

Caritas Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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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

Caritas Care fostering service provides placement for children and young people. It is responsible for the assessments, approval, training and supervision of foster carers.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The fostering service promotes the health, welfare and safety of children and young people very well. Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. Young people have excellent school attendance. Many of the young people achieve well in school. They enjoy participating in new experiences and developing new skills. They develop confidence and self-esteem. They contribute to decisions made in their daily lives and to statutory reviews of their care plans. They learn the skills they need for future independent living. Children and young people are happy in their foster families and many said they feel like part of the family. Foster carers are recognised as core members of the team around the young person and contribute to young people's reviews, personal education plans and pathway plans.

Assessments of potential foster carers are comprehensive and contain clear information. The panel effectively scrutinises assessments and foster carer reviews and makes informed, balanced recommendations to the agency decision maker. However, the panel membership is not gender balanced; The agency is currently addressing this.

The agency is effectively managed. Foster carers receive an excellent level of support, supervision and training from competent staff.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection an appraisal system is in place and all staff receive annual appraisals. The agency also has a clear quality assurance and monitoring system to provide a clear overview of the care provided. The panel also provides feedback to the agency with regards assessments, reviews and reports submitted to panel.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's health care needs are effectively met. Carers are provided with detailed health care plans of young people placed with them and ensure that they are implemented effectively. Carers receive training, support and advice on

promotion of health including promoting healthy attachments; this is a real strength of the service that is highly valued by the carers. Training also includes the promotion of physical and emotional health and well-being. All young people are registered with health care professionals. Young people say that they feel that their carers look after them really well. One young person said 'if I don't feel very well then my carers look after me and if I need to go to the doctors, they will make an appointment and take me.' Foster carers maintain records of all health care appointments and the outcome of them. This ensures that young people's medical needs are promoted highly effectively.

Foster carers promote healthy lifestyles by ensuring that young people have healthy diets and have opportunities to take part in a range of activities which promote good health. Young people understand their own health care needs and have an excellent understanding of health related issues. For example, storing and taking medication appropriately, attending health care appointments and following advice with regards sexual health.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The agency provides foster carers with a range of training to enable them to have an excellent understanding with regards promoting the safety of young people. Young people say that they feel really safe in their placements. One young person said 'for the first time I feel really safe and my carers talk to me about dangers and how to keep myself safe.'

All foster carers complete an initial safe care policy at the time of approval. This is updated to be specific for each individual young person in placement and reviewed on a regular basis. In addition, comprehensive risk assessments are completed. These include health and safety as well as individual risk assessments. These are kept under review and amended when there are any changes. This ensures that foster carers focus on the individual needs of young people and safety is promoted at all times.

Foster carers are aware of what to do in the event of a child missing from their care. This is underpinned by individual risk assessments. The agency has a responsive out-of-hours service; foster carers say that this is excellent. One carer said 'there is always someone there at the end of a telephone to discuss issues with you and to provide advice.'

Appropriate recording mechanisms are in place for foster carers to record any significant event, accident or injury. These are monitored by supervising social workers and this further ensures that the safety and welfare of young people remains paramount.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people enjoy positive relationships with their carers and, in discussion, spoke very warmly about their foster carers, the carers birth children and agency workers.

Foster carers have a range of skills, experience and knowledge to enable them to support children and young people to develop appropriate life skills. This is complemented by training provided as part of their skills to foster and Children Workforce Development Council training. Carers work in conjunction with the agency supervising social workers, placing social workers and other professionals to support and develop young people's resilience and development. This includes enabling young people to develop appropriate friendships with other young people and positive relationships with their carers. Children said that they felt really happy and settled within their placement. One young person said 'my carers are really nice and have helped me so much to have confidence in myself and the things that I can do.' The quality of relationships between young people and adults ensures that young people grow up feeling valued in a loving family environment.

Young people are effectively supported to develop skills in preparation for adulthood. This includes gaining daily life skills, for example, budgeting, shopping and cooking. One young person said 'my carer gives me the freedom to develop new skills but is there to support me if I need help.' Foster carers are aware of their delegated authority to make timely day-to-day decisions, such as agreement to attend school trips and functions. Where this has not been agreed with placing social workers, the agency has taken active steps to ensure that this is put in place. This means that young people are not treated differently to their peers.

The agency promotes and supports education exceptionally well. The designated education support officer ensures that all young people have individual support to access education that is appropriate to meet their individual needs. Young people spoke positively about this support. One young person said 'I never thought that I would enjoy school or get good marks, but this has changed and I am now hoping to go onto further education.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The agency ensures that the wishes and views of the young people are taken into account in all aspects of their care planning. One young person said 'my carers are very supportive. They listen to me. They don't always agree with me but we discuss, negotiate and come to agreements.'

When there is a delay in receiving the placement plan from the placing authority, the agency is proactive in pursuing this to ensure that foster carers are aware of all identified needs of the young person.

Information is provided on how to make a complaint. All children who responded to questionnaires said that they knew if they were unhappy or wanted to make a complaint they knew who to speak with. This included speaking with their social worker, the agency social workers, manager or contacting children's rights officers.

Young people's contact with birth families is promoted in line with decisions made by the placing authority. Carers are encouraged to develop positive relationships with birth families and are supported with any challenges that may arise. Some contact arrangements require a significant input from carers but they are clear about their responsibilities to ensure that it takes place. This has been particularly successful where the preferred option is for the young person to return home. The agency's commitment to the promotion of contact ensures that young people have the opportunity to maintain relationships with people who are most significant in their lives.

Where possible, the agency prefers placements to be planned in order that matching considerations can be taken into account. This reduces the risk of placement breakdown for young people. However, even where placements are made at short notice, the agency is in a good position to match young people with carers who are best placed to meet their needs. The staff ensure that clear information is provided on initial referrals. Due to the relatively small size of the agency, supervising social workers have a good understanding of the skills, abilities, strengths expertise and composition of foster care families. The level of disrupted placements is low and this indicates that the matching process undertaken is working very well.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are strongly supported to make the transition into adulthood. They are involved in their individual pathway plan which clearly identify their needs. Foster carers are aware of the importance of ensuring that young people have the opportunity to develop a range of skills in preparation for adulthood. The agency provides training for carers and supervising social workers provide ongoing support and guidance. One young person said 'getting ready to move on is scary but my carers are helping me to get ready to do so.'

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The ethnicity of foster carers reflects the referral of young people. The agency continues to develop further recruitment strategies to encourage and support applications from foster carers from diverse backgrounds. Case records evidence that care, support and guidance is highly individual to the needs of the young people.

The fostering service is managed very effectively and has a strong, committed and stable management team. Robust recruitment procedures are in place to ensure the safety of young people. The recruitment of a senior practitioner has supported the manager to develop the service. Supervising social workers feel exceptionally well supported within their role. This has a positive impact on the support provided to carers and their role in providing young people with positive and stable placements. Supervising social workers have access to a range of training and all have been supported to complete additional advanced training. They have also been closely involved in the development of updated documentation to comply with new regulations and national minimum standards.

The fostering panel provides robust scrutiny of assessments and reviews. The vice chair of the panel and agency decision maker agree that the assessments coming before panel are of a high standard and that all decisions are made in a timely manner. Members of the panel have a range of experiences and knowledge. However, the agency acknowledges that the panel would benefit from a more appropriate gender balance. Positive steps are being taken to address this with the potential panel members being identified. The central list for the panel is ongoing and panel minutes confirm that panel membership is quorate.

Recruitment of new foster carers is ongoing and the agency are in the process of expanding the area that they currently work within to meet the ongoing demands for foster care placements.

The fostering service continues with its commitment to training, including the Children's Workforce Development Councils standards. Foster carers speak positively about the training provided and say that the support that they receive from supervising social workers is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose has been reviewed and is up to date. It contains clear information about the aims and objectives of the service. Information about being in foster care is provided to young people in appropriate formats. This includes written, pictorial and recorded information. This ensures that all young people have an understanding of their placement.

Case records for young people are comprehensive and clearly written in a way that emphasises the individuality of young people. Carers are required to complete weekly reports summarising a young person's progress. This enables the young person to reflect on their achievements; these records are stored securely.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure as far as practicable, panel membership should be gender balanced and

where appropriate include a person who has experience of being in foster care themselves (Volume 4 Statutory Guidance 5.8)