

Be My Family Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sharon Lewis
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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

Be My Family is an independent fostering agency, which was registered in 2009. The agency is privately owned and managed by an experienced social work manager. 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 16 foster carers from diverse cultural backgrounds. They are currently providing care for 16 children.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The agency provides consistently good outcomes for children. An outstanding feature is the agency's innovative parenting programme. This is a valued resource for parent and child placements and focuses on effective safeguarding. Another key strength is the agency's robust quality assurance and management information system. Children benefit from the strong commitment to meeting their holistic needs. Children thrive within stable, life-enhancing placements. Arrangements succeed in building up children's self-esteem, emotional well-being, social and independent living skills.

The agency has made exceptional progress and demonstrates a very good capacity to further improve. Foster carers are currently completing their vocational training. The coaching and mentoring of foster carers are empowering. This instils them with confidence to meet the demands of their role. Professionals highlight the agency's good partnership working and high quality carers. Shortfalls are minor and are already being addressed by the agency. These relate to placing the Statement of Purpose on the website, updating the children's guide to reflect Ofsted's new contact details, and supervision records.

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 active promotion of their health needs. Prior to each placement there is extensive gathering of essential information. During each placement the agency and foster carers demonstrate very good partnership working. This ensures children's holistic needs are effectively met.

The management information system includes recording key health appointments for each child. This ensures there is robust monitoring of children's health and development. There is a strong understanding of the emotional trauma children experience. The agency liaises with the appropriate agencies to ensure children receive the psychological assistance they need.

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

Children enjoy a healthy diet and regular exercise. Children engage in physical activities which enhance their emotional well-being. Examples are going swimming, martial arts, walking, ice skating and dancing. Staff and foster parents empower children with pertinent health information, enabling children to make informed decisions regarding their choices and lifestyle. This is extremely important as they grow older and consider becoming sexually active.

Children receive care from fosters carers who have a broad range of training and guidance on health matters. This enables them to positively meet children's general needs and particular health conditions. Foster carers are competently able to administer medication and maintain appropriate records. The agency works closely with foster carers through coaching to develop personalised responses to care and behaviour management issues. The agency is consistently striving to improve children's health outcomes. Future plans include introducing a health survey for children and further training on drug and alcohol misuse.

Foster placements are nurturing and enable children to thrive. Placements strengthen children's emotional resilience and social development. There are marked improvements which contribute to significantly raising children's self-esteem and self-confidence. Other professionals comment on the 'good emotional attachment' and explain that behaviour is 'stabilised'. Children live in warm, clean, comfortable, well-maintained homes. Their bedrooms are appropriately furnished and decorated. Children are able to personalise their rooms with their toys, games and meaningful items. Homes are subject to regular health and safety checks. This includes annual unannounced visits.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive excellent protection from the agency's comprehensive safeguarding arrangements. Policies and procedures incorporate government and regional guidance. Safeguarding is systematically embedded into all practice. This includes individual risk assessments, placement planning, supervisory visits, recording, monitoring and service development. The agency dynamically advocates for children, ensuring decision making promotes the best interests of children. The agency has innovatively produced their own parenting assessment framework. This meticulous task-centred programme complements parent and child placements and exceeds expectations.

Children feel valued, stating they 'love it here'. Foster carers receive considerable initial and ongoing training which is dedicated to protecting children. Each child has individualised safe caring guidelines. Children proactively contribute to this process. There is a proportionate response to risk management. Children rarely go missing or are absent without authorisation. There is, however, an effective protocol regarding this behaviour which includes local guidance. This includes making the necessary referrals and sensitively debriefing the child when they return.

There is a very clear, comprehensive procedure for responding to, documenting, and monitoring safeguarding concerns. Foster care training ensures foster carers are fully aware of the procedure for managing disclosures and recognising the signs of harm. The agency is highly qualified to manage allegations; this is due to several key individuals having substantial expertise within the area of child protection. The agency has a good understanding of safeguarding in the digital age. Foster carers have clear guidance in relation to internet and mobile phone use. This helps to protect young people from cyber bullying and other forms of abuse. Children report that they feel safe and there are no issues with bullying.

An exceptional strength is the relationship children and their parents have with foster carers. The latter specifically refers to parent and child placements. Foster carers are extremely child focused and dedicated to providing a mutually respectful environment. Foster carers positively engage children in diversion activities to prevent them becoming involved in potentially harmful pursuits. Staff offer highly valued 24-hour support which foster carers highlight as being instrumental in preventing placement breakdown. Foster carers highlight that staff 'instil confidence' in their abilities. The training, coaching and ongoing support enable foster carers to effectively respond to behavioural management issues. Foster carers describe the support as 'outstanding', explaining that 'staff are always there for you.'

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children blossom within placements which enable them to maximise their potential. They describe their care as 'brilliant'. Professionals comment on children's 'improved quality of life', making particular reference to disabled children. Foster carers provide a positive experience of parenting. Adults within parent and child placements greatly appreciate this support, stating that the foster carer 'inspires' them. Children learn to reflect and take responsibility for their actions. They respond well to rewards and appropriate sanctions. Staff and foster carers work in partnership with external agencies to address socially unacceptable behaviour, an example of this being that young people have not committed further offences since being in their fostering household.

Children live with foster carers who create a stimulating environment committed to their holistic development. Children receive ongoing encouragement to pursue their hobbies, interests and talents. Within their home they have access to relevant toys, equipment and books. The agency provides regular updates on local and regional

activities, an example being the current newsletter details how young people can get involved in the forthcoming Olympics. Specific funds are available for children to follow their interests. Children are supported in following their religious and cultural customs. An additional bonus is that they also learn the traditions and celebrate the festivities of other communities. This contributes to their socialisation and appreciation of diversity. The agency encourages foster carers to take children on holiday and makes discretionary payments to facilitate this.

The agency has high expectations regarding each child's education and proactively advocates for their needs, an example being helping to secure school placements. Children benefit from improved educational outcomes. Examples are regular school attendance, reintegration into mainstream school and prevention of exclusions. Children are excelling in their studies and receiving awards. Foster carers receive training which specifically focuses on this area. Foster carers liaise regularly with establishments and attend related events and meetings. Extensive guidance further equips them for their role. Foster carers demonstrate great tenacity and effective partnership working. They provide a learning environment, which involves reading with children and helping with homework, in addition to ensuring children join their local library.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Children receive care from an agency which strongly values their opinions. There are a wide range of systems which promote effective consultation and ensure children feel part of the organisation. Children routinely express their opinions in supervisory visits, at their statutory reviews and in a variety of consultation documents. The agency is currently examining more creative methods of gathering views. This includes using the social media. Children comment that their 'carer listens all the time'. There are a variety of examples where children have influenced decision making. An example is requesting the supervisory social worker does not visit on a Sunday. Children exercise choice throughout their daily lives. Examples are related to their food, clothing, leisure activities and celebrations.

Foster carers state they 'offer stability and assurance' and treat the foster child 'like their own'. Children are introduced to the extended family and enjoy spending time with birth children. Children have opportunities to widen their social circle. They have appropriate friendships with birth children and regularly spend time together. Examples are going on shopping trips and engaging in fun activities together. Children develop a sense of belonging and acceptance. Foster carers assist with life story work. Children are able to make sense of their past and work towards their future. This assists in building their self-esteem and increasing their emotional resilience.

The agency actively promotes children's sense of identity and self-respect. There is a strong awareness of working in a non-discriminatory manner. Foster carers receive training and guidance, which enable them to positively promote a child's identity and

cultural heritage. Additional innovative assistance is given to support transracial placements. Professionals highlight how children have 'settled well and integrated in the family, despite cultural differences'. Matching procedures demonstrate the agency's dedication to providing placements that meet children's holistic needs.

Children move into and out of their home in a sensitive manner. They benefit from the agency's commitment to maintaining and developing family contact and friendships. This is particularly challenging as a number of placements have complex contact arrangements. Foster carers receive support and guidance to facilitate this process. Foster carers escort young people to contact sessions. The agency closely monitors all contact arrangements, and specific forms are completed to record these meetings. Foster carers succeed in building positive relationships with relatives and other important people in children's lives. Examples are welcoming them into their homes on a daily basis, inviting them to celebrate birthdays and for Christmas.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The agency recognises the importance of teaching all children age-appropriate independence skills. This includes taking responsibility for tidying their room. As children grow older, expectations increase. Staff and foster carers effectively contribute to the pathway planning process. The agency has proven experience of successfully assisting young people with their transition into adulthood. Young people receive extensive support which enables them to maximise their potential. Young people proudly acquire key life skills. These include cooking culturally reflective dishes, budgeting and the practical tasks needed to maintain a household.

Young people and foster carers proactively prepare for moving on. Young people receive ongoing coaching, which enables them to secure employment and pursue further education. Young people confirm that they 'always talk about the future' and are encouraged to have high aspirations. Foster carers are very efficient and build up substantial savings for young people, which contributes to their financial stability. Foster carers encourage young people to regularly purchase household items. They also assist with decorating and moving into the new accommodation. There is a strong awareness of the personal, social and emotional skills young people need. This includes sexual and relationship matters and the wide range of health and community resources.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency succeeds in their aim to 'provide safe, healthy, stable, high quality foster placements'. Children are very satisfied with their care and all provided very positive feedback. The agency is run in an ethical manner and is financially sound. There are clear roles and responsibilities. The agency prides itself on their personalised approach and their wish to promote a family atmosphere. The Statement of Purpose

comprehensively details their principles and working practices. Children have their own age-appropriate guides which summarise the agency's ways of working. Children benefit from the agency's considered approach to matching. Documentation clearly highlights the strengths of each match.

The agency has good arrangements regarding the recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers. Professionals feel the agency provides 'experienced high quality carers'. Prospective foster carers benefit from a comprehensive information pack, which clearly details the demands of the role. Assessments are of a high quality and concisely highlight applicants' strengths. There is a good training strategy and induction programme for foster carers. Foster carers are making good progress with their Children's Workforce Development Council training. Foster carers receive a broad range of support. This includes a comprehensive handbook, regular structured supervisory visits and respite breaks. The agency uses coaching and mentoring methods to empower foster carers. Carers report that 'fostering gives them a great sense of achievement'.

The agency benefits from very effective panel arrangements. There is an efficient tracking system to monitor assessments and annual reviews. The panel is chaired by a deeply committed, extremely experienced social work manager. The panel chair demonstrates a passion for equality, inclusion and positive outcomes for children. Panel membership is culturally diverse, representing a variety of professional and personal experiences. The agency decision maker is well qualified for the role and considers recommendations in a timely manner. Panel provides robust quality assurance, which contributes to further improvements within the agency. Panel members have a good induction and ongoing training. Performance appraisals are currently in progress. There is a high level of peer support. Panel members routinely share their expertise regarding developments within their respective fields. This helps to keep panel members up to date on best practice.

The agency has sufficient staff to efficiently meet the needs of children. Recruitment procedures ensure that adults who work within the agency are thoroughly checked and have relevant experience. The Registered Manager and social work staff have extensive experience within children's social care. Professionals highlight that the agency works well with placing authorities. Foster carers also comment on the 'good working relationship' and the fact that staff are 'always there to help'. Social work staff benefit from regular reflective supervision. The only minor shortfall is in relation to the written record. This does not consistently detail the time, duration of each meeting and signatures of both parties.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong commitment to working in a non-discriminatory manner. These principles are applied throughout working practices, documentation and training. Children's sense of identity is actively promoted. There is a good understanding of children's needs which positively addresses their heritage, gender, sexual orientation, faith and disability. Children benefit from a diverse range of foster carers and staff. They represent a variety of ages, professional backgrounds, religions and ethnicities. Foster carers learn how to support children as they tackle discrimination, and strongly advocate on their behalf.

Children learn to have respect for themselves and others. There are good examples of transracial placements working extremely well.

One of the agency's key strengths is their management information system. A wide range of measures are used which provide robust quality assurance and monitoring. The agency maximises the use of information technology to monitor, analyse, review and improve service delivery. The agency efficiently manages allegations and makes appropriate notifications to Ofsted. The agency has suitable premises within a business centre. This is easily accessible by public transport and road links. The agency has the required infrastructure and insurance. Records are concise, up to date and comply with regulations. Children's records sensitively detail their care experience. The agency securely stores all records. The business continuity plan provides an efficient administrative back-up system.

There is a good understanding and implementation of the new standards and regulations. Documentation effectively maps how the agency is meeting the standards. The service development plan further explains their wish to exceed standards. Foster carers receive a generous allowance, which takes into account the complexity of each placement. Additional guidance is also received to access appropriate welfare benefits, an example being disability living allowance. The only other shortfalls are minor and do not impact on children. These relate to requirements related to the new legislation. The Statement of Purpose is not on the agency's website and the children's guide does not give Ofsted's updated details. The agency is currently addressing these areas.

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
3 (2011)	ensure a copy of the statement of purpose is placed on the agency's website (Regulation 3(2))	01/08/2012
3 (2011)	ensure the children's guide contains Ofsted's new address, telephone number and email address. (Regulation (3)(c))	01/04/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff supervision records detail the time, length of each supervision and are signed by the supervisor and supervisee. (NMS 24.5)

