

Capstone Vision Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Capstone Vision Foster Care Limited is based in Dartford, Kent and provides a wide range of placements for children and young people. These include emergency, bridging, assessment, short term, long term and parent and child.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

This fostering agency has an imaginative and established commitment to improving the lives of children. In addition to the main office, the agency has two branches, one of which is in London and the other in the Midlands. Systems are centralised and there is an excellent range of information that includes the Statement of Purpose and supplementary leaflets for children about the agency, advocacy for children and young people, and access to records. The agency also produces a quarterly newsletter with contributions from social workers and managers, as well as children and young people and children who were fostered by the agency and have now moved on.

The promotion of equality and diversity is excellent. The organisation respects difference and the rights and values of all individuals, children and adults. The director of the organisation plays an active role in developing the agency, and the management team, social workers and administrators are very experienced in fostering.

Placing social workers say that they think the agency is very mindful of the needs of the children and young people. This is evident in the quality of the training and effectiveness of foster carers. Fostering social work staff are knowledgeable and experienced in direct work with children; all have direct experience of fostering agencies. They work under the supervision of skilled managers, who are well trained and supported, and are proud to work for the agency.

The agency has a sophisticated range of consultation and quality processes that are

accessed by all the branches. There are systems for producing and reviewing the quality of care that address areas such as consultation with children, parents, placing authorities and independent reviewing officers. There are systems in place to ensure that all complaints are formally resolved, through vigorous investigation.

A range of monitoring and tracking systems and the active involvement of the director and senior managers have maintained the smooth working and growth of the agency through the current challenges and the recent resignation of the Registered Manager.

The team responds in partnership with safeguarding teams to allegations and suspicions of harm, providing effective protection and support for everyone concerned. All adults working with children are safely recruited according to rigorous procedures. Thus fostering social workers, foster carers and their families, consultant educational advisors, panel members, administrators and support staff are checked to ensure their suitability to work with children.

No actions or recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Children and young people have made outstanding progress, developing a positive self-view and excellent relationships with their carers, family and friends. They have knowledge of their culture and have excellent support in understanding and accepting their background. There are very few unplanned endings for children looked after by this agency. Of the 535 placements in the last year, 2.4% were unplanned endings and 6.7% of the children were reported as missing from care. Of these 3.5% were classed as persistent absentees, which is below the national average.

Children and young people are welcomed into the foster home and are included in the planning of possible placements in a way that is appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Their identity and cultural needs are understood and met in ways that suits their needs. The agency and the carers ensure that children and young people are healthy and they are very well informed about healthy lifestyles. Where appropriate, children and young people are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their own health.

Children and young people thrive and develop in their foster placements. Experienced and well-trained foster carers promote their physical, emotional and social development. Carers know the health needs of the children placed with them exceedingly well. Excellent placement plans support a professional and child-centred approach. Well-designed strategies ensure an excellent focus on clearly defined health outcomes for children and young people.

Education is a major priority of this agency, and children and young people benefit

from a dedicated education support worker who ensures that children are accessing the education to which they are entitled. All children and young people of school age attend full-time education provision. School attendance is high and exclusions are minimal. Children and young people are making progress taking into consideration their age, abilities and their starting points. All achievements in education, regardless of how small, are recognised and celebrated. A teacher commented positively about the progress a child is making: 'The child is doing very well, he has gone from p level to national curriculum level in one year which is a major achievement.'

Children and young people's views are taken into account in a systematic way and their views and wishes are seen as vital to inform and influence future agency developments. The agency follows an excellent multi-level approach to ensure that children have many opportunities to communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. Children are provided with excellent information to encourage them to seek help and advice if needed, to establish contact with external advocacy agencies and to enable children to complain if they so wish.

The agency and its foster carers ensure that children and young people begin to develop age-appropriate skills that are in line with their age and understanding from the beginning of their placement. For example, children have opportunities to prepare meals, manage their finances, do their laundry and keep their rooms tidy. The agency and its foster carers ensure that young people make a very successful transition to adulthood. Most foster carers have signed up to the 'Staying Put' programme that ensures that young people can stay in their placements after leaving school and help to prepare and support young people for further education, employment or training. Many children continue to have contact with their foster carers after leaving the foster home.

Quality of service

The quality of the service is **outstanding**.

Carers provide children and young people with an outstanding quality of care. Outstanding commitment to planning and proactive management ensures an effective and long-term strategy to recruit and assess carers. All enquiries from prospective carers are treated fairly and without prejudice. The assessment process focuses on the skills and aptitude of applicants and their capacity to care safely and responsibly and is conducted in a rigorous, yet open and transparent way.

An efficient panel ensures an in-depth analysis of fostering assessments; panel members are clear about their remit and their responsibilities. They make timely decisions and useful observations about the quality of the agency. The fostering agency plans for stable placements that can meet children's needs. The fostering panel also provides a highly effective quality assurance function and promotes the welfare of the children in the care of the agency at all times. The views of children and young people are sought and taken into consideration. The excellent knowledge, experience, level and range of expertise of panel members means that competent recommendations and decisions are made for all children, including those with the

most complex and diverse needs.

The matching process ensures that placement breakdown is minimal. The administrative arrangements provide consistent systems to fulfil the fundamental responsibilities of a fostering agency. There are timely processes for recruiting and monitoring the progress of foster carers, through initial enquiry, to assessment, approval and review. Foster carers report no delays and a thorough process of assessment. There is a clear framework of foster carer training and development which is used as the basis for assessing performance and identifying training and development needs.

Stakeholders, and those involved with the fostering agency, are extremely satisfied with the work and commitment of this agency. There was a very good response to questionnaires and these were very positive about the quality of the agency. One person commented that, 'the agency is very transparent'; another said that she is, 'impressed by the high standard of care and the professionalism of the foster carers and social workers'. Another said, 'my young person is very happy and the foster carer is very committed.' The foster carers go over and above expectations to ensure that children feel part of the family. A social worker pointed out that a foster carer stayed at the hospital for two weeks when the child in her care was admitted to hospital. This ensured continuity of care and attachment for the child.

The agency supports children to maintain contact with their parents and all other people who play a significant part in their lives. Foster carers are given excellent levels of support. Good placement planning ensures that carers are enabled to work with the birth family in a positive and constructive way. A thorough approach to risk assessment makes sure that foster carers know about specific circumstances and follow agreed protocols to be certain that any restrictions on contact are in the best interest of the child.

Children and young people enjoy positive and meaningful relationships with committed carers. Carers are trained in behaviour management strategies and have access to professionals and agencies that help them respond to challenging, risky behaviours. They implement clear and consistent boundaries, demonstrate patience, and provide positive role models to promote good behaviour. This helps children and young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and make positive changes.

A high proportion of carers are achieving qualifications in fostering children and young people. Support for foster carers is outstanding, frequent and child focused. Foster carers were positive about the response and support from the agency in times of crises. They say there is, 'always someone there to help'. Foster carers say that in addition to the basic courses, they are encouraged to seek training that will meet their needs and those of the children living with them. The agency supports carers to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's training standards in an exemplary fashion. Foster carers work in close partnership with their individual support social workers and praise their dedication and attention to the children's care and best interests.

Carers are aware about their responsibilities not to physically restrain children and young people and use consequences and incentives. Children and young people respond well to these interventions and some of their challenging behaviours have minimised over time, thus leading to fewer incidents. Children and young people are encouraged to make friends, socialise and develop socially acceptable behaviour.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Good recruitment and vetting practice prevents unsuitable people having access to children. There is careful selection of staff, foster carers and fostering households and members of the fostering panel. The agency benefits from the centralised safer recruitment practices and policies. Vetting processes generally follow all elements of the relevant standards and regulations. Children and young people enjoy safe and secure placements. The agency promotes a strong ethos and culture of safe caring and provides a strong safeguarding framework for all fostering households.

Children know how to keep themselves safe and have access to a range of support agencies and help lines should they want to discuss any concerns. Safer care plans are of an outstanding quality. Excellent provision of safeguarding training ensures that foster carers are knowledgeable and competent in safe care practices and are able to protect children from significant harm and abuse. Highly specific risk assessments identify specific safeguarding needs for the more vulnerable children.

The agency works in partnership with other agencies. Children are protected and supported during safeguarding investigations. Allegations and suspicions of abuse are handled effectively and in line with the agency's robust policies and procedures. Managers and support social workers work closely with the Local Safeguarding Children Boards in the area of each fostering household. All safeguarding processes are consistent with local procedures. Foster carers and staff have an excellent knowledge of safeguarding and safe parenting practices.

Children rarely go missing. The foster carer handbook contains a comprehensive missing from care policy. All foster carers have received and know the content of this policy and are able to implement the current procedures in relation to children going missing. The duty and placement manager collects data that identifies, monitors and evaluates the overall numbers of incidents.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the independent fostering agency are **outstanding**.

The agency is managed by a very experienced and highly professional and competent team of individuals. The current team have the appropriate skills, experience and recognised professional qualifications to deliver an outstanding

service. The Registered Manager for the agency has recently resigned his post; however, the agency has appointed a new manager and an application to register the new manager has been made to Ofsted. Members of staff and foster carers speak highly of the team. They feel that the agency is highly focused on outcomes for children and it is the agency's ambition to achieve the best possible welfare and childcare practices.

The agency's approach to ensuring that children, young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality is outstanding. The children's guides are clearly written and describe the services and complaints procedure, which is made accessible in different languages as well as in picture format for children and young people. In addition, the agency works together with agencies such as health and education to ensure individualised plans are in place for every child.

Foster carers are provided with an excellent handbook which covers essential policies and procedures, such as those relating to safeguarding, and contains a wealth of other relevant information. Carers know how to complain and are supported to make a complaint about any aspect of the agency.

Good data collection and evaluation ensures that the activities of the agency are always monitored and controlled. Children's outcome reports collate vital information about the quality of children's placements and are monitored for any concerns and for forward planning purposes.

The fostering agency listens to children's and young people's views and wishes at every opportunity. In addition to all the normal routes of meeting with children and annual surveys, this agency organises 12 events a year to meet with as many children and young people, including the birth children of foster carers, as possible. This gives children and young people the opportunity to have their views heard and for the agency to learn about how young people are feeling and what is important to them. Children and young people's achievements are also recognised at an annual celebration of their achievements.

Actions from the previous inspection have all been addressed and completed. These related to the safe caring policy and ensuring that the Registered Manager had a recognised qualification. Good practice recommendations related to having safe caring guidelines, risk assessments for children who share bedrooms and written guidance on mother and baby placements. All these have been addressed and met. This has resulted in an improvement in the service for children and young people who are fostered.

Support and supervision arrangements for social work staff are outstanding and enable them to provide the best possible service for children. All staff receive excellent levels of support, including professional formal one-to-one supervision at regular intervals. Supervisions have an exceptionally strong focus on the work with individual children. Social work staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. Training needs are assessed regularly and opportunities

for professional development and learning are good. Capacity and workloads of support social workers are monitored and evaluated at regular intervals.

Foster carers' and children's files are clear, up to date and contribute to staff and carers' understanding of children's needs. This increases carers' ability to support children. Appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The offices used by the fostering agency are of a high standard, each social worker has their own computer, and there is sufficient space for training, and supervised contact arrangements. The processing and payments of allowances are very well managed and paid on time.

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 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for independent fostering agencies.