

Foundation Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is an independent fostering agency. It has an office in Worcestershire which was registered with Ofsted on 2nd July 2013. It offers a number of different types of placements for children and young people; emergency and unplanned, respite, bridging, long-term placements and specialist support services. Since registering they have recruited and approved 6 foster carers: with five children placed and 6 vacancies.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This newly registered agency has an experienced Registered Manager, staff team and foster carers who are highly committed to fostering. They are using relevant research, theories and their expert knowledge to establish, and continue to develop, a robust fostering service. They are successful in meeting their aim to achieve good outcomes for young people by promoting the well-being, effectiveness and personal development of foster carers.

There have been no unplanned endings of placements. All children and young people are well matched and in stable placements. All children and young people are effectively supported in line with their local authority plans and as a result are making good progress. This progress is monitored and regularly reviewed. Staff and

foster carers listen to the views of children and young people and work in partnership with parents and other agencies to ensure their needs continue to be met.

The recruitment and preparation of foster carers is thorough. All foster carer assessments and approvals are undertaken within eight months of application. The agency recruits well informed and professionally qualified foster carers who have excellent insight into the needs of children and young people who need foster care. Children and young people state they are happy and secure in their placements and are positive about the care they receive. Foster carers feel they have clear delegated authority, are actively involved in the life and development of the agency. They feel valued, well informed and excellently supported by the supervising social workers and support workers.

Safeguarding practice and monitoring is a priority in this fostering agency. There are effective, proactive systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe. Thorough assessments of foster carers' skills are conducted and robust risk assessments are carried out. These ensure that children and young people's welfare is promoted and that they experience positive outcomes.

There are no breaches in regulations. However, one recommendation has been made as a result of this inspection to develop the views and involvement of birth children in all relevant aspects of the agency's processes.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that reviews of approvals of all foster carers and their household are undertaken annually and include any enquires necessary to inform this judgement. This specifically relates to accessing the views of birth children (Statutory Guidance Volume 4, as amended July 2013)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Individual support to children and young people and their foster family has a high priority by this agency and is a key strength. Each child and young person is treated as an individual and given personal support tailored to their individual needs.

Children and young people enjoy positive relationships with their foster families because they are matched and placed appropriately within families capable of meeting their needs. For example, a foster carer who is caring for a child with Cystic Fibrosis is a qualified nurse. A young person who is quadriplegic and has Cerebral Palsy is living with a skilled foster carer whose home is appropriately adapted to

meet their needs.

Children and young people are welcomed into placements and are well-informed of the support they can expect. Foster carers provide age-appropriate, colourful and well-illustrated information about their home and family to children and young people before they move in. These booklets include photos, and where appropriate, symbols for children and young people with communication or learning disabilities. Where possible, placements are planned and introductory visits are organised. All children and young people have their own bedrooms and can personalise them. Sensitive practice helps children and young people feel comfortable with their foster carers and this results in strong sense of self and belonging in their placements.

Children and young people have a positive self-view and good understanding of their background. Foster carers are proactive in supporting them to continue, and where appropriate, increase contact with their family and friends. Children and young people also establish successful new relationships and friendships through play groups, school, clubs, hobbies and employment. A young person stated: 'I like it here. It feels more like a family because they help and listen to me. I now have a job and a boyfriend. I feel like I am making good progress because my foster carers help me succeed.'

Children and young people benefit from foster carers who provide a safe and nurturing environment which results in them becoming more confident individuals. They experience age-appropriate opportunities to achieve developmental milestones and life skills. For example, a pre-school child was attending 'time for twos sessions', 'toddler sense' and 'rhythm time.' These successful sessions resulted in good progress in communication, social and mobility skills.

Children and young people learn about good health because they have regular discussions with their foster carers. Some children and young people, with poor or unstable health when they are first placed with a foster carer, receive appropriate health interventions which result in their health improving or their needs being addressed. Foster carers provide a healthy environment for children and young people to grow up in. They ensure children and young people are registered with a General Practitioner, see a dentist regularly, attend any other relevant health appointments and meet specific responsibilities set out in their health care plan. Staff and foster carers are in regular contact with community nurses, speech therapists, occupational therapists and school nurses to meet children's individual needs. A key strength of this agency is the sensitive support foster carers give to children and young people with complex health needs. For example, foster carers actively support one child who requires daily physiotherapy and another young person who has frequent and long stays in hospital.

Children and young people have good school attendance and make good educational progress. Foster carers support children's development and learning through play and pre-school clubs; and young people to attend appropriate, or specialist, schools. Foster carers are confident in meeting the educational needs of children and young people and are supported in this task by supervising social workers. All foster carers have good local knowledge of educational authorities and are involved in the

personal education plan (PEP) process and attend planning meetings for individual children. Foster carers support and encourage attendance and celebrate achievement and success. They attend parent evenings and other school activities; facilitate homework, as well as liaising with other professionals, such as the designated teacher for looked-after children at school.

Children and young people pursue interests and engage in new leisure, educational and community activities. This helps them make friends and establish positive links in their local community. Foster carers actively involve young people in a wide range of family activities including geocaching, cycling, cooking, gardening and walking. Older young people also spend time socialising with friends independently. In addition, agency support workers befriend and help young people identify and pursue hobbies and interests. For example, one young person, who is a wheelchair user, has been accompanied to attend his first football match. Another young person is being encouraged, away from his lap top and out of his bedroom, to experience some more social, community-based activities. Another young person is going with a support worker to London to a comic convention. Children and young people participate in sports, arts and recreational hobbies and, consequently, increase their self-confidence and sense of self-accomplishment.

The agency makes sure that children and young people are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic well-being. Foster carers provide all children and young people with creative opportunities to take measured risks and to learn independence skills. These are appropriate to their age and ability. From an early starting point they are encouraged to develop practical skills in cleaning, cooking, budgeting and taking personal responsibility; initially through play and fun activities. Young people then learn more practical skills and grow in emotional maturity. For example, one young person was encouraged to apply for employment and when successful, was supported to maintain it. This has resulted in her being offered more work, as she has proved more reliable than other young people employed at the same time.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency ensures prospective foster carers are robustly recruited and assessed to ensure they meet the needs of children. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical and identify the competencies and strengths foster carers have or need to develop. Preparation and assessment is thorough and conducted with appropriate depth and rigor. All assessments and approvals have been completed within eight months of the application.

The panel is, on the whole, appropriately vigilant about the quality of assessments presented to them. The panel meetings are well-chaired by a very experienced practitioner. Panel members are recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds and have the experience and expertise to ask insightful, relevant questions to ensure robust recommendations are made. Good quality assurance systems monitor the

effectiveness of the panel and the standard of assessments to deliver quality foster care placements. For example, an independent panel observer stated: 'The quality of analysis and debate amongst the panel members led to appropriate and robust checking of any facts, anomalies and issues arising from the assessment, with questioning of the assessor enabling and informing a fuller assessment of the applicant by panel.' Panel minutes are clear, informative and ensure any outstanding issues are effectively followed up. The panel makes timely and appropriate recommendations and decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children and young people in foster care. Decision making is similarly prompt and effective. The process is rigorous and well recorded and, where necessary, has challenged the recommendations of panel. These effective and robust systems deliver foster carers who are able to work towards and provide permanence within a warm, stable and safe home for children and young people. Since registering there have been no unplanned endings to placements within this agency.

Foster carers are well informed because the agency provides them with good advice, support, guidance and training. For example, foster carers receive excellent support to ensure high quality care is given when looking after children and young people with complex health needs. All achieve initial training requirements within timescales. They also access a running programme of mandatory training and more additional focused training linked to each placement. The agency further supports foster carers by signposting them to health professionals and literature that enhances the care of the child or young person. As a result, children and young people are leading healthy, full lifestyles and making informed decisions about their future and well-being. Where children and young people have specific issues or conditions, foster carers manage these professionally and sensitively.

Foster carers receive good quality support from staff through regular visits, telephone calls, supervision and support groups. Foster carers feel highly valued within the agency. They feel a key strength of the agency is the support they receive to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. All feedback received from foster carers has been extremely positive with comments such as: 'The support group set up by the agency was encouraged and facilitated by the agency. Although we have been given support and advice to form the group, we have also been encouraged to develop it in a way that best supports us as carers, as well as meeting the National Minimum Standards. It therefore is not merely adding to the burden of work it is genuinely supportive in nature.' 'There is a strong emphasis on this being a developing agency and all opinions are valued.' 'The supportiveness and openness of the agency ensures that foster carers feel trusted and valued. There is a genuine commitment to the welfare of the carer which supports directly our ability to care for the children.'

Children and young people are carefully matched to their foster placements to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. The formal process successfully identifies any gaps and provides additional support, resources and training that are needed to support the foster carers and the young person's placement. The agency requires comprehensive information to help them and the foster carers make the most appropriate placements. In turn, they share good quality

information with placing authorities and young people.

Foster carers work in partnership with the agency to achieve the best outcomes for young people. They communicate regularly and effectively with children's social workers and other professionals. They are actively involved in planning for the child or young person and ensure they work towards the aims of the placing authority plan and the wishes of the child. Foster carers work well with local authority colleagues and attend and contribute to all essential meetings. A local authority social worker stated: 'Communication has been great. The foster carer and the agency are very on the ball and informative. The foster carer produced a detailed report for the child's review.' Foster carers are clear about delegated authority and specific arrangements are effectively dealt with at the start of the placement. Young people benefit from this effective partnership work.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

All agency staff and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children and young people is paramount. Foster carers are wholly committed to developing positive relationships with children and young people and generate a culture of openness and trust. Prior to, and throughout a placement, a young person's safety and well-being is regularly reviewed and monitored. A range of methods, including risk assessments and individual safe-caring policies, ensures changing needs are identified and strategies are put in place to address them. The agency endeavours not to be risk-averse and seeks to be proactive in identifying and developing strategies to manage risk. As a result, children and young people feel safe and learn how to protect themselves and make sensible, safe decisions. A key strength of this service is the in-depth knowledge of supporting young people with disabilities. They are sensitive to each individual's complex needs and effectively balance the need to safeguard with the need to promote independence.

Children and young people have not gone missing from their foster families. If this did ever occur, the agency is ready to work closely with other agencies to ensure young people are protected and responded to positively on their return. There is a policy and procedure, familiar to foster carers if children go missing from care. Staff and foster carers are trained and confident in using practice and comprehensive up-to-date procedures to safeguard children and young people and secure good outcomes. All panel members, staff and foster carers attend safeguarding and whistle-blowing training and respond in a very professional and knowledgeable way to any concerns about children's and young people's safety.

Foster carers have regularly reviewed, individual, child-centred, safe care policies that are specific to their families. Initial safe care risk assessments are undertaken to help identify any areas of risk and help inform the safe care policies. Individual risk management, intimate care procedures and individual behaviour management strategies are also completed if deemed necessary. This is excellent practice and ensures that the safety and well-being of individuals is effectively promoted and

always a priority. Foster carers are well equipped to promote e-safety and address any instances of bullying or cyber-bullying, in consultation with their supervising social workers and young people's social workers. They have a good awareness of the particular vulnerabilities of looked after children and current issues and practice.

There are clear, robust safeguarding policies, procedures and guidance that underpin recruitment, staff vetting, assessment, preparation, supervision, induction and on-going training of foster carers and staff. The agency also has positive working relationships with local authorities and other agencies. This proactive partnership work, in line with multi agency protocols, focuses on meeting the specific needs of each child and young person and ensures they are kept safe and supported to reduce any high-risk behaviour.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The fostering agency is effectively managed by the Registered Manager who is appropriately experienced and qualified for their role. The style of management ensures that staff and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and enabled to promote welfare, safety and achieve good outcomes for the children and young people in their care.

The accurate Statement of Purpose underpins a comprehensive range of policies and procedures, which effectively guide and support foster carers and staff. These documents, as well as the agency's website and the developing Foster Carers' Charter, ensure staff and foster carers understand the aims and objectives of the service. Complaints are seen in a positive light and as a way of improving practice, however, there have been no complaints about the agency since they were registered.

The agency has effective working relationships with placing authorities. A commissioning officer stated: 'It is clear from talking to the Registered Manager he is committed to providing high quality support to foster carers which enables them to concentrate on meeting the needs of the children. The agency is developing a positive working relationship with the local authority. The Registered Manager is very approachable and very proactive at providing information.' The Registered Manager has clear expectations of local authorities. He ensures foster carers are equipped to succeed and able to provide the best care for young people to enable them to flourish. For example, where necessary he has been proactive in setting up timely placement meetings.

Children and young people have good opportunities to express their views. The agency, foster carers and children and young people have fun together and are developing positive relationships with each other and their community. For example, the agency operates a social responsibility strategy and this year they have formed a link with a local hospice.

Children and young people influence their day-to-day care through discussions with their foster carers, support workers and directly with the Registered Manager. The agency plans to gather their views at foster carers' annual reviews, where their views will be sought by the panel. They plan fun activity and consultation days. The profile given to the voice of the child is good and continues to be developed in this newly registered service. However, the views of birth children are not currently being drawn upon to improve the foster agency's service, or the care of children and young people living in their homes.

The premises and administrative systems assist the fostering service to run smoothly. For example, payments to foster carers are fair and paid in a timely way and foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them. Records are clear and child centred.

Recruitment procedures for staff ensure that all appropriate checks and references are undertaken and appropriately ratified. There are robust processes for the selection of staff and fostering households. There is a low key, but effective, approach to recruiting carers. The Registered Manager is confident that the agency's growth is in line with its development plan and that he is attracting carers with the right skills and qualities to meet the needs of the children.

Staff, panel members and foster carers receive the support; training and development they need to carry out their role effectively and meet the specific needs of children and young people. For example, foster carers receive regular excellent quality support and supervision from supervising social workers. There is also a highly effective out-of-hours service for foster carers and it is standard practice that foster carers join a support group. The outcome for foster carers is that they are well-supported. In turn, they provide high quality care, support and guidance to children and young people in placement.

The Registered Manager has good systems for monitoring, which include tracking the progress and outcomes for children and young people. The manager also provides detailed and analytical monthly reports to the panel which give an honest appraisal of how the agency is progressing.

All significant events relating to the health and protection of children and young people fostered by the agency are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities. There is a clear process for managing the notification of significant events. These events are low at the agency and reflect that placements are planned and well matched.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.