

Foster Care Associates - Eastern Region

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Foster Care Associates (FCA) is an independent fostering agency. It is a national organisation and has been operating since 1994.

FCA Eastern Region consists of a regional office in Suffolk and additional offices situated in Essex, Cambridge and Norfolk. FCA Eastern Region offers a range of placements, including emergency, short-term, long-term, bridging, parent and child and respite placements. Therapists, education and support services staff provide a range of support to these placements, including activities, direct work with children and additional support for foster carers.

At the time of this inspection, FCA Eastern Region was supporting 165 approved foster carer households, in which carers were looking after a total of 183 children and young people.

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**.

The service offers good quality care and excellent outcomes for children and young people requiring foster care. Children and young people make good progress and receive outstanding individualised care. Young people say that their carers are '10 out of 10 because (they are) lovely' and that they 'wanted me to come and live with them, this was nice.'

Records examined and discussions with children and young people, carers and service staff demonstrate that the fostering agency is very child centred. There is careful matching and thorough planning in preparation for placement. This ensures that children and young people are placed with carers who can meet their needs very well.

There is an enthusiastic and committed staff team who are extremely able and are

focused on ensuring that children and young people have excellent outcomes. The panel is effective; however, minutes of panel meetings do not accurately reflect the comments made by panel members. Carers speak very highly of the supervision, support and training they receive to equip them to provide such positive placements for children and young people.

The recruitment and selection of staff and carers protect children and young people. There are also good plans, procedures and monitoring in place to improve the care provided by the service. However, there are concerns about the monitoring of children who occasionally go missing from their placements and there is a delay in notifying Ofsted of significant events. Despite these shortfalls the service has maintained and improved outcomes for children and young people who use their service.

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
36 (2011)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 36 (1))	31/05/2013
13 (2011)	ensure that the fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written procedure to be followed if a child is missing from a foster parent's home without permission (Regulation 13 (3))	31/05/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (NMS 14.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

This service provides excellent outcomes for children and young people. Children and young people's views are able to influence their care and the fostering service, through young people forums and through completing questionnaires for placement reviews. When issues are raised by children the service is supportive and goes over and above what is expected of them to resolve any concerns. For example although young people thought that their carers were 'awesome', they wanted more sport orientated activity. The service addressed this by providing a support worker who accompanied young people to extra sporting activities. Children and young people are positive about the care they receive and state that 'they respect me and treat me like their own children.'

Children and young people enjoy exceptional, committed and comprehensive care in their foster placements. Highly valued relationships between the children and young people and their carers are developed over time at a pace that meets the needs of the children and young people. One young person described how they 'clashed' with their foster carers when first placed but said that her carer 'persevered' and now they 'get on well'. Young people often continue to receive support from their carers after they leave care. Dedicated and forward thinking carers and supporting social workers are imaginative and innovative in providing individualised packages to enable young people to move on safely. This has contributed to the extraordinarily successful and long-term nature of many of the placements for children and young people with incredibly complex and diverse needs.

Children and young people are placed with foster carers who can meet their complex social, emotional, psychological and physical needs. The service uses a positive, versatile and holistic approach to providing an optimum care provision for children and young people. This includes therapeutic support, extra educational input and stimulating activities to ensure that carers have an effective understanding of the children and how they can successfully achieve their potential.

Children and young people lead healthy lives within their foster homes and this is significantly supported by the service. The service organises and children and young people attend an international football tournament on an annual basis. They participate in physically and psychologically healthy activities during school holidays throughout the year. Children and young people are able to demonstrate their knowledge of a healthy diet and understand the need to follow a healthy lifestyle.

Education is a top priority for the service. Children and young people have high attendance and comprehensively achieve in their education provision. They understand the need for a good education and when problems do arise the service provides a creative package of help individually tailored to the needs of children and young people. Young people say their tutors are 'fab and got me into liking school again.' The service provides extra tuition for young people in their last year at school. A large majority of young people placed with the service attend further education once they leave school. Young people are keen to do well in their education and have realistic ambitions to progress and have fulfilling careers.

Children and young people are fully supported to have a flourishing family life. They spend gainful and fruitful time with their foster family and enjoy activities like motocross, bowling and visits to local parks which they described as 'really exciting'. Young people value contact with family and friends and carers are adaptable to the needs of each child and young person. Young people state that they are pleased that their foster carers get on well with their family as they do not need to 'worry about upsetting them both' and that their carers 'always made time afterwards when it was difficult.' This ensures that children and young people make and maintain positive and thriving relationships with people that are important to them.

Quality of service

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

The service provides good quality carers to meet the needs of children and young people with complex and wide ranging needs. Commissioners of the service report that the service is an 'invaluable partner; they have excellent capacity and quality. They have a sophisticated knowledge of their carers and therefore get placement stability right.' Although there have been some unplanned endings to placements, the service is committed to learning from the issues and supports carers, children and young people to develop an in depth understanding of the experience.

Assessment of children and young people's needs is of good quality. The service matches carers who have the ability to meet the specific needs of each child extremely well. Carers report that assessors give 'good explanations and help (them) to understand the fostering process and see things from a child's point of view.' This ensures the safety and welfare of children and young people.

Foster carers report that they are well prepared for each placement and receive excellent support and supervision from knowledgeable and competent supporting social workers. Carers receive good quality training and have regular support, such as training 'drop in' sessions, which enables them to complete training courses. Carers are able to give feedback on the quality of the training the service provides and influence the provision of any courses that would improve the care that they provide for children and young people.

All fostering panel members on the central list have a good range of relevant experience and expertise to consider carers' approvals and relevant annual reviews. The panel minutes reflect that the panel provide feedback and clear reasons for panel recommendations. However, the fostering panel minutes do not clearly and consistently express the views of each panel member. Applicants to become carers are invited to attend the panel and are given the opportunity to present their views on the process. Carers spoke positively about the approval process.

Carers are given consistent and individualised information about the children and young people that they care for. Carers follow a detailed and accurate placement

agreement and plan that promotes competent and successful care for children and young people. Carers have good quality skills to manage and support children and young people in managing their behaviour. This is supplemented by staff, such as therapists, educational professionals and support workers, who work with foster carers and the placing authority to improve behavioural and emotional issues and encourage stability within the placement. Carers complete detailed and extensive recording that gives pertinent information about the development of children and young people and encourages carers to promote and improve the self-esteem and emotional resilience of children and young people.

The service provides a broad range of support for their carers and their family. This includes carers support groups, a foster carers forum and a 'buddy' system for new carers. Support is also provided for their families; birth children can attend their own activity based support group and there is a support group for men who foster. Foster carers say that they are 'very well supported which ensures that they can provide the best care for those that they care for'. Carers say that they are part of the team within the service and are proud of their achievements for children and young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Carers are made aware of the impact of abuse on children and are aware of the action to take if they are concerned. Staff and carers receive safeguarding training which is robust and of good quality. This ensures they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and young people. Carers have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and know how to refer any issues or concerns to the service. Children have occasionally gone missing from their placements and there have been a few allegations and complaints against carers. However these are dealt with in a competent and child focused process and lessons learnt from these incidents are used to prevent them happening in the future. Annual health and safety checks are conducted on all fostering households to ensure that the environment is safe for children and young people.

The service has a strong anti-bullying procedure. Children and young people are given information at the beginning of their placement, which provides them with strategies to counteract and prevent bullying. Children and young people say that they feel safe. Children and young people have extensive and effective support and know how to seek independent advice on any issues that may affect them.

The service is managed by those who are suitable to work with children and young people. All staff are extremely experienced and passionate about the service that they provide. The recruitment and selection of staff and carers protects children and young people. All staff have Criminal Records Bureau checks in place. The service oversees assessments completed by staff and carers' case records are also assessed on a monthly basis. Carers spoken to are extremely positive about the individual support that they received from staff who provide assessment and supervision.

Leadership and management

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

The service is managed effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of those children and young people requiring foster care services. There has been no Registered Manager in place since November 2011. However there is an experienced manager in place and their application is being processed by Ofsted.

There is extensive and consistent monitoring in place which shows the excellent progress of children and young people in their foster placements. However notifications of significant events to Ofsted have been delayed. Although not affecting children and young people directly at present, this could affect the services ability to safeguard them in the future. The recording of children who are missing from home, especially from the out of hours service, is confusing. The procedure does not accurately record the numbers of children and young people who go missing from their placements and therefore cannot be used by the service to monitor and track the progress in an efficient manner. However there is clear evidence that the service responds appropriately to young people who occasionally go missing from their placements.

Foster carers report that they are valued and are part of the team working with children and young people. The service uses support groups and feedback from children and young people, staff and carers to improve the quality of care that it provides to children and young people.

The service has good relationships with partner agencies. The service has developed effective and supportive relationships with local schools and has improved the knowledge and understanding of some schools to the issues affecting children and young people who are placed with foster families.

The service has strong procedures for learning from research and practice outcomes. All unplanned endings to placements are examined in detail and lessons learnt from this process are used to improve future placements and to inform future training needs. The service also examines the issues around carer and staff retention to ensure that carers and staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. Staff and carers report that their skills are recognised and they are given opportunities to develop and expand these skills to better meet the needs of the children and young people that they care for.

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.