

Future Fostering

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

Future Fostering Limited is an independent fostering service. The company was established in February 2010. The service is owned and managed by social work practitioners who are who are experienced in the fostering field. The service aims to provide a range of placements for children and young people to meet their diverse needs. This includes long, short term, respite, parent and baby and other specialist foster care. The agency currently has seven foster carers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The agency has a good foundation to succeed within the fostering sector. Children benefit from the strong commitment to meeting their holistic needs. There is an extensive awareness and implementation of the new standards and regulations. Foster carers are making good progress in vocational training and receive a wide range of support to equip them for their role.

The agency demonstrates a good capacity to further improve. There is an extremely experienced panel Chair who contributes to the robust quality assurance system. Shortfalls are minor and are already being addressed by the agency. These relate to strengthening assessments and the approval process and to ensuring the Registered Manager completes the necessary management qualification.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection since registration.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children benefit from the agency's strong health arrangements. This focuses on their holistic needs, positively addressing their physical and emotional wellbeing. The agency is able to seek pertinent medical advice from a doctor. The agency's philosophy of care concentrates on children thriving. There is very good acknowledgment of the need to assist with children's emotional resilience, spiritual and social development. The management information system includes monitoring of health checks. Staff will support carers with accessing local health resources; this assists with providing the practical and therapeutic support children require. Foster carers know their responsibilities related to health and the roles of involved

professionals.

Foster carers understand the importance of their role in securing a good standard of health care for children.

They highlight the need to promote a healthy diet, exercise and lifestyle choices. Children receive care from foster carers who have an extensive amount of training and guidance on health matters. Initial training supports them in identifying and addressing children's health needs; additional specialist training is available to meet particular health conditions. It is positive that children are also able to attend workshops and training. This helps raise their awareness and encourages responsibility in health related matters.

Children reside in clean, comfortable and homely environments. They benefit from their own room which they can also share with a sibling. Rooms are appropriately furnished and decorated. Foster carers are flexible about accommodation arrangements and are prepared to move rooms to meet the children's needs. The agency ensures foster carer's homes robustly meet health and safety standards. Annual unannounced visits contribute to the effective monitoring arrangements.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Children's safety is of paramount importance. The agency's ways of working effectively safeguards and promotes the welfare of children. Foster carers provide a safe, secure, stable and nurturing environment. Staff and foster carers receive good basic and ongoing training which centres on all aspects of protecting children. The agency effectively implements safe caring principles. This involves questioning and challenging individual values. There is a proportionate response to risk management. Foster carers demonstrate a commitment to building positive and mutually respectful relationships with children, the aim being to provide an open and trusting atmosphere where children feel safe.

The agency has a good understanding of safeguarding children, especially in regards to information technology. Foster carers have clear guidance in relation to internet and mobile phone use. There is a comprehensive procedure for managing disclosures and recognising the signs of harm. The management and staff are well qualified to manage allegations; this is due to their experience of working within the child protection field. The agency has effective links with the local safeguarding board. Children also benefit from the agency's strong awareness of the wide ranging forms of bullying and discrimination.

Children receive the necessary protection from the agency's missing from care policy. This complies with the local runaway and missing from home protocols. The agency offers 24-hour support to foster carers, which is essential during distressing times. Children have their own guide which contains useful information on agencies dedicated to their safety and welfare. This includes information on how to complain, report concerns and access advocacy services. Personal safety is a key aspect of

children's learning. Foster carers receive the necessary guidance to assist children. This effectively includes personal awareness, sexual exploitation and anti-social behaviour.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children benefit from the agency's commitment to helping them fulfil their potential. The agency recognises that foster parents make a unique contribution to children's growth and development. Foster carers provide nurturing homes for children which are centred on sound, positive relationships. The agency has a wide range of foster carers who are parents and are also experienced in professionally caring for children. Foster carers have the skills needed to understand children and instil clear boundaries. The comprehensive behaviour management policy is very practical. It offers useful techniques in helping a child develop socially acceptable behaviour.

The agency considers leisure and recreational pursuits to be an important part of a child's social education. There is a strong understanding of promoting the holistic development of each child. Specific funds are available to enable children to pursue their hobbies, interests and talents. Foster carers receive dedicated training and guidance which focuses on helping a child to enjoy life and achieve. Children are supported in following their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. Training, information and resources are available to assist foster carers with this area of work.

Children receive care from an agency which greatly values education. They are dedicated to 'narrowing the gap' so that every child has the chance to succeed regardless of the barriers they face. The importance of education is highlighted within the agency's operational framework. It provides extensive guidance and encourages the educational achievement of children. It is the expectation that foster carers liaise regularly with education establishments and attend the necessary events. There is an enthusiastic approach to reading; this includes daily reading, enrolment at libraries and purchasing relevant books. Foster carers of younger children purchase educational toys and engage them in learning through play. The agency actively supports children's educational development, for example by securing extra English lessons for children who do not speak this as a first language.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children receive care from an agency which aims to empower them and promote their rights. There are a wide range of systems for children's participation in discussions and decision-making about their future. This includes consultation documents, staff discussions and outings. The aim being to gather children's views through informal and formal avenues. Foster carers are made aware of the importance of listening to children. The needs of individual children in placement will be an essential focus on home visits. Although support groups for carers are not yet

in place, plans are in place to provide these and to produce newsletters for children.

The agency actively promotes children's sense of identity and self-respect. There is a strong awareness of and attention to issues of race, culture, religion, gender, sexuality and ability. All foster parents are required to keep relevant memorabilia for the children they foster and to work with them on understanding their past history. They may also undertake life story work with specific foster children in negotiation with their placing authority. The supervisory visit form reflects the importance of the positive contribution outcome area. All foster carers have an Every Child Matters chart which highlights their role in ensuring a child feels loved and valued and enjoys a stable placement. Foster carers also benefit from training which ensures children move into and out of their home in a sensitive manner.

Children have the opportunity of living within family-based placements, which encourages and promote continuing links with their families. Maintaining and developing family contact and friendships are integral to the service provided. This is emphasised through the training and support given to foster carers. Children's views and wishes about contact with family members is taken into account. However, placing authorities will inform these arrangements. Children have access to independent advice. Children's guides contain useful contact numbers should children wish to contact advocacy services and Ofsted. The agency is dedicated to placing children in placements that meet their expressed views and needs.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from the agency's strong commitment to promoting their independence. Foster carers receive a very good level of support to prepare them for this role including specialist training and guidance. A good example is the explanation of leaving care terminology detailed in their handbook. There is comprehensive information on the practical skills needed to make a successful transition into adulthood. This includes meal preparation, daily living chores, changing plugs and fuses, household safety and first aid. Foster carers' allowances include an element which has to be saved for each child to help give them financial stability. Young people's independence training includes budgeting, financial management and increasing awareness on the benefits system.

Young people receive encouragement to engage with appropriate agencies and networks that help prepare them for independence. There is a strong awareness of the personal, social and emotional skills young people need. Training effectively includes sexual and relationship matters and the wide range of health and community resources. The agency encourages young people to have high aspirations for their future. Support is available to help them fulfil their goals. Young people receive valuable assistance to pursue further education and employment opportunities, including preparing their curriculum vitae, completing application forms and preparing for interviews.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Children receive care from an agency which has an effective management team. There are clear roles and responsibilities and a sincere desire to provide a high quality service. Agency staff pride themselves on their open culture built on cooperation, collaboration and communication. There is a very good understanding and implementation of the new standards and regulations. The Statement of Purpose comprehensively details their values, principles and working practices, all within the legislative framework. Children benefit from their own guide which summarises the agency's ways of working. The agency is run in an ethical manner and is financially sound.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong commitment to working in an anti-discriminatory manner. This is threaded through working practices, documentation and dedicated training. Children's sense of identity is actively promoted. Children benefit from a range of foster carers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Carers can speak a variety of languages and are of varied religions, reflecting children's diverse needs.

The agency has good arrangements to prepare carers for fostering,. There is a good training strategy and induction programme for foster carers and staff. Foster carers are making good progress with Children's Workforce Development Council training. Foster carers receive a broad range of support. This includes a comprehensive handbook, regular structured group meetings and supervisory visits. There is a good level of peer support and foster carers value each other's experiences. There is commitment to regular supervision for staff, which combines management and developmental aspects. Foster carers confirm that they feel valued and receive a professional yet amicable service. They find that the manager 'listens' and is 'very child focused'.

The service benefits from a panel which is chaired by an extremely experienced professional who is passionately committed to children's needs. The panel Chair has high standards and demonstrates challenging independence. This results in very robust quality assurance and a strong emphasis on improving practice. Panel membership is relatively diverse and there are plans to reflect a wider cross-section of society. The central list is predominately made up of social work professionals. Foster carers find a 'compact' assessment process and praise the way social workers make them 'feel at ease'. The agency decision maker considers recommendations in a timely manner. There are plans in place to further improve on the quality of assessments and terms of approval.

The service and business plan demonstrates strategic vision, direction and performance targets. There are robust quality monitoring and assurance systems. These include effective methods and systems for the views of children, staff, foster carers and stakeholders to be heard. Management takes action to address identified areas for improvement. The owner and manager have a wide range of practical

experience within fostering. The manager has been employed within social care. Although the manager does not have a management qualification, they have considerable experience of social care and relevant management experience.

The premises is located within a business centre easily accessible by public transport and road. The agency considers foster carers and panel members needs and holds meetings in more central venues. Good use is made of information technology and virtual systems of communication. Foster carers benefit from their own pen drive which contains pertinent documentation. As this information is electronic it can be easily updated.

There is a business continuity plan which provides an efficient administrative back-up system. Recruitment procedures ensure that adults who work within the agency are thoroughly checked and have relevant experience. Foster carer allowances and expenses are well structured and contribute to promoting good outcomes for children.

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 the written report on the foster carer's suitability sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. This includes evidenced based information (NMS 13.7)
- ensure the registered manager completes the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services. (NMS 17.3)