

Fostercare UK Ltd

Inspection report for Independent Fostering Agency

Unique reference number	SC363485
Inspection date	14/11/2008
Inspector	Debbi Flint
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	25/01/2008

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Fostercare UK is an Independent Fostering Agency which was registered in January 2008. The agency offers a wide range of fostering services with an emphasis on tailored placements, attention to detail and a strong partnership approach. At November 2008 there were 17 carers approved with this service and several more carers awaiting the decision of a forthcoming panel meeting.

The agency is based at the company headquarters in Betteshanger, Kent but also has a sub office in Thornton Heath, London.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This statutory inspection was undertaken as an announced key inspection.

The service was judged to be operating at a good standard overall with some areas of operation and practice which were found to be outstanding. Staff recruitment and selection is robust and the agency has a comprehensive training programme. There is a high degree of support offered to both staff and carers. The agency's matching policy pays fine attention to detail and emphasises the importance of race, culture, language and religion. Individual needs are recognised and carers of young people currently placed are able to ensure that these needs are met. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout the standards inspected.

Three recommendations have been made at this inspection visit. It is recommended that the registered manager register for a management qualification such as National Vocational Qualification level 4 or another qualification that matches these competencies. It is also recommended that the agency develop a system of monitoring any non compliance by placing authorities with regard to statutory reviews. A further recommendation has been made with regard to ensuring that the young person's guide is suitable for all children who may be fostered through the service.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the agency's first inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The agency has very good measures in place to ensure that children and young people placed are receiving health care, advice and guidance which meets their individual needs. There is a policy on the promotion of health and development for children in foster care which underpins the agency's current good practice. Carers are given good guidance on their role with regard to promoting the health of the young person. All children and young people placed are registered with primary health care services such as doctors, dentists and opticians and can access other health care professionals as and when necessary. The agency has also ensured that all young people placed have received a 'Looked After Children's' (LAC) health check within the last 12 months. Carers currently record health information and appointments in the young person's daily record. The registered manager states that the agency is planning to introduce a personal, individualised and user-friendly health record of accidents, illnesses, inoculations and allergies which can be kept by the young person. The agency plans to develop this following consultation with young people over coming months as the service continues to grow. Carers demonstrate an awareness of the importance of healthy eating and young people report that they are encouraged to eat healthily.

The agency has introduced a very good training programme to ensure that foster carers will be provided with the training necessary to promote the health and well being of the young people. Training on offer includes first aid, healthy care and sexual health. There is also the opportunity for carers to undertake training in life story work and this ensures that they are aware of the importance of the past for young people in their care and also the importance of their cultural heritage. As this is a new service not all carers have taken advantage of all these training opportunities at this stage but agency professionals state that they are committed to providing this training for all carers. The agency has access to a range of consultants who can respond immediately to any psychological needs of a child or young person. A system is in place to monitor any accidents that might occur and there is a log to record any such accidents. There have been no accidents involving the young people since the agency was registered.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The professionals involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary knowledge and experience to run the business and staff state that they provide the service with strong and efficient leadership. The registered manager is a qualified social worker and is registered with the General Social Care Council. The manager states that she will be undertaking a management qualification in the near future. All staff working in the agency have the necessary qualifications and training to carry out their duties and the information held on staffing files meets the requirements of Schedule 1.

There are good systems in place to ensure that foster homes are safe and suitable and that young people are being cared for appropriately. There is a strong focus within the service on making the right match for the child and on ensuring that the foster carers have the capability and skills to meet the child's needs. Staff involved in the matching process report that they are impressed with the supervision and administrative back up that they receive. The agency's matching policy pays fine attention to detail and emphasises the importance of race, culture, language and religion. Carers report that they receive very good support from the agency to ensure that they meet the needs of the young people placed with them.

Foster carers are provided with good guidance and training on safeguarding children and young people and protecting them from harm. There is a safeguarding and safe care policy which is issued to carers and all carers have individual safe caring plans. The carer's handbook is extremely comprehensive and contains essential information necessary to safeguard young people such as the child protection and anti bullying policy. Basic child protection training is included in the carer's induction and staff state that all carers will undertake more detailed child protection training at a later date within their first year of being registered with the agency. The agency provides carers with good guidance on action to take should a child or young person be missing from a foster home.

The agency has a panel guide which clearly details the function and remit of the panel. There have been some recent changes to panel membership but both panel members and the registered manager state that there is now a strong team in place with expertise in both education and child health. Membership of the panel is diverse and reflects varying cultural backgrounds, both genders and different sexualities. Minutes of previous meetings show that all panel meetings have been quorate.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The agency gives a high priority to ensuring that young people are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality. The carer's handbook gives good guidelines on equal opportunities and valuing diversity and the registered manager states that all carers will complete equality and diversity training within a year of registration. The manager states that a potential carer's attitude towards equality and diversity forms a key part of the initial recruitment process and some potential carers have not been recruited due to the fact that they have not shown sufficient commitment to the importance of valuing diversity. Trans-racial placements have been successful and young people in these placements state that they are happy, get on well together and have equal access to opportunities to develop and pursue their own individual interests and hobbies. The agency has recruited a wide variety of carers of diverse cultures, different sexualities and varied backgrounds.

Foster carers are given good guidance with regard to their role of ensuring that a

child's educational needs are met and they understand the importance of attending parent and open days at educational establishments. Personal Education Plans are on file for most of the young people placed and where these are not on file there is clear evidence that the agency is reminding placing authorities of their responsibility in this area. All the young people placed with carers are attending school or college. Young people approaching transition are progressing well and state that they plan to continue with their education at sixth form college.

The agency offers short term breaks and there are carers registered to provide such breaks. A policy is in place for the provision of short term breaks.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The agency has a 'Contact with Children in Foster Care' policy and gives a high priority to the importance of promoting contact as and when appropriate. The carer's handbook gives carer's good guidance on their responsibilities in promoting and supporting contact arrangements. The manager states that the agency will not accept a placement if it is thought that facilitating contact will not be feasible and all carers are advised that they should be prepared to put themselves out, if necessary, in order to ensure that contact takes place. Carers of children from overseas promote contact through the use of the telephone. The agency has also ensured that contact has been facilitated at school open days where appropriate with a supervising social worker supporting this.

The agency has a consultation policy and carers demonstrate an awareness of the importance of listening to the children placed with them. The registered manager states that a questionnaire will be sent to each young person placed prior to their carer's annual review. There have been no questionnaires sent yet as there have not been any annual reviews due to this being a new service. The registered manager states that young people are consulted as part of the assessment process and that there are plans to set up a young person's forum next year. The young person's guide reinforces details of how young people can be consulted and the agency also arranges fun days for young people which provide an informal opportunity for consultation.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The agency has a policy on preparing for adulthood and carers are also given good guidance on this outcome in the carer's handbook. The registered manager states that preparing children and young people for independence will start from the moment the children and young people are placed and not when they achieve a certain age. Young people who are currently in the transition process have clear ideas about what they want to do when they complete their education and are also forming ideas about their long term plans for the future. They have achieved a

degree of competence in skills such as meal preparation and using public transport which is in line with expected outcomes for young people of their chronological ages. They also have keys to the home in which they are placed. The agency has been proactive in reminding one placing authority of its' responsibility with regard to one young person who had not been allocated a leaving care worker. This young person now has a leaving care worker in place and the agency continues to be proactive in seeking independent living accommodation for this young person. Carers are proactive in assisting young people to increase their independence and one carer has been working with a young person to enable independence in the use of public transport which has now been achieved. Young people living in the London area are equipped with oyster cards to enable them to travel around London. The agency has ensured there is a saving allowance for young people and also a leaving care grant.

The agency has a written policy on fostering allowances and carers are clear about the breakdown of the money that they receive. All carers state that they are paid on time.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The agency operates from premises which are suitable for the purpose and there are appropriate facilities for the secure retention of records. Efficient and robust administrative procedures are in place. There is a Statement of Purpose which clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The service has produced a young person's guide which is extremely comprehensive and contains a lot of useful information. The guide is user friendly for older children but younger children may find it more difficult to read.

The agency has a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability and a service manager is available to manage the service should the manager be absent. The registered manager and all employees have job descriptions and contracts of employment. All staff are issued with an employee handbook which contains a copy of all key policies including the diversity policy and details of disciplinary procedures. The registered manager receives monthly supervision with the service manager and all other staff are also regularly supervised. There are regular staff meetings and staff state that they are pleased with the training on offer to them.

The agency has a recruitment and selection policy for the selection of carers and there is also a clearly set out assessment process. There are good administrative procedures in place for dealing with initial enquiries from prospective carers. Assessments are currently carried out by Independent Form F Assessors. One assessor commented, 'The agency managers are very ethical. I feel very well supported and I feel valued. The service is good and well run. The managers communicate very clearly with staff and the support is definitely there'.

The role of the supervising social worker is made clear to the carer through training and also through guidance in the carer's handbook. Carers state that they receive

regular supervision and feel very well supported. There is 24 hour support and there are also monthly support meetings for carers. Carers complete the initial 'Skills to Foster' training and then go on to complete further training tailored to meet their requirements and the needs of the child. The agency offers a very comprehensive training programme in line with Children's Workforce Development Council standards. Training on offer includes attachment, challenging behaviour, child protection and safer caring, basic first aid, healthy care, life story work and equality and diversity. Carers have been given comprehensive information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and allegations. There have currently been no allegations or complaints. Carers report that the agency is a fair and competent employer. Foster Placement Agreements are in place and these meet the requirements of Schedule 6.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to equality and diversity in practice which can be seen in recruitment and selection procedures, staff training and attention to detail when assessing the needs of the children and young people. All young people currently placed are being cared for by carers who have a detailed knowledge of their individual needs and are able to ensure that these needs are met.

The registered manager monitors the service according to Schedule 7 and a record of monthly monitoring is kept. Monitoring does not as yet include a system for reminding the placing authorities of their duties with regard to providing young people with regular reviews. The agency has a quality assurance policy and the registered provider states that he is committed to ensuring quality performance. An independent consultant has been contracted to assist the agency with gaining the ISA9001 and the Investors in People Award.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- register the manager for National Vocational Qualification level 4 in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by National Vocational Qualification level 4. (NMS 2:2)
- ensure that the young persons guide is suitable for all children who may be fostered through the service. (NMS 1:5).
- ensure that the placing authorities reviews of placement plans are monitored in order to follow up any non compliance by local authorities with regard to six monthly intervals for reviews. (NMS 4).