

# Moments

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

Moments Ltd is an independent fostering agency based in Kent. Services that can be provided include long, short term and emergency placements, supervised contact and outreach for children not attending school.

At the time of this inspection the service was supporting 30 children and had 26 approved foster carer families.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Children are placed in stable, caring placements which provides safe care. Foster carers are approved subject to robust assessments and are subsequently provided with the training and guidance they need to continue to provide outstanding levels of care. The agency provides excellent support and supervision to foster carers.

Children and young people say they feel safe and valued. They are fully encouraged to enjoy their hobbies and interests. They are supported to maintain contact with those who are important to them. Their health and educational needs are comprehensively met. Appropriate support, guidance and interventions promote their continued development and progress in all these outcome areas.

The agency, while small, has an appropriate staff team who are suitably qualified and experienced to meet the needs of the carers and children. The leadership and management of the agency makes good use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities relating to the quality of care provided and for continually improving outcomes for children. The social work staff receive the training and support needed to be effective supervisors. Three recommendations were made following this inspection to help improve practice.

### Improvements since the last inspection

Six recommendations were made from the previous inspection of 07 August 2007. Action was promptly taken to address these areas and in the resulting five years the quality of service provision has improved dramatically. The initial referral and matching information has been greatly improved to ensure foster carers have all relevant information, along with stringent health and safety checks, better health information ensuring better safeguards for carers and young people. The monitoring and quality assurance progress has strengthened the service and now provides improved outcomes and excellent quality of care for children and young people.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children benefit from living in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health needs are comprehensively promoted and met. One local authority social worker commented 'This child has needed a lot of specialist help and day to day management and has flourished in this placement.' Foster carers are very knowledgeable about their children's health needs and are clear about which responsibilities and decisions are delegated to them. Children have prompt access to health professionals, with foster carers strongly advocating for specialist services where required. Detailed daily health records are maintained by the foster carers that demonstrate individualised care and how they are able to meet that child's needs exceptionally well. Supervising social workers collate this information on a monthly basis to produce a report for placing social workers. Hence, current and ongoing health needs are comprehensively documented and monitored. All staff within the agency are strong advocates of healthy living and eating and lead by example, with many fun healthy activities for the young people being organised.

Comprehensive matching paperwork and planning meetings are fully utilised to obtain pertinent health information. Records include health chronologies and consent forms for emergency treatment. All foster carers are trained in first aid and regular updates in training ensures safe practice in these areas. Clear guidance and policies on medication administration and homely remedies are contained in the handbook provided to foster carers. While the information about medication administration is available to foster carers they do not receive appropriate training about it; this means that some carers may not be clear about their role in relation to administering medicines. All carers receive a lockable cabinet to ensure safe storage of all medication.

Any required equipment and aids needed to facilitate the ongoing care of the children is provided. Children are safeguarded through all necessary checks being undertaken to ensure vehicles used for transporting them meet the required standards. Children live in suitable, well maintained and safe physical environments. All health and safety checks for the foster carers' homes are completed by staff with the appropriate knowledge and training. Unannounced visits are completed annually which ensures they continue to meet the needs of the children. All foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have clear guidelines on their responsibilities.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Children are safeguarded through clear and comprehensive guidance and training for carers; this ensures foster carers can keep them safe and promote their welfare. Comprehensive safeguarding training is annually provided to carers and monthly refreshers on roles and responsibilities are promoted within supervision sessions. Children are supported by their foster carers to develop a strong sense of safety and

well-being and are encouraged and supported to take reasonable risks. Each home has an individual safe-care policy. This is linked to further risk assessments which have been highlighted through the initial referral and matching processes. The senior supervising social worker, who takes responsibility for child protection issues has very extensive knowledge and uses current best practices to support the agency.

Incidents of children missing from placements do not occur very often and they mainly return promptly. The agency has appropriate policies and procedures which include local authority protocols and all foster carers know how to implement these. The agency has measures in place which ensure children are safeguarded and their whereabouts are clear at all times.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Children benefit from carers who have high expectations of them and they are able to flourish in their new environments. Children enjoy excellent positive relationships with their foster carers and feel valued and welcome in their homes. All carers receive training on de-escalation and positive care and control techniques; so foster carers can provide an environment that promotes and supports positive behaviour. For example, one foster carer family has worked hard, with support from multi agencies, to greatly improve the challenging behaviours of two young children over a period of time; this has meant that less favourable behaviours are now greatly reduced due to all the opportunities and support that has been available to them. Bullying is not identified as an issue within surveys received from young people. Foster carers have undertaken training in anti-bullying, which helps them keep young people safe. Support is also available to foster carers from their supervising social workers to help manage any bullying if it did become an issue. All foster carers also receive training and advice on helping young people stay safe when using social media sites.

Children are given access to opportunities to develop and pursue their talents, interests and hobbies. For example, some children are supported to attend a circus club, some go swimming and others take part in dance lessons or belong to local clubs. The agency has a designated staff member who provides an excellent support service to the foster carers. They help to find activities or local clubs or places of interest to suit young people's individual interests. Young people are encouraged to make and sustain friendships outside of the foster family. This includes visits and overnight stays to the homes of friends, as appropriate to the age of the child.

The educational attainment of children is promoted, with foster carers' responsibilities towards the children's educational needs being made clear and specific by the agency. Clear records are maintained of children's educational progress, needs and achievements. Exclusions of children and young people placed with the agency are tracked and monitored. The agency identifies those who are not in mainstream school, which can be for a host of reasons, and ensures they receive appropriate support. Children benefit from living in a learning environment with

access to a range of educational toys and books within the foster homes. Foster carers maintain excellent links and communication with the schools attended by the children they care for and attend all school events.

Children live in foster homes which provide an appropriate environment. Outside spaces are safe and secure. All children currently placed have adequate bedroom space and risk assessments are completed for siblings sharing a room to keep them safe.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

Children benefit from having their views and feelings being taken into account. For example through being involved in setting house rules and completing quarterly surveys sent out by the agency; their views are also sought in a variety of other ways. The agency staff see all the young people regularly to ensure they develop good relationships with them and so they know they can talk to someone about their concerns. Children are routinely consulted with at the time of their foster carer's annual review, and when discussing their wishes for their own reviews.

Children know who is available to them to offer support or to whom they can make a complaint. Details of how to complain or make representations are included in the children's guide and this is explained to them during their very first review. Individual safe care plans for both foster carers and young people are clear and include all issues relevant for the safe care and support of the child.

Young people are well supported by foster carers to maintain contact with their families. This may include escorted contacts taking place several times a week to help with assessments or rehabilitation back into the family. Foster carers receive training so they are clear about the importance of contact and are encouraged to help the children make sense of their situation and support them to express their views.

Children benefit from placements being planned and this enables the agency to provide a period of introduction to a proposed foster carer in a sensitive manner. The exception to this is an emergency placement but effort is still made to ensure the young person has pictorial or written information about the carers and their new home before they arrive; this helps them to be less anxious. The referral and matching process and the placement plan clearly identify children's needs. This helps to promote a child's individual identity and ensures that how best to support the child's needs is clear and commences on introduction to the carer. Children leave placements in a planned and supportive way; this enables the child to still maintain contact with their carer, where appropriate. Foster carers provide a memory book to the children about the time spent living with them. The ongoing suitability of foster carers' homes is monitored during supervision and support visits to ensure the best possible care is always provided to the children.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Young people receive the guidance they need to achieve a successful transition into adulthood. Foster carers provide good support in line with individual placement plans. Foster carers ensure they provide the necessary opportunities for young people to learn how to budget and develop the practical life skills needed for independent living. The agency provides foster carers with specific training and guidance in order to equip them with the information they need to deliver good quality support.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose accurately reflects what the agency offers. The aims and objectives have a strong focus on equality and diversity and shows how they aim to improve the outcomes for children.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff are extremely proactive in promoting equality and diversity. They are inclusive and honest in their relationships with the foster carers. The agency recognises and addresses any needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language and culture comprehensively within the matching and placement plans. Equality and diversity is promoted through all the training given to both staff and foster carers. The impact of this ensures that foster carers promote equality and young people's feelings of self-worth.

The service provides excellent levels of support to children, foster carers and staff. There is a clear system to cover the manager's absence and senior staff who deputise have the skills and experience required. Supervising social workers effectively manage the on-call arrangements and this ensures families receive the same level of expertise 24-hours a day. Lines of accountability are clear and effective and suitable deputising arrangements for the social workers ensure the service is effectively managed.

Foster carers are recruited subject to thorough vetting and assessment processes. Children are therefore placed in safe households which are able to meet their needs. Foster carers spoken with are professional and committed to their roles and responsibilities and said they had benefitted from the excellent training provision. Core mandatory topics include child protection, health and safety and first aid. Carers stated they could request any training they felt would further benefit them. All foster carers have completed or are on course to commence or complete the Children's Workforce Development Council's training and the National Vocational Qualification, level 3 award. Foster carers speak very positively about the support they receive from the agency. They feel the support they receive is outstanding. Foster carers also value monthly support group meetings, which combine training and a support element. This combined helps to ensure the young people are receiving excellent

safe care from well trained, committed professional foster carers.

Staff are appointed with the same close scrutiny as foster carers and all team members possess the qualifications and expertise commensurate with their roles and responsibilities. Recruitment procedures are robust and personnel files contain all the required information; this serves to effectively protect children and young people. The agency is efficiently run by a team which has the skills and experience necessary to ensure excellent outcomes for children and young people. Social workers and agency staff receive ongoing supervision and training opportunities which promote their development; this gives them the skills needed to support foster carers effectively. However, written supervision records for the social work staff need to be more comprehensive to ensure the annual appraisals are considered as part of the supervision process. Staff spoken with stated 'The team is very cohesive, with a willingness to keep developing, and it is a professional environment and very child focused.'

Panel members bring a wealth of experience and expertise to the agency. The panel is quorate and members are suitably qualified to undertake this task. Assessments of prospective foster carers are rigorous, comprehensive and thorough. The agency implements strict criteria for independent staff completing assessments to ensure the highest quality. Therefore carers who reach the approval stage are deemed to have the potential to provide safe and stable placements. Foster carer reviews occur on time and the panel undertakes a clear and effective role with regards to monitoring quality assurance, training and safety issues. This ensures the ongoing quality of carers and the effectiveness of the placement.

Excellent referral procedures and matching arrangements ensure that children are placed with families who can meet their needs. Stringent referral processes are used to ensure that placements are only offered if the agency is confident of having the best possible match. Any gaps are clearly highlighted and arrangements made to supplement these; full risk assessments are completed for any placement made. Disruptions and breakdowns are rare. The stability of placements is a particular strength due to the complexity and comprehensive referral and matching processes.

Foster carers benefit from a management team who are able to critically evaluate, monitor and reflect on the service to provide the best outcomes in a child focussed service. The registered provider and manager conduct monthly and weekly monitoring and evaluation of the service. The quality assurance systems of the agency are used to inform the recruitment and improvement strategies to ensure young people achieve positive outcomes and their are being met. The agency does not have a clear written development plan for the future of the service. Effective systems with regards to any safeguarding concerns are understood and implemented. Complaints and concerns are rare but thoroughly investigated and the service makes notifications to external agencies in a timely manner to ensure the children are appropriately safeguarded. Written and electronic case records are very well documented, easy to navigate and securely stored. The service is financially viable and provides its staff and foster carers with the resources they need.

Payments and expenses are accurate and on time and such factors ensure a sense of security for the stakeholders of the agency.

## **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 foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication (NMS 6.10)
- ensure a comprehensive written record is kept by the fostering service detailing each supervision held for each member of staff (NMS 24.5)
- ensure the registered provider has a written development plan for the future of the service. (NMS 18.2)