

Fostering Support Group:London Office

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Caroline Wilson
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Registered manager	Aneesa Lagerdien
Responsible individual	Michael Gerard Hill
Date of last inspection	27/07/2009

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Fostering Support Group (FSG) was first established in 1989 and provides fostering services in the Kent area. The agency provides emergency, short and long-term foster placements for children of all ages and with a range of care needs. There are currently 36 foster carers, with a total of 43 children in placement.

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 agency provides a good quality service which supports foster carers to achieve good outcomes for children and young people. There is a strong management team which effectively leads the team of supervising social workers to provide child-focussed support to foster carers. The training offered is of a high standard and relevant to the fostering task. This fostering agency ensures that the welfare, safety and individual needs of children and young people are central to the care provided.

Children and young people are treated as individuals and their wishes and feelings are taken into account. Children and young people's progress is celebrated and they are supported to meet reach their full potential in matters such as their health, education and transition into independence. Robust assessment and on-going monitoring ensures that suitable foster carers provide safe households for children and young people to live in.

The management team is committed to fostering and has an insightful understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. They have taken steps to improve it.

Shortfalls identified during this inspection relate to the need to ensure that all foster carers are supported to attend relevant training courses, namely to complete their Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) training and restraint training within relevant timescales. A statutory requirement has been made in relation to 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
17 (2011)	ensure that foster parents are provided with such training, advice, information and support as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17 (1))	30/06/2013

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 start independence training from an early stage so that they can reach their full potential and achieve economic well-being. They participate in tasks that are appropriate to their age and level of understanding, such as self-care, cleaning and budgeting tasks. Young people have the option to remain in their foster homes under 'staying put' arrangements, so that they do not have to leave their placements until they are confident in and have developed the necessary skills to manage the practicalities of a home.

Children and young people have regular access to primary health care professionals who promote their good physical health. Children and young people with specific health needs are supported by their foster carers and relevant health professionals to lead as full a life as possible; for example, a psychologist employed by the fostering agency helps children and young people to keep good emotional health and maintain stability within their placements.

Children and young people live healthy lifestyles. They are involved in leisure activities within their local community that promote their self-esteem as well as providing them with an enjoyable way of keeping good physical health.

Children and young people's achievements are celebrated throughout the year and culminate in an awards ceremony, where each of them, including foster carers' birth children, receive certificates for the progress that they have made.

Children and young people are supported to achieve to the best educational standards that they possibly can. They have access to suitable facilities to support their studies and for the completion of homework, for example, computers. Children and young people have foster carers who support their educational aspirations. For instance, one foster carer advocated on one young person's behalf for them to be enrolled in a local grammar school. This young person has now progressed on to university.

Children and young people enjoy contact with family and friends, when it is safe to do so. Contact arrangements for children and young people are frequent and enable them to reinforce, sustain and create links with their birth families. Contact takes place in a safe environment and may be supervised so that it is constructive and safeguards children and young people's welfare.

Quality of service

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

The recruitment of foster carers is low. Arrangements are in place for dedicated workers with a clear strategy to focus on the marketing of the service to potential foster carers.

The retention of foster carers is good. They speak highly of the quality and content of the training offered and how it contributes to their overall effectiveness. There are some carers who are 'hard to reach', who have not attended training courses on a regular basis; for example, they have not completed their CWDC training within timescales. It may be that the dates and times conflict with their work schedule or the demands of the child that they are caring for has impacted on their ability to attend. In these instances, the fostering service is developing individualised home study programmes to improve this.

Monthly support group meetings provide foster carers with informal training alongside supervising social workers. Foster carers are updated with changes in legislation and helped to find solutions to difficulties that they may be facing within the fostering task. Fostering support groups are being provided where they can receive peer, emotional and practical support. All foster carers have access to back-up carers, who provide them with breaks from caring to enable placements to continue. Foster carers are happy with the level of support provided by their supervising social workers and say that their views are taken seriously and acted upon.

Foster carers receive good quality information about children to be placed with them, including all the information that is available to the fostering service. Some information is not always available at the beginning of a placement. However, this is in place within five days of the placement. Foster carers understand that some placements, such as emergencies, may be accompanied by limited information, but support is in place for the child.

The fostering panel provides a good quality assurance role and ensures that the assessments are of good quality. The fostering panel is quorate and makes informed decisions about a potential foster carer's ability to safeguard and promote children and young people's welfare. Panel members are appropriately challenging and seek evidence that prospective foster carers have the necessary skills to meet children and young people's needs. All foster carers are reviewed at least annually to ensure that they remain suitable. Children and young people's views, together with those of relevant professionals, are sought to inform the panel's judgement.

The matching process is robust. Information held about foster carers, such as their working arrangements or issues with family members or other fostered children, are carefully considered before a child or young person is placed. This ensures that children and young people are placed with carers who can best meet their needs.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Policies set out the instances in which a child or young person may need restraining. For instance, children may need to be restrained to prevent likely injury to them, others around them or damage to property. However, not all foster carers have received training in physical intervention to ensure that restraints are safely conducted and that the term 'minimal force' is understood and adhered to.

Foster carers provide safe, clear boundaries which have significantly reduced the number of incidents when young people go missing. Foster carers are clear with regards to their duty to report any such incidents and keep in contact with young people in order to keep them safe. Foster carers understand issues with regards to children and young people who may be in gangs or at risk of sexual exploitation. This enables carers to intervene effectively to safeguard children.

Safeguarding concerns are reported in timely manner and appropriate steps are taken to keep young people safe. This includes the use of temporary carers within the fostering agency, which provides children and young people with safety and stability during the investigative process. Support provided to foster carers who may be subject of an investigation has significantly improved. For example, foster carers have access to an independent fostering agency for support and they can be debriefed by the fostering agency's psychologist once the investigation is complete. Foster panels provide an additional safeguarding function and fulfil a crucial role where there are concerns with regards to concerns that do not meet safeguarding thresholds. These are quickly brought to panel and an assessment made with regards to a foster carers' on-going suitability to provide a high standard of care.

Complaints are rare and are usually resolved at an informal stage. Formal complaints are well-managed and undertaken within timescales. Responses are formalised so that complainants are clear about how decisions were reached. They are provided with information about how to take the matter to the next stage if they are unhappy with the outcome.

The recruitment of foster carers and staff is robust. Relevant background checks are undertaken in order that the fostering agency can ensure that only people who are carefully vetted can provide care for or work with young people. Checks such as Criminal Records Bureau and health and safety and health checks are regularly updated. This means that risks associated with recruitment are reduced and that the children's living environment is safe.

Leadership and management

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

The recommendations from the last inspection have been complied with. The complaints procedure has been updated. The majority of foster carers have completed their first aid training and can now provide prompt care in the event of a medical emergency.

This fostering agency experienced significant changes over the past year as a result of a company acquisition. There is a strong management team who work well with each other. They have made excellent progress and have raised standards during a difficult period of change. The Registered Manager, operations director and quality assurance manager communicate well with each other to ensure a good quality service which meets the needs of children and young people. They further ensure that children are in placements where they are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted. Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the agency through consultation with children, young people and foster carers. They use this information to promote good practice and to address areas of weaknesses to improve the overall quality of care and support.

Supervising social workers prioritise children and young people's welfare and this is reflected in all areas of their work. They provide high quality support and guidance that enables foster carers to understand and be empathetic to the challenges that looked after children face. They keep themselves up-to-date with research matters and changes in legislation to ensure that foster carers are meeting each child or young person's needs. Supervising social workers offer support and have a framework in place to assess the foster carers' performance and to develop their skills. Visits to support carers are undertaken within relevant timescales, in addition to weekly telephone contact. Discussions cover a range of issues that consider whether children and young people's care plans are met. Administration staff provide good business support that ensures the smooth running of the service, including timely payments to foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose is a key document which sets out the how the fostering agency will meet its aims and objectives and its areas of responsibility. It is child focussed and which sets out the framework of how the fostering agency will help children and young people achieve positive outcomes.

There has been a vast improvement in the monitoring of the agency to ensure that

the agency is operating in accordance with its Statement of Purpose. Quality assurance checks have also significantly improved and this is evidenced in the high quality of recording. Records of visits are recorded in a timely manner and measure how well children and young people are meeting the aims and objectives of their care plans. They also measure how foster carers are promoting young people's welfare and meeting their professional developmental objectives.

The foster carers' handbook clearly and concisely sets out how the fostering agency will support foster carers. It includes an overview of the fostering agency's expectations, so that carers know the conduct that is required from them.

The assessments of potential foster carers are undertaken by independent social workers. This enables supervising social workers to be dedicated to the supervision of foster carers and children and young people. The Registered Manager and fostering panel review the quality of assessments to ensure that they are robust. Decisions to approve a foster carer focus on whether applicants can act in the best interests of a child or young person.

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.