

Credo Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Lucy Ansell
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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

Credo Care specialises in foster care for disabled children and young people. They offer short and long-term placements and short breaks. The main office is in Kent, with a further sub-office in the Midlands.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The service provides good levels of care to children, and a number of the standards are exceeded. Excellent matching processes are a particular strength and children enjoy the stability of long-term placements.

Foster carers manage complex health care needs very well and safeguarding processes are sound. Overall, children are being placed within safe, nurturing households and receive the very specific care they need.

Foster carers receive good support from a stable staff team, which is effectively managed under strong leadership. Staff members are competent and suitably qualified, but would benefit from a more structured approach in terms of their own professional development and training needs. There are omissions with regards to some areas of foster carers' training. The service demonstrates a keen desire to improve.

Improvements since the last inspection

The four recommendations made at the last inspection have been met. The service has adopted safer and more robust procedures for the benefit of the young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children flourish from living in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health needs are comprehensively promoted and met. One placing social worker commented that the carers, 'provide a very high level of physical and emotional support'. All of the children placed with the agency have some degree of disability, from mild to very complex; many have complex and challenging health needs. Foster carers are very knowledgeable about the children's health needs and are clear on any responsibilities and decisions that are delegated to them. Foster carers know when further medical consent needs to be obtained, ensuring the children receive all required support with no delay. Foster carers maintain detailed

daily health records. Supervising social workers collate this on a monthly basis to produce a report for placing social workers. Hence, current and ongoing health needs are very well documented.

Children have prompt access to health professionals, with foster carers strongly advocating for specialist services where required. Foster carers and their support workers are very clear on the health needs of the child prior to placement and all necessary training is completed to ensure a smooth transition. Foster carers receive excellent ongoing health training and guidance to provide appropriate care and support for children with complex needs. Foster carers receive training on recording and administration of medication and receive a lockable medication cabinet to ensure safe storage and recording of all medication. Any required equipment and aids needed to facilitate the ongoing care of the children are provided, along with appropriate physical adaptations to the home. All necessary checks are undertaken to ensure vehicles used for transporting the children ensure their safety.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children benefit from carers who can keep them safe and promote their welfare. While carers actively safeguard the children, and safeguarding practices are good, this could be further enhanced by all foster carers and staff undertaking the training provided which is specific to children with a disability. Children are supported by their foster carers to develop a strong sense of safety and well-being and are encouraged through appropriate support to take reasonable risks. While the 'All about me' booklet identifies risks for the young people, the protective measures lack comprehensive detail, which may impact on the safety of the child. Body maps are completed for any marks or bruises seen on the children and are kept securely with the comprehensive written records of the carers. Each home has an individual safe care plan but variable quality and content of individual safe care plans mean children could be put at risk.

The complex physical disabilities of the majority of the children accommodated means their whereabouts is known at all times. Incidents of children electing to be missing do not occur. The agency has the appropriate policies and procedures in place and all foster carers know how to implement this policy.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children enjoy significant positive relationships with foster carers that are not only beneficial but promote excellent attachments. The ethos of the agency is child focused and proactive, which is supported by the carers' high expectations and aspirations for the children in their care. All foster carers spoken to ensured the children in their care are supported and shown appropriate positive behaviours. Foster carers receive training in de-escalation and positive behaviour management,

which helps them support the children in the most effective way.

Children are actively encouraged to engage in lots of leisure activities which help develop their skills and confidence, both within the home and outside environments. Updated foster placement agreements give foster carers clarity about delegated responsibility and decision making on behalf of the child. Children are encouraged and enabled to make and sustain friendships as appropriate, enabling their growth in social and emotional skills.

Children benefit from educational potential and educational achievements being comprehensively promoted. The foster homes promote an excellent learning environment which supports the child's development with a range of activities, toys and resources. All children are supported to attend school, and many of the children with additional educational support are accessing mainstream schools. Foster carers liaise regularly with the school and attend all the parents' meetings and school celebrations. The support given to the children by the carers is monitored and encouraged by the agency during supervisory visits and annual reviews.

Foster carers' homes are maintained to an excellent standard and are safe and secure. These are inspected annually and throughout the year at unannounced times and during supervision visits. One placing social worker commented on the 'stable and nurturing home environment which was well able to meet the child's needs'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Children benefit from being able to express their views, wishes and feelings, know they will be listened to and if appropriate, their wishes will be acted upon. The agency ensures the children have access to an independent advocate if required. The majority of children within the agency have significant learning disabilities and cognitive impairment. The agency states they 'adopt a holistic and multi-agency approach to act as advocates to accurately capture their views and feelings'.

'About me' is a document to enable anyone who cares for the child to understand their individual special needs and requirements. This task-centred approach covers all aspects of the young person's day-to-day living needs. While the practical elements of caring for the child by the main foster carers are exemplary and uniquely individual, the written documentation lacks comprehensive guidance for a respite carer to also support the child's individual care needs.

Children are extremely well supported by foster carers to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships. Foster carers have an excellent understanding about the importance of contact, and the feelings the children may have about their family ties. Foster carers demonstrate understanding of the effects of separation and attachment, past experiences on the child's behaviour, and can respond sensitively to both protect and support the child where necessary. The agency is proactive in offering contact arrangements and contact supervisors to the placing authorities.

Children succeed in their placements because of the meticulous attention to detail given to preparing a child and a foster carer for a new placement. All placements are planned so children are welcomed into the home in a sensitive manner, already feeling they belong and are valued and wanted. The same attention is paid to transitions from the foster home when they are ready to move on.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Many of the children in placement will not be able to prepare for independent living. However, all the children are encouraged by their foster carers to develop skills appropriate to their age and understanding, with responsibility for household tasks. The agency has written guidance and training for foster carers on preparing young people for independence and transitions.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Clear, comprehensive processes for the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers serve to provide high quality placements. Foster carers possess the necessary skills and experience to meet the very complex needs of the children the agency looks after. All required checks are completed within a timely fashion and assessment reports are comprehensive. Annual reviews of foster carers are sufficiently thorough to make decisions about ongoing suitability. They include any areas of concerns or where additional support may be needed to support the young people.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Children's needs are individually assessed and met, and they are afforded many opportunities to participate in all aspects of life.

The fostering panel provides a clear quality assurance function in relation to the assessment and review of foster carers. It ensures they are suitable for approval in line with the agency's overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. The panel is properly constituted and benefits from a central list of members who bring a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience in childcare and fostering. Panel minutes are accurate; they include the key issues and record the reason for the recommendations made to support the decision making process.

Excellent matching processes are a particular strength of the service. The effort, attention to detail and quality of the information obtained is outstanding. The presenting needs of the child are rigorously explored alongside a comprehensive review of carers with vacancies. The agency does not attempt to suggest a placement unless its own stringent criteria are met; this is demonstrated through the agency's excellent track record of no unplanned endings in its operational history.

The Statement of Purpose contains all the required information and shows how the service will meet outcomes for children. It is reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Young people benefit from comprehensive information about the services they can expect from the agency and its carers. The children's guide is available in DVD and pictorial formats and includes information about the agency's complaints procedure and independent agencies should they wish to raise a concern.

The fostering service is run and managed by people who are suitable to work with children. They possess the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service. Staff are clear about lines of accountability and responsibility. The Registered Manager and operational manager's roles and responsibilities are clear and staff know who they are accountable to. The fostering service is financially sound. While the agency does have a development plan in place, it lacks sufficient detail and is therefore unclear in terms of the continued development of the service and how this will be achieved.

Children are safeguarded by the agency's thorough practice in terms of staff recruitment. However, those responsible for staff recruitment and selection do not have training in safer recruitment practices and this omission presents potential risks if they are unclear on the correct procedures to follow. All necessary references and checks are undertaken before staff, including panel members and freelance workers, commence their employment. Written records demonstrate that all staff and foster carer recruitment and suitability checks are complete. The agency's social work and administrative staffing is appropriate in terms of the size of the agency and can meet the needs of the service.

Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their roles effectively. Foster carers receive pre-approval training and an excellent range of post-approval training alongside individual training to meet the needs of their matched child. Most foster carers have completed or are on their way to completing the Children's Workforce Development Council standards. Training records are maintained for foster carers but they do not have personal development plans; hence expectations of training to be completed by foster carers are not always made explicitly clear.

Foster carers receive excellent support and supervision in order to care properly for the children placed with them. Foster carers state the support they receive is 'flexible, reliable, helpful and supportive', 'child focused and proactive' and 'excellent'. There is an effective out-of-hours service, allocated respite care and available support hours, so foster carers feel supported and enabled to carry out their role effectively. Foster carers are clear about the role and purpose of the supervising social worker, and, together with all the support given, is another valued asset to making the placement work. The placing social workers all felt that there was good communication between the agency and themselves and they effectively work together for the benefit of the children placed in the agency. One stated: 'It was transparent, good joint working and the child was always the priority.'

Social work and administrative staff receive regular, formal supervision from their direct line manager. Annual appraisals for staff and good quality learning and development programmes to enable career progression for staff are currently not in place. Staff meetings and managers' meetings are held regularly and staff are able to contribute to these. All persons on the central list have received induction training and will be receiving further training on the panel role and function.

There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling, along with ensuring the quality of service, to best meet the needs of the children placed in the agency.

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 (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg	Statutory Requirement	Due date
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. (Regulation (4) (a))	29/06/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment (NMS 4.5)
- ensure the individual safe care documents promotes the safety and the welfare of the children (NMS 4.1)
- ensure foster carers meet children's needs as set out in the child's placement plan (NMS 2.3)
- ensure there is a written development plan for the future of the service identifying planned changes (NMS 18.2)
- ensure all personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate to these good practices (NMS 19.2)
- ensure 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. (NMS 20.5)