the young people to ensure that they were apprised of each young person’s on-going educational needs. When young people were not receiving education at the start of their placements, the education lead was proactive in liaising with the local authorities and schools to ensure that the appropriate steps were being taken to secure education for them. This meant that the staff member actively encouraged children and young people to attend education and during the inspection we ascertained that all children and young people who were placed with the agency were in education placements. Children can be assured that their right to an education is respected and promoted as high priority.
2. Care and Support

Summary

Children and young people are cared for by carers who want to make a positive difference to their lives. The support and guidance provided to carers by staff at the agency in turn filters to the children and young people to support them in altering their behaviours for the better.

Our findings

The quality of care provided by foster carers is effective. Staff and foster carers were genuinely committed to supporting children and young people to reach their full potential. We read within a supporting social workers file and cross referenced the information within a young person’s file and both confirmed that the worker had supported the foster carer and young person through a difficult time. The evidence showed that the supporting social worker provided telephone and 1:1 meetings that were in addition to the foster carer’s 1:1 monthly visits. As a result of this level of support provided to the foster carer, the placement continued to be an effective one for both the young person and the foster carer. A social worker commented in their feedback to the agency that they were very impressed with the amount of support that children and young people received along with the level of emotional support foster carers received. As a result, children and young people feel secure and there are changes in how they present and behave.

The fostering agency recruits a range of foster carers, in line with their statement of purpose, who can meet the very diverse needs of children and young people. The fostering agency had clear and successful marketing strategies in place to attract potential foster carers, however relied mostly on word of mouth and this appeared to be very successful. Prospective foster carers received various information about the fostering role and were also visited by staff to help them understand matters further and provide them the opportunity to ask questions about the agency and role. They were also provided with information on the training they would receive to prepare them for their fostering role and what training was available if successful being approved as foster carers. Feedback from foster carers was overwhelmingly positive about their experiences and they enjoyed participating in group discussions and meetings. A Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) foster carer’s feedback form praised the staff and stated the following; ‘They were brilliant and extremely clear and communicative about the support they could offer’ and another foster carer commented that they were ‘treated with warmth and welcomed to ask questions throughout and very supportive’. Foster carers, staff, managers commented on the fostering agency functioning more as a family, where people cared about each other and share openly concerns, issues and success. Foster carers received a range of training that supported them to care safely for vulnerable children and young people. Managers' continual monitoring and evaluation of this training ensured its effectiveness. Training subject matter was diverse and relevant to the fostering task. In recent months, training had included issues such as life story work, child sexual exploitation, safe caring and autism awareness. Foster carers told us that they valued the training provided as it reflected the issues and problems that faced them in caring for children and young people and that the quality of the training was effective. Foster carers’ support, supervision and training were effective and took place regularly, and provided them a further opportunity to discuss any concerns or training required to enhance their knowledge. This ensured that children and young people received a quality standard of safe care that meets their needs. We
ascertained that supervising social workers visited placements on a fortnightly basis and as and when required depending on the complexity of the children and young people’s behaviours and the level of support foster carers required. Staff reduced the frequency of visits, only once the placement was stable and there were no concerns. Members of staff ensured they frequently talked to children and young people in private so they had the opportunity to discuss any placement issues or any other matter. Staff records of supervisory visits were comprehensive and consistently explored the experiences, progress and protection of young people, placement issues and the impact of fostering on the foster family. This demonstrates that children and young people benefit from having effective and caring people around them to enhance their life opportunities.
3. Leadership and Management

Summary

Leadership and management of the agency is effective, there is an efficient monitoring system of the agency and thus good insight into the direction the agency is developing and moving towards in the near future.

Our findings

The leadership and management of the fostering agency is effective. Leaders and managers were highly visible within the agency. This allowed them good opportunity to meet with all stakeholders, including children, young people, foster carers and their families to listen to their ideas first-hand about the effectiveness of the agency. Managers welcomed and encouraged feedback and they routinely acted on suggestions to further enhance the agency. For example, they had addressed all of the breaches in regulation and achieved the good practice recommendations made at the previous inspection. Also, we recommended within our feedback that the agency made clear their position regarding the Welsh language, and children and young people’s booklets and the agency’s statement of purpose was available in Welsh; and they agreed to address this in good time. The manager and responsible individual confirmed that they would ensure that this would be completed and the documentations sent to CIW upon completion.

The agency’s monitoring systems are effective and benefit the outcomes for children and young people. The agency’s monitoring systems were effective and were linked to the outcomes for children and young people. The agency had conducted a quality of care review report, which was a comprehensive document that referred to the outcomes framework for children and young people. Feedback had been sought from children and young people, foster carers and placing authorities about the quality of the provision they had received. The manager had analysed the feedback and other data so that the agency’s strengths had been recognized, but also the areas for improvement and development had been identified. The manager had reviewed the policies and procedures since the previous inspection to ensure they reflected current legislation and were fit for purpose. Other areas of the agency subject to regular monitoring included file auditing, review of foster carer and staff training, safeguarding procedures and practices including children and young people absenting, complaints, training and allegations. The agency’s monitoring systems ensured all those involved in the agency were aware of the strengths and areas identified for action to further improve the service. The agency invites stakeholders, particularly children and young people to contribute to help support any identified areas for improvement and this demonstrates transparency.

Leaders are skilled and experienced to manage the fostering agency efficiently and with positive effect. Foster carers overwhelmingly identified leaders’ strong skill, compassion and advocacy for looked after children as being exceptional. A foster carer told us that ‘the reason I am here with this agency, is because of Colin, I am absolutely confident that he is 100% committed to ensuring children’s needs and outcomes are met’. The fostering agency staff team and foster carers ensured the safety and well-being of children and young people was paramount. The recruitment, assessment, preparation, supervision and training of foster carers had strong focus on safeguarding. The fostering agency’s protection of children and young people was robust at all levels and was contributing to keeping children
and young people safe. The agency had appropriately referred and shared information / concerns / disclosures to the relevant authorities when they were made aware of these and provided CIW with notification with the actions taken to ensure each child and young person continued to be safe. This is another clear strength of the agency.

Children and young people benefit from the agency’s clear and comprehensive safeguarding and child protection policies. Managers review policies regularly to ensure their continued effectiveness. The registered manager was the ‘safeguarding ambassador’ for the agency. This was to ensure there were effective and consistent protocols and systems in place for the protection of children and young people. Currently, the manager is responsible for the promotion of child protection within the agency; to share and cascade pertinent research and trends and to monitor and report on all safeguarding issues within the agency. Foster carers received written guidance and training to assist them to keep children safe from harm and abuse. Recently leaders, staff and foster carers had shifted the focus of safeguarding to explore current concerning trends such as missing from care and child sexual exploitation matters. Where these concerns had been evident, staff and foster carers took prompt and effective action to enhance children and young people’s safety. The fostering agency was proactive in ensuring there was effective partnership working with regard to child protection enquiries. We read there was purposeful and consistent liaison with involved professionals such as the designated officer, placing authority and the police. Allegations against foster carers were infrequent. When these occurred, members of staff managed these appropriately and with sensitivity. Foster carers, subject to allegations, similarly received appropriate support both internal and external to the fostering agency. Children and young people can be confident that the agency promotes, respects and encourages their human rights.

Prospective foster carers’ assessments are well focused, analytical and completed in a timely manner. This meant that potential foster carers were not lost through deficits in the processes and the skills and strengths of carers were clearly drawn on a diverse range of carers were approved and being approved. This meant that children and young people were well matched with their carers and had genuine potential to make sustained good progress and lasting relationships with them. The manager, responsible individual were a visible and good leadership team. They worked collaboratively and reflectively together to ensure that they maintained a sensitive, child-centred ethos in all work they undertook and carers were very confident in them. Their approach to growing and diversifying the agency was cautious, thorough and effective and all involved were aware of this. All breaches of regulations and good practice recommendations made at the previous inspection had been addressed which demonstrated the agency had developed and improved over a short period of time and were committed to providing good outcomes for children and young people. The fostering agency had recruited carers who meet the diverse cultural, behavioural and emotional needs of children and young people. We found that the agency provided clear initial information to potential carers about the complexity of the fostering task and that staff committed significant amounts of time talking and meeting with potential carers about the skills needed for fostering. For example, we read the minutes of the panel meetings and ascertained that the panel had scrutinised the applications and asked appropriate questions regarding potential foster carers. This ensures that good-quality carers are going through assessment and approved the approval process is thorough.
4. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection

4.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspections

The non compliance from the previous inspection had been addressed.

4.2 Recommendations for improvement

We recommended the following to further improve the agency.

To include details of the agency’s position regarding the Welsh Governments ‘Active Offer’ of the Welsh language in all documentation including the statement of purpose, young people’s guide.
5. How we undertook this inspection

This was a planned, announced inspection and all three quality areas were considered. The inspection was carried out by 2 inspectors and took place on Monday 5th and Tuesday 6th March 2018 between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm.

The following sources of information / evidence were used to formulate this report:

- We spoke with the registered manager.
- We spoke with the responsible individual.
- We spoke with two social workers for the agency.
- We examined 10 children and young people’s files.
- We examined 10 foster carer files.
- We read two foster carers’ Form F assessments.
- We read the records of the last two 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 supporting foster carers records, supervision records and staff team meeting minutes.

We issued questionnaires to the following;

- 10 foster carer households, 10 were returned.
- 10 children and young people, five were returned.
- 10 placing local authority social workers, none were returned.
- 10 panel members and five were returned.
- 10 staff members, five were returned.

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

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<tr>
<th>Type of care provided</th>
<th>Independent Fostering Agency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered Person</td>
<td>1st Affinity Fostering Agency Ltd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registered Manager(s)</td>
<td>Colin Tucker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of previous CSSIW inspection</td>
<td>09/02/2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dates of this Inspection visit(s)</td>
<td>05/03/2018</td>
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<td>Operating Language of the agency</td>
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<td>Does this agency provide the Welsh Language active offer?</td>
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<td>Additional Information:</td>
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