

Seafields Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC033806
Inspection date	04/11/2013
Inspector	Seka Graovac
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Seafields Fostering Ltd, 29-31 Malvern Road, HORNCHURCH, Essex, RM11 1BG
Telephone number	01708 733735
Email	jo.savage@seafields.com
Registered person	Seafields Fostering Limited
Registered manager	POST VACANT
Responsible individual	Bernadine Louise Gibson
Date of last inspection	30/07/2010

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned fostering agency that joined the Compass Community of Foster Agencies in May 2012. The agency operates from the main office in Hornchurch and from additional offices in Newick and Newmarket. The agency has 128 approved foster carers living in 72 households. In the last 12 months, the agency has approved 10 households. There are 80 children and young people currently placed with 52 households. The agency provides a range of services, such as short- and long-term fostering including permanency for children and young people.

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**.

The service is effective at making a significant positive difference to the lives of children and young people. The quality of social work and direct foster care work is good. Robustly approved, well-supported and highly skilled foster carers make vital contribution to good partnership working around the child. The provision of safe, stable, caring and supportive family environment underpins the effectiveness of the placements.

Children and young people's individual needs are met. Their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. They develop safe and secure relationships. They achieve stability,

including permanency when that is in line with their care plans. They take active part in decisions made about their lives. They make good, and in some instances exceptional progress across different aspects of their welfare and development. They have good educational outcomes. They have become more mature, polite and confident young people who are willing and able to contribute to the society.

At the time of the very significant changes, the agency has lost some staff and foster carers. The reduction in the size of the agency is against the national trend. However, this has not had any negative impact on the quality of the fostering provision. The improved strategies for recruiting and retaining good foster carers are being implemented.

Leaders and managers are visible, confident, ambitious and committed to continual improvement of the service. Monitoring processes are strong and self-evaluation is accurate. Positive outcomes for children and young people remain firmly in focus of all development initiatives.

The recommendations are given in this report to support the improvement work that the agency has already started to undertake: fine-tuning of the risk management process and the quality of the records of foster panel meetings; and 100% attainment of training support and development standards for all foster carers.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- improve the quality of the written risk assessments and risk management plans, especially for children and young people who behave in ways that puts them at risk when outside of the household (NMS 4.4)
- improve the minutes of the foster panel meetings, so that the reasons for the fostering panel's recommendation to change the terms of approval for foster carers are stated more clearly (NMS 14.7)
- ensure that all approved foster carers attain training, support and development standards within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people report that they felt genuinely welcomed by their foster families, when they came to live with them. Before moving in, children and young people received clear information about the service, including highly individualised profiles of the foster carers. All social workers spoken to commented how quickly children and young people settled in their new homes and established positive

relationships with their foster families.

Children and young people talk in very positive terms about their foster families. They describe foster carers as really caring and nice people who they fully trust. They very much feel being part of the family. They are growing up in a stable, protective and nurturing environment. They receive good support and have their needs met. They are well looked after. They have good opportunities to achieve the best possible outcomes across different aspects of their development.

One young person described their foster carers as truly inspirational. This person said that, without their help they would have never achieved as much as they have.

Children and young people feel safe and protected, but also, supported and challenged to set and achieve ambitious goals. Many young people are working hard to secure good educational attainment and access to the university-level education in the subject of their choice. Other older teenagers are planning different careers that are more practically based.

Children and young people's achievements are celebrated within their foster family environment and also, within the agency. These are some of the great achievements that have been included in the agency newsletters: achieving eight GCSEs, completing a 'total respect' course and becoming a trainer to educate others as to what it is like to be a child in care, having the tidiest stable, raising money for a nursery, being a prefect at school, making a beautiful wooden rocking horse at the carpentry class, competing and winning on a national level in karate and a 'great header' at a football club.

The agency also runs a reward scheme for 100% school or other educational provision attendance. The great majority of children and young people achieve this. For those who do not, foster carers make concentrated efforts with other professionals to help children to overcome the barriers to engaging better with learning and education.

Children and young people have become more aware of the consequences of their behaviour. They have learnt to take better responsibility for themselves. Knowing that they are listened to and that their views count has enabled them to communicate more constructively and engage better with the services available to them. They have developed trust and discernment that enables them to make safe and positive choices.

Children and young people have developed healthy lifestyles. They receive relevant health advice and help when they need it.

Children and young people's confidence and social skills have significantly grown. They have achieved better integration within their communities. They regularly use local recreational facilities. They have fun and enjoy various activities. They go on outings and holidays with their foster families. They live with their brothers and sisters, whenever that is in the best interest of everybody involved.

They are popular with their peers and have a wide circle of friends. They have safe overnight stays with their best friends. Unless there are particular safeguarding reasons that preclude the contact, they maintain relationships with their own birth families. They benefit from the agency's own contact centre facilities and the expertise that the agency staff have built up in relation to family contact.

Children and young people understand their care plans and contribute to the decisions made about their lives. They are happy with the fostering arrangement and able to voice their opinions, feelings and wishes. One young person described the experience of living with the foster family: 'I enjoy playing with the dog; to an extent the freedom and generally it is quiet and vibrant and never really boring.' Another young person wrote: 'It is harmonious and we all get along as a normal family.'

Placements exceptionally rarely break down. Children and young people remain with their carers as long as they need care and support. The permanent arrangements include remaining under Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or through an adoption arrangement. In the last 12 months, three SGO were granted and three adoptions were formalised.

The comprehensive arrangements for supporting young people's independence are effective. Over the years, many young people have confidently and successfully moved on to lead semi or fully independent lives.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency's policies, procedures and processes for recruiting, assessing, approving, supervising, training and supporting foster carers are effective. All agency's activity is firmly centred around the needs of looked after children and young people. The agency's staff are always looking at how best to promote positive outcomes for each individual child or a young person.

The fostering panel plays a significant part in ensuring a high quality of the fostering provision, and in particular the quality of foster carers who have been approved to carry out the work on behalf of the agency. The panel members bring to the discussions a wide range of experience of working with children and young people in different professional fields, including having substantial expertise in child protection. The decision making process is robust and minutes are kept to demonstrate this. However, the reasons for recommending the change of the terms of approval are not always stated in the clearest terms in the actual minutes of the foster panel meetings.

Commissioners and social workers from different placing authorities give consistent feedback that the agency provides skilled foster carers who are effective at promoting positive outcomes for children and young people placed with them. They

also comment very positively about good information sharing with the agency, careful matching considerations and provision of highly stable and effective placements. They appreciate the agency's transparency and willingness to proactively work together on stabilising the placements and providing additional support when it is needed.

Foster carers have in-depth understanding of the needs of children and young people who are in care. They also have the ability to work effectively together with other professionals to ensure that those needs are met. They clearly demonstrate that they enable children and young people to feel part of their family. Children and young people benefit enormously from living in an emotionally warm, nurturing and supportive family environment with clear boundaries and expectations.

Foster carers play active part in the team around the child. Their views are highly valued. They proactively influence the care planning process and the progress that children and young people make. They fully participate in the decisions made from the point of matching, through the statutory meetings or any other meetings that have been organised for the benefit of the child or young person, to the discussions around permanency or leaving care. The agency ensures that good practice in relation to delegated authority is fully embedded in the fostering provision. Many children and young people commented highly positively about the freedom, respect and trust that they have been given. This has had a tremendous impact on their self-esteem.

Foster carers receive high quality supervision, support and training from the agency. This enables them to continue to consistently provide good care to children and young people who live with them. They are very positive about the support provided to them by the agency. They say that the agency is brilliant, wonderful and could not have been better. The frequency of supervising social workers' visits and the level of support is flexible and individually tailored. The agency also provides additional support to the placements through an effective child and family support service, when it is needed. For example, by providing additional learning opportunities, safe-care work, life-story work, social outings or child-directed play.

The agency facilitates good family life and contributes to the fostering being an enriching and positive experience for everybody involved. These are some of the comments that birth children of foster carers have made: 'Love it; the children are great'; 'It has taught me a huge amount' and 'It is enjoyable experience. We do not treat the foster children any differently. They are part of our family and I would not change that for anything.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

There is a strong emphasis on child protection, safeguarding and promotion of welfare of children and young people in all the aspects of the fostering service

provision.

The agency operates a safe fostering service. In line with the safe recruitment practice, all staff and panel members have been thoroughly vetted before commencing their work for the agency. This ensures that they are suitable to either directly work with children and young people; or have access to confidential information and contribute to making important decisions that impact on the lives of children and young people.

The fostering panel adds rigour to the agency's arrangements for protection and safeguarding through robust review of the information presented, in respect of the prospective and already approved foster carers.

The agency has a good range of activities in place to ensure that it provides safe foster care families. In addition to frequent supervisory visits in which discussions around safeguarding and promotion of children and young people's welfare play a prominent part, unannounced visits are carried out at least annually. The agency's social workers make effort to see children and young people alone, every six weeks. Safe care plans that include the risk assessment of the individual needs of children and young people are agreed with each fostering household.

In addition to the basic training in safeguarding and child protection, foster carers and staff receive additional training on a number of safeguarding topics, such as working with children who have been sexually abused, understanding resilience after trauma, sexual exploitation of children on internet, sexting and impact of sexualised and violent media on children and child protection. The recent conference focused on raising awareness of the current research and highlighted the importance of building protective factors around children and young people to enable them to develop emotional resilience and safer behaviours.

Foster carers have good understanding of the potential impact of abuse and neglect on children and young people's development and behaviour. In line with the individual placement plans and risk assessments, they work in close partnership with other professionals to minimise any negative impact and to proactively promote children and young people's welfare.

They follow local multi-agency protocols to protect children and young people who go missing or run away or are absent without authority. Trusting relationships between foster carers and foster children, as well as opportunities for children and young people to safely have overnight stays contribute to the low number of incidents of this kind. In majority of situations, when children and young people are absent, they keep in touch with carers.

The Compass Community of Foster Agencies has recently established its own Internal Quality and Safeguarding Board to enhance the robustness of the oversight, review and evaluation of the safeguarding and child protection practice within its agencies. The log of safeguarding concerns demonstrate an open culture, stringent monitoring, safe child protection practice and emphasis on learning and

development.

One of the areas that has been identified for improvement is the quality of the risk management plans for each child or a young person. It is evident from the written information available on the files that the agency's staff and foster carers work in close partnership with other professionals to agree and implement protective strategies when a child or a young person put themselves at risk, particularly outside of the fostering household. However, the written safe care plans are not always updated with this information and not detailed enough to clearly encompass all the good work that is carried out.

The agency has started introducing a new individual child risk assessment format to enhance the quality of the process, streamline the record keeping, bring all the relevant information together in more comprehensive plans and support clearer evidence base. This is work in progress.

Children and young people consistently report that they feel safe. They say that they are not subject to any form of intimidation or bullying or to over-protective strategies that would limit their development. They are aware of the safety risks that some behaviours carry. They confirm their commitment to behaving in ways that keeps them safe, while being free to safely build on their personal confidence and independence. There is a range of people in their lives who they would approach if they had any concerns.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The leadership of the agency has significantly changed since the last inspection. The leaders and managers have a clear vision for the service and this vision is effectively channelled through different levels of the organisation. The new leaders have brought with them a new energy, extensive knowledge and ambitious plans for the future of the agency. The service has continued to focus sharply on promoting and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people, through provision of a high quality fostering service.

Following recent resignation of the Registered Manager, a manager who had been registered previously with Ofsted for the same agency is now applying to re-register. This person has many years of relevant experience and is supported well by an efficient business administration support team and teams of competent social workers and other staff. All staff are appropriately qualified for their roles and highly dedicated to their work. They receive good quality supervision and training that enable them to support foster carers and placements, effectively.

Some positive developments have been recently implemented. This includes centralising the assessments of foster carers for the whole Compass Community of Fostering Agencies with the aim of improving the consistency of the high quality of

the assessments and building on 'in-house' expertise.

The introduction of 'foster tracker' data-base system enhances the already strong evidence base in support of the agency being able to demonstrate its contribution to children and young people's good progress across different outcomes. The monitoring tools that are in use ensure that any lack of expected progress is swiftly identified. Proactive steps are put in place to enable foster carers to better aid and support children and young people's progress, in challenging circumstances.

Staff maintain effective working relationships with placing authorities, in particular with children and young people's social workers and with other professional services. One commissioner highlighted good partnership working between foster carers and teachers as one of the most positive things about the service. This partnership firmly underpins the effectiveness of the agency at supporting children and young people's good educational progress. The impact on this is far-reaching.

The agency has strengthened its monitoring on all levels of the organisation. A comprehensive framework of management meetings contribute to the quality of on-going reviews and drive continuous improvement. Generally high quality record keeping and quarterly reviews of all files contribute to the meaningful reviews of the quality of the service. Annual quality and performance data, as well as notifications of significant events are promptly forwarded to Ofsted. This enables Ofsted to carry out its regulatory responsibilities effectively.

The overall effectiveness of the fostering service was judged as good at the last inspection that took place in July 2010. No requirements were made. The management has taken seriously all the recommendations that Ofsted made at that time. The records in respect of health-related consent have been improved and a clear policy on short-breaks has been developed. More foster carers have attained the training, support and development standards. While 59% attained these standards in 2012, this has now increased to 68%. Comprehensive training programme and good agency support minimise the negative impact of this shortfall. The great majority of carers who have not completed the standards are not the main carers in the households.

With the significant period of change, the agency has lost some staff and foster carers, who broke away and formed another independent agency. This has not had a negative impact on the quality of the fostering service. However, in response, the agency has developed and implemented more comprehensive and better strategies for recruiting and retaining high quality foster carers. Some of the foster carers who had left are now coming back.

The agency is appropriately resourced and financially viable. The leadership is forward looking, improvement driven and child-focused.

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.