



Inspection Report on

1st Affinity Fostering Service

**First Affinity Fostering Service
4a Chester Road
Wrexham
LL12 8TN**

Mae'r adroddiad hwn hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

This report is also available in Welsh

Date Inspection Completed

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About 1st Affinity Fostering Service

Type of care provided	Fostering Service
Registered Provider	1st Affinity Fostering Service Limited
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	30 April 2018
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	This service is working towards providing an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language and demonstrates a significant effort to promoting the use of the Welsh language and culture.

Summary

1st Affinity independent fostering agency is registered to provide a fostering service for children between 0-18 years of age. 1st Affinity offer long term placements, bridging, emergency, parent and child and short-term breaks placements. There is a Responsible Individual and a manager who is registered with Social Care Wales.

The fostering agency provides a highly effective service which consistently supports children to have significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences. Children have developed good relationships with foster carers and are encouraged to eat a healthy balanced diet, be physically active and develop independence skills. Children are encouraged and supported to participate in primary, secondary, and further education. Foster carers advocate on behalf of children to ensure their health and safeguarding needs are maintained.

The fostering agency work well with local authorities to enable a smooth transition for children to live with foster families. The matching of children and foster carers is effective. There are separate children's groups and foster carer groups which support everyone to have their voice heard. The management team, together with supervising social workers and foster carers have developed a highly effective service.

Well-being

Children are supported by foster carers and supervising social workers to ensure their views are heard and respected. Foster carers and supervising social workers consistently obtain children's views and respond to their wishes and feelings. Children are supported by foster carers and supervising social workers to attend their Child Looked After (CLA) reviews and are consulted as part of the formal annual review process of foster carers. Children provide meaningful and honest feedback to the fostering panel for carers reviews and the agency is shaped by children's voices. The agency is proactive in ensuring the voices of children are heard and applied in the development of the service to ensure it is targeting support and services to the specific wishes, feelings and needs of children they provide care and support for. Information about the service is available for children in a variety of formats to suit their age and level of understanding. There is information about how to make a complaint or who to talk to if they have any worries.

A strength of the agency is the management team's ability to support foster carers to build trusting and caring relationships with children. Children noted in records of discussion carried out with supervising social workers they feel safe and happy. A child stated within a record of discussion the following: *'I can speak to my carers about any feelings I have whether it be home life, school or anything else on my mind.'* Additional records of discussion with children noted they are safe and secure, and they really enjoy living with their foster family and feel included in their foster families lives. Foster carers told us the support they and children receive is helpful and *'Above and beyond what is required ... and ... management are always available.'* They further commented that should a supervising social worker not be available; the Responsible Individual and management team are always available to visit their home to provide advice and support and to listen to children. Foster carers noted the Responsible Individual and management team engage with children during regular social events and whilst visiting foster carers. The Responsible Individual ensures children know who they are to help build trusting relationships to make themselves approachable to gather feedback.

Children make considerable progress in all areas of their life. An outcome tracker assessment is undertaken by supervising social workers together with foster carers. This highlights the progress children are making and recognises where the children are benefiting from the nurture, care and support provided. It guides foster carers to adapt their care and support to respond to children's needs sensitively and effectively. Children have positive health outcomes.

Care and Support

Children's relationships with their families, where applicable, are valued and promoted. Children's relationships with their siblings are protected, and they are placed together whenever possible. Birth families are included in children's life story work, and this allows them to understand and make sense of their childhood journey. Children's achievements are celebrated and can be viewed on the agency office walls and there is some reference at the foster carers support group room which the inspectors attended. Staff provide support to foster carers who can use the advice to build children's confidence and develop their understanding of certain situations and how to change their behaviour.

The service ensures children have placement plans, risk assessments and safer care plans to support foster carers to provide safe and consistent standards of care and support. Safer care plans are specific to individual foster carers and children and are developed when children move into their foster home and are reviewed regularly or when a change occurs. Risk assessments identify children's risky behaviours to ensure foster carers have a good understanding of how to support children and manage risk. When children require support with their physiological and emotional health, swift referrals are made to the appropriate services in consultation with placing authority social workers. Foster carers, supervising social workers and when required the management team advocate on behalf of children and appropriately challenge other professionals to ensure children are safe and their needs are met. When support is not forthcoming, the agency advocates and ensures that children receive what they need to flourish in life.

There are examples of good practice when managing safeguarding incidents. Foster carers, supervising social workers and other professionals work together to ensure children remain safe. Foster carers and supervising social workers told us they feel supported by management for advice and support. When children go missing from foster care, there is a clear protocol followed to report them missing to the appropriate authorities to ensure they are located and returned safely. Placement plans are consistently amended to reflect the changing needs of children. The agency has adopted a comprehensive programme of therapeutic support. This has had a positive impact on foster carers morale, skills and knowledge of children who have experienced trauma. This allows foster carers and supervising social workers to provide children with therapeutic care that supports them to process their past trauma.

The agency matches children with suitable foster carers to support linguistic and cultural needs. For example, a Welsh speaking child has been matched with Welsh speaking foster carers. This has supported the child to continue to communicate in Welsh and respect their cultural needs and requirements. The child has continued to build strong relationships with other children in the Welsh medium school and within the locality of the foster carers home.

Children's education is promoted, and foster carers play an active role in supporting children to achieve and reach their full potential. Foster carers advocate for children's educational needs and ensure they are available to attend meetings and reviews. Children are encouraged to participate in new activities and interests, and are supported to join clubs. They have opportunities to socialise and make friends and foster carers support children to attend parties and play dates to encourage positive friendships.

Foster carers monthly supervisions are completed in the home to ensure supervising social workers assess the home environment. Standards of health and safety in foster carer's homes are considered as part of the formal annual review process, together with pet assessments to assess safety. Arrangements are in place to ensure Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are completed at the point of recruitment and renewed at the required periods.

Environment

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) do not consider the Environment theme in full due to the nature of the independent fostering agency.

The office premises for the fostering agency is suitable and fit for purpose. The office space is large and provides space for delivering training or meetings. Records relating to children and foster carers are stored securely. The service has an electronic system for records which is password protected with individual access codes. Staff files and other documentation which are paper based are stored securely in locked cupboards.

Leadership and Management

The leadership and management is highly effective. The Responsible Individual, management team, supervising social workers and foster carers are cohesive and collaborate in their practice. The management team and supervising social workers noted there have been positive developments since the previous inspection in 2018. The developments have led to the expansion of the service with an increase in supervising social workers and foster carers. Feedback from foster carers and external professionals involved with the agency is positive. The agency has safe recruitment practices in respect of employing supervising social workers. There is a thorough induction process to prepare supervising social workers for supporting foster carers and children. In general, administrative recruitment practices are effective, references are obtained and verified. Supervising social workers files contain a copy of the job description detailing the requirements of the role and evidence of relevant qualifications.

The Responsible Individual supervises the management of the service and is highly committed to provide appropriate advice and guidance. The Responsible Individual and manager ensure supervising social workers have access to meaningful supervision to allow them to reflect and develop their knowledge and performance. Foster carers noted the Responsible Individual and manager are incredibly supportive and always available when an issue arises. Management are highly committed to ensuring children are provided with opportunities to reach their potential and have positive outcomes. Foster carers noted the management team are incredibly supportive, knowledgeable, and able to offer sound advice. A Welsh speaking supervising social worker can provide a Welsh speaking service for children and foster carers.

Foster carers provided positive feedback regarding the advice and support they receive from the agency. They value the expertise of the supervising social workers and there is always management available who they can contact for guidance should they have any issues that arise at any time of the day. Foster carers are involved in the planning and matching process of any new placements. All moves are managed sensitively and at the pace children are comfortable with. When children move in with their new foster carers it is managed sensitively and with care to allow a smooth process of transition. Foster carers commended the assessment process to be registered as carers as being thorough and necessary given the role. Following registration, foster carers noted the skills learned from fostering training, advice and support provided by supervising social workers as being essential to the challenging role.

The quality assurance mechanisms regarding assessments and foster carer review reports are scrutinised by panel members to ensure foster carers are safe, suitably fit, and competent to undertake the role. Fostering panel documentation evidence scrutiny and decision-making in respect of changes of approval status, and foster carer agreements are reviewed and signed following any change. Foster carers and supervising social workers have access to mandatory and optional training to underpin their knowledge. Additional training is made available to foster carers particularly when the needs of children fluctuate or become more challenging. Foster carers complete regular safeguarding training and noted they understand their role in safeguarding and protecting children. A foster carer handbook provides information about the service and how to submit a complaint.

The Responsible Individual reports are completed within timescale and include sections for documenting which records have been audited and when children, foster carers, supervising social workers and placing authorities have been consulted. The quality-of-care review provides a thorough analysis of data; to understand and identify any patterns and trends to shape and develop the service.

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

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