

# Wellcare Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Setting address</b>	220 Trafalgar House, Grenville Place, London, NW7 3SA
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<b>Telephone number</b>	020 8906 7823
<b>Email</b>	info@wellcarefostering.co.uk
<b>Registered person</b>	Wellcare Fostering Services Limited
<b>Registered manager</b>	Alvira Jamil Siddiqui
<b>Responsible individual</b>	John William Dilleyston
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	06/07/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Wellcare Fostering Services is privately owned. It was registered as an independent fostering agency in October 2004. The agency aims to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of children who are looked after by local authorities. It provides a variety of placements, including parent and child placements. While foster carers come from different areas of London, the agency's office is North West London. The agency has six approved fostering households. It is currently providing three placements within one foster family.

### 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**.

Children receive a good service from an agency that has made exceptional progress since their last inspection. Their implementation of regulations and standards is commendable. Children are thriving, safe and feel part of a family. Foster carers demonstrate a great commitment to helping children flourish. Foster carers feel they are valued as professionals and that their views are respected. Children benefit from a range of culturally diverse carers who are focused on providing the best outcomes. Children and professionals provide very positive feedback regarding their placements. Staff and foster carers enjoy good training opportunities and receive substantial support.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the service, ensuring that all decision making promotes children's best interests. Fostering panel arrangements are robust. Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to fostering and are taking effective steps to further improve the service. They have an accurate understanding of the areas for development. The agency has a successful foundation for continual improvement. Recommendations are being made to build on practice. These relate to further enhancing children's and foster carers' influence in the development of the agency, updating the service development plan and executive monitoring.

## Areas for improvement

## Recommendations

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

- take into account the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them when developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- update the written development plan (NMS 18.2)
- ensure that board members or management committee members receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months and monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children. (NMS 25.7)

## Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children are thriving within stable, nurturing placements that positively enrich their lives. Children state that they 'feel like part of the family'. Professionals highlight that children are 'given a second chance for a family' and that they 'feel at home' in their placements. Foster carers feel they are all part of a 'beautiful extended family'. There is a strong commitment to providing a welcoming environment. Foster carers state that 'if a child has a secure base, they will flourish'. The agency provides children with comprehensive personal profiles of each foster family. Profiles include photographs and foster carers describe their family and routines. This document assists with alleviating children's anxieties and familiarises them with their new living arrangement.

Children are able to maintain meaningful contact with their relatives and friends. Children enjoy friendships similar to their peers, for example, by going on sleepovers. Foster carers sensitively support contact arrangements as dictated by a child's care plan. For example, where face-to-face contact is not possible, foster carers send photographs and cards. Foster carers demonstrate a good understanding of attachment and loss and helping children understand their circumstances. Within the agency children have opportunities to create new friendships. Children enjoy attending the agency's end of year party, which enables them to socialise with their own and other foster families.

Children live with foster carers who are able to meet their diverse needs effectively. This includes social, emotional, psychological and physical needs and those in relation to their ability, age, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, religious belief and sexuality. Professionals comment on the 'very good cultural matches'. The agency offers an extensive range of support, which includes training on diversity, transracial placements and meeting the needs of disabled children. Identity is a regular agenda

item on each supervisory foster carer visit and is an integral part of each child's monthly progress report. The agency is also able to commission interpretation and translation services, if needed.

Children are able to build up resilience and make sense of their personal circumstances. Children understand why they are unable to live with their birth parent and highlight the positive aspects of being in foster care. Life story work further contributes to helping children develop a positive self-view. Children positively influence their own lives and the agency through a variety of avenues. They express their views in support groups, questionnaires, at their statutory reviews and in-house meetings at home. Children also contribute to their foster carers' annual review. They regularly meet with the Registered Manager. This enables them to provide feedback on procedures; for example, young people recently commented on the complaint procedure. The new staff appraisal process will include children's views and there are plans to further enable children to influence wider service development.

Children's educational achievement in relation to their starting points is very good. School attendance is excellent. Professionals highlight that foster carers 'encourage and support the children to do their best academically and are focused on the children achieving'. Social workers also comment on children's motivation and 'significant improvement'. Children are taking external exams and have aspirations for the future. An example of this is a child describing their recent visit to Oxford University as an 'inspiring experience'. Foster carers tenaciously advocate for children's educational needs, which results in them receiving additional funding and tuition. Children also highlight that foster carers assist them with their homework and take them on educational trips.

Children engage in a wide range of experiences that broaden their outlook and life chances. The agency provides them with a holiday allowance, birthday and festival allowances. Foster carers succeed in nurturing the talents and individuality of each child. Extra-curricular activities include drama, playing musical instruments, attending youth clubs, holiday schemes and positively contributing to their local community and church. All these experiences assist children with building up their confidence and raising their self-esteem. Children are now more assertive, independent and are developing responsibility for themselves. Foster carers highlight that they encourage children 'to believe in themselves'.

Children benefit from better health outcomes. There are significant improvements in their personal hygiene and emotional wellbeing. Children no longer require psychological support and health passports are being introduced to further monitor health needs. Children understand key health concerns and there are no concerns in relation to smoking, substance misuse or sexual health. Children confirm that they have a nutritious diet and lead a healthy lifestyle. They enjoy engaging in various forms of exercise; for example, swimming, bike riding, playing badminton, basketball, football, dance fitness classes and going to the gym. Foster carers have first aid training and access to general and individualised training enabling them to meet specific health needs.

Children are able to successfully prepare for adulthood. The completion of age-appropriate household chores is part of their daily routines. The agency has a good audit tool which focuses on empowering young people with the skills needed to live independently. This includes practical skills, personal development, budgeting, career planning and identifying long term goals. Children benefit from foster carers saving a substantial amount for them; this is an additional bonus for when they move on. Foster carers also undertake specific life skills training and learn how to delegate responsibility to young people.

## Quality of service

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

Children receive care from a fostering agency which professionals describe as being able to 'deliver good quality care'. There is a culturally diverse range of skilled foster carers, who are committed to improving the outcomes for children. Professionals describe 'brilliant carers', who 'really understand the needs of the children'. Foster carers feel valued, respected and appreciated. They work in partnership with the all agencies and understand the professional nature of their role. Children benefit from efficient care planning which focuses on their needs. The agency has very comprehensive matching documentation that highlights the strengths of each placement and also identifies any gaps, risks and vulnerabilities. Additional support is provided to enhance the stability of placements.

The agency has good arrangements regarding the recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers. The preparation and assessment of foster carers is governed by the underlying principle that the welfare of children is paramount. Assessments are transparent, competency based, evaluative, analytical and quotes from applicants assist with highlighting their unique attributes. Assessments take into account the new standards and focus on the applicant's ability to work as part of a team. Children receive care from foster carers who are well supported. There is a training and development programme for foster carers, which they describe as being 'very good'. All foster carers have obtained or are completing their vocational training. Foster carers have personal and professional development plans. There is an expectation that foster carers reflect on training and highlight how it assists with improving their practice.

Foster carers' personal qualities, skills, training and support equips them to meet children's needs effectively. Foster carers benefit from regular structured supervisory visits, support groups and respite breaks. Their handbook covers a wide range of topics and has the contact details for numerous external agencies. The agency also provides them with books and links to relevant websites. Foster carers also have free membership of The Fostering Network which is also able to offer advice. The agency succeeds in providing relevant support to the whole fostering family. Foster carers express their satisfaction with the agency. They have a sense of belonging and feel that they are 'part of the company'. Foster carers are strong advocates for children. They take pride in the importance of their role, sharing responsibility and efficiently

engaging with other key professionals in the child's life.

Children benefit from effective panel arrangements that ensure all decision making is in their best interests. The panel is chaired by an independent person experienced in social care. This individual brings a significant amount of knowledge to their role. The central list includes a care leaver and a range of independent professionals. Panel members benefit from on-going training and annual performance appraisals. The panel is kept up-to-date on developments within social care, which ensures that it makes competent recommendations which incorporate best practice. The panel also regularly receives management information which enables the members to have an overview of the agency. The agency decision maker considers recommendations in an efficient and timely manner. Decision making is robust and outlines why the agency is deciding on approval and the strengths of each applicant.

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

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

The fostering agency demonstrates a strong commitment to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. Children confirm that they feel safe and they know how to complain. Children highlight that they would report any concerns to the Registered Manager. They also have contact details for independent advocates. Foster carers are fully aware of their duty to protect children. They also highlight how they educate children on personal safety. Children do not report bullying as an issue. The agency has a good policy on combating bullying; this includes cyber bullying and links to relevant websites. Children are happy within their placements and do not have unauthorised absences. The agency, however, has a comprehensive procedure if children are missing from care. This procedure incorporates regional protocols.

Foster carers receive effective training which enables them to understand the extensive nature of safeguarding and the impact abuse has on children. Foster carers are fully aware of the safeguarding procedure and they highlight the importance of reporting and keeping children as safe as possible. Foster carers know the diverse forms of abuse and neglect. These include internal and external environmental risks and personal and internet safety. Foster carers have their own safe care policy relevant to their family circumstances. Health and safety has a high priority within the fostering agency. Standards of care and safety issues are continually monitored and efficiently addressed. The risk management system also includes bedroom sharing and the extensive risks related to children.

The agency's safeguarding procedure complies with regulations and has been sent to the Local Authority Designated Officer. The agency has good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This includes accessing training and keeping up to date on relevant information.

The agency manages any allegations in an effective manner, which focuses on the best interests of children. There is a clear differentiation between allegations and

standards of care. The agency learns from allegations using them to further improve on practice and they routinely take cases back to the fostering panel. Children receive protection from the agency's recruitment system. The agency does not employ new staff unless all the necessary checks have been completed. This helps prevent unsuitable persons from working within the agency. Registration of qualified social workers with the Health and Care Professionals Council is also carefully monitored.

## **Leadership and management**

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

Children receive care from a transparent agency which is making exceptional progress. The effective implementation of regulations and standards is commendable. There is a strong commitment to improving the service and effectively meeting children's needs. Foster carers highlight that the agency 'does not hide anything' and that they were aware of the previous inspection judgement. Foster carers state that 'standards are very high' and professionals express their satisfaction with the service.

The agency has effectively addressed all requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. The significant progress and investment demonstrates that the agency has a good capacity for continuing improvement. New management arrangements are highly effective and leaders and managers positively benefit from external professional support. Professionals highlight the Registered Manager's 'dedication and determination' which they attribute to a 'high quality of social work'.

The fostering agency has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose which is updated and clearly highlights their aims and objectives. This is available on the agency's website. Children benefit from their own vibrant, pictorial guide, which clearly summarises the agency. Age-appropriate versions are available for younger and older children. The guide also provides children with the contact information of national agencies which can assist them. Foster carers are extremely skilled and proactively support each other. The agency has adopted the Foster Carers' Charter and is implementing these values in partnership with carers. The agency rigorously monitors and evaluates children's progress. This enables them to produce action plans in relation to further improving outcomes. The agency works well with other organisations and professionals highlight that it has been a 'pleasure and privilege' to work with them.

There is a renewed focus on providing a good service which enhances children's lives. The agency has a strong emphasis on learning and keeping up to date with new legislation, research and practice developments. This is appropriately shared with foster carers to improve the quality of the service. The agency demonstrates a firm commitment to professional development. Staff are well supported through appraisals, professional supervision and relevant training. Quality assurance is an effective tool in helping to raise standards. Quality of care reports are founded on robust evidence. The agency is financially viable and has a service development plan.



This plan does not fully reflect the agency's aspirations. Leaders and managers acknowledge this and are determined to build on areas of strength. The agency is forward thinking and demonstrates a commitment to sustained improvement. Leaders and managers recognise that the executive side of the organisation need to be kept informed to ensure that there is continued investment in the service.

## 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.