

Welcome Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Responsible individual	Shazad Mohammed
Date of last inspection	23/09/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Since the last inspection the agency has changed its name from Faith Foster Care to Welcome Foster Care. Welcome Foster Care is a private limited company incorporated in August 2007. The agency is situated in a business centre in Stratford within the London Borough of Newham. The agency provides short term, emergency, parent and child, and long-term placements. The service currently has 29 approved foster families with 24 children placed.

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**.

Foster carers say they like the, 'family atmosphere' in this service. They feel supported by the staff to focus on children's individual needs and help them make progress in the placement. Foster carers are very satisfied with the fostering agency and the working relationships they have with staff.

Children feel they belong and are treated as one of the family. Foster children rate the service as good saying the agency staff, 'give that extra little bit'. Outcomes for children are positive regarding their education, health, maintaining contact with their birth families and feeling settled in their placement. Children keep in touch with their foster families when they move on from the placement.

The agency provides good quality care through assessing, approving, training and supervising suitable carers. Foster carers say they are, 'treated and respected as professionals'. Where there are shortfalls in performance, the agency provides appropriate support or takes steps to reconsider carers' suitability. This ensures only carers who can develop, work professionally with the agency, and provide nurturing care, continue to care for children.

There is a strong focus on keeping children safe. The agency makes sure that staff and carers are trained to protect children and advocate for their rights. Foster carers receive effective 24-hour support to help them manage children's care safely.

Leadership and management are strong; ensuring that the service is run efficiently, but have not identified the shortfalls found in this inspection and are therefore judged adequate. The inspection finds some weakness in evidencing staff recruitment; gaps in specific information in reports of reviews of the service; the timeliness of some training and staff appraisals; how the panel communicates the reasons for its recommendations; and how panel has access to full information before reaching decisions. However, these shortfalls do not affect the quality of care foster children experience or the outcomes they achieve, which are good.

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
24 (2011)	make sure the fostering panel makes clear the reasons for its recommendations; specifically, recording this clearly in all minutes (Regulation 24 (2))	21/01/2013
35 (2011)	provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1); specifically, ensuring this includes review of monitoring conducted on all matters set out in Schedule 6. (Regulation 35 (2))	21/01/2013

Recommendations

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

- make sure the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision; specifically, that reports from the medical advisor are in place before panel meets (NMS 13.7)
- demonstrate consistently, including from written records, that the agency follows good recruitment practice and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in staff recruitment (NMS 19.2)
- evidence that foster carers have attained the Training Support and Development Standards within 12 months of approval (NMS 20.3)
- ensure all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at

least annually. (NMS 24.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children say they feel safe living with their foster families. They also feel safe when out and about. For example, they know someone is waiting for them to come home who expects to be informed of their whereabouts, and they are taught how to cross roads safely. They experience trusting, nurturing relationships with the adults and birth children in their foster families.

Children regularly attend school or college. They generally make good progress. Some achieve outstanding educational outcomes from the time of their placement, particularly in acquiring English as an additional language, in learning other languages, or in taking GCSE exams. Some young people aim to further their school education by enrolling in vocational courses or applying to attend university. They develop confidence and self-esteem through their school success and raised aspirations, as well as gaining valuable skills and qualifications to optimise their chance of future employment.

Few children experience unplanned endings to their placements. Those young people getting ready to leave foster care acquire the skills they need for the next stage of their lives, for example, learning how to budget on a limited income and how to prepare meals from reasonably-priced ingredients. They feel that the money carers save on their behalf will provide some security for when they live independently. Some young people benefit from the stability of continuing to live in their placement in supported lodgings arrangements. This respects their expressed view that they are, 'not ready to leave' their foster family when they become adults. Others maintain important links to their foster families when they do move on. For example, by visiting to join family meals or celebrations, or maintaining contact through electronic media when living abroad; this furthers their sense of belonging to their foster families.

Children feel well matched to their foster families and feel that they are treated like, 'one of the family'. Although not all children live with families who are a complete match to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they experience support to meet their diverse needs. For example, by accompanying them to places of worship, carers make sure children can meet other people of similar cultural and ethnic heritage. However, although their needs are met, they could face potential further disruption in order to move to a placement which better matches their identity. Children get useful information about their proposed foster families to help prepare them for the move and help them settle. Children going on a short break to other fostering families are able to meet their temporary carers and read useful information about their temporary new foster home to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

Generally, children enjoy improved health and happiness. Those in emotional distress are supported by their carers to feel more calm and confident. Agency staff help to

secure further support, for example, with referrals for counselling or therapy to improve children's well-being. Excellent life story work, using memory boxes and photo books, help children of all ages understand their personal histories and make sense of their past lives. Some children have experienced very considerable improvement in physical health outcomes. They become aware of the dangers of smoking, drug or alcohol use and there is little risk-taking behaviour. Children understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle; some find their understanding of healthy living is better than peers at school, particularly regarding healthy eating. Children keep information about their own health in the agency's very useful 'health passports'. They are able to take this passport with them when they move on so they retain full information about their health.

Support to help children remain in touch with their families is very strong, achieving outstanding outcomes in some areas where children have returned to live with their birth families or with other relatives. Children can live with their siblings when this is part of their care plan. Some share bedrooms, but this is part of a positive decision to help children feel secure and settled. Frequent contact visits mean babies remain connected to their birth parents while legal decisions are made about their future care. Children have been supported, financially and emotionally, to visit family members in other countries to help maintain these essential relationships. Help is offered to those children seeking asylum should they wish to search for information about family members in their countries of origin.

Children contribute to formal consultations about how the agency may improve its service. They also have frequent opportunities to speak to the fostering social workers and share their views. Children are listened to and respected; they contribute to their own reviews and those of their carers, as well as to everyday matters about their lives.

Quality of service

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

The agency works with carers to develop their skills through training, support and supervision. Foster carers find the preparation and assessment process clearly focuses on the needs of fostered children and there is a strong emphasis on positive parenting. Developing warm and trusting relationships, use of praise and reward, and no use of restraint, ensures foster carers manage children's behaviour safely and help them make progress in improving behaviour. Carers find their training, 'really helpful' for the work they have to perform. On-going training helps fill any gaps in carers' skills, knowledge or understanding in relation to children's individual needs, for example, training in specific health needs or in the care of babies. All foster carers are supported to achieve the recommended training, support and development standards in foster care, although this is not always completed within the recommended 12-month timescale.

When placements are required, the agency takes time to carefully consider all aspects of children's needs when matching these to foster carers' skills and abilities.

The agency takes steps to gain all relevant placing authority documentation so foster carers have as much information as possible about the children they are to care for. The agency persists in trying to obtain vital information when this is not readily supplied. It has also developed its own forms to try to speed the flow of information and delegated authority, to help carers carry out their work smoothly, for example, forms for the consent of medication and emergency medical treatment. Foster carers and children's social workers enjoy good working relationships with the agency. A social worker said the agency staff, 'work well' with them and are of, 'immense help'. Foster carers find the agency will always, 'go the extra mile' to help them support foster children. Children find the staff friendly and say, 'They ask how I'm getting on-check my room.'

The fostering panel promotes effective quality assurance through its scrutiny of any weaknesses in reviews and assessments. The panel generally makes recommendations only when all information is in place, although made one recommendation while waiting for advice from the panel medical advisor. However, the agency decision maker only makes decisions based on complete information about candidates. The reasons for panel recommendations are usually made clear in panel minutes. However, in one case, these reasons were not made explicit in order to assist the agency decision maker to reach their conclusion. These minor shortfalls in the function of the panel do not affect the quality of care children receive, as decision makers have complete assessment information before giving final approval to foster carers.

Foster carers show clear consideration for equality and diversity to ensure that children achieve positive outcomes. There is effective work to support children's religious, language, ethnicity and faith needs. For example, practising Muslim children attend Mosque and eat suitable foods. Effective carers provide very good quality of care to babies with special needs. Extremely skilful work helps parents placed with their babies to develop their parenting skills and maximises the likelihood of retaining care of their children. Foster carers are welcoming and accepting of young people's sexual orientation and willing to seek help and advice about how they might best support a young person's emerging sexual identity.

In some cases, extremely dedicated care has allowed children to thrive physically and develop bonds with their carers. For example, some carers have stayed in hospital with their foster children for a considerable time as they received treatment, so they could learn how to manage their health needs from hospital staff, as well as providing reassuring support to their foster children.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children feel safe from bullying, abuse and discrimination. Foster carers recognise the impact that children's experiences may have on them and help them to feel safe and secure in their foster homes. Agency staff make sure carers deal with any suspicion of bullying and information is shared at annual reviews to ensure that

children are protected. Children are encouraged to raise any concerns or complaints through various means, including their foster carers and the agency staff, as well as external charities. The number of complaints is very low, but children's concerns are taken extremely seriously and are assured of a response to any complaint and that lessons will be learnt.

Effective staff and foster carer training, with regular supervision and support, promote a strong focus on protecting children. More than two unannounced visits to foster carers are made each year, ensuring a further safeguarding check on the household and premises. Care planning takes into account the impact of abuse or neglect and the actions foster carers must take to support children. This includes helping children to improve sleep patterns, or to develop their identity through strong gender role models.

Incidents of children going missing are infrequent and not typical. There is an agreed protocol for foster carers to follow should this happen so they can help bring about children's safe return. Any concerns around such incidents, for example, if involvement in prostitution is suspected, are relayed to the placing authority so the suitability of the placement location and the young person's safety may be reviewed.

The system for vetting staff is mostly robust, with checks made with the Criminal Records Bureau and references sought and verified before staff begin to work for the agency. This helps to ensure that only suitable adults work with children and young people. However, an application form is not available for one member of staff. Not all references are in place for students on placement at the service, although they are supervised in their work with children and references are obtained by their university.

A member of staff is a 'Children's Champion' whose role is to visit children in their foster homes and be accessible to them at other times. This process is an additional safeguard to make sure children can express any concerns or complaints and to ensure that they are safe and happy in their placements.

Leadership and management

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

The agency has expanded with a move to larger premises in Stratford and has opened an office in Bradford. The number of foster carers has increased, with a recent improvement in the recruitment of potential carers from more diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds to more fully meet matching considerations. For example, although 24 per cent of children are from a mixed background, no carers are from this background. Also, children of Black and Black British background are twice the number of carers from this background. Recruitment campaigns and links with minority ethnic communities are being used to recruit a broader range of carers and to avoid potential placement disruption for children where a 100% match has not been possible. Membership of the service's fostering panel shows a more diverse

representation in terms of gender and ethnic origin since the last inspection.

The agency has progressed since the last inspection and demonstrates a capacity for continued improvement, although evidencing a sound recruitment process remains a weaker area. The service is well led by an experienced Registered Manager. To develop their management skills and meet national minimum standards, they have gained a qualification in management since the last inspection. While there are regular, established systems for monitoring all aspects of the service, these have not been fully effective in highlighting the shortfalls found during this inspection. Also, annual reviews of the quality of care have been supplied to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector as required, but do not review all matters required by regulation. However, very strong management monitoring of children's development and progress, and of foster carers' supervision, ensures the quality of care and that children are kept safe.

The agency is well resourced and recruits additional staff in response to the expansion of the service. Direct financial support is available to help children develop their hobbies and interests, take part in holidays and cultural awareness trips abroad, or support their study, for example, through the purchase of laptops.

Staff experience good management support. They find the new, electronic data system a great improvement in how they can maintain records. New equipment and technology, for example, laptops for staff and the use of video conferencing for panel meetings, helps staff work more flexibly and efficiently. Staff receive regular supervision which is effective in helping them to support carers and sustain children's placements. Appraisals are carried out, but in one case, not within the recommended timescale. All staff take advantage of opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through training, which they find useful in their work with foster carers and children. Staff show commitment and enthusiasm in their support of foster carers; they are very motivated to do their best for children and provide a quality service.

The Statement of Purpose makes clear the aims and objectives of the service. Children receive a guide to the service which is comprehensive. The guide is available in an alternative format to meet the needs of children with learning disabilities or translated for those who do not read English, so children can understand what to expect from the service. However, the manager has identified that this document is not particularly child-friendly or representative of all children who are fostered and plans to review this in consultation with children.

The manager has positive relationships with placing authorities and other professionals involved in children's care. Children are consulted about the quality of the service and how it might improve. Although the agency asks for feedback on its service, a few parents, social workers and independent reviewing officers said they were not sure that the agency asks them their opinion of its services and how it might improve.

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.