

Time For Children

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Setting address	24 Mossford Street, LONDON, E3 4TH
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Telephone number	020 8983 3811
Email	admin@timeforchildren.org
Registered person	Time For Children Limited
Registered manager	Janet Digby-Baker
Responsible individual	Rebecca Mary Hall
Date of last inspection	24/09/2008

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Time for Children is an independent fostering agency that was established in 1999. The service specialises in providing short- and long-term placements for sibling groups.

Time for Children prides itself on being small, friendly and like an extended family. During this inspection visit 67 children are placed with agency carers and there are 52 fostering households.

The head office is based in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, five minutes walk from Mile End tube station. The premises provide appropriate space for the staff team to work and accommodate an accredited contact centre. The agency has foster carers all over London and some in areas of Essex and Kent.

The fostering agency was last inspected in September 2008.

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 fostering service is effective. The agency has a passionate belief in the child as a whole which includes the child's personal and social education. The agency is fully committed to fulfilling good outcomes for children and young people. The agency achieves this through ensuring children and young people achieve well in their education and that they lead healthy and active lifestyles. Children and young people's psychological and emotional health is understood and supported. Children and young people are positive about the quality of their care and their relationships with foster carers. Relationships are based on trust and help them settle and develop by reaching their full potential.

A broad range of foster carers are recruited to match the diverse group of children and young people, which enables siblings to stay together as a family. Foster carers are sensitive and well supported to meet the needs of children and young people

fostered. Foster carers ensure that outcomes are positive for children and young people and that they are kept safe.

Foster carers are well supported, supervised and receive excellent training. Foster carers are professionally well developed and work as part of a team at the agency. Children and young people are consulted about their views and care and do influence decisions.

Leadership and management are good. The agency develops good working relationships and regularly seeks feedback from foster carers, social workers and local authorities. The agency takes active steps to create continuous improvement and service delivery. They act on feedback from children and young people on an on-going basis.

As a result of this inspection, there is one requirement set which relates to the agency always ensuring it notifies Ofsted correctly of all serious events. The recommendations for improvement relate to encouraging foster carers' support groups to take place; to developing a 'Staying Put' policy for young people beyond the age of 18; and to always ensuring the agency gets the full care plans from the placing authority. None of these areas adversely impact on the continued good outcomes that children and young people achieve.

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 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))	30/04/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure the fostering service develops and implements a policy covering 'Staying Put' arrangements and the assessment process for foster carers should prepare them for the possibility of continuing to provide support to young people beyond the age of 18 (Volume 4, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.125)

- encourage peer support, foster carer associations and/or self help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported (NMS 21.4)
- ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. (NMS 31.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people's participation is good; it is creative and increases dialogue. Children and young people are able to express their views and they are listened to. They do this through a variety of ways. For example, the dedicated participation worker regularly seeks the views of children and young people. A strong aspect is the collation of children and young people's feedback which is heard at the carer's review, the child's review and at the monthly panel meetings. As a result, all adults are kept in touch with what children and young people say.

Children and young people say they are living in safe and comfortable homes. One child commented, 'I love the big garden that we have and it's great to play in. We have a trampoline. In the summer we get the swimming pool out.' Overwhelmingly children and young people report that they feel part of the fostering family. One child commented, 'The best thing about living here is I know they love me for who I am and keep me safe.' This is testimony to how inclusive each foster carer is with clear intrinsic welfare benefits for children and young people.

Children and young people's health is good. They learn to understand the importance of eating healthily. There is strong encouragement to eat healthy foods such as fruit and healthy snack options. All children visit their doctor, dentist and optician and this ensures no health issues are going undetected. Access to specialist services such as counselling also takes place. All children and young people receive a bicycle and also access their local swimming centre to promote their physical health and increase their fitness. This entitlement is financially supported by the agency. Children and young people say they lead full and active lives by doing a wide range of interesting and different recreational activities. This impacts positively on children and young people's health outcomes.

Children and young people's progress in their learning is good. Overwhelming, children and young people say that they are helped by their foster carers with their homework. In some instances they receive extra tutoring to help them achieve their full potential academically. One young person commented, 'I know where I am going with my education. I am now in first year of sixth form and ultimately I want to become a nurse. This is my aim and goal.'

Children and young people enjoy living in stable foster care placements. Just over a third of children and young people are living with their foster carers long term. Many

of these are siblings because this is what the agency specialises in. Those children and young people living in short-term placements are there because this is part of the agreed plan with the local authority. Unplanned endings are slightly below the national proportion in all independent fostering agencies.

Children and young people benefit from contact with their family and friends. All children and young people report that they are able to stay in contact. Consequently, they are keeping in touch with people that are important to them. The agency's contact facilities are very child friendly and provide a warm welcoming environment. All children and young people have access to a complaints process and this is published in the accessible children's guide.

Young people are very positive about the support and preparation for independence. They learn to master key life skills such as domestic tasks, budgeting and traveling independently, so that they can navigate the world to adulthood. However, the agency has not yet developed a policy on 'Staying Put' to support young people beyond the age of 18. As a result, this limits information and guidance available to young people about their future options.

Quality of service

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

Recruitment and retention of foster carers are good and lead to effective placements. Good recruitment is achieved through careful advertising and personal referrals. All foster carers are able to provide sibling placements. In most instances, the agency can offer large sibling groups foster placements for this distinctive group of children and young people.

Assessment of foster carers is good. The majority of assessments are completed through a combination of internal in-house assessors and through independent assessors. Broadly, reports are of a good quality, comprehensive and completed in time and without delay. The vast majority of foster carers agree that the agency matches children and young people with appropriate foster carers. Effective support is provided to the whole fostering family including the foster carer's birth children.

The preparation, training and supervision of foster carers are good. Many of the foster carers maintain informal support networks but foster carers self-support meetings are not taking place and the benefits of its crucial role are not being realised. Foster carers say that training is a key strength of the agency, including core and additional training. There are many examples of targeted and specific training that further enhances foster carers knowledge and skill base. Foster carers say the behaviour management and de-escalation training is superb and helps them provide positive care and to manage children and young people's behaviour effectively. This is underpinned by the data that shows 91% of carers have completed their the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards, which is a much higher proportion in comparison with all independent fostering agencies.

The fostering panel functions effectively and promotes safe, secure and stable placements. Foster panel members are suitably qualified, professionally experienced with working backgrounds in social work, education, legal, health and an adult who was once in care. Panel members are strong, enquiring, thorough and robust in their recommendations to the agency.

The fostering agency recognises and values foster carers as integral to the agency's team in achieving good quality care for children and young people. Foster carers say they feel respected and their contribution is strongly valued. They understand and advocate on behalf of children and young people. One foster carer commented, 'I am treated as part of the professional team working with the fostered children.' Foster carers are satisfied with the service they receive. They have a good working relationship with the agency.

The vast majority of the foster carers say that they receive the necessary information about children and young people that they need. One foster carer commented 'I get comprehensive information that helps me to understand the children's needs, including any issues relating to their family.' However, in a very small number of cases this is not the situation. One foster carer commented, 'This is not due to the agency but the lack of information that is passed from social services even after many phone calls.' Despite good efforts being made by the agency, it is not escalating this issue to the director of children's services. As a result, the local authority is not being held to account.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The agency's practice and provision ensures that children and young people's safety and welfare are safeguarded and protected. All foster carers implement the safe caring rules which are revisited when circumstances change. Equally, matching and risk management are given a good priority by the agency. This is underpinned by reviews through training, policies and procedures. For example, recent training has addressed e-safety in tandem with safeguarding which included preventing and tackling bullying. Finally, accidents are monitored and prevented.

Children and young people rarely go missing from a foster carer's home. Where this does occur the agency works effectively within the multi-agency arena. Foster carers help young people to learn and understand about taking unnecessary risks and strategies are put in place to avoid this being repeated.

Recruitment and selection is sound and robust. The recruitment processes are transparent, open and ensure staff and foster carers are suitable to work with children and young people.

The procedures for handling allegations are good. Over the past 12 months there have been five allegations related to the fostering service. Foster carers say they feel well supported through these challenging periods.

Leadership and management

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

This agency has good leadership and management, showing clear aspirations and determination for children and young people to experience good quality fostering. There is a competent senior management team that work hard within clear roles and with different levels of responsibilities within the agency. The Registered Manager has a very hands-on approach and has a visible presence with foster carers, staff and children and young people alike. A key strength of the agency is that it retains its child-centred work through specialising in providing sibling groups a positive fostering experience.

Children and young people progress well through their placement. One supervising social worker commented, 'We have a passionate belief in the whole child which includes personal, physical and social education.' Foster carers say they are supporting children and young people so that they can live a normal and integrated life as far as possible. Children and young people's individuality, identity and diversity is supported and celebrated.

Foster carers say they are a valued member of the agency. One foster carer commented, 'There is a partnership approach.' They feel well supported and guided by the supervising social workers. They receive at least a monthly visit and weekly phone calls so that the quality of care is continually monitored. A key strength of the agency is the availability of extra support from additional staff with responsibility for championing children and young people's participation, activities and transport. Foster carers provide monthly progress reports so that the child's holistic progress and development can be tracked. As a result, this helps to demonstrate how they achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

The staffing arrangements at the agency are good. There are enough qualified supervising social workers to support foster carers effectively. They are properly supervised through regular and consistent supervision and receive an annual appraisal. The agency strongly supports social workers practice through courses that aid their professional development. For example, a recent conference on secure attachment and the implications of research for practice was provided.

Good quality assurance monitoring is taking place at the agency, leading to the agency gaining its Investors in People award which is being maintained annually. Senior managers regularly seek feedback at the local authority level, from schools, foster carers and children and young people. This feedback is collated and helps to shape and improve the fostering agency further. The senior management team complete monthly meetings and reports to assess the performance of the agency, which includes learning from outcomes of allegations and placement breakdowns. All this work helps to drive improvement and to help the agency to plan more effectively. For example, the agency has improved its consultation processes with children, young people and birth children. It has sharpened its administration support

to help and assist with recruitment, foster carers and staff. Consequently, the agency monitors and delivers an effective service to children, young people, foster carers and staff.

The fostering agency has addressed previous requirements and recommendations by ensuring all the relevant local authority consents to any child being placed within a fostering household. Improvement has been made to the panel process through extra training and also including foster carers attending their reviews. Case records now show the essential information for each child. Contact details for Ofsted are now available in a full range of literature produced by the agency. All these actions show a positive and proactive stance being taken by the agency.

The fostering agency notification system is reasonable. The fostering agency has correctly notified social workers, police and the local authority of significant events taking place at the agency. However, the agency did not notify Ofsted of all events, through the notification reports system. As a result, Ofsted was not aware if the concerns were fully resolved. The agency is taking immediate steps to rectify this administrative oversight.

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.