



Inspection Report on

Action for Children Fostering Wales

**Action For Children
The Stable Block
Beechwood Park
Newport
NP19 8AJ**

Date Inspection Completed

26/07/2023

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About Action for Children Fostering Wales

Type of care provided	Fostering Service
Registered Provider	Action for Children and Action for Children Services Ltd
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	27/03/2018: Fostering 31/01/2018: Short Breaks
Does this service promote Welsh language and culture?	This service is providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language. It anticipates, identifies, and meets the Welsh language and cultural needs of people who use, or may use the service

Summary

Action for Children Fostering Wales has two parts to the service which were previously registered separately with CIW, at the time of the last inspection. Fostering Wales find full time care with safe, and loving families for children who are looked after. Neath, Port Talbot and Swansea Community Short Breaks provide overnight care with short breaks carers, for children with a disability. At the time of inspection, there were 60 children receiving support from the service, 42 full time foster carers and 10 short breaks foster carers.

Children are supported by a caring and dedicated team, which includes foster carers, who support them to achieve positive well-being. Children are provided information about the service and are consulted regularly, to ensure their views, wishes and feelings are heard. Foster carers told us, they feel supported in their role. The service organises a range of activities, support groups and training for foster carers and children to engage in. The service offers innovative attachment clinics for all looked after children, which supports foster carers and the network around the child to better understand their support needs and how best these can be met.

There is effective management oversight of the service, which supports its smooth operation. A very strong consistent management team, drive forward improvements within the service and social care sector. Foster carers are supported by highly trained and experienced staff who provide regular supervision and annually review their approval. There has been a recent change to the Responsible Individual at the service; they are proactive and have already identified areas within the service which require further development. Some children's records are not available or up to date. This is an area for improvement.

Well-being

Children are provided information about the service and their rights and entitlements, in a variety of formats to suit their age and level of understanding. A written guide provides information on the care and support they will receive, how their voices are heard and how to raise a complaint. Children's views, wishes and feelings are captured in daily interactions with their foster carers. Supervising social workers also engage children during home visits and as part of carers annual reviews. Children are regularly asked for feedback on the care they receive and if there is anything they may want to do or change for the future. These views are taken seriously and inform the development of the service they receive. Children are supported to attend their Local Authority reviews of their care and their foster carers and supervising social workers advocate on their behalf. Children are treated with dignity and respect. The service is proactive in taking steps to understand children's individual needs and tailor support to promote positive well-being. The service provides an active offer of the Welsh Language and promotes equal opportunities. Children are supported to be healthy. They are registered with health services and when needs arise, are supported to attend more specialist services. Foster carers are trained to meet the individual health needs of children they care for. With their foster carers and families, children get to do things that promote a healthy lifestyle and make them happy. This includes individual hobbies, trying new activities and family holidays. Children, foster carers and their families are offered a range of activities which are arranged by the service. Activities arranged in the past year have included, zip world, go karting, paddle boarding, archery, trampolining, ice skating, ninja warrior, pantomime, Noah's ark farm, art clubs and summer picnics. The service also arranges a number of residential trips for children throughout the year. On the week of the inspection, children who access short breaks, were attending a residential trip to Llangranog and a group of children were looking forward to a residential trip to Gilwern the following week.

The service is proactive in ensuring children are protected from abuse and neglect. Foster carers and staff are trained in safeguarding and understand their responsibilities. When concerns arise, these are referred on promptly, shared with the services central safeguarding team, and the service works collaboratively, to share information and safeguard children.

Children's education is promoted, and they are supported to reach their full potential. The agency works closely with schools, to help them understand children's needs and support reintroduction or stability in their education. Children benefit from additional support to meet their goals, including extra tuition and attendance at summer clubs. Children are developing independence skills in line with their age and stage of development. The service facilitates a young person's skill group which is run by the young person's transitions worker, with an aim to increase resilience and independence skills.

Care and Support

The service provider considers a wide range of views and information to determine which foster carers and families can best meet the needs of children. Supervising social workers spend a lot of time assessing, getting to know, and supporting foster carers, which provides extensive knowledge which helps them with this task. Parents and foster carers have provided positive feedback regarding the role of the service in supporting positive matches and preparation for caring for children. Parents told us detailed information is gathered about their child's needs and a 'about me book' is shared with short break foster carers. Pre placements meetings, which can include families and social workers, share key information. Foster carers receive training to support them to meet any specific needs, prior to starting to care for children. Transitions are planned and reviewed throughout to ensure they meet children's needs. Matching documents are completed which consider children's needs and the match with foster carers skills. Assessments of the compatibility of children living together, impact on foster carers and evidence of the services admissions policy being followed, require strengthening. Childrens records were not all available or up to date. This includes copies of their care and support plans, and minutes of reviews. This is an area for improvement, and we expect the service provider to address this.

Children who access short breaks, are matched with foster carers who can commit to offering them overnight stays in the long term. Foster carers develop positive relationships with families and parents told us they play an important role in providing stability for their children whilst supporting them to achieve positive outcomes. Parents told us 'Its excellent, we can always relax, knowing they're in safe hands and it has made such a difference to our lives, my child loves their stays'; and 'my child's carers know him well, knows how to motivate him to develop his independence skills'. Foster carers attend regular short breaks reviews, alongside parents and other key professionals to review children's outcomes.

The services attachment clinics are offered to all children who are looked after, who live with foster carers full time, and are highly effective in supporting children's stability at home and in school. These are offered within six weeks of children moving to foster families, routinely and when needs arise. Foster carers and key professionals including social workers and teachers are included, to share information and consider the impact of children's history on their attachment and presentation. Plans are agreed around how best the child's network can respond to support them to feel safe. Consideration is given to any additional therapeutic services children may need. Support provided, strengthens, and prevents breakdowns in relationships. We saw examples of children's poems and raps which they have completed during direct work. These reflect, children feeling a sense of belonging, feeling safe, feeling supported to understand their past and now understanding they are not to blame. Supervising social workers told us the service shows a 'commitment to providing bespoke and tailored support to children in their care'; and 'the additional support provided strengthens relationships' and ensures carers are 'equipped' to meet children's needs.

Childrens personal wishes and aspirations are recorded and discussed during support visits. Risk assessments and safer care plans are personalised and support foster carers to

provide safe and consistent standards of care and support. Childrens outcomes are recorded in 'outcome monitoring forms' which have been introduced in the past eighteen months and detail their goals and the actions foster carers and the service can take to meet these goals. The service is considering how they can further embed these into other processes, to improve monitoring of children's outcomes.

The ethos of the fostering service is to recruit life-long foster families for children. There are a number of children who have remained with their foster families, after the age of eighteen in 'When I'm Ready' arrangements, stay with their foster families, when they return from university and who have continued relationships, after they reach adulthood.

Environment

Action for Children fostering Wales operates from three offices. The main office is in Newport, South Wales. There is satellite office in Mold, North Wales and the short breaks part of the service is in Neath, South Wales. As part of the inspection, we inspected the main office in Newport. The office premises is suitable, fit for purpose and supports children to achieve positive well-being. The office is large and provides good space for delivering training and meetings. A 'cwtch' room is available for carers and children to use and is warmly decorated. There is a large room used as an 'art space' which overlooks the city below. This space is used to host a number of events throughout the year, including a summer picnic, which took place during the inspection. Children's artwork is proudly on display. There is suitable space within the premises to provide privacy for the supervision of staff. Records are stored securely, including password protected electronic records, in line with legislation. Health and safety checks are routinely carried out to ensure the premises remain safe to children, foster carers and staff to use.

Foster carers' homes are assessed when they are recruited to determine their suitability in meeting children's needs. Supervising social workers visit homes routinely during announced and unannounced visits, which provide opportunity to assess the home environment. Standards of health and safety in foster carers' homes are considered as part of the formal annual review process, together with pet assessments to assess safety. Actions to mitigate risks are agreed, recorded and reviewed as required. Children who live with foster carers full time personalise their bedrooms to their tastes which provides them a sense of belonging. Children who access short breaks have items and belongings which are important to them, during their stays.

Leadership and Management

There are safe recruitment checks for foster carers and staff working at the service. They are both, passionate about supporting children to reach their goals. Staff working at the service include service managers, team managers, supervising social workers, a young person's transition worker, therapeutic lead practitioner and a recently created consultant social worker. The service recruits, assesses and trains foster carers to ensure they are skilled to meet children's needs and are willing to provide a long-term commitment to children. Prospective foster carers receive clear information and training to prepare them for their fostering role. Carers find the assessment process thorough and a number have transferred from other agencies, and told us, they were impressed by the levels of support provided. Fostering panel records evidence good scrutiny and decision-making for foster carers approval, changes of approval, and when concerns are raised regarding standards of care and support provided to children.

Foster carers feel supported within their role. Carers receive training online and face to face. There is an extensive annual training calendar which includes safeguarding, caring for traumatised children, managing contact, crisis management, conflict management, team teach, dyadic developmental psychotherapy and mental health. Short breaks carers receive bespoke training based on individual children's health needs. Foster carers told us the training on offer, more than meets their needs. Foster carers views are gathered, on the training they receive. The quality of foster carers reflection on how training has helped them in their role is not consistent in records. Carers benefit from the services out of office hours support and support groups. All carers are consulted and have input into their annual review of approval which includes self-reflection on how they have met the fostering competencies.

Staff working at the service, feel supported by their managers, through regular team discussions and supervision. Staff review their carers and meet fortnightly in 'team briefings' to discuss the current needs of children and foster families who require additional support. All staff know the children, foster carers and their families. Foster carers told us they find this reassuring and know, when they call the office, they will speak with someone, who knows their situation.

There is very strong leadership and management at the service. The staff team is supported through a clear line management structure and by the organisation at a local and national level. The responsible individual (RI) has been in post for three months and we received positive feedback, they are 'responsive'. The RI is getting to know the service including carers and engaging in discussions regarding future development. Team managers and senior managers within the service have been in post for a number of years and understand the service well and the needs of children they support. This knowledge is shared to promote positive changes within children's social care.

There are effective governance arrangements in place, which support the smooth operation of the service. Managers have good oversight of support being provided to children and foster carers, ensuring supervisions and annual reviews happen regularly and reviewing the quality. In some areas of the service, other managers from the organisation complete audits, which provide an additional layer of oversight.

There are effective quality assurance processes in place to review the standards of care and support provided to children and foster families. These include consultation with staff, foster carers and children to inform the development of the service. Foster carers told us they feel able to raise any concerns and feel their input is valued. Quality of care reviews identify strengths and areas requiring additional development. During their visits, the RI has identified areas of the service which would benefit from further strengthening. Detailed actions are recorded within RI visits and reviewed in quality-of-care reports.

Summary of Non-Compliance

Status	What each means
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people’s well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

Priority Action Notice(s)

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection. Where the provider has failed to make the necessary improvements we will escalate the matter by issuing a Priority Action Notice.

Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
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39	The service provider has not ensured they have up to date copies of children's care and support plans, minutes of their children looked after reviews and 'matching records' do not fully evidence the commencement of service policy is being followed.	New
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