

# Break Fostering Service

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Tracy Murty
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<b>Provision subtype</b>	Voluntary org placing children

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<b>Responsible individual</b>	Hilary Bridget Richards
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/08/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

The Break Fostering Service is run by a charitable organisation. The fostering agency provides therapeutic foster placements to children and young people aged between seven and 18. The agency provides medium, long-term and respite placements. Five sets of carers are approved to provide single child placements.

### 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 is the first inspection of this agency since its registration. The agency consistently promotes and maintains good outcomes for children. The selection and approval of foster carers is rigorous and ensures only high calibre carers are approved. The agency works positively and proactively with a wide range of agencies and professionals to ensure improved outcomes for children. Close partnership working has enabled children to make significant improvements in all areas of their lives since being placed with carers from this agency.

Children report feeling safe and protected from harm. This is due to the commitment and skill of foster carers, who ensure that any areas of concern for children are addressed promptly. Placing authorities, education providers and health professionals all report high levels of satisfaction with the services provided for children. Agencies report noticeable and significant improvements in health and education outcomes for children placed with this agency. Children report feeling very much a part of the agency and are able to contribute their wishes and views. The agency fully considers the views of children as part of the selection and recruitment of staff and includes them in the interview process.

Leadership and management of the agency are good. Managers monitor and track performance across all areas of the service and have clear and detailed development and strategic plans in place. Staff all report high levels of satisfaction with the level of support, supervision and training they receive. They feel they have been encouraged and are able to make contributions to how the agency has formed and

developed.

Foster carers also report very high levels of satisfaction at the support provided to them by the Registered Manager and staff team. Foster carers state that this agency appealed to them due to its ethos and commitment to providing therapeutic support for children. They feel that the levels of support and training offered ensures that they continue to provide high quality care to children with very complex needs.

The quality of service provision is good. Recruitment of staff and carers is robust and ensures that no unsuitable adults are employed in any capacity to work with children. Foster carers receive frequent and good quality supervision and training. They also attend regular support groups, facilitated by a qualified psychotherapist. Carers present as highly skilled, experienced and committed to meeting the needs of those children placed with them.

There are some shortfalls, including one regulatory shortfall. Recording of educational attendance, attainment and progress on children's files is not detailed. The processes for foster carer assessment, decision-making and approval are not consistently robust. There has been no impact on the welfare or safety of children from 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
16 (2011)	implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster carers. (Regulation 16(2)(a))	26/04/2013

### Recommendations

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

- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements (NMS 26.6)
- ensure that the foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the

decision maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days (NMS 14.10)

- ensure that the agency decision maker takes account of the Hofstetter principle (Statutory Guidance Volume 4, paragraph 5.40)
- ensure that the fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for fostering panel members which includes identity checks. (NMS 19.3)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children report being happy in their foster placements, feel part of the foster family and that they are listened to. They experience positive relationships with foster carer's own children. One social worker stated, 'The foster carers and their own children all promote positive role models for the child.' From their starting points, children present with increased confidence and a sense of pride in their achievements. They feel included in decision making about their lives and that what they say will be taken seriously by their carers and the agency. This is supported by placing social workers, who state that foster carers talk through and include children in decision making processes.

Children develop increased self-confidence and an ability to speak openly with their carers about any worries they may have. This has led to a marked reduction in bullying reported by some children in school, as children feel confident in sharing their concerns and of action being taken. Positive and proactive action by foster carers ensures that children feel safe and protected from harm. One school reported high levels of satisfaction with how foster carers work with them. The school stated: 'The changes in the child have been ten-fold since they moved to live with these carers. I cannot praise what they have done enough.'

Placement stability is good, with children being well matched with foster carers. The agency has robust selection procedures to ensure that only the most suitable foster carers are approved by the panel. Children make good progress educationally and socially with foster carers support. This is attributable to the particularly robust matching process undertaken by the agency. One placing social worker praised the agency staff for ensuring close liaison and discussion with the previous foster carer for a child. Such attention to detail is a particular strength of the agency. It has enabled new placements to commence with full and detailed information on the holistic needs of the child and agreed plans for how these will be met.

Children receive support from their foster carers to ensure that their individual health needs are met at all times. Carers keep detailed recordings of all health related appointments and treatments for children in their care. Where appropriate, parents have been actively involved in such appointments and meetings. This ensures that both children and birth parents feel included in meeting their needs and in being consulted. Children take pride in seeing how their health needs have been met and

of improvements being made in certain areas. Carers support children to consider their own health needs and to share their wishes and feelings about how they can be met.

Children with specific health needs have been supported by their foster carers to access appropriate support from health professionals. The agency employs the services of a qualified psychotherapist. This has enabled the agency to further ensure that the emotional and behavioural support needs of children receive consideration. Foster carers report high levels of satisfaction at this additional support for them and the children placed with them. The psychotherapist attends the fortnightly carer support groups and provides practical and emotional support to carers. Such support has led to carers feeling better able to deal with any challenging or unexpected behaviours in children placed with them. This has also led to increased placement stability and better outcomes for children. Carers feel skilled in being able to deal with children's immediate and longer-term mental health needs due to the support the agency provides to them.

Children's attendance and engagement in education is very good. From their starting points, children begin to develop increased confidence and achieve well academically. One school reported noticeable improvements for one child. Their physical presentation has improved and they are now working at the same level as their peers, which was not the case previously. The agency is also particularly good at considering the educational needs of those children in the process of being matched with their foster carers. One educational provider stated how impressed they had been with how the agency had worked to ensure that a school was identified for a child about to move to a foster placement. They stated 'I have been really impressed with the agency taking the lead on identifying a suitable school for this child before they move. Such forward planning does not always happen in my experience. They should be credited for taking the lead for this child'.

Children who had previously experienced difficulties in relation to concentration and engagement with peers in school have made good progress. One school reported how pleased they were that a child was now much calmer and able to complete their homework. The school attributed this to the commitment of the foster carers and stated: 'They are excellent; they have done so much for this child in such a short time'. The recording of the attendance, progress and achievements of children is not fully recorded on their files at present. This would not assist children to have a clear and detailed understanding of how these areas are monitored by the agency and foster carers during their time in placement.

The agency has a dedicated transitions team working alongside them. They become involved with young people who are working towards independence and assist them in all areas of planning for the transition to adult life. Members of that team have been included in training events with foster carers over the past year. This provides foster carers with a clear understanding and awareness of the additional support available for those young people approaching the transition from care.

Children take part in a range of activities, which further promotes their sense of self-

worth and confidence. Such activities include football, swimming, cooking, and boxing classes and trips out. Children report confidence in being able to discuss any activities of interest to them and of them being provided for them. Some children have been actively involved in the recruitment and selection process for key members of the agency over the past year. This increases their self-confidence, presentation skills and involvement in how the agency is run.

Children feel supported by their carers and the agency to maintain positive contact with significant family members. Placing authorities report confidence and satisfaction at how well the agency and its carers support contact plans. Foster carers work sensitively to ensure that children experience positive contact with family members, supporting direct and phone contact for children on a regular basis. Foster carers imaginatively consider how to ensure contact for children can be improved and work closely with placing authorities to discuss any issues or ideas for improvement. Children report being able to keep in contact with family and friends in their placements and satisfaction with the levels of contact they have.

The agency ensures that detailed and clear records are maintained for all aspects of the care provided to children. Foster carers ensure that daily and weekly reports include all relevant information about significant events, educational achievements, social activities and health issues. The recording of all such matters is recorded in great detail in foster carer files, but less information has been recorded on children's files to date. This would not assist children if they were to access their files now or in the future.

## **Quality of service**

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

The agency has robust and stringent selection and recruitment processes in place for new foster carers. This ensures that only carers of a high calibre have been approved to work for this agency. The agency has undertaken rigorous checks on all applicants and detailed assessments prior to presenting them to the fostering panel. Foster carers report high levels of satisfaction with the assessment and approval process. While some state that the process was challenging at times, they all felt that this was necessary and appropriate. Post-approval training and development opportunities for foster carers have further enhanced their skills and confidence.

The fostering panel has a diverse and skilled membership. Panel provides good analysis about potential foster carers' suitability. Good induction and on-going training ensures panel members have a thorough understanding and awareness of relevant legislation and practice. The selection of panel members is rigorous but records for some members do not accurately reflect this. There has been no impact on the welfare or safety of children from this.

The fostering panel considers all assessments in detail and asks challenging and relevant questions. Discussions have been held between the panel chair, panel advisor and Registered Manager following panel meetings. These meetings have

included discussions about how assessments and presentation at panel could be improved further. The Registered Manager has ensured that areas of needs have been considered with staff members promptly. The panel chair reports high levels of satisfaction with the agency's commitment to learning and improving performance. Issues raised by the panel chair have led to improved assessments and presentation at panel by agency staff. The agency decision maker considers all recommendations made by panel members promptly and contacts foster carers verbally and in writing to advise of their decisions. Recording of oral feedback to foster carers and decision making by the agency decision maker is not always recorded on foster carer files.

The agency undertook an imaginative recruitment campaign last year. This led to a range of enquiries from prospective foster carers in the local area. The staff team screened all enquiries and counselled out those who were not felt to have the necessary skills required for the role of therapeutic foster carer for the agency. Such attention to detail in relation to recruitment of carers has led to a small, but committed number of carers being approved. One placing social worker commented that the agency is very committed to ensuring the right match of carers to children. They stated: 'This agency will not just offer a placement because they have a vacancy. They are totally committed to getting it right for the child and the carers every time.'

Foster carers all report feeling very supported by the agency staff. They feel able to discuss issues and concerns with any member of the team. Foster carers receive fortnightly supervision from a qualified member of staff. Supervisions consider the needs of those children placed, how they are being met and also the birth children of foster carers. Foster carers maintain detailed records of all significant events for children on a daily and weekly basis. These are then shared with the placing authority. Placing authorities report high levels of satisfaction at the care provided and how well the carers meet children's needs. Foster carers also attend fortnightly support groups, led by managers, staff and the psychotherapist. Groups have included sessions on such areas as attachment. This has led to increased confidence and skills for foster carers in being able to support the complex needs of those children placed with them. One foster carer stated that such support has enabled them to manage difficult and challenging situations with a child calmly and with confidence. They also feel that this has improved placement stability for children.

The agency provides on-call support for all foster carers 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Carers also receive 24 days per year respite from their caring roles. Respite care is provided by approved foster carers within the agency, who have a specific remit for providing respite care. This attention to detail ensures that children know who their respite foster carer is and enables them to form meaningful and positive relationships with them. The agency is particularly good at ensuring that thorough and detailed planning is completed prior to any respite care arrangement commencing. One respite carer stated how pleased they were at being able to get to know a child before they started coming to them for respite care. The support groups enable all foster carers to share information and any concerns or issues they may have about children placed with them. The psychotherapist provides clinical support and guidance for them during these meetings and at other times.



The agency considers all requests for placements as a team in detail. The psychotherapist is also asked to consider the referral information and contributes to discussions about potential suitable matching of children with foster carers. Such attention to detail has led to strong and positive placements being made and sustained to date. A commissioning officer stated their satisfaction at the robust matching process undertaken by the agency. They feel that the agency would never take a placement purely because of having a vacancy, unless this met the needs of the child and the ability of the carers to meet those needs.

A particular strength of the agency is its commitment to ensuring that all relevant information is sought and gained about children, prior to placements commencing. Agency staff persistently seek all relevant information from placing authorities to ensure that assessments and plans for children remain up-to-date. The provision of psychotherapy input by the agency has further assisted carers to meet the complex needs of children placed with them. The agency has recently begun work with a local university in relation to tracking and monitoring the strengths and needs of children placed with their carers. It is envisaged that this work will lead to improved understanding of the starting points for children and how carers meet their needs and improve outcomes for children over time.

Foster carers all report feeling very much a part of the agency at all levels. They feel motivated and confident in making contributions to how the agency runs and develops. Carers were asked to complete questionnaires following their attendance at fostering panels last year. Their responses have been used by the panel chair to consider how future panels can improve their performance. The agency demonstrates a real learning culture and commitment to improvement in all areas of its practice and performance.

Carer's birth children receive support from agency staff as part of the supervision process every fortnight. Their views and feelings are sought and considered by the agency regularly. This ensures that placement stability is maintained and that foster families remain able to meet the needs of children placed with them at all times.

One foster carer stated that they had selected to work for this agency in particular. They feel that the ethos and size of the agency ensures that children receive the best possible care and that their needs will be met. Carers receive good quality training in a range of areas relevant to their roles. Recording and monitoring of all training attended by foster carers is robust and provides good evidence of how they continue to be able to meet the needs of children placed with them. The agency demonstrates a real commitment to ensuring that its foster carers receive training opportunities throughout the year.

### **Safeguarding children and young people**

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

Children report feeling safe from any form of abuse or bullying. Children feel

confident in being able to share any concerns they may have and that action will be taken to ensure their safety. One school reported how pleased it was that a child had been able to share concerns with their foster carer about being bullied in school. This has led to clear strategies being put in place to resolve this problem. Children report confidence in knowing who they can talk to about any worries they may have. The agency has a clear and detailed complaints procedure in place. Foster carers report a detailed awareness of this and other procedures relating to safeguarding issues.

Children receive a personalised version of the children's guide prior to the placement starting. This includes information of who they can contact if they have any concerns and details of how to make a complaint. Children feel confident in who they would speak with if they had any concerns about their placement. The agency attended a local looked after children council meeting last year and asked children and young people's views on the children's guide. They were also asked to consider what makes a good or bad foster carer. The information gathered was then used to update the children's guide and also for training new foster carers. The agency demonstrates a real commitment to listening to looked after children and including their views in how the service is run.

Each supervision session with foster carers has a section to discuss any actual or potential safety issues for children placed with them. This ensures that regular discussion and recording is made about children and their needs. The level and detail of the supervision and foster carer recordings reflects their commitment to safeguarding children at all times. There have been no reported complaints from children or others about the agency or its carers since the agency was registered. Supervision records reflect the commitment of the agency to ensuring that children remain at the centre of all practice. Detailed discussions with carers takes place every two weeks about the child placed with them. All aspects of their care needs are fully recorded and actions set by the agency, carers and others. This ensures that any changes for a child which may be of concern are given prompt and full consideration and action is taken to address them.

Prospective foster carers undertake a rigorous assessment process, which includes a clear focus on safeguarding issues. Approved carers feel that the training they have received in child protection, restraint and attachment has raised their awareness further in this area. The trained therapist in the team provides further information to carers as to how children's behaviour may reflect past trauma and how to deal with this. Carers feel well prepared to deal with any actual or potential safeguarding issues and have high levels of support from the agency at all times. Carers state that they have all felt totally supported to know what concerning behaviours and emotions a child may display, both in the short and longer-term. This has been achieved through the support offered to them in supervision, as well as through the support group meetings and involvement of the therapist.

Safer-caring plans and risk assessments for children clearly set out specific areas of need for foster carers to consider and address for children placed with them. Regular meetings and discussions with the placing authority and agency ensure detailed and relevant information informs all assessments and plans. The agency robustly tracks

and chases placing authorities for information to assist carers in meeting a child's needs. Agency staff take time to visit placing authorities and read case files and information relating to children. This has ensured that foster carers have full and detailed information relating to a child prior to a placement starting. This has led to increased placement stability and successful outcomes for children.

There have been no reported incidents of children going missing from foster placements to date. The agency has in place detailed and comprehensive missing from care procedures for carers to follow. This includes details of the joint missing from care protocols for relevant local authorities. Foster carers demonstrate a clear awareness and understanding of the procedures to be followed in the event of a child going missing without authorisation from their placement.

Foster carers also receive detailed information about how allegations made against them would be dealt with. They display a detailed knowledge of the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer and what action might be taken in the event that an allegation were to be made about them by a child. Training has been provided for carers and the agency demonstrates a real commitment to ensuring that carers receive support and communication with placing authorities is robust. No allegations have been made against foster carers with this agency since its registration.

## **Leadership and management**

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

The Registered Manager regularly monitors the services provided by the agency and produces detailed reports. Tracking and monitoring ensures that services continue to improve outcomes for children. This has included the work being done currently with a local university, to monitor and track outcomes for children placed with the agency. Plans are in place to further include children in the recruitment and selection of staff, including children of foster carers. This further demonstrates the agency's commitment to ensuring that the wishes and feelings of looked after and birth children are sought routinely.

Children play an active part in contributing to how the service is run. Supervising social workers seek the wishes, views and feelings of children during each supervision session with carers. This ensures that children's views are taken into consideration by the agency every month. Foster carers feel very included in the running of the service and have been asked to contribute to how the fostering panel could improve. Foster carers have also provided detailed feedback on training and development events attended to date. This has led to further consideration by the Registered Manager of the future training and development needs of the entire staff team.

Foster carers feel very included in all aspects of the planning and provision of services for children with this agency. They report high levels of satisfaction at how the Registered Manager and staff include them in decision making at all levels. This is particularly evident from the point of potential matches being considered. Foster

carers and the staff team discuss all referrals in detail before agreeing on a possible suitable placement for a child. This has led to very good placement stability and ensures that the holistic needs of children placed are met at all times. There has been significant improvements noted by other agencies for children placed with this agency over a short period of time.

Foster carers were actively involved in the devising of the Foster Care Charter for the agency. This is seen by all carers as a live and meaningful document, which reflects the commitment of all involved in the agency. There is clear and good evidence that the agency and foster carers are meeting the commitments set out in the Charter for children placed.

A key strength of this agency is its multi-agency working. Involved agencies consistently report high levels of satisfaction at the positive communication from the agency. From the point of referrals being received by the agency, staff take considerable time to ensure that full and detailed information on potential placements is obtained. Close working with placing authorities, education and health providers has ensured good matching of carers to children. Placements start with education provision in place for children and their health needs are promptly addressed and met. This ensures that children have the best possible start to their new placements. It has led to improved outcomes in relation to their education and health issues.

The agency has not had any complaints to date, but has clear and detailed procedures in place for dealing with any concerns raised. Children report confidence in knowing who they can speak with about any concerns they may have. The children's guide for the agency is very user-friendly and provides children with detailed information as to who they can contact if they have any concerns. This includes details of their independent reviewing officer, Ofsted and other agencies.

The agency demonstrates a capacity for continuing improvement, based on progress made to date. The service is currently expanding, with plans to increase the number of foster carers employed by the end of this year. A further fostering panel has been set to consider current assessments being undertaken by agency staff. The agency intends to approve more permanent and respite foster carers to meet the needs of the local community. Weekly meetings are held with the local authority to consider potential placements and identify possible suitable carers. The Registered Manager has also been in recent discussion with other placing authorities and intends to build on this over the coming months. This is reflected in the development and strategic plan for the agency.

Staff report high levels of satisfaction at the level, frequency and content of supervision and training provided to them. Training provided to date has assisted them in supporting foster carers and children placed. It has increased their knowledge and awareness of specific issues and how to address them. The entire staff team have all come from backgrounds in fostering and adoption and demonstrate a wealth of skills and experience in this area. They report high levels of satisfaction at how they are included in all aspects of the service delivery and

development. Regular team meetings ensure that the agency continues to identify potential new carers and training and development needs.

The inclusion of a qualified therapist in the team has enabled foster carers and staff to feel better able to provide high levels of therapeutic support to children placed. Carers and staff feel confident in their ability to meet children's holistic needs, from the support and guidance provided by the therapist in the team. The agency is small enough to be able to consider in detail the needs of all children referred for a placement. This has led to increased placement stability, improved outcomes for children and involved agencies reporting high levels of satisfaction and praise for how the agency operates.

## 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 the inspection of independent fostering agencies.