

Community Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Sarah Oldham
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Date of last inspection	04/12/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency is registered as a charity and 'not for profit' limited company. The agency has another registered office in the South West. Its main functions are to undertake recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers to provide care and support to children and young people. On the 31 March 2012 there were five children and young people in placements and six approved foster carers. At the time of this inspection there were six children and young people in placement and eight approved foster carers.

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 **good**.

This fostering service is a small agency with a specific remit to recruit foster carers to provide placements for children and young people from the region where it is situated. Comprehensive assessments are completed and presented to the fostering service panel, who provide robust scrutiny and clear recommendations. This enables children and young people to be matched with carers who have the necessary skills to meet their needs. This means that disruptions or unplanned changes to placements are very rare and ensures that children and young people experience stable placements.

All children and young people are making good progress and are happy within their placements. They feel that their foster carers really listen to them and help them to achieve positive outcomes, including educational attainment. Their health care needs are supported and all young people say that they are encouraged and supported to lead a healthy lifestyle. This includes access to a range of leisure activities. The agency ensures that the views of the young people are listened to and this is confirmed by the children and young people.

Foster carers receive excellent levels of support and have access to a range of training to enable them to effectively care for and support children and young people. This includes specialist training to meet specific needs of individual children.

The service is managed effectively. Staff receive excellent support, with regular supervision, annual appraisals and access to ongoing training and development. Ongoing monitoring of the service is undertaken with three-monthly reports being submitted to the board of trustees. These reports reflect the ongoing development and progress of the service. Where any shortfalls have been identified, there are clear and detailed actions plans in place. This demonstrates that managers are clear about the strengths of the service and areas for development.

The service has a detailed Statement of Purpose in place. However, this is not specific to this registered service and includes details of the registered service in Gloucestershire. This document is required to be service specific and therefore a requirement has been made to address this.

Areas for 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 person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
3 (2011)	ensure that the statement of purpose is compiled in relation to the fostering service, and consists of a statement of the aims and objectives and a statement as to the services provided by the fostering service. (Regulation 3 (1)(a)(b))	30/08/2012

Recommendations

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

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people are effectively supported within their foster placements. They feel that they are part of the carers' family and this provides them with a strong sense of belonging. They are enabled and supported to take part in a wide range of activities within the local community. This enables them to feel very much a part of the community. Placements are settled and unplanned endings are rare. Young people who were spoken with during the inspection or who responded to questionnaires were exceptionally positive about their placement. Comments included: 'I am really happy here and being told that I can stay here until I am

grown up is really good. I get to do lots of things and I am doing really well at school.'

Children and young people are supported with maintaining contact with family and friends and this ensures that they have a good understanding of their identity and background. Where restrictions have been placed on contact, foster carers support children and young people to have a good understanding of their background and this enables them to have a good sense of identity and heritage.

Health care needs are effectively identified and supported. This enables children and young people to enjoy good health. Foster carers are proactive in ensuring that children and young people are registered with appropriate health care professionals and supported to attend appointments when required. Annual health care assessments are undertaken. However, there has been a delay in receiving the documentation. The agency has followed this up to ensure that this does not impact on the health care of the children and young people.

Educational attainment and school attendance are positively promoted. Carers support children and young people to attend school, and advocate on behalf of the children to support them to make good progress and to achieve good educational outcomes. As a result of this, young people are achieving good educational attainments in relation to their starting point.

Children and young people are supported in developing a wide range of social and leisure activities both within the local community and the home. These are age appropriate and provide children and young people with the opportunity to make friends and develop new interests.

Children and young people are supported to gain skills in accordance with their age and abilities to assist them as they get older.

The agency is proactive in ensuring that children and young people are involved in decisions about their day-to-day lives and their future. They are involved in consultation days and planned group activities. Formal opportunities for consultation include contributing to their reviews, and their opinions are obtained for carers' reviews. They are visited on a regular basis by the fostering service's social worker and placement support officer and this provides an opportunity for young people to have their views heard and contribute to the development of the service. One young person said: 'I think that my carers really listen to me and help me understand things.' Another young person said: 'We know the staff well and always have lots of opportunities to speak with them.'

Quality of service

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

The agency recruits, assesses and supports foster carers who are highly committed to supporting and meeting the needs of children and young people. Assessments are

thorough, with detailed reports presented to the fostering panel. The panel is independently chaired by a suitably qualified and experienced individual. It is appropriately constituted and is robust in decision making, enabling recommendations to be made to the agency decision maker that have been explored in detail.

Matching is a particular strength of the service; this results in stability of placements, with disruption in placements occurring very rarely. Foster carers say that they receive information regarding the children and young people in a timely manner. Where there is a shortfall in information, this is obtained by the supervising social worker. Wherever possible, introductory visits are supported to enable the children and young people to meet foster carers and this enables them to have an informed choice regarding their placement. One young person said: 'I had several visits to my carers before I moved in. I am really happy living here and feel as though I have always been here.' Another young person said: 'I feel really safe and happy here.'

Foster carers receive comprehensive training, supervision and support. This enables them to meet the individualised needs of children and young people. All carers have either completed or are in the process of completing the Children's Workforce Development Council training standards. Where specific training is required to meet the individual needs of a child, the agency is proactive in sourcing this to enable foster carers to further develop their skills. They say they feel part of the professional team and are actively involved in the care planning, reviews and ongoing development of the child. All foster carers spoken with said this is part of the ethos of the agency and why they chose this particular fostering agency to work for.

Placing social workers are highly satisfied with the quality of care and support provided. Comments received include: 'The carers are excellent and they have supported young people really well. Communication is good and young people are making significant progress.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe and secure in their foster homes and are happy there. They feel that their carers support them and work well to promote their health, education and well-being. None reported any issues of bullying and felt confident that if they were being bullied, they could talk with their carers who would advise and support them. There have been no incidences of children or young people missing from home. However, carers are confident of the procedures to follow. They say that they receive excellent support and there is an effective on-call system to contact if advice or support is required.

All children and young people have individual risk assessments in place and foster carers are provided with this information. This enables them to have an understanding to appropriately manage any identified risk.

Carers, children and young people are clear about how to raise any concerns about the agency and that these would be taken seriously and looked into. In addition, children and young people are provided with a range of external contact numbers and addresses to contact if they have any complaints or concerns. Those spoken to or who responded to questionnaires said that they feel able to discuss concerns with their carers and feel that they will be listened to and appropriate action taken.

All foster carers and staff receive training in safeguarding and are aware of the procedures to follow in the event of a safeguarding concern or disclosure. Procedures in place ensure that any allegations made are responded to quickly to promote the safety and well-being of the individual.

Recruitment and selection processes are robust. All foster carers say that the assessment and approval process is rigorous and fully understand the importance of this. Staff recruitment files contain all the information required prior to commencement of employment.

Leadership and management

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

The agency has a Statement of Purpose in place. This document is developed for the organisation and includes information about this registered service and the company's other registered service. It is a detailed document. However, it is not specific to this registered service. This was identified as a shortfall at the previous inspection.

This service is adequately resourced. All staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. They provide effective support to carers and have manageable workloads. Staff receive regular supervision, have annual appraisals and have access to ongoing development and training to further underpin their skills and knowledge. Team meetings are held on a regular basis, enabling clear planning and discussions to take place. Foster carers also have monthly meetings where they are kept updated, and have access to regular training.

The agency is a small agency, and as a result, all carers and children are well known to all the staff. This enables children and young people to be placed with carers who have the skills to meet their individual needs. Effective monitoring of placements is undertaken. This ensures that the needs and progress of the children and young people remain foremost in all aspects of ongoing care and support. Positive working relationships are established with placing authority social workers, health professionals and education to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people. Foster carers say that they feel part of the team working with the children and young people and this ensures that there is a holistic approach to care provided.

The service demonstrates an ongoing commitment for continual improvement. The

requirement made at the last inspection on 4 December 2009 has been addressed. Placement agreements are in place for all children and young people. Three of the four recommendations have been addressed. All foster carers' homes have an annual health and safety assessment undertaken, and the child protection procedures have been reviewed. These measures promote the safety and well-being of children. Foster carers receive information about children and young people in a timely manner. This enables them to provide effective care and support. Where there has been a delay in information being received, the agency has clear procedures in place to follow to obtain the information. The recommendation with regards the Statement of Purpose being specific to the registered office has not been addressed. This has now been made a requirement at this inspection.

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.