

Fitzgerald Fostering & Consultancy

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

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Inspector	Maire Atherton
Type of inspection	Key

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Registered manager	Lesley Ann Fitzgerald
Responsible individual	James Steven Townend
Date of last inspection	05/12/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

Fitzgerald Fostering and Consultancy Limited operates from a serviced office complex in Winkfield, Berkshire.

The aim of the agency is to provide a range of foster placements on an emergency, short term or longer-term basis, for children and young people who are unable to live within their families of origin.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced inspection covered all the key standards. This is a fledgling agency and at present the Registered Manager and the responsible individual are undertaking all the work needed, calling on independent workers if required. As the agency grows this will be reviewed.

All the outcomes are evaluated as good. Foster carers effectively promote the safeguarding, health and education of children placed, with good support from the fostering service.

One action and two recommendations are made. These relate to two omissions in recruitment records and a lack of clarity in two instances of recording.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of this agency since registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Foster carers effectively promote children's health and well-being. This is achieved by attention to healthy living messages, such as diet and exercise and routine appointments, as well as pursuing referrals to specialists when necessary. Health needs are identified in care plans and foster carers ensure that full records of appointments and any health issues are maintained. Foster carers provide this information to the placing authority as part of the child's review.

The agency ensures that foster carers are trained to meet the health care needs of children, for example through paediatric first aid training. A parent was very pleased

with how well the foster carers are managing the health care needs of the child placed. Professionals also commented on the noticeable health benefits for a child.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The Registered Manager and responsible individual are both qualified social workers with a wealth of experience across a broad range of children's social care provision, including safeguarding. There are no other permanent employees as the Registered Manager is undertaking assessments and link work at present. The agency plans to use independent assessors and employ staff as the demand for assessment and link work grows. There are two shortfalls in the required information obtained on those working for the purposes of the fostering service; one panel member does not have a second reference and there is a gap in the details of a foster carer's adult children.

The fostering service promotes the safety of children by regular monitoring of foster carers' homes. Foster carers provide warm, comfortable homes which are appropriately furnished, decorated and maintained. The homes are inspected as part of the foster carers' approval process, which includes the completion of a health and safety checklist and reassessed through the annual review. Foster carers are provided with training relating to health and safety as part of their preparation.

There are clear matching protocols in place and these are implemented in practice. The foster placement agreements contain detailed information about the needs of the child and how well the foster carers are placed to meet these needs. This provides an opportunity for the fostering service and carers to identify any additional support required.

The agency and foster carers have a good understanding of the systems that are used to safeguard children. These systems are introduced through the preparation groups and there are opportunities to refresh these through in-house training, tailored on an individual basis as required. Safe caring guidelines are developed for each placement and updated appropriately. The foster carers' handbook contains good written guidance on behaviour management, including that which is not acceptable. There is clear guidance for foster carers on how to address bullying issues and manage unauthorised absence.

The fostering service has established a panel that meets the requirements of the regulations. Panel members, including the chair, have been selected to provide a breadth of experience, including education and health, and diversity. The chair is clear in the role and implements the quality assurance function of the panel; panel business meetings also take place. As the agency is very small, the providers have appointed an independent decision maker to provide an additional layer of scrutiny to the assessment and approval process. There is an instance where a detail of the terms of approval recommended to the decision maker does not fully meet requirements.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The fostering service has a strong commitment to promoting and valuing diversity. This is begun in the 'skills to foster' preparation group training, explored during the assessment process, reflected in the information for foster carers, carefully considered when making a placement and reviewed as the placement progresses. Foster carers are good at noticing and developing the strengths, likes and interests of children, for example providing a range of activities that include bouncing, for a child who loves this type of activity.

Foster carers are very keen to promote education for the children in their care. This includes providing an environment in which young children are encouraged and supported in imaginative play. Foster carers have established good links with education, working together to achieve positive outcomes for children, seeking specialist input, such as speech and language therapy where necessary. It is unclear whether personal education plan meetings have taken place. A parent commented that their child 'has come on a long way'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Contact arrangements are effectively supported in accordance with the plans for the children placed. Foster carers understand the importance of contact and do what they can to ensure that it is a positive and enjoyable experience for those involved. They also ensure clear records of contact are maintained. Some contact may take place in carers' homes following a risk assessment. A parent spoke positively of the actions of a foster carer in promoting family links.

Foster carers demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of listening to children from a very young age, offering choices at lunch time and providing that which the child has requested. The Registered Manager regularly meets with children placed, providing them with an opportunity to talk to her.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Foster carers have a good understanding of the need to provide children with age-appropriate opportunities to learn life skills. This is achieved through participation in, and contribution to, family life by helping tidy up toys and getting their own plate out for lunch, for example.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The fostering service places a high priority on addressing issues of equality and diversity. A parent said that foster carers have a good understanding of their child's individual needs and provide the support necessary.

The Statement of Purpose is up to date and accurately reflects the service provided by the agency. The agency is in its infancy and the Registered Manager and the responsible individual between them undertake all the tasks required, including monitoring, which is up to date, and responding to initial enquiries. There is a recruitment policy in place, and a number of expressions of interest in fostering for the agency have arisen from personal recommendations. An independent assessor has been recruited and will take on some assessments of prospective foster carers. A foster carer described the assessment process as 'thorough, thought provoking and emotional', and the subsequent report as 'fair and deep'.

Foster carers are supported to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council standards workbook. In-house training is provided by the service tailored to meet the individual needs of carers. There are plans in place to link up with other agencies to extend the number and frequency of courses on offer that will provide foster carers with more options about when and where they can access training. Foster carers contribute to the preparation groups for applicants.

Foster carers are very appreciative of the high support levels provided by the agency, both planned visits and the on-call out-of-hours service. One said: 'They are always available no matter what time of night it is, makes me feel safe.' The agency has also been able to link with foster carers from another agency to provide peer support.

There are separate files maintained for children and foster carers and these are stored securely. All files are well maintained and are up to date. This is the first inspection since the registration of the service and there have been no complaints or allegations in this time. Children are enabled to understand their history by foster carers who recognise the importance of recording and keeping memorabilia.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
15	ensure that all the required checks on staff and carers are undertaken, in particular two references for every panel member and particulars of adult children of foster carers. (Fostering Services Regulations 2002 20(3)(d)(i) Schedule 1 (3) and 27(a) Schedule 3 (4))	16/12/2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers' terms of approval are clearly stated in the panel recommendation to the agency decision maker (NMS 30)
- confirm whether or not personal education plan meetings have taken place. (NMS 13.3)