

**Health Information and Quality Authority  
Regulation Directorate**

**Monitoring Inspection Report -  
Non-statutory Foster Care Services under  
the Child Care Act 1991 (as amended)**



<b>Name of Agency:</b>	Five Rivers Fostering Services Ireland
<b>Dates of inspection:</b>	19 – 21 April 2016 26 – 28 April 2016
<b>No. of Fieldwork days:</b>	6
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<b>Type of inspection:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Announced</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Unannounced</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Full</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Themed</b>
<b>Inspection ID:</b>	<b>757</b>

## About monitoring

The purpose of monitoring is to safeguard vulnerable children of any age who are receiving foster care services. Monitoring provides assurance to the public that children are receiving a service that meets the requirements of quality Standards. This process also seeks to ensure that the wellbeing, welfare and safety of children is promoted and protected. Monitoring also has an important role in driving continuous improvement so that children have better, safer lives.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is authorised by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs under Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991 as amended by Section 26 of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011 to inspect services taking care of a child on behalf of the Child and Family Agency (the CFA) including non-statutory providers of foster care.

In order to drive quality and improve safety in the provision of foster care services to children, the Authority carries out inspections to:

- **Assess** if the service provider has all the elements in place to safeguard children and young people and promote their well being while placed with their service
- **Seek assurances** from service providers that they are **safeguarding children** through the mitigation of serious risks
- **Provide** service providers with the **findings** of inspections so that service providers develop action plans to implement safety and quality improvements
- **Inform** the public and **promote confidence** through the publication of the Authority's findings.

Monitoring inspections assess continuing compliance with the regulations and Standards, can be announced or unannounced.

This inspection report sets out the findings of a monitoring inspection against the following themes:

<b>Theme 1: Child Centred Services</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theme 3: Health and Development</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theme 4: Leadership, Governance and Management</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theme 5: Use of Resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Theme 6: Workforce</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## 1. Methodology

As part of this inspection, inspectors met with children, foster carers, and or other agencies and professionals. Inspectors observed practices and reviewed documentation such as care plans, relevant registers, policies and procedures, foster carer files, children's files and staff files.

During the inspection, the inspectors evaluated the:

- quality of care and safety of the service
- organisation and management of the foster care service
- assessment of foster carers
- safeguarding processes
- effectiveness of inter-agency and multi-disciplinary work
- outcomes for children.

The key activities of this inspection involved:

- the interrogation of data
- reviewing of policies and procedures
- reviewing of 52 children's case files
- reviewing of 41 foster carer's files
- meeting with 22 children and 23 carers
- two focus group meetings with 14 link workers
- two focus group meetings with 21 carers
- meeting with 11 link workers
- interview with the managing director
- interview with the operations manager
- interview with the education support coordinator
- interview with the senior counselling psychologist
- interview with the therapeutic service manager
- interview with one team manager and two team leaders
- reviewing of 18 staff personnel and supervision files
- reviewing completed external professional questionnaires from five Child and Family Agency social workers, and two other external professionals
- telephone interviews with three parents
- visiting 12 foster care homes.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Authority wishes to thank the children and carers, for the openness with which they embraced the inspection process and welcomed inspectors into their homes. Inspectors also wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the members of Five Rivers Fostering services with the inspection.

## **2. Profile**

### **2.1 The Child and Family Agency**

Child and family services in Ireland are delivered by a single dedicated State Agency – the Child and Family Agency - overseen by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013) established the Child and Family Agency with effect from 1 January 2014.

The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) have responsibility for a range of services, including the provision of a range of care placements for children including statutory foster care services.

Children's foster care services may also be provided by non-statutory foster care agencies following agreement with the Child and Family Agency. The Child and Family Agency retain their statutory responsibilities to children placed with these services and approve the foster carers through their foster care committees. The foster care agency is required to adhere with relevant Standards and regulations when providing a service on behalf of the Child and Family Agency. Both services are accountable for the care and well-being of children. This inspection focuses on the specific responsibilities of the service provider under the Standards in providing quality and safe care to children.

### **2.2 The Service Provider**

Five Rivers was the first non-statutory foster care agency to operate in Ireland and has been developing its services since 2002. It provided a range of placements which included emergency, short term, long term, parent and child and out-of-hours placements. The service also conducted a number of relative foster care assessments for the Child and Family Agency. At the time of inspection it was undertaking seven such assessments for the Mid West service area.

Since 2009 Five Rivers has provided an emergency place of safety service (EPS) for the then Health Service Executive. The purpose of this service was to provide placements to children where Gardaí removed children from their homes under Section 12 of the Child Care Act, outside of normal working hours, on an emergency basis. The Child and Family Agency established a national call centre in November 2015 to provide emergency out-of-hours social work services to the Gardaí and this has brought operational changes to the emergency place of safety service provided by Five Rivers.

The foster care service comprised two directors, one of whom was the managing director and the other who was the operations manager. Information provided to HIQA by Five Rivers prior to the inspection outlined that the service also had two social work team leaders, one team manager, one senior social work practitioner, 13.5 social workers, one education support coordinator, two play therapists, one senior counselling psychologist (part-time), one social care leader, 3.5 administrators and 1.5 finance staff.

The service operated out of offices located in Dublin and Cork. The two directors were based in Dublin and the team manager (an enhanced team leader role) managed the team located in the Cork office.

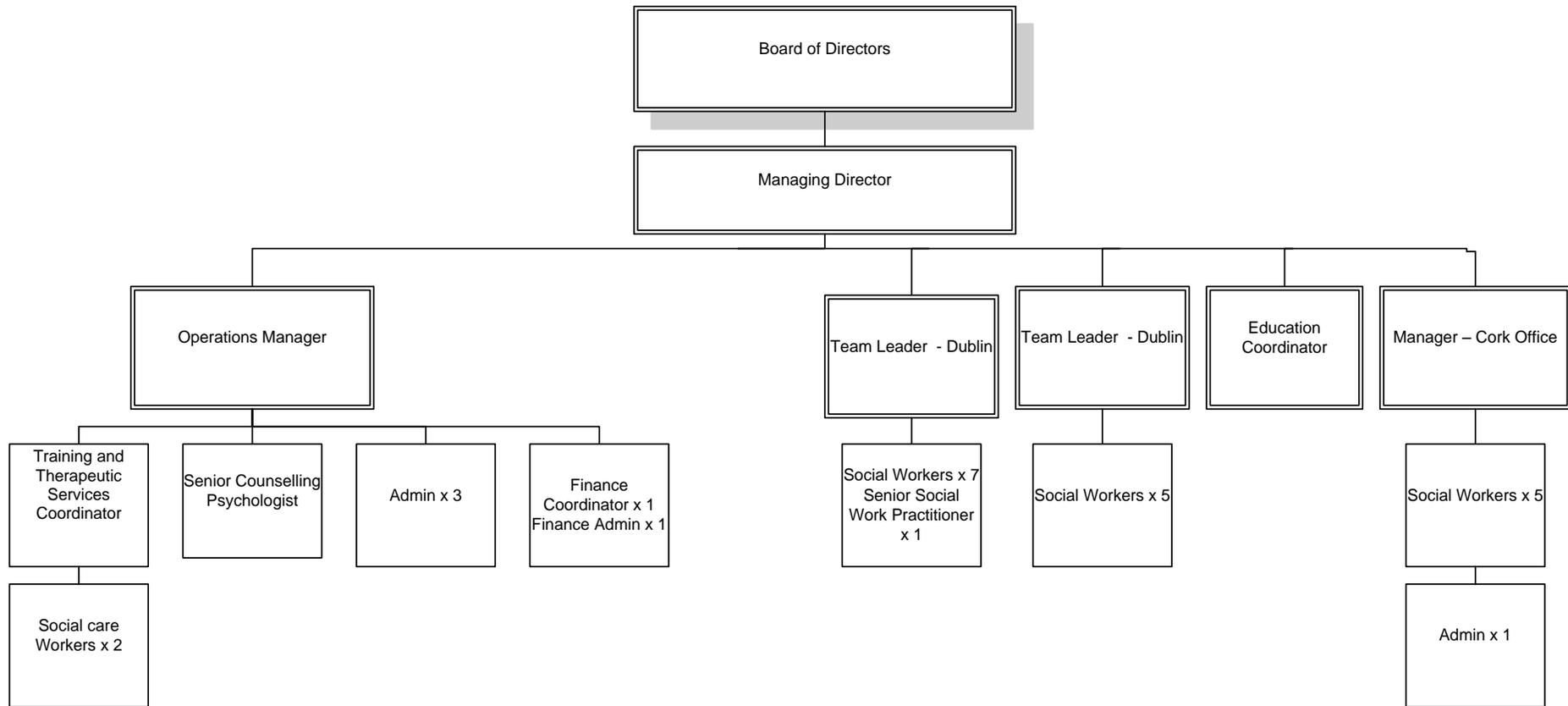
At the time of inspection, the service had 103 foster care households across the country who provided foster care placements for 115 children from across the Child and Family Agency service areas. Five Rivers had a service level agreement in respect of an emergency placement service with the Child and Family Agency. It did not have a service level agreement for general foster carers. This was subject to ongoing negotiations and was still unresolved at the time of inspection.

The organisational chart in Figure 1 on the following page describes the management and team structure as provided by the service.





**Figure 1: Organisational structure of the foster care agency<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Provided by the Foster Care Agency

### 3. Summary of Findings

Children in foster care require a high quality service, which is safe and well supported by social work practice. Foster carers must be able to provide children with warm and nurturing relationships in order for children to achieve positive outcomes. Services must be well governed in order to produce these outcomes consistently.

Five Rivers is a 'social enterprise' organisation and its services are monitored by Tusla. It reinvests surplus into the organisation mainly in the areas of training, therapy, education and support so as to improve outcomes for children and young people in care.

In this inspection, the Authority found that of the 19 Standards assessed, the service exceeded three Standards, met eight Standards, and required improvement in eight Standards. The findings are set out in Section 5 of this report and the action plan is published separately.

Children's emotional and physical care was appropriately met within the fostering service through the quality of care provided by foster carers and interventions provided by staff. There were appropriate measures in place to safeguard and protect children from abuse. Children with complex needs were well supported by the service and foster carers had good access to support services. Children presented as content and settled in their foster homes and felt listened to.

The views of children and their families were valued and respected. The service had a child centred approach and was proactive in maintaining children's relationships with families and friends. Managers had good oversight of the service to ensure that the service provided was safe and appropriate to meet the needs of children.

The governance and management systems in place provided clear lines of accountability and areas of responsibility. Good leadership and service planning was evident. The service currently had a sufficient number of foster carers to provide general foster care for children as there were no children awaiting a placement. Improvements were required in the overall management of the emergency place of safety service, the development of a risk management framework and aspects of quality assurance.

Overall, Five Rivers fostering service provided high quality care and exceeded the standards in relation to the recruitment, retention; supervision and support of foster carers as well as in the provision of a quality educational support package to children. Foster carers experienced continuity with link workers and developed trusting relationships with the allocated link worker. Child care planning and review

processes were undertaken, however, the absence of an up-to-date care plan impacted on the service’s capacity to match children appropriately.

This report makes a number of findings which the provider is required to address in an action plan. The provider’s action plan is published separately to this report.

#### 4. Summary of judgments under each Standard

During the inspection, inspectors made judgments against the National Standards<sup>2</sup>. They used four descriptors:

**Exceeds Standard** – services are proactive and ambitious for children and there are examples of excellent practice supported by robust systems.

**Meets Standard** - services are safe and of good quality.

**Requires improvement** – there are deficits in the quality of services and systems. Some risks to children may be identified.

**Significant risk identified** – children have been harmed or there is a high possibility that they will experience harm due to poor practice or weak systems.

National Standards for Foster Care (April 2003)	Judgment
<b>Theme 1: Child Centred Services</b>	
<b>Standard 1:</b> Positive sense of identity	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 2:</b> Family and friends	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 3:</b> Children’s rights	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 4:</b> Valuing diversity	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 25:</b> Representations and complaints	Meets Standard
<b>Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services</b>	
<b>Standard 8:</b> Matching carers with children and young people	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 9:</b> A safe and positive environment	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 10:</b> Safeguarding and child protection	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 13:</b> Preparation for leaving care and adult life	Meets Standard

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Appendix 1 for full description on National Standards for Foster Care (April 2003) and Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995

<b>Standard 14:</b> Assessment and approval of foster carers	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 15:</b> Supervision and support	Exceeds Standard
<b>Standard 16:</b> Training	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 17:</b> Reviews of foster carers	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 22:</b> Special Foster care	N/A
<b>Theme 3: Health and Development</b>	
<b>Standard 11:</b> Health and development	Requires Improvement
<b>Standard 12:</b> Education	Exceeds Standard
<b>Theme 4: Leadership, Governance &amp; Management</b>	
<b>Standard 18:</b> Effective policies	Meets Standard
<b>Standard 19:</b> Management and monitoring of foster care agency	Requires Improvement
<b>Theme 5: Use of Resources</b>	
<b>Standard 21:</b> Recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers	Exceeds Standard
<b>Theme 6: Workforce</b>	
<b>Standard 20:</b> Training and Qualifications	Requires Improvement

## 5. Findings and judgments

### **Theme 1: Child Centred Services**

*Services for children are centred on the individual child and his/her care and support needs. Child-centred services provide the right support at the right time to enable children to lead their lives in as fulfilling a way as possible. A child-centred approach to service provision is one where services are planned and delivered with the active involvement and participation of the children who use services.*

### **Inspection findings**

Five Rivers valued the views of children and their families and made efforts to consult with them. The service was proactive in maintaining children's relationships with families and friends. There was a good system in place to record, manage and resolve complaints. Good consideration was given to a child's ethnic and cultural background; however, no specific cultural awareness training was undertaken by carers or staff.

### **Children's Rights**

There were systems in place to ensure children were informed of their rights. A number of children who met with inspectors demonstrated a good awareness of these rights, while others were not sure what this meant when asked.

The service had their own information document for children entitled "Five Rivers Family Placement Service – Children's Guide about Foster Care". This was in a child friendly format, but it did not outline how children could access their files/information. A number of children who met with inspectors said they did not receive this booklet and were unclear about some of their rights particularly how to access their information. The service also had a number of booklets and leaflets available from external organisations explaining children's rights.

Inspectors did not evidence on the electronic files that children were made aware of their rights including being given a booklet or any other information about rights. Five Rivers staff were strong advocates for children, however, one example, on a file reviewed by inspectors a link worker noted that a particular child would benefit from the input of a disability advocate; however there was no evidence that this was followed up on.

Fostering link workers told inspectors that they met with children on some of the monthly link visits and asked for their views but this was not consistently recorded. Interviews with fostering link workers, in general, demonstrated that the service was

child centred and respected children's rights. Foster carers who met with inspectors said that the service respected the rights of children.

External professionals reported that in their experience of working with the service, it had been a strong advocate for the rights of children in care. They reported that Five Rivers and their service worked well together to promote the rights of the child and that children were involved in key decisions about their lives.

### **Diversity**

The service met children's needs in relation to their diversity, communication and literacy needs. Over 50% of the children in the foster care placements were from a diverse ethnic, cultural and religious background and 15% of children had a disability. Children were not always placed with carers from a similar background. Children's ethnicity, religion, and disability were routinely recorded in the files reviewed. There were also examples of really good consideration of a child's ethnic background such as in the recording of the child's preferred language, the preferred name and where a child was supported to attend religious service of their choice. Other examples included: where a child of African ethnicity was encouraged and facilitated to cook their favourite African food, another child deciding what religion they wished to observe. The foster carer in the latter case told the inspector that Five Rivers provided support sessions to help the child with their identity and this was evidenced on the child's file.

Fostering link workers told inspectors that culturally appropriate placements were prioritised when necessary and reported that the service had a lot of families with an amount of experience of working with children from various cultures. Management outlined that there were not enough culturally appropriate placements and felt that more training was needed in this area. One of the social work team leader's, alongside a foster carer, was designing a training module for caring for African children which would be rolled out as part of the training schedule. Staff reported that culture and ethnicity would be discussed at review meetings if issues arose for the child or foster carers. Long term matching reports to the Foster Care Committee (FCC) were comprehensive and considered diversity, disability and communication needs of children.

The service also met children's needs in relation to disability. A good example of this was found in the provision of education and psychology support provided to a child with a disability by Five Rivers, who continued to offer this support with the agreement of the child's social worker. This was commendable as the child was no longer placed with foster carers within the service. An inspector found during a visit to a foster care household, that the carers were respectful of the child placed with them due to their disability and were knowledgeable of their circumstances, so as to

appropriately meet the child's needs. They reported that the fostering link worker support and monitoring was of good quality. Interviews with fostering link workers demonstrated how the service advocated for the needs of this child with disability services.

A focus group with foster carers demonstrated how carers networked with each other regarding the cultural/diversity needs of children. Training modules in relation to diversity included traveller cultural awareness, caring for children from ethnic minorities in alternative care attended by two staff, fostering separated children, assessment of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender applications, as well as several modules in relation to disability and looking after children with specific needs. Overall, foster carers and staff who met with inspectors felt cultural awareness training was an area that could be further developed by the service.

All children were given a memory box for children to store personal belongings. Foster carers told inspectors that the children used this to store photographs of family members and information about their culture. One young child proudly shared their life story book with an inspector, which they completed with a therapeutic staff member from the service. One child told an inspector that their foster carer helped them to make a life story book in picture format, and that they use their memory box from Five Rivers to keep it safe.

### **Communication**

The service communicated effectively with children and families. A review of case files showed evidence of good communication with children and foster families in case notes and records of fostering link worker visits. The majority of foster carers said that communication was excellent and respectful and that they felt part of the service. Inspectors found evidence of fostering link workers meeting with foster carers own children to discuss their views. Some birth parents said they were communicated with well. Fostering link workers told inspectors that they met with foster carers, the child in foster care and the foster carer's birth children to discuss the family policy. This was a user friendly document used to record the agreements reached by everyone in the foster family, so as to ensure there were equal expectations, rules and boundaries for all. This was completed once a year or each time a child was placed in the foster home.

Some children who met with inspectors said that they were invited to reviews and felt listened to by their carers, but said they did not like talking to social workers and had too many forms to complete. Inspectors observed a foster carer review which considered the forms completed by the children for the review and these were read out and discussed.

A number of external professionals reported that the views of the child were discussed in a careful, meaningful way and given appropriate consideration. They felt that children had choice in their daily lives regarding who they could interact with, the level of contact with their biological family, and celebration of key milestones in their lives. Others outlined that children's views were listened to, included and responded to in meetings that they had attended. They also felt that Five Rivers strived to involve children and give them choices.

### **Family and Friends**

Children were able to maintain positive relationships with their parents, siblings and significant others where appropriate. Inspectors found from file reviews and interviews, very good evidence of the service facilitating and encouraging access with family and friends. The service was proactive in promoting access and contact and providing transport and support where required.

Children's access arrangements were recorded on their care plans. Details of access visits were recorded in monthly fostering link worker visits, but the quality of the information varied across different staff members. When a child refused to go to access, the service respected the child's wishes. Interviews with staff and file reviews demonstrated evidence of access arrangements in place. Foster carers told inspectors that they facilitated children to and from access visits and were clear about the importance of this. A number of parents also said that they were happy with access arrangements. Some foster carers outlined very good relationships with birth parents as a result of facilitating access and information sharing on their child. Other good examples of facilitating access with families included: a student link worker who assisted an older child to use public transport independently to visit their brother who was in a residential placement, a sibling group who were facilitated by carers to telephone their mother and other siblings abroad on a regular basis, and attend the church they attended prior to coming into care to maintain links with friends and community.

Some children were not always placed within their own community and therefore had to change schools on occasions as a result of this. However, this was not a routine practice and inspectors found several examples of children placed within their own community. Reasons for a child not to be placed in their own area included: concerns for the safety of a child due to an assessed risk and not having sufficient numbers of carers within the area.

Five Rivers had several placements with sibling groups which were in line with the children's care plans. A review of one placement found that it was given significant support to prevent a breakdown and to keep siblings together. In general, children had regular respite with the same carers being used, as demonstrated in file reviews

and interviews with children and carers.

A number of external professionals outlined that foster carers were very accommodating around facilitating access with birth families. They said that carers encouraged phone contact with children's parents, and had observed discussions between foster carers and link workers that would indicate that children maintain positive relationships with their biological family members while in this foster care service.

### **Complaints**

There was a good system in place to record, manage and resolve complaints. A review of the central complaints folder maintained by the Operations Manager found that complaints were managed effectively and in a timely manner. Outcomes, timelines and actions required were clearly recorded on a cover page of each complaint and appropriately signed off by management. Complainant's satisfaction with the outcome was also recorded. The number of complaints made in the 12 months prior to the inspection was ten. Five complaints related to the general fostering service, of which three complaints were in relation to one family within the service. Two complaints were made by children; two complaints were made from a Tusla principal social worker and one by a parent. All complaints were followed up by the service. A formal review of complaints made in 2015 was undertaken by the service. It found one noticeable trend in relation to the Emergency Placement of Safety service (EPS) and put in place a number of actions to address this such as further training for all EPS carers, updated and re-issued the EPS booklet and set an allowance for each family to buy items needed for a child placed.

One complaint made in 2015 was still ongoing at the time of inspection. A review of the records related to this found that the complaint was dealt with appropriately by the social work department, and Five Rivers. The foster family in question were currently on hold pending a full investigation of the complaint, however all processes were followed to date. The fostering link worker was in the process of compiling a report for the FCC. There was good evidence of engagement by Five Rivers with the social work department and the foster carers to address the complaint.

Children who met with inspectors had varying knowledge of how to make a complaint, some said that they did not know they could complain and were not given any information on this. The information booklet for children placed in foster care did clearly outline the process and who they could contact.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

*Services promotes the safety of children by protecting them from abuse and neglect and following policy and procedure in reporting any concerns of abuse and/or neglect to the relevant authorities. Effective services ensure that the systems are in place to promote children's welfare. Assessment and planning is central to the identification of children's care needs. In order to provide the care children require, foster carers are assessed, approved and supported. Each child receives the supports they require to maintain their wellbeing.*

**Inspection findings**

Children's emotional and physical care was appropriately met within the fostering service through the quality of care provided by foster carers and interventions provided by staff. Child care planning and review processes were undertaken, however, the absence of an up-to-date care plan impacted on the service's capacity to match children appropriately. There were appropriate measures in place to safeguard and protect children from abuse. The service exceeded the standard in relation to the supervision and support of foster carers.

**Assessment and Care Planning**

Children lived in approved foster care placements. Matching was considered at assessment stage and recorded on the service's information system, as viewed by inspectors. Staff told inspectors that they assessed and consulted with their line manager about potential matches and felt that due to their low caseloads, they had a good working knowledge of foster carers and were satisfied that they made informed matching decisions. However, the quality of the matching process varied. Records of fostering link worker's supervision visits were inconsistent, leading to a variation in the quality of information that was available for matching. Interviews with managers and staff confirmed that there was no formal system in order to match children to appropriate foster carers and matching meetings were not held.

Child care planning and review processes (which were the responsibility of the respective Tusla social work area teams) were undertaken. A review of children's files evidenced that Five Rivers' staff and managers participated in these meetings and provided reports to Tusla for these meetings. Managers and staff told inspectors that they were not receiving care plans from the child's social worker following these meetings. External professionals reported that they had participated in statutory reviews where a child's current situation and needs were discussed so as to inform the child's care plan. Foster carers confirmed their attendance at care planning and review meetings.

The majority of files reviewed did not contain a copy of the child's care plan. Those that did have a copy on file were not an up-to-date care plan. Inspectors found in a review of files that the service sought care plans from the child's social worker but the frequency of these requests was inconsistent. A number of care plans found on files dated back to 2013 and 2014. Examples of cases with no up-to-date care plans included one case where there was no care plan on file despite the fact that four child in care reviews had since taken place and repeated requests by Five Rivers were recorded on three occasions from 2014-2016. Another case involved a child who was placed in January 2015 and the care plan was not received until April 2016 following three requests by the fostering link worker. Other cases showed that requests were not done in a timely manner. Examples of this included a child's care plan dated May 2014; however, the service's request was dated April 2016. Another child's care plan was dated August 2013 and again the service's request was dated April 2016. Inspectors found several other examples of this during the inspection.

The fostering link workers interviewed told inspectors that they continuously reminded Tusla social workers about the need to have a copy of a care plan on the child's file. In the absence of care plans, staff outlined that they met with foster carers monthly and had their own notes from the most recent child in care review meeting to guide the care required.

While the care provided to children by foster carers was of a high quality, outcomes for children could not be properly assessed. The absence of an up-to-date care plan impacted on the service's capacity to match children appropriately and to develop placement plans and offer specialised supports to meet identified needs.

Information provided to foster carers prior to a child being placed was not consistent. Inspectors could not evidence on files that foster carer's were given sufficient information. However, foster carers in general confirmed that they were given as much information regarding the child's needs as the service had but felt that more information could be provided by the child's placing social worker. Fostering link workers interviewed told inspectors that they give as much information as they have to the foster carers and provide support through link visits and phone calls. Where placements were planned there was good evidence of a pre-placement planning meeting held and where some children met with the foster carer prior to placement.

The service carried out disruption reports when a placement ended in an unplanned manner but this was not undertaken consistently or in a timely manner for a number of cases. Completed disruption reports were forwarded to the respective Foster Care Committee (FCC) for approval and oversight. Fostering link workers told inspectors that their managers encouraged additional foster care home visits to prevent

placement breakdowns where difficulties had arisen. Five Rivers provided significant supports to foster carers so as to avoid placement breakdowns and this was confirmed by foster carers who met with inspectors.

Information returned by Five Rivers to HIQA reported that in the 12 months prior to this inspection 29 placements had ended in an unplanned manner. A sample review of these cases found that where reviews had been undertaken, a comprehensive disruption report was completed and submitted to the respective FCC. Other files reviewed by inspectors showed that this practice was not consistent and the time frame between the placement ending and the completion of a disruption report ranged from one to 12 months and in a number of cases, no disruption report was completed. This had the potential to impact on the learning by the service as to why placements ended in an unplanned way, in order to avoid repeated disruptions.

There was evidence that the service provided specialist supports to children as agreed in their care plan such as psychological, educational, or other therapeutic services, such as art and play therapy, as well as the involvement of a social care worker in direct work with a child. This was demonstrated in a review of children's files. It was not always clear to the inspector how the need for supports was identified as a copy of the child's care plan was not on every file reviewed. Foster carers spoke very positively of the supports provided by Five Rivers but some carers told inspectors that they were not aware of some of the supports available to them. An example of this was where a child had ongoing difficulties with school at a critical time for the child, but the carers did not know about the educational supports provided by Five Rivers.

### **Quality of Care**

Children's emotional and physical care needs were appropriately met within the fostering service through the quality of care provided by foster carers and interventions provided by staff. Inspectors visited 13 foster carer homes and observed engaging, respectful and positive interactions between foster carers and children. A number of external professionals reported that Five Rivers had supported Tusla in identifying specialist and child-centred services for children where required and on occasions they had paid for these services so as to ensure that services were made available to children in a timely fashion.

Foster carer homes were found to be homely, comfortable and welcoming, where children were treated as members of the foster carer's families. Children interacted easily with inspectors during these visits and said that they were very happy and safe in their foster placement and felt part of the family. The service had systems in place to ensure the children's environment was safe and a review of foster carer files found that health and safety checklists for the foster carer's homes were generally

completed when carer's were initially approved.

Children were encouraged to pursue their hobbies and interests and to try out new activities so as to develop their self confidence. Examples of activities that a number of children were involved with included: rugby, football, boxing, dancing, art, after school clubs, summer camps, among others. A birth parent told an inspector that their child was now engaged in a range of activities that they were unable to source for the child prior to the foster placement. Monthly reports completed by foster carers outlined interests and activities undertaken by their respective children.

Children's achievements and significant events were acknowledged and celebrated and foster carer's told inspectors that mementos of these would be maintained in the child's memory box. Trophies and medals awarded to children in respect of their hobbies and interests were on display in a number of foster care homes. Photographs on display showed that children went on holidays and trips with their foster family, as well as other celebrations, such as going to see Santa. Foster carer's who met with inspectors spoke positively about fun days and activities arranged by Five Rivers for the foster care families and how all the children and carer's enjoyed these occasions. Tusla social workers outlined the positive impact on children of the care they received from foster carers and Five Rivers.

Children were appropriately dressed and inspectors saw evidence that children's individual preferences were respected. Parents told inspectors that foster carers were supportive of individual children's clothing preferences.

While preparation for leaving care and after care plans were primarily the responsibility of the respective Tusla area teams, Five Rivers staff and foster carers worked in partnership with young people and Tusla to promote independence and to ensure that the transition into adult life and independent living was well supported. A number of staff and managers interviewed outlined that the service had developed a 'Preparing for Independence' process in consultation with an external advocacy group. A workshop on this process was delivered last year to staff and carers but it required further development so as to tap into foster carer's experiences of preparing and supporting young people. A comprehensive needs assessment and basic skills capacity tool were developed as part of this process.

A review of children's files found that several children over 16 years in foster care placements within the service were without a leaving care plan, while some had aftercare plans and were allocated an aftercare worker. Inspectors found it difficult to find requests for copies of a leaving care plan, where applicable, on files. Information returned by Five Rivers to HIQA prior to the inspection reported that there were 24 children over the age of 16 years in the service's foster placements

and nine young people over 18 years were in receipt of other aftercare supports from Five Rivers, such as educational supports.

During visits to foster care homes, inspectors found a number of young people over 18 years who continued to be supported by their foster carers while attending third level education or training programmes. Foster carers outlined their understanding of what should be in place for young people in relation to preparation for leaving care and adult life but were frustrated in some cases at the lack of support in relation to this for the individual young person. The respective young people spoke about the lack of preparation and support by Tusla in relation to leaving care and aftercare provision but were positive about the supports and guidance from their foster carers and Five Rivers where applicable.

### **Safeguarding and Child Protection**

There were appropriate measures in place to safeguard and protect children from abuse. Each foster care household had a designated link worker. Five Rivers' policies and procedures provided clear practice guidance for foster carers and staff. Child protection and welfare referrals were managed and reported in line with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011*.

Information returned by Five Rivers to HIQA reported that in the 12 months prior to the inspection there had been two child protection concerns reported against foster carers. A review of child protection records maintained by the designated liaison person (DLP) found that one was reported and managed appropriately.

An allegation made by a child in September 2015, in relation to previous foster carers, which had been made after the child left the placement had not been addressed in a timely manner. Tusla had appointed an independent assessor in January 2016 but at the time of the inspection in April 2016 the assessor had not met with the child or the previous foster carers. There were no children placed with these carers pending the outcome of the investigation of the allegation by Tusla.

The national policy on children missing from care was implemented by Five Rivers. Information returned to HIQA reported that there had been two occasions in the 12 months prior to the inspection where a child had gone missing from their placement. Inspectors found that the foster carers had reported these incidents appropriately. Interviews with a number of fostering link workers and foster carers demonstrated knowledge of missing from care procedures. A review of children's files found that absence management plans (AMPs) were not consistently held, however there was evidence that absence management plans were recently requested from Tusla.

Five Rivers had a whistle blowing policy in place, which informed staff and carers on how to report any wrongdoing, without fear of being victimised or dismissed. Staff demonstrated knowledge of the policy during interview and were confident they could express concerns if they arose. They also reported that there was a culture within the service that encouraged staff to express any concern they may have.

During interview, a team leader outlined how foster carers were provided with training in safe care and child protection. A review of the training schedule and foster carer files demonstrated that safe care and child protection training had been provided to all carers. One of the social care workers had created a visual tool to explain safe care to children. Fostering link workers visited foster care homes once a month and a review of records found that on occasions, unannounced visits were undertaken. Foster carers who met with inspectors also confirmed this and demonstrated good knowledge of safe care practices and an understanding of their responsibilities to report any concerns.

There were appropriate notification systems in place for children in foster care. Foster carers interviewed outlined what was required of them in terms of notifications to Five Rivers in respect of any adverse event regarding the child in their care. Five Rivers maintained a register of all incidents/adverse events, which were risk rated and reported to all relevant parties, including the Tusla Monitoring Officer. This was evidenced in a review of notifications seen on files.

### **Foster Carers – Assessment, Training and Support**

Foster carers were assessed and reviewed appropriately in order to meet children's needs; however, they were not always within the timeframes outlined in the regulations and standards. Foster carers received a high level of support and supervision. Foster carers signed contracts and these were maintained on foster carers' files.

Inspectors found that assessments were of a high quality, comprehensive and used a recognised assessment tool which had the potential to inform good decision making and matching. Foster carers were assessed by qualified social workers within Five Rivers. Of the foster carer assessments reviewed, inspectors found that the timeframes for the completion of some ranged from two to 18 months. Foster carers interviewed reported that the assessment process was thorough and comprehensive. They confirmed that the outcome of the assessment was discussed with them prior to being presented for approval to the Foster Care Committee (FCC) of the area placing the child, and that they also had the option to meet the FCC that considered their application.

A review of foster carer files found that Garda vetting was up-to-date for all adults,

including foster carer's children who had become adults.

The timeframe between completion of the assessment report and the presentation of same to the respective FCC was done in timely manner, with approval generally agreed within a one to three month period.

Information returned to HIQA prior to the inspection reported that 17 foster carer reviews had been undertaken in the 12 months prior to inspection. A review of foster carer files found that the majority of reviews were undertaken in line with regulations and standard and were comprehensive and of good quality. However, others demonstrated that while an initial review was held within the first year of placement, evidence of further reviews within a three year interval could not be found on files. There was no evidence on the files whether the respective Foster Care Committees were informed of the outcome of the review.

An inspector observed a foster carer review as part of the inspection. This was attended by the fostering link worker and their team leader, as well as the foster carer. The review included the link worker's report, the views of the children in the placement and the foster carer's feedback forms. The inspector noted that the foster carer's performance, training, and any changes in circumstances were discussed in detail.

The service carried out additional reviews where they were warranted, for example, where a complaint or a child protection concern had been reported.

Children with complex needs were well supported by the service. Due to the multi-disciplinary aspect of the Five Rivers staff team, children and foster carers had good access to support services such as psychology; educational supports, play and art therapy, among others. A number of external professionals reported that Five Rivers supported carers in coordinating the services identified for children in their placements. They said that Five Rivers had on occasions contributed financially to ensure access to a service to meet the particular needs of a child when required. The managing director confirmed that training had been provided in relation to behaviour, including challenging behaviour. The Foundations for Fostering training module and a trauma workshop also covered behaviour issues. However, a number of files reviewed by inspectors confirmed various supports in place for individual children with complex needs but not specifically to behaviour that challenged. A number of carers said that they had no specific training in relation to behaviour that challenged but understood that any restrictive practices such as restraint should not be used. Inspectors saw evidence on files that the fostering link worker discussed behaviours with foster carers, but the advice or guidance offered was not always

recorded. Social workers spoke positively of the care provided by foster carers and Five Rivers and noted improvements in a child's overall development and wellbeing.

Foster carers experienced continuity with link workers and developed trusting relationships with their allocated link worker. They received regular support visits, and supervision and respite arrangements were in place to support children and foster carers.

Foster carers who met with inspectors spoke highly of the supports in place from Five Rivers such as the 24 hour on call service and respite arrangements. They were confident in raising issues with link workers as they arose in the placement and said that they would be supported in an emergency. This was also demonstrated in a review of foster carer files, where the quality of fostering link worker visits was good, discussions with foster carers were child focused and linked to the ability of the foster carer to respond to the child's needs.

Regular respite arrangements were in place to support children and foster carers. There was a good consistency of care with many children availing of respite with the same foster carers. A review of children's and foster carer records showed that, where placements were very difficult due to a child's behaviour and emotional needs, regular respite was offered. Where a placement was at risk of breakdown, Five Rivers offered further supports, such as weekly respite and weekly visits by the fostering link worker, in order to maintain the placement. Inspectors were told by foster carers and children who availed of respite that they were happy with the arrangements in place.

### **Theme 3: Health and Development**

*The health and development needs of children are assessed and arrangements are in place to meet the assessed needs. Children's educational needs are given high priority to support them to achieve at school and access education or training in adult life.*

#### **Inspection findings**

Children's health care needs were appropriately met. However, comprehensive medical records were not in place. Foster carers demonstrated the knowledge and skills to promote children's health. However, improvements were required in the provision of training in the safe administration of medication. The service exceeded the standard in relation to its educational support package to children in foster care.

#### **Health Needs**

There was some evidence that children's health needs were being met by the foster carers but comprehensive medical records were not in place. A review of children's case files found that the health needs of children and corresponding interventions were primarily recorded on a child's care plan, and not on the child's file maintained by the service. Medical visits and appointments were captured in the monthly monitoring report filled out by the foster carer. Inspectors could not evidence on all files if children's medicals prior to or on admission had taken place and medical consents obtained which was the responsibility of the respective Tusla social work area teams.

Foster carers interviewed or who met with inspectors were very clear about their responsibilities in addressing the medical and health needs of their respective foster child and attended appointments with any necessary specialist intervention for a child in their care. Appropriate information and specific training about the medical and personal care needs of children was provided to foster carers who demonstrated the knowledge and skills to promote children's health. A review of case files and training records demonstrated training courses undertaken by foster carers such as first aid, eating patterns of children in care, among others and this was confirmed during foster care household visits.

The service had a clear policy and procedure in relation to the administration of medication and care of medicines. Foster carers maintained records where necessary. While they received training in relation to first aid, foster carers were not adequately trained where necessary in the administration of medication for individual children.

## **Education Needs**

Five Rivers had a comprehensive educational support package in place for children and young people within their service, and children were supported to attend educational placements by their foster carers. The educational support package was developed to ensure that the children in foster care placements had appropriate supports and opportunities to maximise their potential. This was led by a dedicated, qualified and experienced education services coordinator. During interview the coordinator outlined the educational supports in place. This included one-to-one work with children, the development of working relationships with all relevant professionals, school personnel, carers and the child or young person, and the development of personal education plans. It also included the provision of psycho-educational supports to teachers around elements that impede learning for children and young people.

Some children's files contained copies of correspondence between the education support coordinator and the schools. A review of children's case files demonstrated that education needs were addressed in care planning and review processes, social worker case notes, monthly summaries completed by the foster carers and reports completed by the fostering link worker.

Children were referred for educational supports by the foster carer or teacher; the Child and Family Agency social worker or the fostering link worker. The educational needs of children were assessed so as to inform their educational programme. Five Rivers also employed an external educational psychologist and educational psychotherapist, where a highly specific intervention or assessment was warranted. Questionnaires completed by these external professionals reported that Five Rivers provided very good support in difficult circumstances and advocated to help children achieve good educational outcomes. The education services coordinator told the inspector that in order to provide these supports, the service undertook a recruitment process for education tutors/volunteers and about 20 people had signed up. These people were interviewed and vetted appropriately and provided with training, which included safeguarding and child protection. An appropriate education tutor/volunteer was then matched with a child's specific learning need based on their skills, experience, compatibility and geographical location of both tutor and child. This educational support package was seen as very positive and proactive in addressing the educational needs of the children in foster care.

Foster carers interviewed placed education as a high priority for children. With the exception of one foster care household visited, foster carers were aware of or had experience of the educational supports for individual children and spoke very positively about it. They also confirmed training modules in relation to the effects of disrupted attachment, loss and trauma on learning and behaviour in school, provided

by Five Rivers, which gave them a better understanding of how to support the child's educational needs.

There was very good communication and engagement between carers, professionals and schools, as confirmed by those interviewed. Children and young people were encouraged by the service and their carers to participate in further education or vocational training. Five Rivers were able to provide the numbers of young people who had completed their second level education while in the care of its foster carers, and who then went on to third level education, for example in 2014, 14 of 15 young people went on to third level education and in 2015, seven young people completed their Leaving Certificate examinations and were currently accessing third level education.

#### **Theme 4: Leadership, Governance and Management**

*Effective governance is achieved by planning and directing activities, using good business practices, accountability and integrity. In an effective governance structure, there are clear lines of accountability at individual, team and agency levels and all staff working in the agency are aware of their responsibilities. Risks to the service as well as to individual systems are well managed and the system is subject to a rigorous quality assurance system. Services are robustly monitored.*

#### **Inspection findings**

The governance and management systems in place provided clear lines of accountability and areas of responsibility, to ensure that services to children were delivered in a planned and well resourced manner. The dynamic within the service facilitated a good quality of work undertaken by staff. Improvements were required in the overall management of the emergency place of safety service, the development of a risk management framework and aspects of quality assurance.

#### **Management Structures and Systems**

There was an effective governance structure in place with clearly defined lines of authority and accountability. The directors and managers of the foster care service provided clear leadership and governance. The managing director had been in the service since 2002 and was made a managing director in 2006. She reported to the Chief Operating Officer and owner of the service in the United Kingdom (UK) and was required to submit comprehensive reports to the Board of Directors. A sample of these reports was reviewed by inspectors, as well as minutes of the board meetings held on a quarterly basis. The operations manager who was also a director of the service had been in place since 2011 and reported to the managing director. He clearly outlined his role and responsibilities during interview and had over 30 years experience working in the child/social care area.

The directors and managers of the service were experienced and supported in their roles by a board of directors. They demonstrated good leadership and accountability as observed by inspectors and reported by staff interviewed. The directors had oversight of all aspects of the service and alongside the manager had in-depth knowledge of information pertaining to their foster carers, children, staff and operating systems within the service. This was demonstrated during interviews and discussion of cases with inspectors.

Staff spoke very positively about the governance of the service and the accessibility to and approach taken by managers. Staff were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and outlined that managers were consistent, and had systems in place to monitor practice at all levels. A number of external professionals

commented that the service was a professional, child-centred service that was safe and well-managed.

Managers had good oversight of the service to ensure that the service provided was safe and appropriate to meet the needs of children. Where gaps and/or deficiencies were found, management took appropriate action, for example an overview of complaints was undertaken in 2015 which identified a trend and appropriate steps were put in place to mitigate the risks. There were comprehensive policies and procedures in place, which those interviewed, were knowledgeable of. These provided clear guidance and were consistently implemented. The service also had a comprehensive foster carer handbook which provided foster carers with information about the policies and procedures to be followed, as well as clear guidance about dealing with situations as they arose. Foster carers who met with inspectors confirmed they had received this and what it entailed. However, the service did not have a risk management policy in place.

The emergency place of safety (EPS) service required improvements. Since November 2015 Tusla has been operating a new national call centre to provide emergency out-of-hours social work services to the Gardaí. This changed the way in which Five Rivers operated its existing EPS service since 2009 and required good communication between Tusla and Five Rivers. An on-call social worker from Five Rivers was available out-of-hours Monday to Friday and 24 hours at weekends and bank holidays. Depending on where the calls from Gardaí came from around the country, the service's on-call social worker had guidance to follow. This guidance provided the respective steps to be followed depending on whether the calls came from the Gardaí in Cork North Lee or South Lee areas; from the Gardaí in Dublin, Wicklow or Kildare and calls from the Gardai from any other region.

The service had eight foster carers who provided designated EPS placements only and 33 other foster care households had capacity for emergency placements but not all of the time. Five Rivers had to have 20 foster care placements available for emergency placements each night. The operations manager currently had oversight for this part of the service, and outlined how the system operated and the steps followed. The Five Rivers procedures manual clearly identified the steps undertaken by the EPS service and the inspector undertook a visual walk through of the process with the operations manager. This demonstrated a number of persons involved along the way which included the initial contact from the Tusla national call centre and the Five Rivers on-call social worker, Five Rivers duty social worker during office hours and a service administration person. The inspector found that the system relied primarily on the information about its foster carers and their capacity recorded onto its electronic information system by the fostering link workers. The inspector found gaps in the information recorded that would enable the on-call social worker

to make a thorough risk based assessment of a potential emergency placement and the directors were not always aware of these deficits. Therefore, the coordination of this service was not robust to ensure its effectiveness. The directors had made the decision to appoint a senior practitioner to be responsible for the EPS. This position had been advertised for and applications had closed at the time of inspection.

There was a comprehensive and up-to-date electronic foster carer register, and panel document that recorded information about foster carers in the service, which was supported by robust software. The information system could issue a comprehensive record form with all relevant information for each foster carer. This record form assisted inspectors in their review of cases initially by providing an overview of each case.

There was a prompt notification system in place. When any incident occurred in the foster care placement, the foster carer was obliged to write up an account of the incident and report it to their link worker. The matter was then reviewed by the link worker and their team leader. The report was then filed and notified to relevant parties including Tusla. The operations manager maintained a quarterly register of all incidents which were risk rated.

There was a mix of formal and informal communication systems in place. The service had an excellent electronic information system to support information sharing. However, this was dependent on link workers ensuring information inputted was up-to-date and all necessary documents were uploaded. Staff reported no issues with communication in general. External professionals reported that communication was good. There were regular meetings between the service management team and Tusla. They also noted that the fostering link worker was available to talk when needed, and responded to emails and phone calls in a timely manner.

### **Planning the Service**

The service had a comprehensive business development plan in place. It was in the second year of a five year plan. It noted that the plan was ambitious and it set challenging targets for the team. Managers stated that these were achievable. Staff interviewed reported that they were consulted as part of the overall business planning. Foster carers who met with inspectors said that their views were taken on board and used to plan the service where appropriate. Future plans included increasing the number of foster families and improving training levels. It also included the expansion of services to include training, therapy, assessment and family contact services, which could be accessed or purchased by the Child and Family Agency and other relevant organisations.

## **Risk Management**

Risk was effectively managed in the service and the service had a risk register in place. However, the service had no risk management policy in place.

A review of the risk register found that it had 14 identified risks recorded since 2014, four of which were identified to date in 2016. The inspector found that the risk register reflected the risks identified, key stakeholders and current practices. It recorded changes implemented, new practices developed as well as review timeframes and outcomes. The review timelines were appropriate given the individual risk identified and outcomes were noted where applicable or measurable. There were a number of ongoing actions recorded for specific risks at the time of inspection.

The service used a risk rating process as part of its electronic information system known as RAG (Red, Amber, Green). This indicated the status of a placement of a child with a foster carer in terms of risk. For example, the fostering link worker would rate the placement Red when a child was placed due to the unknown factors of how the placement would be for the child. As the placement progressed, the rating would be changed to reflect if it was positive or there were continuing issues for the child and or foster carer. The rationale for the rating was unclear from the information system as it was not routinely noted in the specific RAG rating section. Inspectors found this to be an issue on a number of cases reviewed and also found that there were significant time gaps in the RAG rating so as to ensure the most up-to-date information was recorded on its electronic information system. This had the potential to impact on robust decision making regarding a placement, if not updated.

Serious and adverse incidents were appropriately managed. Information returned to HIQA reported that in the 24 months prior to the inspection there had been 222 in total of these incidents. A breakdown of these was as follows: 2014 x 125; 2015 x 79; 2016 x 18. Examples of incidents included: a child being disruptive in school, a child attending the hospital due to an injury in school, non-adherence to a care plan, a child who got upset and ran out into the road, a child who was verbally abusive.

## **Quality Assurance**

There were monitoring systems in place to improve the quality and effectiveness of services, outcomes for children, and to ensure compliance with the standards.

One team leader had oversight of assessments carried out by fostering link workers and a second team leader had oversight of the responsibilities of the duty system. The team manager in the Cork office stated that she quality assured all reports that

were to be submitted to the Foster Care Committee and that she read all of the compulsory monthly summaries completed by foster carers.

Each case was reviewed during supervision with the respective case holders. Inspectors found from a review of case supervision records, that they were of varying quality, for example it was not always clear what actions were agreed and timescales or persons responsible were not recorded. However, these records did evidence good oversight of cases. In addition, the managing director/team leader outlined that she carried out a spot check on the fostering link worker's record keeping on the electronic information system as part of supervision of staff. The managing director had set up a file auditing system on a quarterly basis, to identify deficits or gaps in information in a random selection of cases. It was unclear if the deficits or gaps identified were completed or not as this was not routinely recorded.

The service had been visited by a Tusla monitoring officer on a number of occasions prior to inspection. The service was awaiting a copy of the monitoring report following the most recent visit.

An up-to-date service level agreement (SLA) was in place for the emergency place of safety only. This outlined agreed performance management requirements and other information requirements. An SLA in relation to general foster carers was out of date. The inspector reviewed copies of correspondence from the service to Tusla requesting an SLA to be agreed. This was still an ongoing issue at the time of inspection and had not been identified on the service's risk register.

Foster carer reviews provided opportunities for feedback from foster carers, to inform the quality of the service provided. Disruption reports following placement endings, planned or unplanned were completed, which also provided opportunities to inform the quality of the service provided. The electronic information system had the ability to run information reports. The managing director told the inspector that this facility allowed information to be used to review processes and improve the services provided.

## **Theme 5: Use of Resources**

*Services recruit sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of children. Foster carers stay with the agency and continue to offer placements to children.*

### **Inspection findings**

The service had proactive strategies in place for the recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of carers. The service provided quality care through a group of experienced and consistent carers. The service exceeded the standard in relation to the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

### **Recruitment and Retention of foster carers**

The service actively ran recruitment campaigns and had retention strategies to maintain an appropriate range of carers. Eight recruitment campaigns had been held in the 12 months prior to the inspection, with a total of 419 enquiries about becoming a foster carer. The average response time to a new enquiry was 24 hours or up to 72 hours at weekends. The service had received 50 applications from prospective foster carers of which 42 were assessed.

A power point presentation on the foster carer recruitment drive for 2016 outlined the aims of the campaign, planning processes, recruitment processes, working with the media, advertising, social media, assisting current carers in recruiting new foster carers and targeted campaigns. The plans had clear timelines and specific tasks had persons responsible identified. Recruitment strategies included the following: social media, other media sources such as radio and newspapers, information stands in large shopping centres, letters to carers regarding recommending a friend for fostering, community advertising such as leaflet drop, school newsletters, churches and other religious institutions, libraries and community notice boards. The service had run an advertisement campaign on a local radio station which ran for one week each month for 12 months. This had led to an increase in enquiries. These enquiries were logged on their IT system, which allowed them to track where the enquirer had heard about the service.

An inspector observed good discussion during a staff team meeting in relation to enquires and applications, recruitment drives and training needs of foster carers. The whole team were involved, with different staff leading on various initiatives.

Six information meetings were held for prospective foster carers in the 12 months prior to the inspection. Managers outlined that attendance had increased at these meetings due to the radio campaign.

The managers of the service outlined that they did not have sufficient foster carers in place to meet the demand for services particularly in relation to the emergency place of safety service provision even though there were no children awaiting a foster care placement. At the time of inspection, the service were actively trying to recruit a number of new foster carers for this service, to meet the demands of placements required for the Dublin/Wicklow/Kildare service area, which they had been asked to take on by the Child and Family Agency.

Resources were consistently in place to retain foster carers so as to meet the demands of the service. Information evenings, coffee mornings and family fun days were held. Recognition and appreciation dinners were held with foster carers and awards were given for five and 10 years commitment to providing foster care for children. Foster carers interviewed or who met with inspectors spoke very positively about their experience of the fostering service and the high level of supports they received, such as the provision of a 24 hour on call service, the option of taking 14 days respite in each calendar year, which recognised that fostering could be a challenging task that placed considerable strain on foster families at times. Other supports included the availability of link workers, therapeutic staff, managers and the training provided.

Exit interviews were offered to all carers, so as to inform future learning for the service; however, these were not always taken up by carers.

## **Theme 6: Workforce**

*Each staff member has a key role to play in delivering child-centred, effective and safe services to support children. Children's agency recruit and manage their workforce to ensure that staff has the required skills, experience and competencies to respond to the needs of children.*

### **Inspection findings**

The service was provided by an experienced, skilled and supported staff team that had the capacity to meet the needs of the foster carers and children. While staff were recruited in accordance with legislation, standards and policies, some improvements were required in relation to specific staff. Supervision was regular and consistent and staff received appropriate training and support to fulfil their roles.

### **Recruitment**

Staff were recruited in accordance with legislation, standards and policies and this was reflected in the 18 personnel files reviewed by inspectors. With the exception of one, staff files had evidence of up-to-date vetting, references, copies of qualifications, contract of employment and job descriptions and appropriate registration with the relevant registration body. One staff member had all of the appropriate recruitment requirements on file with the exception of appropriate professional registration evidence. The issue in relation to this matter was that the staff member's qualifications from Northern Ireland were not recognised in the Republic of Ireland. There was evidence of correspondence between Five Rivers and CORU, the health and social care professional's registration body in order to address the matter. However, at the time of inspection, this staff member was still unregistered. The inspector raised the issue with the Directors of the service during the inspection. They were satisfied with the staff member's work to date and there had never been an issue or concern in relation to her caseload and professionalism to date. The inspector requested that an interim arrangement be considered for this staff member in light of the finding until such a time that the application for recognition was approved and appropriate registration was obtained.

A number of staff outlined the induction programme they completed; however a record of same was not evident on staff personnel files reviewed. There was also no formal probation process or performance management or development system in place.

One manager told the inspector that they were never formally appointed as manager. She also outlined that she was responsible for recruitment of staff and

carried out interviews of potential staff. However, she had no formal training as an interviewer.

### **Sufficient staff and skill mix**

There were sufficient experienced and qualified staff in place to deliver the service. The service comprised one managing director, one operations manager/director, one team manager, two social work team leaders, one senior social work practitioner, 13.5 fostering link workers, 0.5 senior counselling psychologist, one education support coordinator, two play therapists, one social care leader, 3.5 administrative staff and 1.5 finance staff. There were no vacancies or no staff on extended leave at the time of inspection. There was consistent staffing in place. This was confirmed by foster carers and external professionals who outlined that the service seemed to retain their staff and many of the carers have had the same link worker for a number of years. This was reported to contribute significantly towards the foster carers' ability to provide a consistently high-level of care, in often very difficult circumstances.

The two directors and the team manager had appropriate skills and experience. During interviews, they each presented as knowledgeable, and were qualified and experienced. The managing director held a Masters in Health Care Management, the director in charge of operations held a Masters in Care Management, but the team manager did not have any formal management training. The lack of management training was evident, in that she did not have formal audit systems in place, reporting structures were done in an ad-hoc or as needed basis, and were not formalised. However, during interview the manager presented as very competent, and always available to staff, as demonstrated in service documents and observations during the inspection fieldwork.

### **Supervision and support**

Staff were supported and supervised appropriately. A review of 18 staff supervision records found that supervision was very regular and very thorough. Staff interviewed confirmed that supervision took place on a monthly basis and was a consistent practice throughout the service. Each case that a link social worker had was systematically reviewed, and other areas like personal wellbeing, caseload management, training and development were also discussed. The records, while they recorded brief updates on each case, and did identify some actions, did not always indicate if actions were then followed up at the next supervision session. A caseload weighting tool had been developed in the weeks prior to the inspection, to support the fostering link workers in the review and management of their cases in terms of looking at the needs of the foster carer, the child, travel requirements due to geographical location and reviews.

The senior counselling psychologist and play therapists also had external clinical supervision with accredited persons, who had been Garda vetted, and were required to meet with the directors annually to discuss any issues that arose, as well as ensuring adherence to *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011*. A new contract for external supervision was being developed at the time of inspection.

Staff meetings were held regularly and were very well attended. They covered a broad range of issues, clear records were maintained but actions were not recorded. The minutes did not refer to any previous review of meeting minutes, so it was unclear how issues were tracked from meeting to meeting and it was not always clear if actions had been completed or not. Staff told inspectors that the managers of the service were very approachable and supportive.

### **Training**

Staff received adequate training to carry out their duties. A review of 18 staff files showed that staff had participated in significant training since joining the service and this was actively promoted by Five Rivers. The service had a training development manager who scheduled training primarily for carers, but staff also participated in this. Twelve staff and two foster carers had been trained as trainers so as to deliver training to other staff members and carers. All staff had child protection training and further training was scheduled for May 2016.

Staff reported they could seek other training opportunities outside of the annual schedule and the service was very supportive of this. A database of training attended by staff was maintained and some personnel files evidenced recent certificates of attendance at training.

## Appendix 1

<b>National Standards for Foster Care (April 2003)</b>
<b>Theme 1: Child Centred Services</b>
<b>Standard 1: Positive sense of identity</b> Children and young people are provided with foster care services that promote a positive sense of identity for them.
<b>Standard 2: Family and friends</b> Children and young people in foster care are encouraged and facilitated to maintain and develop family relationships and friendships.
<b>Standard 3: Children's Rights</b> Children and young people are treated with dignity, their privacy is respected, they make choices based on information provided to them in an age-appropriate manner, and have their views, including complaints, heard when decisions are made which affect them or the care they receive.
<b>Standard 4: Valuing diversity</b> Children and young people are provided with foster care services that take account of their age, stage of development, individual assessed needs, illness or disability, gender, family background, culture and ethnicity (including membership of the Traveller community), religion and sexual identity.  <i>Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995</i> <i>Part III Article 8 Religion</i>
<b>Standard 25: Representations and complaints</b> Health boards have policies and procedures designed to ensure that children and young people, their families, foster carers and others with a bona fide interest in their welfare can make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the fostering service, whether provided directly by a health board or by a non-statutory agency.

## **Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

### **Standard 8: Matching carers with children and young people**

Children and young people are placed with carers who are chosen for their capacity to meet the assessed needs of the children or young people.

#### ***Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995***

*Part III, Article 7: Capacity of foster parents to meet the needs of child*

### **Standard 9: A safe and positive environment**

Foster carers' homes provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for the children or young people.

### **Standard 10: Safeguarding and child protection**

Children and young people in foster care are protected from abuse and neglect.

### **Standard 13: Preparation for leaving care and adult life**

Children and young people in foster care are helped to develop the skills, knowledge and competence necessary for adult living. They are given support and guidance to help them attain independence on leaving care.

### **Standard 14a: Assessment and approval of non-relative foster carers**

Foster care applicants participate in a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering task and are formally approved by the health board prior to any child or young person being placed with them.

#### ***Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995***

*Part III, Article 5 Assessment of foster parents*

*Part III, Article 9 Contract*

### **Standard 15: Supervision and support**

Approved foster carers are supervised by a professionally qualified social worker. This person, known as the link worker, ensures that foster carers have access to the information, advice and professional support necessary to enable them to provide high quality care.

### **Standard 16: Training**

Foster carers participate in the training necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge required to provide high quality care.

### **Standard 17: Reviews of foster carers**

Foster carers participate in regular reviews of their continuing capacity to provide high quality care and to assist with the identification of gaps in the fostering service.

**Standard 22: Special Foster care**

Health boards provide for a special foster care service for children and young people with serious behavioural difficulties.

**Theme 3: Health and Development**

**Standard 11: Health and development**

The health and developmental needs of children and young people in foster care are assessed and met. They are given information, guidance and support to make appropriate choices in relation to their health and development.

***Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995***

*Part III, Article 6 Assessment of circumstances of child*

*Part IV, Article 16 (2)(d) Duties of foster parents*

**Standard 12: Education**

The educational needs of children and young people in foster care are given high priority and they are encouraged to attain their full potential. Education is understood to include the development of social and life skills.

## **Theme 4: Leadership, Governance and Management**

### **Standard 18: Effective policies**

Health boards have up-to-date effective policies and plans in place to promote the provision of high quality foster care for children and young people who require it.

#### ***Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995***

*Part III, Article 5(1) Assessment of foster carers*

### **Standard 19: Management and monitoring of foster care agency**

Health boards have effective structures in place for the management and monitoring of foster care services.

#### ***Child Care (Placement of Children in Foster Care) Regulations, 1995***

*Part IV, Article 12 Maintenance of register*

*Part IV, Article 17 Supervision and visiting of children*

## **Theme 5: Use of Resources**

### **Standard 21: Recruitment and retention of an appropriate range of foster carers**

Health boards are actively involved in recruiting and retaining an appropriate range of foster carers to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in their care.

## **Theme 6: Workforce**

### **Standard 20: Training and Qualifications**

Health boards ensure that the staff employed to work with children and young people, their families and foster carers are professionally qualified and suitably trained.