

# Fostering Dimensions

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Unique reference number** SC438506  
**Inspection date** 17/08/2015  
**Inspector** Tracy Murty  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype**

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**Date of last inspection** 06/03/2013

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This fostering service is privately operated and was registered in January 2012. It provides short term, long term, emergency, bridging and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection there were six fostering households providing placements for four children and young people. The agency is currently undertaking five assessments of prospective fostering households.

### 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**

The agency ensures that young people's individual needs are well met during their time in placement. Young people report feeling safe and say that they are listened to by their foster carers and agency staff at all times. One young person stated: 'I have had several foster placements before this one. This is the best by far. My carers really listen to and understand me, I could not be happier.'

Young people receive highly personalised care. This helps them to develop skills and gain in confidence. For some young people, there has been a noticeable improvement in their concerning behaviours and engagement in education. Foster carers really advocate for the young people placed with them. This is evident in how well they support young people to express their wishes and feelings, particularly when they are not happy with certain aspects of a placing authority's decision making. Agency staff and managers also routinely challenge placing authorities and

other professionals, in support of young people and meeting their individual needs.

The matching of young people to carers is good, with careful consideration given by managers and staff to identifying the most suitable placements. Foster carers report high levels of satisfaction in the support provided to them by the agency. They report receiving high quality supervision and a range of training opportunities once approved. All carers are on track to complete mandatory post-approval training within the required timescales.

Staff demonstrate good verbal and written communication skills. Recording is detailed and reflects the high levels of support provided to foster carers. Staff feel very well supported by the registered manager and responsible individual, with one stating: 'I have learned so much from the manager in a short time and really feel part of the agency. I am able to share ideas and take the lead on things, which makes me feel really valued as a social worker.'

Some shortfalls have been identified following this inspection. None of them have any adverse impact on the young people placed. Shortfalls relate to training of foster carers, panel meetings, panel members' appraisals, and notifications.

## Areas of improvement

### Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. This is with specific reference to the investigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry (Regulation 36(1) Schedule 7))	30/09/2015
ensure that no business may be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as a panel - (ii) one member who is a social worker who has at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience, and (iii) three other members (Regulation 24(1)(ii)(iii))	30/09/2015
ensure that the registered person gives notice in writing to Ofsted without delay if there is a change of director of the organisation. (Regulation 39(1)(e)(ii))	30/09/2015

## Recommendations

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

ensure that foster carers receive sufficient training in first aid (NMS 6.7)

ensure that foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication (NMS 6.10)

ensure that all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes (NMS 3.8)

ensure that the agency decision maker reviews the performance of the panel chair and that for all other panel members, the panel chair conducts the performance review. (Volume 4, page 41, paragraph 5.15)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people receive detailed information prior to placements commencing with the agency. This is in the form of a children's guide and profiles of the foster carers. One young person stated: 'I had never been given information before about my new foster carers or the agency. I really appreciated this and being able to meet the carers before I moved in. It really helped me to settle into my new home.'

Young people spoken with during this inspection reported how happy they are. They form positive attachments to their carers and feel very much part of the fostering family. One young person stated: 'This is the best placement I have ever had. The foster carers really understand me and are helping me to overcome things. I never want to leave them.' Another young person, when asked what was good about their foster carer said: 'She is the best cook ever and I am learning to cook things as well.'

Foster carers proactively support young people's contact arrangements with their family members and significant others. They demonstrate a detailed awareness and understanding of young people's backgrounds, and work with parents, the placing authority and others to ensure that their holistic needs are consistently met. One young person praised their foster carers for knowing their background and in actively trying to help them to overcome issues of concern to them. This promotes a real sense of belonging and of being valued.

Young people report feeling listened to by their carers and staff at the agency. Supervising social workers always ask to speak alone with young people during their visits to the foster carers' homes. Young people welcome this and feel it shows that the agency cares about them, and their wishes and feelings. The agency also takes prompt action to consider any potential concerns which might have an impact on placement stability. They have sourced and provided therapeutic support for some placements, to help carers, young people and birth children to overcome any issues. Young people and birth children report feeling very pleased with such imaginative services. An independent reviewing officer also praised the agency for providing such additional services to support placements. They stated: 'The managers identified the need for additional support for one young person's placement, sourced and paid for it. It has proved valuable in supporting the placement and I was very impressed with the agency for being so proactive and prompt in doing this.'

For some young people, there has been a noticeable improvement in concerning or potentially risky behaviours since they moved to their current placements. One placing authority commented on how successful a placement has been for one young person. They stated that incidents of aggressive and violent behaviours have decreased significantly in a relatively short period of time and that the young person is engaging very well in education.

Young people receive very good support to meet their holistic health needs. The agency is particularly good at considering and providing support to meet the

emotional and psychological needs of young people. It provides therapeutic social work support for carers and young people at no additional cost to placing authorities. The agency also employs the services of an independent organisation to provide additional psychological support for young people and carers. This enables carers and agency staff to easily and quickly access advice and direct support for the young people in placement. This organisation also contributes to the training programme for the agency.

Young people have educational provision that provides for their statutory entitlement of 25 hours per week. For those young people who have recently moved to their foster carers, plans are in place to secure educational placements for them for the new term. Foster carers really advocate for the educational needs of young people. They work with placing authorities to identify the most suitable educational provision and attend meetings and interviews. One young person commented: 'I have a new school now and in a very short time, I am working to a much higher standard than I was before. My foster carers have really helped me to get back into education and I am really enjoying it.' For others, progress made in education has been excellent. They have moved from one-to-one supervision within school to full integration into the classroom. This is attributable to both educational staff and also to the care and support provided by foster carers.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has recruited and approved six fostering households, consisting of eight foster carers to date. Carers come from diverse backgrounds and are able to meet the identified needs of those young people placed. Young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours benefit from well-matched and planned placements with competent and committed carers. The agency provides high levels of support, supervision and additional specialist services to further support and promote positive outcomes for young people.

Foster carers report the assessment process as being robust and challenging. Carers demonstrate a clear and detailed understanding of their role, and that of the local authority and the agency. Carers consider the Foster Carer Handbook, policies and procedures as part of their post-approval induction training. This mandatory training ensures that all carers are very clear as to the expectations of them and the agency.

Carers receive regular supervision from agency staff. Recording of such meetings is very detailed and comprehensive. Carers report high levels of satisfaction at the quality and range of training opportunities offered to them, including online options. The agency has clear structures in place to ensure that all approved foster carers complete their Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of

approval. Foster carers would benefit from specific training in relation to first aid, administration of medication and positive care and control of children. These areas are considered as part of other training courses, but more focused training would further enhance their skills and competence.

Foster carers are very much part of the team around the child. They work closely and proactively with agency staff, local authorities, health and education providers to ensure young people consistently receive the care and support they need. Carers really listen to what young people say; they act on their wishes and feelings and seek advice and guidance from others. Young people spoken with during this inspection were all highly positive about their carers and in feeling listened to. They feel that their views are important and that carers and agency staff will and do act on what they say. This promotes increased confidence and a sense of being valued.

The fostering panel consists of members with a wide range of skills and experience. The panel is chaired by a highly efficient and competent person. There is good evidence of the panel challenging and fully considering all assessment and review reports. The agency decision maker, who is now a director of the fostering agency, is also highly competent and efficient in their role. However, the responsible individual failed to formally notify Ofsted of the change of directors for the agency. This has no adverse impact on young people.

Recommendations and decisions to approve carers are made following detailed consideration of all documentation presented to panel and interviews with agency staff and applicants. The recording of decisions is very detailed and comprehensive. It reflects very careful consideration by the decision maker of all material and the rationale for their decision. The fostering panel has good systems in place to provide feedback to agency staff and managers on the quality of assessments and reports. The registered manager considers these and uses them to inform improvements of the service and in supervision with agency staff.

There has been one fostering panel meeting which did not have sufficient panel members present because a panel member sent their apologies on the morning of the meeting. The registered manager and panel chair have already made changes to their processes in order to ensure that they have sufficient panel members with the necessary skills and experience present.

Panel members and the panel chair have received annual appraisals of their performance in a timely manner. The views of agency staff and others have been elicited to inform the process. The appraisals to date have been undertaken by the responsible individual and are of a very good standard. However, the agency decision maker should undertake appraisals of the panel chair, and the panel chair should undertake appraisals of all other panel members, to comply with statutory guidance.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people know how to complain and who they can speak with if they have any concerns or worries. There have been no reported complaints from young people since the agency was registered in 2012. Those spoken with during the inspection stated their confidence in their carers and agency managers and staff. They had no doubt that they would be taken seriously if they chose to make a complaint.

Carers display a very good knowledge and understanding of the backgrounds and specific needs and issues for those young people placed with them. Placement plans and risk assessments reflect how those needs and issues will be addressed. One young person commented: 'I never used to have any boundaries in place before. Now I feel safe and really cared for, as my carer wants to know who I am with and sets clear expectations of when I am to come home.'

There have been very few incidents of young people going missing from their placements. Carers fully understand the potential for those young people placed with them to go missing, and ensure that they follow risk assessments. Communication and liaison with other involved agencies is also a positive factor in supporting young people to consider their potentially risky behaviours and to work with them on reducing risks. The involvement of such services as a therapeutic social worker enables young people and carers to work together to consider concerns and to support young people to moderate and better control their emotions and behaviours.

The agency undertakes unannounced visits to its carers and fully considers safeguarding issues in supervision and visits. The agency is also particularly good at ensuring that its staff meets with young people alone during visits to carers' homes. This provides young people with an opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns they may have. Those young people spoken with during the inspection were very complimentary and positive about this. They felt that it showed that the agency cares about their welfare and views. One young person stated: 'The supervising social worker is there for us, as well as for our carers.'

The agency has very clear and robust systems in relation to the recruitment and vetting of all staff and panel members. Personnel files demonstrate the agency's commitment to safer recruitment. The panel chair and members diligently consider all documentation prior to recommending approval of prospective carers. The agency decision maker has a very comprehensive decision sheet which details the considerations and demonstrates that all checks, including disclosure and barring service checks, have been carried out. Such attention to detail promotes safe and appropriate recruitment of staff and foster carers in this agency.

## Leadership and management

**Judgement outcome: Good**

Managers have formed very positive working relationships with placing authorities and commissioning teams since their registration in 2012. A commissioning officer for one placing local authority stated: 'From a commissioning perspective, the agency have been positive to deal with. They have demonstrated good communication both prior to, and throughout the one placement we have with them. All contracts were signed and returned in a timely way. I have had no issues from a commissioning perspective and at this time would use this provider again.'

Clear and comprehensive systems ensure that regular monitoring, reviewing and tracking of young people's progress is in place. This is particularly evident in relation to how the agency tracks and monitors the educational provision, attainment and attendance of each young person placed. Managers send out letters to designated link teachers at the time of a placement commencing, to gain key information on young people's educational history. Agency staff then complete an educational outcomes toolkit with carers in supervision meetings. This ensures that the educational needs and progress of all young people placed with this agency are known and met from the start of their placement.

Managers routinely seek the views of young people, carers and other agency staff and stakeholders as part of their monitoring processes. Feedback is fully considered and contributes to the agency's business plan and staff appraisals. Managers demonstrate a clear and positive approach to ensuring the continual improvement of the services provided and outcomes for young people.

The statement of purpose and children's guide are clear and contain all the required information. Young people understand the aims and objectives of the agency, through the information provided to them, and have a clear understanding of their rights and how to make a complaint. The Foster Carers' Charter has been fully adopted by the agency and details of it are contained in the Foster Carers' Handbook. This is shared and discussed during the mandatory induction training, which all newly approved carers take part in.

Agency staff and panel members have taken part in a wide range of training and development opportunities, which further enhances their skills and ability to perform their role with competence.

The registered manager has failed to send in one notification to Ofsted, relating to a child protection enquiry and investigation. All necessary action was taken and all relevant policies and procedures were followed. Records clearly and accurately reflect good multi-agency working and there has been absolutely no adverse impact on young people as a result of the failure to send in the notification.

At the last inspection, seven recommendations were made. These have all been fully

met. Carers benefit from a wide range of direct and online training opportunities, which are clearly recorded and monitored by agency managers and staff. All information relating to carers has been updated and is reviewed regularly. Agency staff have received, or are due to attend, training in relation to undertaking assessments. Panel members receive induction training in a timely manner. The agency decision member is now a director of the agency. Panel members and the panel chair receive annual appraisals. The registered manager now receives monthly clinical supervision from a suitably qualified professional.

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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.