

Pilgrims Corner Fostering- Verona House

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Mark Blesky
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Date of last inspection	23/07/2010

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Pilgrims Corner Fostering Limited is an independent fostering agency that has been registered since 2008.

As the time of the inspection, the fostering service had eight approved places, with five places filled. The agency provides permanent long-term foster care, short-term foster care and emergency foster care.

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: **inadequate**.

This agency has not had effective leadership and management for a significant amount of time. This has left systems of monitoring young people's progress and development inadequate.

Carers have, in many respects, been left to manage young people while feeling isolated from the fostering agency. Where carers have been motivated and proactive, young people's outcomes have benefited. However, the lack of monitoring has resulted in the absence of any measurable evidence of promotion or driving young people's progress. This has left education, health and the promotion of welfare poorly managed.

Carers have not been effectively supervised. In some cases, this has been as a result

of employing a variety of independent social workers, who have not established effective relationships. In addition, supervision sessions have been intermittent and there is a lack of content within the supervision sessions.

It is acknowledged that supervision has recently improved substantially; however, the lack of this support has left carers' training and professional development poor. Some carers have felt undervalued and isolated from the agency.

There is no evidence of matching young people's needs to the skills and the abilities of the foster carers. The fostering services' panel has raised concern about the absence of matching and the carers' supervision.

Young people's welfare is not adequately promoted. It is acknowledged that a new manager and qualified social worker have more recently joined the company, and the registered provider agrees that comprehensive action will need to be taken to address the many shortfalls in this service.

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
15 (2011)	promote the health and development of children placed with foster parents. In particular, the fostering service provider must ensure that each child is provided with guidance, support and advice on health, personal care and health promotion issues appropriate to the child's needs and wishes (Regulation 15 (2))	31/01/2014
16 (2011)	promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents and implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents (Regulation 16 (2)(a))	31/01/2014
16 (2011)	promote the regular school attendance and participation in school activities of children of compulsory school age placed with foster parents (Regulation 16 (2)(b))	31/01/2014
16 (2011)	provide foster parents with such information and assistance, including equipment, as maybe necessary to meet the educational needs of children placed with them (Regulation 16 (2)(c))	31/12/2013
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))	31/01/2014
17 (2011)	ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information,	31/01/2014

	which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan (Regulation 17 (3))	
26 (2011)	obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to a carer and other members of carer's household and family, and any other information they consider relevant (Regulation 26 (2)(a))	31/01/2014
27 (2011)	ensure that the service provider does not approve a foster parent unless they have completed their assessment of the carer's suitability. This refers to the completion of an appropriate Skills to Foster course (Regulation 27 (2)(a))	31/01/2014
35 (2011)	maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency (Regulation 35 (1)(a)&(b))	31/01/2014
21 (2011)	ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal, and are enabled from time to time to obtain further qualifications appropriate to the work they perform (Regulation 21 (4)(a)&(b))	31/01/2014
8 (2011)	ensure that the Registered Person having regard for the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children placed by the fostering agency, carry on the fostering agency with sufficient care, competence and skill (Regulation 8 (1)(b))	31/01/2014
11 (2011)	ensure that the welfare of children placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. (Regulation 11 (a))	31/01/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority (NMS 3.9)
- ensure children are carefully matched to a foster placement and that foster carers have full information about the child (NMS 11.2)
- support foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future (NMS 21.1)
- ensure there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting

young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs (NMS 12.3)

- ensure that reviews of each carer's approval include an appraisal of performance against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. The foster carer's personal development plan is reviewed and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated. Reviews take into account the views of each child currently placed with the foster carer (NMS 20.6)
- ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills (NMS 21.8)
- ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* [2009] EWCA 328 (Admin), in which the court set out guidance for the way in which the decision maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation (Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance Volume 4 paragraph 5.40)
- ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, is reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings (Children Act 1989 Statutory Guidance Volume 4 paragraph 5.15)
- implement a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers. (NMS 26.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **inadequate**.

Young people are able to express their wishes, views and feelings and their carers support them to do this. However, the fostering agency does not have formal systems to capture this consistently. At the time of the carer's annual review, young people are surveyed for their opinions, however this is not always managed effectively. The fostering panel has informed the agency that this has not been appropriately monitored.

More recently, supervision has been used effectively to capture young people's views and supervision sessions have been more engaging with the young people and their carers. This is beginning to provide increased opportunities for young people to express their views and feelings.

There is a lack of monitoring and oversight of young people's health, their physical and emotional development and their education. This has left young people's welfare poorly promoted. In the absence of effective monitoring and proactivity, the agency is left unclear as to the starting point of young people's development. This has resulted in the lack of any sense of the type and amount of support they may need to reach their goals and to improve their outcomes. Carers commented that this has resulted in leaving them with the responsibility to drive health and education, with limited support from the agency.

Young people enjoy contact with their friends and relatives and foster carers provide both the practical and emotional support for this to be achieved. Carers are aware of the importance of young people enjoying their contact and this topic is effectively addressed during supervision sessions.

Young people say that they are treated as part of the family and young people spoke warmly about the care and support they receive from their carers. Carers demonstrate insight into young people's emotions and their vulnerabilities and as a result, young people feel valued and secure.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **inadequate**.

Young people feel valued and supported by foster carers who understand their day-to-day needs. Where young people share their homes with foster carers' birth children, they say that they are part of the family and they are treated the same.

Young people benefit from being looked after in homes that are well maintained and provide adequate space and support to meet their needs. Young people enjoy a range of activities and hobbies, which help to engage them into the wider community.

When carers provide day-to-day support for young people with regard to both their education and healthcare, the fostering agency does not have effective oversight of this support. The agency is not proactive in this process and therefore largely unable to evaluate both the needs of the young people and the abilities of the carers to meet those needs. Lack of oversight has resulted in one young person being poorly supported in their statutory review. Consequently, the agency is unable to demonstrate effective oversight of the development and progress of the young people.

The fostering panel is establishing quality assurance procedures and some annual appraisals have begun. However, rigorous quality assurance and the support and

training for foster carers are not currently in place.

The process of matching young people with appropriate foster carers is not evidenced. The agency does not maintain records that demonstrate an effective matching process. References to matching are scant and provide no evidence of any evaluation of the young people's needs. In the absence of formal matching, young people are less likely to be matched with foster carers that can meet or understand their needs.

Effective training and development for foster carers is not currently in place. While training for foster carers is provided; training, support and development standards have not been attained within 12 months of the carers' approval. Some carers are unclear of the training expectations as individuals and as fostering households. In addition, the agency is also not aware of any deficits in the foster carer's skills to meet young people's needs and as a consequence training, supervision and support does not enable foster carers to develop their skills accordingly. This has left some carers without core training and as a result, they are less likely to be able to meet the needs of young people in their care. Training is currently being reviewed and the manager accepts that this is an area of priority.

The supervision of foster carers has been fragmented and inconsistent and carers spoken to reiterated this. The agency has used independent social workers that have not worked in a consistent manner and have failed to engage with foster carers. A carer commented that supervision has been variable and not helpful. It is acknowledged that more recently, supervision has been taken over by a newly-appointed supervising social worker and standards are improving. While there are limited examples of supervision, emerging supervision sessions are engaging, challenging and supporting the development of foster carers. Supervision is also providing some practice oversight of the carers and young people's progress. Carers commented that the more recent supervision is a great improvement and supporting them much better.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Young people are kept safe by carers that generally understand them and support them, even though there are examples where information and matching have left the carers unclear of young people's needs. Indeed, carers say that they have learnt about young people's needs and some of their behaviour after the placement rather than before the placement was made; which is not good practice.

Some carers have engaged with young people and developed strategies and techniques for working with them and their safety is now a frequent topic of the supervision sessions.

Young people say that carers value them and keep them safe. Young people spoken to are aware of their rights to feel safe and well looked after. One young person commented that he feels he could tell his carers anything and they would support

him with any difficulties or concerns.

Most carers have undertaken some safeguarding training and this has provided them with an insight and understanding of how to keep young people safe. However, there are significant gaps in carers' training. Core training has not been delivered effectively. This is likely to leave some carers with less insight and knowledge relating to safeguarding and promoting young people's welfare.

Supervision is used to monitor safeguarding and carers understand how previously abusive episodes can affect and influence young people's behaviour. Supervision has been successful in addressing some of these behaviours. Young people have benefited by carers gaining greater understanding of their needs and their improved strategies to support them.

There are examples where carers have adapted and developed effective strategies to address negative behaviours from young people. Safer care planning has provided carers with comprehensive and detailed guidance on how to keep young people safe. Safer care plans are currently generic, but specific plans for each individual young person are being developed. These plans demonstrate that young people's more diverse and individual risks are being considered and addressed. The agency has not however, implemented unannounced visits as part of their safer care plan to support and promote young people's welfare and safety.

The agency addresses allegations and suspicions of harm appropriately. Placing social workers commented that the agency has taken action prompt to inform them of any significant matters. Where carers are considered not to be performing effectively, they are taken back to panel for formal reconsideration of their suitability.

All young people are supported by risk assessments, which consider both young people's behaviour and how their environment may impact on any risk. Risk assessments are discussed in supervision sessions to ensure that the foster carer and the supervising social worker are able to adapt and develop them appropriately to minimise risk.

Young people rarely go missing. The supervising social worker believes that this is because carers are engaged in understanding the young person and they are effective in preventing them from going missing.

Staff recruitment is generally well managed in relation to employees within the agency. However, some panel members' recruitment has not been as robustly managed. In a small number of examples, information relating to previous employment and evidence of qualifications has not been established. While this has had no obvious impact on young people, this is a clear weakness in their recruitment process.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **inadequate**.

There is no Registered Manager in this agency and this has been the case for over 26 weeks. There is ineffective leadership and management in a number of fundamental practices and services. For example, there is an absence of oversight, leaving essential functions such as training, supervision and management of the carers weak. The agency has not managed young people's progress and development in a consistent manner and has failed to drive the development of the agency and to improve the outcomes for young people. A new manager has been appointed and is making an application to Ofsted to be the Registered Manager.

When matters are raised with the agency, the agency appropriately addresses them. However, there is little evidence of any proactivity or drive to improve the outcomes for young people. This is most noticeable in the lack of any action by the agency to drive improvements in health and education. Indeed, with the current lack of monitoring, it is unlikely that the agency would be aware if a young person was failing to achieve in education or maintain their health.

The agency is, in some cases, disconnected from the day-to-day support and progress of the young people in their foster homes. As a result, the files and records fail to capture any sense of the progress or development of the young people. This results in carers, social workers, young people and their parents being less able to influence any review of the fostering agency.

Significant events are notified to relevant agencies and the fostering service demonstrates that appropriate follow-up action is undertaken to safeguard children.

The agency publishes and maintains a Statement of Purpose which describes the services and support for young people. Young people understand from the children's guide what they can expect from the agency and this document explains how they will be looked after. Information within the guide informs them of their rights and provides them with contacts for independent support.

In most cases, the requirements and recommendations made at last inspection in 2010 have not been fully addressed and new requirements and recommendations have been made to address the current shortfalls.

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.