

# Fostering for You

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC448784
<b>Inspection date</b>	14/10/2013
<b>Inspector</b>	Karen Malcolm
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	23/08/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This independent fostering agency (IFA) is a privately owned organisation, based in South London within the London Borough of Wandsworth.

The fostering agency is a small agency with 13 approved foster carers and nine children and young people placed within six household.

The fostering agency is able to provide, short and long term placement as well as intermediate 'bridging', respite, emergency placements, parent and child, short breaks and special placements. At time of this inspection there were no short break or parent and child placements.

### 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: **requires improvement.**

This is the first inspection since being registered on 23rd August 2012. The management of the agency has changed with the appointment of a new Registered Manager in 16th May 2013. The fostering agency is supported by a small management team consisting of the Registered Individual, and manager and one supervising social worker.

The overall effectiveness and all outcome areas are judged as 'requires

improvements'. The agency's first placement was made in 15th March 2013; therefore, this inspection was unable to compare any trends found nationally.

The children and young people are settling well into their placements, and some are thriving from their original starting point. The fostering agency is committed to valuing every child and improving their outcomes. Foster carers are passionate about providing the best possible care, for the children and young people. Children and young people are happy and safe. Where there are plans to move children and young people, this is handled sensitively and safely with the child, their foster carers.

Children and young people are matched with foster carers who receive sound support and care advice either through the school and placing authority. The agency enjoys positive working relationships with all the responsible authorities.

Foster carers are supported and supervised appropriately. Foster carers' feel the management team are very supportive especially in times of need. Therefore, the impact for children and young people is positive.

The areas of shortfalls relate to providing specialist training for foster carers, obtaining views of children and young people, updating carer's health and safety risk assessment especially with regards to shared bedrooms, and contact information. Additional to this the Registered Persons are to review the performance objectives for all panel members and to formally review and develop all areas of the agency.

## 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
17 (2011)	provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))	31/12/2013

### Recommendations

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

- ensure children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care

## household (NMS1.1)

- ensure all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement (NMS 3.8)
- ensure foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. Prescribed medication is only given to the child for whom it was prescribed, and in accordance with the prescription. Children who wish to, and who can safely keep and take their own medication, do so (NMS 6.10)
- ensure foster carers understand what decisions about contact are delegated to them, in line with the child's care plan, and make those decisions in the child's best interests (NMS 9.7)
- ensure each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed (NMS 10.6)
- ensure foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home. (this is in relation to fire procedures and updating Health and safety plans) (NMS 10.3)
- ensure the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for (NMS 14.8)
- produce a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months; that 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; satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration. (NMS 25.7(a)(b)(c))

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

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Children and young people feel safe and secure. Children and young people trust their foster carers and feel comfortable in their new surroundings. They maintain

contact with family members especially in regards to important events such as birthdays and religious celebrations.

Children and young people know they are valued and they learn to feel good about themselves. Foster carers understand individual needs and go to various lengths to meet these. Children and young people are able to live with their brothers and sisters, which suit their personal and emotional needs, therefore, enabling each other to maintain family bond. However, contact arrangements in line with each child's or young person's care plan is not always up-dated as to who may have contact and when.

Children and young people are able to express their views through one to one and review meetings with their social worker, foster carer's and supervising social worker. Children and young people have access to an independent advocacy via their responsible placing authority when there is a need. With regards to the agency they have not found an effective way of capturing children and young people views or opinions to influence or improve the services provided to them through the agency.

Children and young people are placed with foster carers who can meet their identified needs. The agency knows its carers' strengths, for example, those who are able to support children and young people with complex care needs, thus causing minimal upset and trauma for the child. The agency is expanding on this to meet the current demand from placing authorities, thereby ensuring placement disruptions and unplanned endings are reduced. Children and young people although fairly new to the placements are now enjoying some stability following their past experiences.

Some children and young people have enjoyed the opportunity to travel abroad and experience new cultures. Children and young people have been able to develop new friendships and maintain existing ones, helping them to have more rounded peer support.

Children and young people benefit from healthy lifestyles. Healthy lifestyles are well catered for. Children and young people's health needs are identified and met well. For example, the majority of the children and young people have their health assessments completed which highlights any additional needs they may have. Foster carers ensure young people have access to the health services they need. Children and young people with complex medical care needs thrive within nurturing fostering households and are effectively supported by foster carers. Young people are supported to understand the risks with regards to any risk behaviours such as alcohol and drug use, smoking and safe sex.

Children and young people who require medication from time to time cannot be full confident that this will be administered safely, as not all the foster carers have undertaken training in the safe management and administration of medication. The Registered Manager is aware of this shortfall in training and undertakes daily audits on medication charts therefore, minimising any potential risk.

Children and young people benefit from attending educational establishments, which

meet their needs. Attendance for the majority of children and young people has been 90% and above, although, the majority of placements are fairly new. Foster carers have established positive working relationships with schools and colleges. They understand the needs of their children and young people and provide them with additional help and support at home. Achievement figures have not been officially established, but foster carers are positive on the outcomes following various meetings and discussions with teachers. Young people are making positive decisions about their education and see this as a way of improving their life choices and chances as a result.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

All those involved with the fostering agency are generally satisfied with the service they receive. For example, they agreed that the management team is sound, and that communication between the fostering agency, foster carers and other professionals is workable. The management team is also flexible. Foster carers stated that the management team are always available and contactable any time during the day and night. Foster carers appreciate this, especially at times when they need additional support and guidance.

The fostering agency has a small range of foster carers, who meet the diverse needs of the children, and young people. The agency has successfully obtained tenders from different London Boroughs and the numbers of enquires to foster is increasing. The agency undertakes all marketing, assessment and support for prospective foster carers prior to their approval being decided by the fostering panel. Assessments are undertaken by the Registered Manager along with the supervising social worker. Foster carers induction into care includes them having a better understanding of their role and those of the local authority and the fostering agency. Foster carers commented that the initial assessment process was good, a bit intrusive, but necessary.

Many of the placements provided are for children and young people with complex and challenging behavioural needs. Although, foster carers have the support and guidance from the agency and the placing authority to support each child or young person placed appropriately; the plan to provide specialist training has not been earmarked for this calendar year training programme. The agency is aware that there is a number of gaps in training to ensure those carers who undertake specialist care are appropriately trained and skilled. Some foster carers have achieved the Children Workforce Development Council training with their previous fostering agency. Those new to fostering are undertaking the development standards in foster care and are set to pass fairly soon.

The panel members have all been recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds, knowledge and expertise. The majority of the panel members are independent. The decision maker is also independent and provides additional support through file auditing and one to one support to the Registered Individual. The panel chair,

although, has many years of experience working within local and independent fostering services, has not keep abreast with all the current legislative changes within fostering such as the new framework for inspecting independent fostering agencies. Training has been provided to panel member twice this year, but, not in relation to safeguarding.

Matching risk assessments are undertaken once a referral is made. This highlights any risk and additional support needed. Where transracial placements are made any identified gaps in terms of support and aids are explored and planned for. The chances of the success of a placement are maximised, although a small number of disruptions do sometimes occur. The service recognises the value of establishing clear assessments to give children and young people the clarity they crave about remaining in home and being settled.

The fostering agency works with the child's social worker to ensure that the care plan are reviewed and additional meetings are held at any time to prevent any disruption in the placement. However, when there is a change in behaviour this is not consistently updated to ensure this is in-line with the care plan. The agency and foster carers are aware of the local authorities' written policy on delegated authority and will challenge local authorities when individual children and young people are disadvantaged if that authority is not delegated appropriately. The agency is aware that some placing authorities struggle with this, but they have kept this high on the agenda for the child.

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

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Foster carers understand the potential impact of abuse on children and young people, they are fully aware of the procedures to protect them. Foster carers who have been subject to allegations or where there is a standard of care concern are reviewed by the fostering panel. There were no referrals made to the independent review mechanism (IRM). Foster carers spoken to were aware of why and how they could access the IRM. Foster carers initial assessments focuses on child protection and how well foster carers will achieve this. Training and written guidance is provided for foster carers and staff on safeguarding, additional support is found within foster carer's handbook.

Complaints and allegations are managed and monitored well. The system in place ensures that any concerns raised by children or young people are actively listened to and responded to. Therefore, children and young people know that any concern will be taken seriously and acted upon.

The care plans and risk assessments are established with foster carers for each child and young person, where there are any child protection issues, especially in relations to persistent absent without authority or missing care. When a child does go missing and there are concerns for their welfare, there are clear strategies devised to safeguard the child or young person. The agency and the foster carers liaises fully



with the responsible authority and the young person to consider the reasons for them going missing and what action can be put in place to minimise this and keep them safe. Although, there are clear strategies to safeguard young people who go missing, this has not been effectively monitored by the agency. With regards to what lessons are learnt and what training needs are required for carers and staff to effectively support those young people who may be at risk.

Where a child is over the age of three and shares a bedroom, no written agreement or risk assessment is undertaken by the agency, to ensure that the placement setting remains safe, irrespective of whether the children are related or not.

The recruitment processes in terms of staff and foster carers ensure protection for the children and young people. All statutory checks are completed before a new post commences. Social workers possess the qualifications experience and skills, to enhance the quality of the service provided. However, where a panel member knowledge and experience may be deemed insufficient, in some areas, there is no clear account of how this risk assessment is managed by the agency.

Visits to foster carers homes are carried out regularly with announced and unannounced visit. This promotes safe care and ensures the foster carers' home environment remains safe for both them and the children and young people placed. Health and safety plans are undertaken by the foster carers and are approved by the fostering agency prior to approval. However, the plan does not include fire safety or update when there are any structural changes to the home.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Many aspects of leadership and management are sound. The management team have a good working relationship. They have a clear understanding of the needs of the agency and the children and young people they care for. Having a group of the foster carers, who understand their roles and responsibilities, enhances this. The management team know the strength of the agency and where improvements are to be made such as; specialist training for foster carers and panel members and improving the electronic data basis, although, at the time of this inspection the impact could not yet be fully measured.

The annual quality and performance data was completed and submitted to Ofsted within the required timescales. However, the information presented was brief. The report did not provide a qualitative overview of the agency since registration, as to what has been improved and where improvement can be made, with regards to providing good outcomes for children. With regards to the quarterly reports linked to the annual data report these have not been undertaken, therefore the overall monitoring of the service has been.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are accessible. Foster carers and staff are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering agency. Children and young

people receive a copy of the guide on the day they arrive at the carer's home, some found it more useful than others. The Registered Persons are aware more work needs to be undertaken with regards to obtaining children and young people views as this has been a struggle in some areas with young people not fully engaging. Foster carers commented that they found the best form of communicating with the young people is through texting or emailing.

The Registered Manager is aware of the current market trends within the organisation's location. The Registered Manager is also aware that the training needs of foster carers do not fully meet all the current needs. The agency is reviewing the training programme to adapt it to meet the current need, therefore, being able to skill match placements and provide a stable caring placement for a child.

Staff and panel members were positive about the service and the support they receive. Staff and panel members are appropriately supervised. The agency is well staffed and financially viable. Staff receive regular support to enable them to supervise and support foster carers. This includes the views of children, young people and the foster carers' children as well as the carers. Commissioners were positive about the support provided by foster carers and the agency.

The fostering agency ensures all notifiable events are submitted to Ofsted within the required timescales and any action is followed up by the Registered Manager.

## 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.