

Liberty Foster Care Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Suzanne Young
Type of Inspection	Key

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Responsible individual	John Alexander Harper
Date of last inspection	1 October 2009

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Liberty Foster Care Limited is based in Leicester and provides placements for young people from local authorities from the surrounding area. They have been operating since October 2009 and offer a wide range of placements which are provided to children and young people from birth to 18-years-old.

The agency aims to provide children and young people with high quality care in a family setting. The main priority of the agency is to place young people within carefully matched and safe placements, where young people will be supported to develop confidence and reach their potential.

At the time of the inspection Liberty Foster Care is supporting 12 fostering households with 12 children in placement.

Summary

This is the first announced full inspection of Liberty Foster Care. During this inspection all key standards were inspected. The standards relate to the outcome areas of being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution, achieving economic wellbeing and organisation. The inspection also included consideration of additional standards relating to the management of the agency and the supervision of foster carers. All areas of the Every Child Matters framework were assessed.

The agency is newly established and was registered in October 2009.

The agency is judged as satisfactory overall with all outcome areas being judged as satisfactory. The agency performs well with regard to the support and supervision offered to carers. Some good practice was also seen with regard to the matching of children to foster carers. The agency is particularly strong in the promotion of equality and diversity.

The agency has some shortfalls in relation to its administration and records which do not fully underpin the work of the agency. Actions and recommendations have been made in these areas.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is a new fostering service with no previous actions or recommendations.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Children are receiving health care which meets their needs for physical, emotional and social development. Health care needs are being identified and met during referral and through appropriate matching with foster carers. Arrangements for medical consent are clear at the outset of the placement and in the majority of placements sufficient health information is acquired at the point of referral.

Children are registered with doctors, dentists and opticians to ensure that they are able to receive the medical care and attention they require. Children's health is promoted as health care matters are discussed and recorded during foster carers' supervision sessions. Carers maintain records of medical appointments and any other health related issues appropriately.

The agency has a diverse range of foster carers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds to ensure the health needs of the children and young people placed can be met. Detailed policies and procedures are in place to promote the health and development of the children placed with carers which includes the specific needs which may be experienced by children with disabilities and children from black and minority ethnic groups.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency has a range of policies to safeguard children in their care and implements procedures which reduce the risk to their safety. Practices and procedures within the agency help to keep children and young people safe.

The agency ensures that children and young people are well matched with foster carers and this enables their overall needs to be met. There is a matching document in place which is used alongside the referral form to provide a tool for considering the matching of foster carers' skills to the needs of specific children and young people. Foster carers are positive about the quality of matching achieved.

The agency ensures foster homes remain safe through regular supervision and health and safety checks. Children's safety, however, could be compromised by some administrative weaknesses. The behaviour management policy does not specify that foster carers should not restrain young people without first undertaking the appropriate training. This could lead to confusion for foster carers and compromise safety. The agency has developed their own foster placement agreement which is used when the local authority looked after children (LAC) documents are not completed. The agency's foster placement agreement however does not meet all matters required in the fostering service regulations.

Generic safe caring policies are in place for each fostering household although are not cleared with the child's social worker and reviewed on placement to ensure they reflect the individual needs of each child placed with foster carers. Although this could compromise the safety of all individuals with the fostering household this is minimised by the completion of risk assessments which help to safeguard children within their placements and the fostering household.

The agency has recruitment processes in place for new staff and people working for the agency to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The agency's recruitment files however do not evidence whether written references have been verified by telephone calls.

The agency operates its own fostering panel which is thorough and effective. Panel members receive training which means they are fully informed about their roles and functions. The agency however has not always followed its assessment and approval processes before placing children which can compromise both children's safety and the fostering panel's decision making. Processes are set up to ensure panel provides a quality assurance function to monitor and review assessments, to identify problems and provide feedback.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency actively promotes equality and diversity and ensures this is embedded in their policies and procedures. The agency has a range of policies and procedures in place to ensure children are looked after appropriately. These are comprehensive and address differences with regard to diversity issues such as disability, culture and religion.

The agency recruits staff and foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of the children placed. There are a range of approved foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds which enables children's specific needs regarding their culture or religion to be met. Training is provided in equality and diversity for both staff and carers. Management, staff and carers have a good level of understanding of diversity issues. They are clear about how children and young people's needs are to be met and address any issues that arise out of their ethnicity, disability, sexuality or faith.

The agency support carers to promote children's education. Foster carers are knowledgeable and supportive of children's education and assist them with homework and facilities. They are proactive in putting in place strategies to support children and young people to achieve positive outcomes in education and liaise closely with schools and colleges attending meetings when required.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency encourages children and young people to maintain and develop family contacts. Contact arrangements are actively promoted, encouraged and supported from the referral stages through to matching and during placement. The importance of maintaining positive contact with birth family and friends is discussed during the assessment process of foster carers and through training. This contributes to the development of emotional stability in children and young people.

The agency promotes consultation with children and young people. The agency's social workers visit and speak with children on a regular basis to gain their views and opinions. Consultation forms have been devised to gain children's views on a regular basis during their placement at also the end of placement. This enables placements and the individual performance of foster carers to be monitored with a view to raising the quality of care given to children.

Young people are aware of how to make complaints. They are given a children's information handbook which contains information about how to make a complaint and access the support that is available to them. No complaints have been made to the agency since its registration.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The agency supports foster carers in providing age appropriate support to children and young people in developing independence skills. These include supporting young people in further education and to access services and facilities.

There are policies and guidance in place for foster carers to help prepare young people for adulthood and carers are expected to attend training in promoting independence.

Young people over 16 years of age have pathway plans in place.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The agency has appropriate management and organisational practices to support the fostering task. Staff understand the aims and objectives of the agency and their role in achieving those. Foster carers are clear about the support they can expect and the agency meets those expectations.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Equality and diversity is embedded in the agency's policies and procedures and is reflected in practice. Management, staff and carers have a good level of understanding of diversity issues. There are a range of approved foster carers from different racial and ethnic backgrounds which enables children's specific needs regarding their culture or religion to be met.

The agency has a Statement of Purpose in place to assist staff, foster carers and placing social workers in understanding their aims and objectives. The Statement of Purpose, however, does not detail the numbers of foster carers or children placed or state whether any complaints have been made. This compromises the information available to placing authorities which in turn may affect the appropriateness of referrals. The agency also has a children's information handbook which informs children of the role of the agency.

The agency is small and currently consists of the Registered Manager, social worker and the Registered Individual who provides financial and administrative cover. Two further social workers have been appointed and are due to start on a part-time basis in the near future. The agency also uses external assessors to assess prospective foster carers when required. Assessments of prospective foster carers are detailed and comprehensive.

Foster carers feel well supported from the agency which in turn enables them to effectively support the children who are placed with them. They speak highly of the manager and the support they receive. A good system of appropriate supervision and support is in place for foster carers. The Registered Manager currently provides all out of hours cover. She is aware that this cannot be sustained for any length of time and with the introduction of two new social workers, plans to introduce a duty rota system.

A programme of training has been developed alongside the commitment to deliver the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards for foster carers. The Registered Manager is also in the process of developing a quality assurance system to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of care provided to children in order for the quality of service provided to continue to develop and improve. Accurate and effective monitoring is essential in identifying good practice and areas for development.

The agency has administrative systems in place to support the fostering task, however, not all the records required by legislation are in place. The register of children placed with foster carers does not include the address on leaving placement and the record detailing past placements on foster carers files does not detail the age and gender of children placed. Foster care

agreements are also not accurate. These administrative shortfalls impact on the quality of information systems in the agency.

The carer's and young people's files are generally well ordered and maintained, although foster carer agreements and looked-after children documents are not always completed and evident on children's files.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Fostering Services Regulations 2005 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
8	ensure that foster placement agreements are in place for all children at the time of placement and cover all matters specified in Schedule 6 (Regulation 34, Schedule 6)	31 October 2010
30	ensure that all placements are made with persons who are recommended and approved as a foster carer by the fostering service panel and provider (Regulation 34)	31 October 2010
22	ensure foster carers enter into an agreement covering the matters specified in Schedule 5 (Regulation 28 (5)(b))	31 October 2010
25	ensure all administrative records comply with legislation. This refers in particular to Schedule 2 records and Regulation 30 (Regulation 22)	31 October 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure safe caring guidelines are cleared with the child's social worker and are appropriate to the child (NMS 9.3)
- ensure behaviour management policy is clear that foster carers must not restrain children unless they have first received training (NMS 9.2)
- ensure telephone enquiries are recorded as being made as well as obtaining references for all people working in or for the fostering agency (NMS 15.3)
- ensure the statement of purpose includes the numbers of children placed, the numbers of foster carers and numbers of complaints and their outcomes (NMS 1.4)
- ensure comprehensive case records are maintained by the agency for each or young person in foster care which include all required documentation (NMS 24.1)
- ensure that an effective monitoring system is in place which contributes to improving the quality of the service provided. (NMS 4.1)