

Child Focus Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Muhammed Harunur Rashid
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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

The Child Focus Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency which is a subsidiary of Sherico Care Services Limited. The agency provides care to children from birth to 18 years of either gender. The fostering agency provides short, medium, long-term, parent and child and emergency placements.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This is a good service. There are good arrangements in place for meeting children and young people's assessed health needs. The fostering agency ensures that children and young people achieve and attain in education. There are good systems for consulting children and young people in foster care. Children and young people's individual needs are recognised and plans are in place to address them. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The fostering agency employs a number of consultants in order to deliver best possible outcomes for children and young people. This inspection makes three recommendations to improve the membership of panel, to strengthen social work training and to ensure regular supervision for foster carers.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection since the fostering agency registered with Ofsted in 2008.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Children and young people live in a healthy environment and their health needs are met. Children and young people's files provide good information about their health needs. The fostering agency has good policies and procedures in place to promote the health needs of children and young people in foster care. The agency works to obtain the resources required to promote and secure good outcomes for children and young people, for example, it works closely with health professionals. The agency employs a medical advisor who provides advice on health matters to the fostering panel. The agency also maintains good links with the looked after children's nurses from the placing authorities and seeks advice and support from them about meeting children and young people's health care needs. The fostering service has access to the child and adolescent mental health service and social workers make referrals to this service as needs arise. The agency employs a disability consultant who provides guidance and one-to-one support to foster carers caring for disabled children in

placements.

Children and young people enjoy healthy and nutritious meals at foster carers' homes. Foster carers encourage and support young people to attend local gyms and football clubs to keep them physically active and fit. Foster carers accompany children and young people to medical appointments and maintain records of all appointments they have attended. Foster carers attend first aid training and have purchased first aid equipment and fire blankets.

The foster homes are warm, well furnished and decorated and maintained to a good level of cleanliness and hygiene. Foster carers have training on health and safety issues and they take responsibility to ensure children and young people's safety at home.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Foster carers provide children with a nurturing, stable and safe family environment. The fostering agency has child protection and anti-bullying policies in place. Foster carers receive training on safer caring practices and safeguarding. Children and young people confirm that they live in safe placements. The agency works with a number of local authorities in accordance with government good practice guidance and follows the child protection procedure when safeguarding concerns arise. The fostering agency has a good relationship with the local safeguarding children's board and seeks advice if the need arises. Foster carers receive guidance and training for e-safety issues and protect young people from cyber bullying.

The fostering agency has a procedure for children missing from care and there are guidelines in place to follow this when a child goes missing from the placement. No foster children have gone missing and any unauthorised absences are reported to the agency by the carers. The out-of-hours support service provides advice to foster carers in reporting incidents of children who are deemed to be missing from care.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Children and young people in foster care enjoy good relationships with their foster families. The fostering agency provides training and support for foster carers on behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. Foster carers provide an environment and culture that supports positive behaviour and they effectively manage challenging behaviour in a calm and professional manner.

The agency promotes education for children and young people. Children and young people have personal education plans. This gives foster carers a clear understanding of the local authority's educational aspirations for the children. Foster carers are clear about their responsibilities and liaise with schools. Foster carers encourage and

support children and young people to attend schools and help them with homework. A young person in foster care has successfully obtained seven GCSEs and is pursuing a career to be a football coach in the future.

Children and young people take part in various activities and pursue their interests and hobbies. Foster carers encourage and support children and young people to attend after school activities. Age appropriate toys and play equipment are provided to children. Foster carers support young people to access sporting activities in the local community. For example, a young person was supported to join a football club and he plays for a football team.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The fostering agency consults with children and young people through care reviews, foster carer supervision and meetings with children. As part of their role, the supervising social workers see foster children alone to seek their wishes and feelings and views about the placement during their supervisory visits. The agency provides support to children and young people to complete quality questionnaires in order to improve the service they offer. The children and young people's guide provides information about how to access independent advocates.

Children and young people receive individualised and personalised care. They have individual bedrooms which promotes their privacy and they are able to personalise their own space. Foster carers support children and young people in promoting their social and emotional development. Contact is well promoted for looked after children and young people. The agency ensures that children and young people are encouraged to maintain and develop contacts and friendships as set out in their placement plans.

There is a clear policy in place to welcome children and young people into foster carers' homes and when they leave; this happens in a planned and sensitive manner. The planned admissions to foster carers are well organised and children are introduced to the placements gradually. One young person said that he considers the foster carers to be his own family in this country.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The fostering agency has good policy on young people preparing and planning for adulthood. All young people over 16 have pathway plans. Foster carers work closely with local authority leaving care teams in developing pathway plans for young people. Allowances and expenses are paid to foster carers to enable them to support young people to achieve good outcomes. Foster carers support young people to open savings bank accounts and encourage them to save money into the accounts.

Young people have opportunities to develop various skills during their stays at foster carers' homes. Foster carers encourage and support young people to look after their personal space, choose and buy their own clothes, get involved in house shopping and to travel independently into the local community.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The fostering agency has developed a Statement of Purpose which states the aims and objectives of the service. The fostering agency has also developed a children and young people's guide that is in a child-friendly format. This guide provides information about the services available to them. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Children and young people receive an individualised service which is designed to meet their personal needs. Fostering service staff and carers have a good understanding of children's dietary, religious, social and cultural needs. Staff support young people to make personal choices and to access community resources. Children and young people are carefully matched to foster carers so that their needs can be met and this helps to prevent placements breaking down.

The fostering agency has a clear management and staffing structure that ensures clear lines of accountability. Staff receive regular supervision and ongoing support on a formal and informal basis. Caseloads are monitored and the agency currently employs two qualified social workers. The fostering team and the panel are well supported by an administrative staff. Although foster carers have attended various training they have not completed post-qualification training to update their knowledge and skills for professional development.

The agency recruits foster carers through recruitment drives, advertising and word of mouth. The agency carries out comprehensive assessments of prospective foster carers. These cover all areas of the competencies needed to establish if an individual is suitable to become a foster carer. Good systems are in place for working with and supporting foster carers. They are given a comprehensive foster carer's handbook that they find helpful as a reference guide; they also have access to regular support groups. Foster carers receive annual reviews and reports are prepared and presented to the fostering panel as required. The agency provides 24-hour support for foster carers and foster carers feel they can approach the agency any time they have a query or concern. Foster carers receive regular visits from their supervising social workers and written records of these visits are maintained so that any issues can be followed up. However, on one occasion, two foster carers monthly supervisory visits had been cancelled as social worker was on leave.

There is an ongoing training programme in place for foster carers that ensures they are adequately equipped to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care. Foster carers take part in pre-approval training that informs them about what the fostering task entails and helps them explore their opinions and attitudes. Training needs are identified during monthly visits to foster carers and discussed

during the annual review process.

The fostering panel is shared by two branches of the fostering service. This is well managed and effective and its members understand the needs of children and young people. Foster carers and social work staff understand the function of the panel and panel members attend regular training to ensure that they can effectively fulfil their role. Detailed minutes are kept for the panel meetings held. There are clear procedures in place for the panel and the panel fulfils its quality assurance function, thus ensuring a high standard of assessment. Fostering panel members come from a wide range of expertise but do not include people with experience as foster carers. The panel chair said that they would be benefit from this.

A detailed secure record is maintained of each child and young person's life while living with the agency's foster carers. Foster carers are clear about the expectations regarding record keeping. Foster carers demonstrate how they are recording memories as a part of life story work for children and young people; this includes taking photographs and keeping souvenirs from trips and activities. Good administration systems are in place for the maintenance of all records. Sufficient administrative support systems are in place and the agency has ample computer equipment to meet the agency's needs. The agency has an appropriate complaint policy and procedure in place. Staff maintain a complaints and allegations log book. However, the agency has not received any complaints. All records are kept securely and are generally maintained to a good standard. The agency has developed a new tracking system which helps to ensure that statutory reviews are held within time. Other monitoring systems are in place to ensure that statutory checks, such as those with the Criminal Record Bureau, medicals, local authority checks and health and safety checks are also completed.

Each foster carer has a named supervising social worker. Each carer has a foster care agreement in place and has membership of the Fostering Network. Records of activities, incidents, achievements, allegations and abuse and procedures for termination of approval are in place. The fostering agency has clear procedures for monitoring and controlling to ensure the quality of service is maintained. This is achieved by having clear lines of communication, sound financial standing and robust financial procedures and an agreed charge for fostering services. The Registered Manager is confident that the fostering agency is financially viable.

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 that all foster carers receive the support and supervision they need,

specifically regular meetings with their supervising social workers (NMS 21.8)

- ensure a good quality learning and development programme. For example, that includes post-qualifying training for social workers (NMS 23.1)
- ensure the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list take into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for, for example, by recruiting people with experience as foster carers. (NMS 14.8)