

Regional Foster Placements

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Setting address	County House, St.Mary's Street, Worcester, Worcestershire, WR1 1HB
Telephone number	08000191165
Email	admin@regionalfosterplacements.co.uk
Registered person	Regional Foster Placements Limited
Registered manager	Jessamy Jane Albrechtsen
Responsible individual	John Catterall
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Regional Foster Placements aim to recruit, train and support a broad range of families and single people who can provide both short and long term placements for children and young people. Their aim is to recruit a diverse range of carers who will be able to provide placements, which reflect the different socio-economic, cultural and Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds in the West Midlands region. The agency aims to promote a secure base and positive placements for all children and young people. Currently there are seven children and young people accessing the fostering service and 12 fostering households. This agency was registered in October 2012 and this is the first inspection.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: An agency demonstrating and exceeding the characteristics of a good judgement where children and young people are making significantly better progress and achieving more than was expected in all areas of their lives.

Good: An agency where children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met and their welfare safeguarded and promoted. They make good progress and receive effective services so they achieve as well as they can in all areas of their lives.

Requires improvement: An agency that may be compliant with regulations and observing the national minimum standards but is not yet demonstrating the characteristics of a good judgement. It therefore requires improvement to be good. There may be failures to meet all regulations or national minimum standards but these are not widespread or serious; all children's and young people's welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Inadequate: An agency where there are widespread or serious failures which result in children and young people not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This agency has been operating for just under a year. This is a well-managed agency. The registered manager embodies the provision of a holistic approach to fostering care within the context of a positive, inclusive value base.

Children and young people's welfare is promoted. The agency has strong ambitions for the children and young people and supports them to achieve their aspirations. A strength of the agency is that currently the majority of placements are single and are matched to the appropriate carer. These are foster carers with strong parenting

skills.

Children and young people's placement stability is good. The agency reported no unplanned endings during the year. There is currently no national comparator available for 2012-13 as datasets are still being collected, but the proportion among all independent fostering agencies (IFA's) for 2011-12 was a 9% disruption of placements.

Since registration, the agency has met its own set target for the recruitment and preparation of foster carers. The agency has recruited 12 fostering households, since registration. To date 58% have a foster child living with the foster family. This figure is just under that of all IFAs at 61% for 2011-12. This is in line with its context given the backdrop of establishing a new agency.

The quality of the written assessments of foster carers is highly praised by carers, panel members and the agency decision maker. Assessments are completed within timescales. The reports focus on the potential carer's ability to demonstrate understanding of resilience and how they can help children develop their own self-view. Potential carer's accounts of their upbringing are reflective in delivery and insightful in their interpretation of inter-familial relationships and how these have influenced themselves as individuals.

Foster carers see themselves as integral to the agency and part of the team around the child. They advocate in the best interest of the child. Foster carers show a strong commitment to their role within the agency. The agency ensures that partnership working with local authority, social workers, schools, and health professionals are effective. This helps to positively contribute to the children and young people's experiences, progression and outcomes.

As a result of this visit, there is one recommendation being made which relates to implementation of the Foster Carers' Charter. This is minor omission and does not adversely impact on the good progress that children and young people make.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the fostering service helps foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service, this relates to adopting the Foster Carers' Charter. (NMS 21.2)

Experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people's experiences, progression and outcomes are good. They develop trust and this increases their self-esteem and confidence. They experience new and positive relationships. One young person commented, 'All I can say is I am happy with my foster carer and I get on well with my family.' They develop and grow and this is reflected in all the children and young people, of different ages and abilities. They achieve through their education, recreational activities and in daily life. Children and young people are informed about their foster carers and receive information about the new foster carer. A key strength is the welcome memory boxes with a quilt and photo frame, note pads and guide. This allows children and young people to mark memories, moments and celebrations and this builds their capacity to remember. Where feasible, introductions are planned, although on occasions there are emergencies at the instigation of the local authority.

Children and young people are safe and feel at ease living with foster carers who meet their needs. They enjoy a safe family home environment. They feel valued, listened to, respected and are encouraged to be involved in decision making. There are many examples where children and young people's behaviour and outlook to life changes. They acquire new abilities, develop thinking skills and develop emotional and social skills. This is evident with increased attendance at school, reduction of risk taking behaviours, positive peer relationships and looking towards their future. This is clearly correlated to the careful matching with foster carers. This ensures that children and young people needs are met.

Children and young people's development is nurtured. They enjoy a stable, nurturing and stimulating environment. Children and young people are fulfilling their potential. They are in school and progressing well. Children and young people's educational achievement is recognised. One young person proudly commented, 'I am doing well and I am taking the school bus to school.' Previous educational disruption experiences are identified and addressed to ensure continuity of education. The vast majority of children and young people remain at the same school where possible. Any moves to change school are related to geographical moves or in the best interests of the child, on the grounds of welfare.

Children and young people enjoy good health care. This is supported by accessing health professionals and resources. Children and young people are achieving good quality health care because of placement stability. This allows for a good level of consistency to address on-going health matters. Where there is prevalence of mental health problems, help and support is sought so that the correct interventions take place. Children and young people enjoy a good range of recreational activities including visiting friends, sporting events and day excursions near and afar. This ensures they lead full and active lives.

Children and young people remain in contact with their family. They get to see their family, sisters and brothers where this has been agreed. Their views and opinions are respected in relation to contact arrangements. As a result, this helps family contacts and friendships so that they remain connected to their family background and develop a sense of identity.

Children and young people's rights are protected by listening to their views. This enhances their sense of security. Children and young people feel valued because foster carers listen carefully and take on board any comments and feedback that is given. They willingly act as advocates so that views of the child are taken seriously and acted on. Children and young people know and understand that they have the right to complain if they are unhappy, concerned or bullied. Opportunities are provided to see the child alone from the foster carer so that opportunities for improvement are not lost. Consequently, the voice of the child is well embedded.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is able to recruit, train and support foster carers effectively. This has a positive contribution to children and young people's experience, progress and outcomes. The recruitment is led by local needs. All potential foster carers are clearly signposted to the fact that this agency works specifically with complex and extremely challenging needs. As the Registered Manager pointed out, 'It's the not age but the stage of their development.' Many of the young people are older teenagers and often at a point of crisis. All potential foster carers are invited to attend the 'Skills to Foster' training programme ahead of the formal fostering assessment. There is an integrated approach because external assessors attend this training alongside potential foster carers. Consequently, a complete overview of carer's parenting skills and capacity is gained.

The preparation, assessment, support and training of foster carers is good. The skills to foster programme pays a strong emphasis to attachment training. Safe care and the stages of child development are well communicated. Foster carers say they have benefited from the training programme. They said, 'It enables us to understand and help the child to trust, manage behaviour, build self-esteem, help the child to feel effective and be cooperative and help the child to belong.' Consequently, foster carers are reliable and consistent with understanding the needs of the child.

Foster carers receive good quality support and supervision. Foster carers praise highly the quality of support from the supervising social worker and the Registered Manager. One foster carer commented, 'They are there and can be reliably counted on.' All foster carers are working towards a clear programme to complete their development standards, to increase their professional practice. As a result, the agency is developing foster carers professional skills.

Partnership working is effective and accountability and responsibilities are understood. Foster carers work professionally with the child's social worker within the agreed delegated authority leading to effective day to day decision making for the child. Social workers commented very positively about the quality of the care in all cases. Foster carer's homes are welcoming and help the child settle and see themselves as becoming part of the family. Foster carers are fully committed to including the foster child in to family life. So in all cases they are included in decision making and involvement with the domesticity of home life.

The agency employs external independent assessors to complete assessments. Assessments are of a high quality. The panel chair commented, 'The assessments are of a good quality and there is a strong route to potential foster carers developing their professional practice.' The diversity of the panel is a key strength of the agency. This includes adults who have experienced care and independent members with a diverse range of professional expertise in child care. As a result, the panel plays an important role in quality assurance and providing objectivity.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding is threaded throughout the agency. Recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough and robustly applied, for staff, foster carers and panel members. The agency follows good recruitment processes. Child protection, safeguarding and safer care are mandatory training for all foster carers. This covers allegations against carers. As a result, foster carers are well briefed about safeguarding and what aspects of care can be risky. This helps to safeguard children and young people.

The promotion of safety for children and young people is good. As well as doing this the agency encourages children and young people to take appropriate risks. One child commented, 'I play across field in the park with my friends but my carer is always there to keep an eye on me.' Another young person went on to explain that he now travels independently on the train. Risk management is well considered and underpinned by clear documentation. This means that there is a clear approach while making sure children and young people are protected from harm.

Since registration, there have been four times incidences where young people have gone missing. Foster carers say that the agency has very clear step by step guidance for dealing with missing events. In addition, there is support and debriefing strategies. The agency has worked proactively on reducing these events and there have been none since June 2013. This shows a clear reduction over time and a positive impact to reduce this risk taking behaviour.

Partnership working is effective with the local authority. There are many examples of foster carers being proactive with schools and colleges. This is a key strength of the agency. This helps to ensure the focus remains firmly with meeting the child's needs.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Leadership and management make a positive contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. They act effectively when problems arise. Over time, children and young people show improvement. They are experiencing more favourable educational outcomes, emotional and social wellbeing and feeling safe

and nurtured. This is underpinned by effective working relationships with social workers and the placing authority.

The agency's Statement of Purpose and children's guide is accessible, easy to understand and shared with foster carers, professionals and children. This is also published on the agency's website. The agency has not yet adopted the Foster Carers' Charter, although early plans are in place for January 2014 to work jointly with foster carers. This is a development area; it does not detract from the good outcomes and experiences of children and young people.

Leaders and managers monitor and track children and young people's engagement and recreational pursuits. One independent reviewing officer (IRO) commented, 'I am impressed by this carer's commitment to the young person, her good communication with the social worker and her willingness to access the local community to enhance the young person's life.' All children and young people enjoy holidays away with their foster carers. One young person explaining, 'This summer we went to Turkey and I got to try different meals and had great fun in the hotel swimming pool.' Children and young people are adamant that they get to play, join clubs and meet with their friends to have fun. This ensures that children and young people have positive experiences and increases their self-confidence.

The agency has a good structured programme of quality assurance. Leaders and managers track and review performance and take action to address issues. There are weekly monitoring and progress reports completed. As a result, the holistic needs of children and young people are given scrutiny in detail, such as learning and support, consultation and partnership working. This helps to maintain and improve children and young people's achievement and outcomes.

Staff, managers and panel members are professionally qualified with a proven track record in children's services, child protection and safeguarding. There is a well formed programme of training that is highly prized by foster carers and staff. Supervision of staff and foster carers is effective to ensure the development of the agency positively impacts on children and young people's achievement. This helps to make a positive difference in relation to education, health and welfare. One young person commenting, 'I live in a home that I am safe, cared for and call home.'

The agency's notification events are clear and followed consistently. This demonstrates that the agency is taking appropriate action to promote the welfare of children and young people in their care.

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, to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards and to support services to improve.

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.