

# Safehouses

Safehouses Limited

Keystone Innovation Centre, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1JD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Safehouses is an independent fostering agency. It is part of a group of three independent agencies under the same ownership. Safehouses provides a range of foster placements including parent and child placements, and for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and children with disabilities.

**Inspection dates:** 10 to 14 July 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 2 December 2013

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

**Enforcement action since last inspection**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children have good relationships with their carers.
- Many children live in long-term, stable placements.
- Children have lots of opportunities to develop interests and enjoy themselves.
- Children feel part of their carers' families. They enjoy living with them.
- The agency and carers have children's best interests at heart.
- Carers welcome children into their homes, help them settle and provide nurturing placements.
- Carers identify and meet children's individual needs.
- The agency runs a Duke of Edinburgh scheme for some of the children who are placed with it.
- Carers help children to develop their independence skills.
- Carers feel very well supported by the agency.
- The agency takes its responsibility to keep children safe seriously and has a range of 'champions' to help staff and carers manage risks associated with child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, mental health and suicide.
- Work done by the agency and carers reduces the risk to children.
- Carers and the agency help children learn how to keep themselves safer.
- Carers are trained in behaviour management and they help children to understand their behaviour.
- There is an open culture within the agency. Staff and carers feel confident that they could raise any concerns and they would be taken seriously.
- The agency sees improvement as important.
- Carers and staff are supervised well.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- One set of carers have not had the training identified in their personal development plan following a review of their approval and another carer's plan did not identify some key training.
- Concerns identified in a child looked after review were not thoroughly followed up.
- Monitoring had not identified the shortfalls set out above.
- Children are not clearly told how they can read their records.

## What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

### Statutory requirement

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))	30/09/2017

### Recommendations

- Ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. (National Minimum Standards 25.1) In particular this relates to ensuring that identified actions are completed and issues from children looked after reviews are addressed fully.
- Ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (National Minimum Standards 26.6)
- Ensure that foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience. (National Minimum Standards 20.5) In particular this relates to training that is identified from carers' annual reviews and training to help them meet children's specific needs.
- Ensure that areas of concern, or needs for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. (National Minimum Standards 13.9)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children placed with this agency form good relationships with their carers. Many stay in long-term, stable placements that meet their individual needs well. Children speak very positively about their carers. One said that his carers had given him a lot of 'brilliant opportunities' that he would not have had otherwise. He said 'I love this placement. I could not have asked for anything better. It feels like we're their real family. There are always people to talk to.' All of the placing social workers that were spoken to were very complimentary about the quality of the carers and the relationship they have with the children. They spoke about carers having children's best interests at heart, providing nurturing placements and welcoming children into their homes. Even those who had placed children a considerable distance from their home area said that the placements were meeting their needs. There is effective matching of children with foster carers to help ensure that children live with people who can look after them and meet their needs. This also helps to reduce placement breakdowns and moves for children.

The children's placements give them a base from which to develop and grow. The agency supports carers to help children make progress in their education. One child spoke about his long-held plans for employment which the carers were helping him to fulfil. Another child is benefiting from more appropriate education and stronger friendships as a result of her carers advocating for a change of school for her. Her individual needs have been identified and met. As a result of her more appropriate friendships she is able to develop socially and have enjoyable experiences which many children take for granted. The carers make sure that children's health needs are identified and met. A placing social worker spoke of how carers had quickly met a child's health needs and identified possible further needs which they made sure were looked into. This is another example of the focus on children as individuals and carers' commitment to meeting their needs. The carers also help children to understand and come to terms with their past. This helps children to develop their identities and emotional well-being. Some carers spoke specifically about how the agency had supported them in their good work with children.

Children have many opportunities to develop interests, take part in activities and have positive experiences which enrich their lives. The carers encourage and support children to belong to clubs such as football and drama groups. One child spoke of his carers doing everything they could to make sure he could go on a school trip to America, including arranging skiing lessons for him. Another spoke about how much she enjoys going on holidays with her carers and spending time at their beach hut. The supervision notes for one carer refer to a child as 'buzzing' when returned from drama and that it had given her 'a really good boost'. The agency employs a children's champion who, among other things, arranges activities for children and organises the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme in which some of the children can take part. These activities help children to develop and learn new skills. The feedback which children provided to the agency in relation to the Duke of Edinburgh scheme includes:

- 'I made friends when I did not think I would.'
- 'I always give up at everything. I never thought that I could do it and I was proud that I finished.'
- 'I learned that I could be a leader and motivate others.'
- 'I learned to read a map and work a compass.'

The carers help children to develop independence skills that will help them to manage successfully in adulthood. These include helping younger children with personal hygiene and older children with using public transport, cooking and developing social networks. A child said that he had learned more about being independent in the last two years than in the rest of his life. A carer said of a child, 'We push her to do things that she can do and she surprises herself.' This child is unlikely ever to live completely independently because of her specific needs, but this is not stopping her carers from helping her reach her potential. The independent reviewing officer said that the carers are 'doing loads' of preparation for adulthood.

Carers and the agency recognise that moves can be difficult for children and they try to make the process of moving into their homes as easy as possible. When timescales allow, there are detailed child-centred plans for the moves. When placements are made at short notice, the carers help the children and young people settle. A placing social worker spoke of the carers being caring, nurturing, natural and gentle which helped the child to settle. Managers have high expectations of supervising social workers and carers. In most cases, issues or concerns are identified and addressed, but in one case concerns which were raised at a child's child looked after review were not thoroughly followed through. Managers recognise this omission and are very clear that it will be resolved now it has been brought to their attention. The carers feel very well supported by the agency and their individual workers, describing them as 'the best' and 'excellent'. They also have a high opinion of the registered manager. One said that they 'trust her 100%'. The carers feel part of the team around the child and clearly are. Prospective carers are welcomed positively by the agency. One spoke of approaching two fostering providers and choosing this one as they found them to be much more welcoming.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

All children have written risk assessments which help carers and supervising social workers to identify risks and how they can be managed. Supervising social workers update these regularly to ensure that they remain relevant. Particular risks such as being missing from care or at risk of child sexual exploitation are responded to appropriately. The agency has champions for important areas such as child sexual exploitation, radicalisation, mental health and suicide awareness. These roles are filled by social work staff who have an interest in and passion for their respective areas. They provide points of contact for their colleagues and carers as well as disseminating information and maintaining people's awareness of these areas. The agency provides training for carers in all of these subjects. Consequently, the carers

and supervising social workers have a good knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with key safeguarding issues and are able to provide better protection for the children. Some children are frequently missing from care and as a result at higher risk of child sexual exploitation. These risks are monitored through recording and multi-agency working. Children remain at risk due to their behaviour, but that risk is reduced as a result of the work of the staff and carers.

The agency provides training for the carers on managing challenging behaviour and safe handling. Physical intervention is used exceptionally rarely and there is a clear expectation that any such incident should be recorded and reported to the agency as a matter of priority. The carers generally use discussion to help children understand the consequences of their actions. They are clear about what would be appropriate and inappropriate sanctions to use when these are necessary. One set of carers had a review and were returned to panel following an allegation made against them. Their personal development plan recommended that they had receive refresher training in managing challenging behaviour and safe handling by an identified date. They received training on behaviour management, but have not on safe handling. While there is generally very good training to help carers understand and manage children's behaviour, this omission following an allegation indicates a lack of oversight and may prevent the carers from responding to children appropriately.

The children feel safe in their foster placements and their carers help them to understand risks such as those associated with the internet. The agency has run courses for the children to help them understand how to keep themselves safe online. The carers help the children to take age-appropriate risks, which in turn helps them to learn how to keep themselves safer. For one child, this involved the carers walking with her to school and then, after she felt comfortable in this, following her as she walked alone. She can now do the journey alone, but with the safeguard of texting the carer when she arrives. This is reflected in her risk assessment.

The carers and staff say that there is an open culture within the agency. They are confident that they could raise any concerns that they had and that these would be taken seriously and acted upon. This helps to ensure that people are confident in raising any concerns and that they are in turn responded to in a way which safeguards children.

There is a thorough recruitment process to ensure that checks are done for new staff and foster panel members. This helps to reduce the likelihood of unsuitable adults working with the children. The assessment and approval process for new carers is thorough and has a focus on understanding and safeguarding children. The foster panel have in-depth discussions about any possible safeguarding concerns to help ensure that carers are suitable.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The agency has a registered manager who is appropriately qualified and experienced. Carers and fostering staff describe the registered manager as having high standards and expectations of herself and others. There is a suitably qualified and experienced staff team. There have been some changes in this team, but there

is a current recruitment campaign to bring the team to full strength.

Managers, staff and carers have the needs of the children whom they look after at the centre of their practice, and there is a clear focus on improvement within the agency to ensure that they meet their stated aims and objectives. Managers have a good knowledge of the strengths and areas for development of the agency. They use thorough and detailed monitoring systems to help them identify the progress that children are making. These monitoring systems also provide information for managers to help them identify areas for their supervision of staff. In most cases these systems are used effectively, but some of the areas identified in this report, such as failing to follow up concerns from a child looked after review and carers not completing identified training, have been missed. This can limit the quality of care for some children.

Supervising social workers provide good supervision and support for carers to help them provide high-quality and effective placements for children. The carers say that there is good consistency among supervising social workers and that their visits to the home focus on supporting both carers and children. Carers describe their support as 'first rate', 'marvellous' and 'excellent'. They also say that their supervision includes challenge from the supervising social workers when necessary. This helps to maintain children's placements and ensure that everyone is working in the best interests of the child. Managers provide effective supervision and appraisals for staff. The registered manager uses her supervisions of staff to help identify areas which need to be followed up. There are informative inductions to help new staff gain an understanding of their roles. This all provides a supportive environment for staff and carers to develop their practice and provide better outcomes for children.

There is good quality training for staff and carers. Carers in particular spoke about the high quality of the training, some saying that it had improved significantly following a change in ownership of the agency since the previous inspection. Carers and staff say that managers are willing to support them to get the training they need. If they find external training that they feel would be beneficial, they are confident that the agency will take their requests for any such training seriously. All carers have personal development plans to help identify their training needs. However, in one case a carer who was looking after a child at risk due to his drug use had not had training in drug and substance misuse. Although this was an experienced carer, it is important to keep up to date with knowledge of drugs in order to identify concerns and safeguard children as much as is possible.

The agency has a clear expectation that, when there are two carers in the household, they both attend key training. This is made clear to prospective carers when they attend the foster panel and is followed through by supervising social workers. Additionally it is expected that both carers take part in at least every third supervision. Consequently, carers recognise the importance of training, know what is expected of them and all have regular contact with supervising social workers.

The agency has very effective relationships with other agencies, such as placing social workers, commissioning teams and the police. It will challenge other agencies if it does not feel that they are doing what they need to in order to meet children's needs. Carers have advocated for children in order to secure appropriate education, and agency staff will chase any outstanding meetings or information. One placing social worker said that the agency had been rightly chasing her for a meeting and

the fact it had not taken place was her fault and not theirs.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Whenever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.



## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC036888

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## **Inspector**

Clive Lucas, social care inspector



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