



## Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

### Care Standards Act 2000

#### Inspection Report

#### Bridgend County Borough Council Family Placement Team

Bridgend Foster Care  
Floor 4  
Sunnyside  
Bridgend  
CF31 4AR

Type of Inspection – Baseline  
Date(s) of inspection – 2 January 2013  
Date of publication – 15 April 2013

You may reproduce this Report in its entirety. You may not reproduce it in part or in any abridged form and may only quote from it with the consent in writing of Welsh Ministers

Please contact CSSIW National Office for further information  
Tel: 0300 062 8800  
Email: [cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk)  
[www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk)

## Summary

### About the service

The fostering service in Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) consists of three distinct services. These include the main fostering service, the Resolutions fostering service and Family Link Short Breaks Service. The Head of Children's Services is Colin Turner. The manager for the main fostering service is Natalie Silcox. The Resolutions fostering service is managed by Mandy Jenkins. The Family Link Short Breaks service is managed by Wendy Wilcox.

The main fostering service provides a fostering service which provides foster placements for children 0-18 years who may be placed with foster carers approved for general foster carers or family and friends carers. A new support care service has also just been developed. The main fostering service is based in the main offices for BCBC in Sunnyside Bridgend.

Resolutions fostering service is a partnership of four local authorities, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil and Vale of Glamorgan. The service provides child care placements for 10 to 17 year olds who present challenging behaviour.

The Family Link Short Breaks Service provides a series of short breaks for children with disabilities, which provides positive experiences for disabled children and young people, whilst enabling their parents or carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.

The Resolutions Fostering Service and the Family Link Short Breaks Service are based in the Glan Ogwr offices on the outskirts of Bridgend town.

### What type of inspection was carried out?

This announced baseline inspection was undertaken as part of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), routine schedule of inspections. The following methodology was used to undertake the inspection:

- Scrutiny of Self Assessment of Service (SAS) and Annual Data Collection (ADC) on all three services, completed by the three managers prior to inspection.
- Inspection planning meeting with the registered manager of the mainstream and family and friends service.
- Meetings with the newly appointed Liaison foster carers.
- Meeting with the 'men who care' support group.
- Meeting with the family and friends carer's support group.
- Meeting with the Group Manager responsible for Service Provision and specifically the line management of the managers for Bridgend Foster Care and Resolutions and the Principal Officer Disability and Transition who is responsible for Family Link.
- Home visits to foster carers with children in placement, one from the mainstream service and one from the Family Link Short Breaks service.
- Reading of foster carers files and children files for all three services.
- Meeting with staff from mainstream and family and friends team, two staff from the Resolutions team and one member of staff from the Family Link Short Breaks service.

- Meetings with the Placement Support worker and Commissioning and Placement Officer.
- Questionnaires from staff, foster carers from mainstream and family and friends carers, Resolutions carers and Family Link carers.
- Scrutiny of last three panel minutes.
- Attendance at foster panel.

#### **What does the service do well?**

- Men in foster care groups held in the evening to enable male foster carers who work to access training (Mainstream)
- The promotion of children's achievements through an annual awards ceremony which promotes the success and achievements of children. (Mainstream)
- Foster panel undertake quality assurance feedback for each report presented to panel. Foster carers are also given an opportunity to give feedback on the experience of attending panel in a questionnaire. (All 3 services)
- Panel members receive an appraisal a least annually. (All 3 services)
- Panel training in new areas of service is delivered in a timely fashion. (All 3 services.)
- Panel monitor timeliness of annual reviews of foster carers. (All 3 services)
- The Accommodation and Permanence panel ensure that all looked after children have a plan for permanence. (mainstream)
- Robust policies and procedures to support the service (All 3 services)

#### **What has improved since the last inspection?**

##### **Mainstream fostering service**

- Placement support worker recruited to work with identified foster carer for support with moving children on for adoption, support when an allegation or complaint has been made and support with behaviour management and specific issues identified.
- Commissioning and Placement Officer position has been made permanent.
- A social worker has been appointed to specifically assess and supervise support carers.
- The role of the level 4 foster carers had been reviewed to ensure its effectiveness and replaced by four 'Liaison Carers', one of whom who had responsibility for family and friends carers.
- Carers own children group established, although this was still in development and not well attended.
- Family and friends carers group established.

##### **Resolutions**

- Developed carer and staff newsletters but unfortunately has been put on hold because of staff sickness.
- Developed new Resolutions carer handbook which should have been launched in December 2012 but unfortunately again this had been delayed because of staff shortages.
- Greater involvement of carers in recruitment and retention of carers and promotion of the service.
- Increased number of carers approved which had increased availability of placements

- and offered greater placement choice.
- Support groups held every 6 weeks.

### **Family Link Short Break Service**

- Work has progressed in developing Person Centred Child profiles.
- Family link carers have been provided with training portfolios and a presentation was made to the monthly support group to introduce the new approach.
- The policies and procedures handbook has been reviewed and updated.
- Timescales for introductions to placements have improved.

### **What needs to be done to improve the service?**

There were no issues of non compliance identified at this inspection.

We have identified areas where practice could be further developed to achieve improvements for positive outcomes for children and foster carers receiving a service.

These are:

#### **Mainstream fostering service**

- Respite arrangements to be revised to ensure that foster carers requiring respite receive a service which is timely and meets the needs of the children.
- Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks for foster carers should be re-newed every three years.
- We (CSSIW) recognised that the responsibility lies with the children's social workers to arrange for passports for the children who are looked after and not the foster carers supervising social workers. However, it is never the less the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that children are not disadvantaged from being able to access holidays abroad as part of their foster family.
- The service would benefit from having a group specifically for looked after children.

#### **Resolutions**

- There needs to be a review of staffing levels because the current staffing levels cannot be sustained and comprises the health of the staff employed. This will also allow for developments within the service and ensure support for foster carers is not compromised. This will also ensure the welfare of young people placed with Resolutions foster carers.

#### **Family Link Short Break service**

- No issues were identified.

## Quality of life

Overall we (CSSIW) found that children placed within Bridgend County Borough Council can be confident that their security and welfare are promoted and their voices are heard when they are placed with foster carers, Resolution carers or Family Link carers in this local authority. The child centred approach of the fostering services promotes the emotional and physical well being of the children in placement.

Children and young people are on the whole supported to express their feelings on the care provided. The agency actively ensured that there were a variety of ways in which they consulted with young people to make sure that they were listened to and involved with decisions about their lives. We saw that arrangements were in place for children and young people to contribute to their foster carer's annual review, through the use of consultation documents. However, staff said that sometimes it was difficult to obtain their views as they were not always completed. Children were also asked their views on the care provided, when visits were made to foster carers, by the supervising social workers. We were told by the manager of the mainstream fostering service that foster carer profiles were discussed with children and young people, appropriate to their age and understanding by the childcare social workers and where possible they are given the choice of whether a placement would be appropriate. Children and young people receiving a short break service were actively involved in the planning and introductions to proposed Family Link placements. We saw that introductions were planned at a pace that was appropriate to the individual child. The Family Link Short Break service had recently introduced a Person Centred Planning approach for the completion of children's profiles, which ensured that the child or young person was able to express their wishes and views independently of their parents.

We were told that if a placement within a mainstream foster placement was breaking down that children were encouraged to share their views, what the issues are and how they could be overcome. A Placement Support Worker was sometimes allocated to work with the child or the carers as appropriate. Discussion with the Placement Support Worker and some carers indicated that the development of this service was a great asset to support placements.

Children have warm, nurturing and secure attachments to their carers. Through discussion with foster carers and on home visits we saw evidence that children were fully integrated into the foster home and had developed close and meaningful relationships with their foster carers and their extended family. We observed one young person arriving home from school and immediately shouted to his foster carers, 'I am home' and sought out their company to discuss his day at school. Family Link carers spoken to during a home visit described their relationship with the children they have cared for and spoke about them with warmth and concern. They described activities they undertook with the young people which they enjoyed as much as they young people who received a short break.

Children looked after in Bridgend are on the whole supported to achieve their educational potential. This is because clear expectations are given to foster carers about their responsibilities in promoting the educational needs of young people. Foster carers we spoke with showed a keen interest in the academic progress of the children in placement and advocated on their behalf. We saw evidence of children and young people being supported to achieve educationally and through other activities. We saw an example of a young person placed with a mainstream carer for several years who

was doing very well at school. He also represents his school in gymnastics, rugby and football. He was awarded the most popular person in his year at school by his teachers and his peers for his conduct both on and off the pitch. One child's social worker in the mainstream foster carer's annual review commented on difficulties one young person had experienced, particularly around educational issues. She said about the foster carers, *'They display great empathy towards the situation displayed by the child. Both carers were willing and able to sit and discuss problems and were not judgemental in any way. They supported the young person in a very difficult education environment where she was constantly being suspended.'*

We saw evidence that children and young people had been consulted with as part of the wider remit of being looked after. Children in mainstream and family and friends placements had been involved as part of a consultation exercise run by Just Ask Plus. Children's achievements were promoted and recognised at an annual awards ceremony.

Children were seen to have choice and influence in what activities they wanted to engage in, which were appropriate to their age, development and understanding. A good example of positive outcomes seen was of a young man with disabilities who had attended the St John's Ambulance with his family link carer to increase his confidence and independence skills. He had been awarded the Commandant-in-Chief award for his services to the St John's Ambulance and attended Buckingham Palace with his family link carer to receive the award. Another example was of a young person who accessed the Family Link Short Break service, exercising his choice was his reluctance to engage in activities in the wider community, but preferring to have a 'quiet' time in the family link carer's home. Whilst the carer's initially thought they should be doing more, they respected his choice and the placement consequently has been very successful in meeting his needs.

Many of the foster carers from the mainstream and Resolutions service took children on family holidays both in the UK and abroad. We were informed by the Liaison foster carers that they were aware of difficulties that some foster carers had with obtaining passports for the children in placement. They said that this was not due to their supervising social workers who requested these in plenty of time, but they were not actioned in a timely fashion by the childcare social workers. This was said to create difficulties in some instances when foster carers wanted to ensure that children and young people were included in the activities as part of the fostering family. We recognised that the responsibility lies with the children's social workers to arrange for passports for the children who are looked after and not the foster carers supervising social workers. However, it is never the less the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that children are not disadvantaged from being able to access holidays abroad as part of their foster family giving them a sense of belonging.

The physical wellbeing of children and young people is promoted and protected by the service. We saw evidence that foster carers were provided with good information on the health needs of the children and were supported to contact professional health services such as doctors, dentists and opticians as well as specialist health services if required.

Children were supported to maintain links with their families. One child's social worker commented on one of the mainstream foster carer's annual review, *'They have always promoted contact even when this has fallen during holidays e.g Christmas day by taking and picking up the young person from his mother's home. Also support the young person to have contact with his siblings and extended family.'*

## Quality of staffing

On the whole, foster carers and children can be confident that they are supported by competent experienced and motivated staff that ensures foster carers are enabled and encouraged to support children and young people to reach their full potential. It was evident that the staff within the different services, were committed and passionate about the work they undertook with foster carers and children.

The fostering services for Bridgend County Council consisted of three distinct and separate staff teams. These include the main fostering Service, the Resolutions Fostering service and Family Link Short Breaks service.

### Mainstream fostering service

There was an identified senior staff group within Bridgend fostering service which consisted of a team manager, senior practitioner, Recruitment officer and Commissioning and Placements officer each with a specific area of responsibility. The mainstream fostering service was managed by the team manager Natalie Silcox. The team manager was responsible for the day to day running of the fostering service which covers general foster carers, family and friends carers and support care. She impressed as being knowledgeable, organised and had a sound knowledge of the service. She had previous experience as a 'fieldwork' social worker as well as experience of being a foster carer. She was also responsible for a new service, the support care scheme which had been set up. A social worker had been appointed to specifically assess and supervise support carers.

The team of social care staff employed by the service was well established and had a good mix of experienced and new staff who presented as skilled and knowledgeable. We saw that new members of staff were provided with a comprehensive induction at the commencement of their employment. Although there had been some absences of staff for various reasons, future plans gave assurance that staffing levels were sufficient to ensure the safety of children placed with foster carers.

### Resolutions

The Resolutions service was managed by Mandy Jenkins, who was experienced and knowledgeable and had managed the service for many years. She has secured another post in another local authority and is due to leave in the next few months. There were three supervising social workers employed for the service. They were very experienced knowledgeable, skilled and motivated in the work they undertook with foster carers and children. We saw that there were some staffing difficulties because of periods of long term sickness with regards to the Resolutions service. Staff described the impact that this had on what was a small team, with one member of staff absent for long periods. The difficulties in the staffing situation was to the detriment of the well being of the staff. There was sufficient evidence that foster carers were supported, because the staff team were doing everything that they could to ensure that the support of foster carers was not compromised. However, this had put a great strain on the wellbeing of the staff and they were feeling under a lot of pressure. They said that their caseloads were becoming unmanageable and they did not always feel in control. An example of the impact on the staffing levels was highlighted during the inspection. The manager was in a situation on

one day during the inspection when she was the only person present to attend an urgent situation which arose, because one member of staff was on long term sick leave, one member of staff had phoned in sick and one member of staff was on planned annual leave. We discussed with the manager that this situation was not sustainable and she agreed to discuss the concerns with the management board. A further concern from staff was that it was not always recognised that they had to travel long distances that to support their carers, covering 4 local authority areas. The staffing levels were not sufficient to ensure any development of the service e.g a specific handbook for Resolution carers had not been completed as expected. Also there had been plans to produce a Children's Guide specific to children in Resolutions placements, which had been put on hold because of the staffing levels. These were usually provided by the individual local authority in the consortium but were not specific for children in Resolutions placements.

### **Family Link Short Break Service**

The Family Link Short Break Service was managed by Wendy Wilcox, Principal Officer for Service Development, Disability Services & Transition Safeguarding and Family Support. The manager is very experienced and knowledgeable, particularly in the area of disabilities. The staff team was small, consisting of two supervising social workers (SSW) one of whom was full time and the other worked four days a week. One of the SSW had been on long term sick leave for six months and had recently returned. The manager said that in spite of the absence of one of the staff the majority of tasks had been undertaken with the exception of assessments and some difficulty with writing up supervision sessions undertaken with family link carers.

Staff from all the services reported that they were satisfied with the quality of support and supervision from management and had either received an annual appraisal or were in process of receiving one. Staff meetings were undertaken on a monthly basis.

The recruitment and selection of all fostering staff was undertaken by the local authority corporate human resources department (HR). Staff files were not examined at this inspection.



## Quality of leadership and management

We found that foster carers and children and young people in foster care could be assured that the fostering services were well managed and responsive to issues raised. We saw one example of this within the Resolutions service. Newly approved carers raised some concerns of the lack of clarity of their role and lack of availability of policies and procedures and guidance pertinent to Resolutions carers. As a result the carers handbook had been revised with a small group of Resolutions carers having been instrumental in this, under the leadership of a member of staff. It was due for completion in December 2012. However, it was particularly disappointing that this had not happened because of the staff shortages in the Resolutions team.

The last copy of the agency's, Review of Quality of Care/ Quality Assurance, Regulation 42 report was undertaken by the three services, covering the period 01/04/11 to 31/03/12. A report covering the period from 1/04/12 to 31/03/13 was in process of being produced.

We attended the fostering panel and were provided with the last three panel minutes. Both of these evidenced that the Bridgend panel was effective and robust in its decision making. Foster panel undertook quality assurance feedback for each report presented to panel. Foster carers were also given an opportunity to give feedback through questionnaires of their experience of attending panel. Foster carers from all three services were approved at the Bridgend panel. We were informed that panel members were appraised at least annually and that panel members were updated of any service developments or information pertinent to their role as panel members.

Children and young people are protected because the fostering services continued to inform the CSSIW of any child protection concerns as an area of good practice, although this was not a requirement for local authority fostering services.

Foster carers were generally very positive about the support available to them from all three services, both in their questionnaires and in discussion with them. There were a few individual issues raised but we had no concerns following discussion with the foster carers, staff and managers of the service. Overall they felt well supported by their supervising social worker, through the training available to them and through support groups. Comments such as '*I feel well supported*' and '*there is always someone available to support me*' were made. One foster carer from Resolutions said 'All the supervising social workers in Resolutions are very professional and we receive great support'.

Good recruitment and vetting practices ensures the safety of children placed with foster carers. We saw evidence that foster carers in the agency were recruited appropriately through reading the foster carer files and discussion with staff and foster carers. The files examined contained evidence of thorough assessments using the BAAF Form F and all necessary checks were undertaken on foster carers prior to approval. All applicants were taken to the agency's panel for consideration and recommendation as to their suitability to foster. Foster carers were sent notices of approval following their approval and following an annual review. However, we noticed on a few of the mainstream fostering files examined, that there were gaps in when CRB checks were renewed, which should be done every three years. This was discussed with the manager of the mainstream service and her line manager. We were informed that a monitoring

system was in place but they would ensure that this was more robust in the future, to ensure that all foster carers CRB checks were re-newed before they were due to expire.

## Quality of Foster Carers

Overall children and young people benefit from being cared for by foster carers and Family Link carers who are motivated and promote the physical, emotional and social development of the children placed with them. We found that the foster carers we met with were committed to the children they care for and work hard to promote positive outcomes for them.

It was evident during discussion with foster carers and through observation that there were some positive meaningful relationships with the foster carers and the children placed with them. We saw an example of a mainstream foster carer who had successfully moved a child onto adoption. Although it had been acknowledged that this was a difficult time for the foster carers they understood that it was in the child's best interest and handled the situation appropriately. They were fully involved in the transition plan for adoption and as a result the placement with the adoptive family was relatively easy, quick and positive for the child. This was supported by comments from the child's social worker who described the carers as extraordinary and amongst the most committed carers that she had ever worked with. The foster carers and their children had been heavily involved in the compilation of the life story of the young child and had compiled a big chart with photographs of the child and his foster family entitled 'All the people who love me'.

Children benefit from good procedures and practices which are designed to match them with foster carers and Family Link carers that best meet their needs because there is a robust and thorough matching process undertaken. Matching was viewed as a high priority within the three services. We saw evidence that children were appropriately matched with their foster carers within their approval status.

Children's needs are anticipated and benefit from good, timely decisions and responsive care. Children were placed in foster carers homes that are safe and monitored on a regular basis by the supervising social worker. Discussion with staff and foster carers indicated that the agency was committed to providing a safe environment for children placed with them. A comprehensive health and safety checklist was undertaken on each foster carer as part of the overall assessment prior to approval. Health and safety checks were updated annually in accordance with the foster carer's annual review and at the time of any new placements. We saw evidence that unannounced visits were made to the foster carers at least on an annual basis and foster carers indicated that they had received an annual review. Children's safety was protected through specific safe caring plans which were evident in the files examined.

A robust assessment process, pre-approval training and ongoing training, prepares foster carers and Family Link carers to cope with the demands of fostering. Foster carers had an allocated supervising social worker who undertook supervision and provided support to ensure that issues that arose were dealt with effectively and efficiently. Additionally foster carers had an annual review where children's social workers and young people in placement were given the opportunity to comment on the quality of the placements for children and young people.

The well being of children and young people is promoted and protected. Systems for protecting children and young people are robust and ensure that staff and foster carers are aware of their responsibilities. Child protection was an integral part of the induction

for newly approved foster carers. The fostering services ensured that foster carers attended training to develop their knowledge and understanding of safe care practices and protection of children from significant harm and abuse. We saw evidence that foster carers had attended training on child protection, safe caring, behaviour management, first aid and other training specific to individual carers to support and promote the welfare of children and young people in placement.

Mainstream foster carers, family and friends carers, Resolutions carers and Family Link carers were given the opportunity to attend support groups. In particular a 'men who care' group had been developed to enable male foster carers to discuss common themes or anxieties they may have. This was open to general carers, family and friends carers and Resolution carers. This group was held in the evening to enable the men to receive training as many work during the day when mandatory training usually takes place. We attended this group as part of the inspection which included information on drug awareness. The group said that they had received training on 'Safe Care' at the last meeting which had been informative. We also attended a 'family and friends' group run by one of the Liaison family and friends carer. This was viewed as a good resource by the family and friends carers who attended as they said that it met their particular needs as family and friends carers and it was anticipated that training more relevant to their needs would be provided.

All Resolutions carers were able to access training offered by all four partner authorities as well as any relevant external training. Guest speakers were arranged for the six weekly carer support groups which provided a training element. All Resolutions carers were expected to complete the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) Diploma in Health & Social Care-Children & Young People Level 3 for which they received an additional payment once successfully completed.

Foster carers from the mainstream fostering team were able to access QCF. Some family and friends carers said that they did not feel they had equal access to undertake QCF. This was discussed with the manager who said that this was not the case and that she would ensure that they were informed of the process and arrangements to access QCF.

**How we inspect and report on services** We conduct two types of inspection; baseline and focussed. 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.

- **Focussed 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. Focussed inspections will always consider the quality of life of people using services and may look at other areas.

Baseline and focussed 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.

Further information about what we do can be found in our leaflet 'Improving Care and Social Services in Wales'. You can download this from our website, [Improving Care and Social Services in Wales](#) or ask us to send you a copy by telephoning your local CSSIW regional office.