

Child Focus Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Child Focus Fostering is based in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It is a privately owned, independent fostering agency providing services for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service aims to provide safe and nurturing foster placements that meet the assessed needs of children. Carers are recruited from a range of different cultural backgrounds that reflect the racial mix of the children and the local community. The volume of recruitment has been minimal due to the need to stabilise the agency due to organisational changes.

At the time of inspection there were 23 approved foster carers and 27 children and young people were placed through the agency. Different types of placements are made available, including long term, permanent, continuing and time-limited care. Assessment and emergency placements are also considered.

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**.

Children receive a good service which meets their individual needs. Children are thriving, they feel safe and also 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. Relationships with partner organisations are effective and focus on promoting the best outcomes for children.

Safeguarding is at the heart of the service, ensuring that all decision making promotes children’s best interests. Fostering panel arrangements are robust. The recruitment and preparation of foster carers result in a wide range of skilled foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children. Foster carers’ assessments are competency based, focused and analytical, highlighting the strengths of each candidate. Assessments are completed within the relevant time frames, which ensures potential foster carers are not lost because of deficits in the process. Foster carers are part of the team working with the child and they benefit from comprehensive training and support to equip them for their role. Staff benefit from good professional development, a wide range of training opportunities, regular supervision and performance appraisals. This enables them to competently support, and where necessary challenge, foster carers, which ultimately benefits children.

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. Quality assurance, and the views and experiences of children and foster carers influence service development. Updates on sector developments, training and referrals also help shape strategic thinking. Leadership within the agency is visible and effective and there is a strong, stable Registered Manager. Management are aware of the minor shortfalls and are vigorously working towards improving outcomes. They agency needs to notify Ofsted of all notifiable events. The strengths outweigh this minor shortfall and there was no impact on safeguarding or promoting children’s welfare. There is one good practice recommendation, regarding children influencing appraisals.

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
36 (2011)	notify Ofsted of significant events as detailed in Schedule 7. (Regulation 36)	01/01/2014

Recommendations

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

- take into account children's views in the staff performance appraisal process. (NMS 24.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children state that they are 'very happy'. They flourish within stable, nurturing, life-enriching placements. Children appreciate being part of a family and have positive attachments to their immediate and extended foster family. Children state that their foster carer, 'loves me and she is the best'. They also warmly remark that, 'Aunty is my best friend', and, 'my relationship with my foster carer is incredible. He is like my father'. Children describe their placements as 'like living in a real family'. Children state that they are treated 'with respect and equality'. They appreciate that they can 'discuss everything' with their foster carer; this includes discussing sensitive personal information.

Prior to moving in, children receive comprehensive profiles and photographs of their proposed foster family. Profiles contain meaningful information which helps children familiarise themselves with their prospective foster family. Children are also able to complete their own form, which enables them to self-define themselves and highlight their likes and dislikes. This admission process alleviates anxieties and helps children settle into their foster home. Children benefit from remaining with their foster carers for as long as they need; this includes extending to permanency and supported lodgings arrangements.

Children maintain meaningful and appropriate contact with their relatives and friends. The agency has its own contact centre, which offers a familiar environment for children. Foster carers and staff advocate to ensure contact arrangements are changed to promote the best interests of children. Foster carers sensitively support contact arrangements as detailed in each child's care plan. Family members and friends are able to visit the foster carers' home. Foster carers additionally assist with rehabilitating children back home and offering support to birth parents. Foster carers demonstrate a good understanding of attachment and loss, and sensitively help children understand their circumstances. Within the agency children have opportunities to create new friendships. Children enjoy an annual support event where they have the opportunity to socialise with other children in foster care. This year they had an opportunity to showcase their talent, alongside participating in games and fun activities.

Children live with foster carers who are able to effectively meet their diverse needs. 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 receive assistance to develop a positive identity. Children are able to follow their religious traditions; examples include fasting during Ramadan and purchasing a special outfit for Eid. They can also observe cultural traditions, an example being a Nigerian baby having a naming ceremony. Children whose first language is not English, are now speaking fluent English. They can also maintain their original language skills through their foster carer learning useful phrase. A good example was seen of this with younger children, who appreciated being reminded of greetings in their parents' language. Children's feedback forms cover equality and diversity. Children appreciate that they can maintain their own culture and learn about others. Children felt they 'know a lot'; they gave examples of living with children from different faiths and that they are all 'treated the same'.

Children are able to build up their confidence and self-esteem within placements which seek to empower them. They 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 are surpassing expectations and reaching their developmental milestones.

Children share their wishes, feelings and views through a variety of avenues. They express their views at supervising social worker visits, through questionnaires, at their statutory reviews and in day-to-day discussions at home. Children also contribute to their foster carers' annual review. Older children would like to be updated through email contact and they have passed on their email addresses to the agency. Children do not share their views during the staff appraisal process; however, there are plans to further enable children to influence the service. Children know how to complain and they have the contact details of external agencies. They can also access an advocate and have used this mechanism to successfully promote their rights.

Children's educational achievement in relation to their starting points is very good. School attendance is excellent. Children are pursuing further education, going to college and university. Children receive good educational support. Children are able to attend education fairs, English as an additional language tuition, and carers purchase relevant study materials. Children are taking external exams, vocational courses and have realistic aspirations for the future.

Children engage in a wide range of experiences that broaden their outlook and improve their life chances. They go on holiday with their foster carers, which includes visiting their country of origin. Children are able to pursue their hobbies, interests and talents. They enjoy going on boat trips, meals out, to art galleries, museums, sightseeing, to theme parks and other attractions. Extra-curricular activities include attending army cadets, drama, attending youth clubs, and holiday schemes. Children positively contribute to their community through volunteering at charity shops. Children are now more assertive, independent and are developing self-responsibility.

Children benefit from improved health outcomes. Children are learning to manage their enuresis and personal hygiene. They are also learning to successfully manage their health conditions, which involve specific care and managing their emotions. Children understand key health concerns and are able to make informed choices regarding their health. An example is having the relevant vaccinations and choosing to be accompanied to the sexual health clinic. Children enjoy a nutritious diet and engage in various forms of exercise. Children go power walking with their foster carer, they go to the gym and are learning karate. Foster carers also undertake general and individualised training, enabling them to meet specific health needs.

Children are able to successfully prepare for adulthood. Their daily routines include undertaking age-appropriate household chores. Children learn how to clean, cook, budget, undertake their own shopping, do their laundry and prepare their meals. Children are also developing their personal awareness and emotional intelligence. Children are learning to take responsibility for their behaviour, which contributes to their increased maturity. This includes reducing incidents of offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited. Children benefit from foster carers regularly saving a specific amount for them, which is a valued 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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children report that they 'like everything' about their foster placement. Professionals highlight that foster carers are doing 'an excellent job' and praise them for their 'outstanding work'. They state that one of the agency's key strengths is its ability to identify 'good placements'. Children benefit from a culturally diverse range of foster carers, who effectively meet their complex needs. Specialist support is available in a variety of formats which contributes to placement stability. The agency is acutely aware of the types of foster carers needed, and their recruitment strategy is targeted to effectively address this issue.

The agency has good arrangements which effectively focus on the preparation, assessment, support and training of foster carers. Preparatory groups provide an efficient foundation for foster carers, enabling them to develop an in-depth understanding of children. Assessments are comprehensive, competency based and concisely highlight each applicant's personal attributes. On-going support builds on this knowledge, enabling foster carers to confidently fulfil their role. Foster carers benefit from regular constructive meetings and ad hoc contact with their supervising social worker. These discussions enable foster carers to formulate strategies and further improve their quality of care.

Children receive care from foster carers who are well supported. Foster carers benefit from their own handbook and regular newsletters. The comprehensive training and development programme covers a wide range of topics to effectively equip foster carers for their role. This includes training on attachment, life story

work, effective communication and equality and diversity. Foster carers have obtained or are completing their vocational training. Foster carers have personal development plans which are centred on their continuous professional development. Foster carers are able to attend training in the day, evening or weekends. They also have access to educational DVDs, practice-based support groups and learning sets dedicated to vocational training. Foster carers are currently working on producing their own cookbook to reflect the diverse range of international cuisine represented in the agency. This will also be of assistance when caring for children from a different cultural background.

Foster carers feel valued, respected and appreciated. They work in partnership with all agencies and understand the professional nature of their role; this includes delegated authority. Foster carers welcome children into their homes and ensure they are treated as part of the family. Foster carers succeed in promoting the holistic needs of children, providing a stable, secure base where children can thrive. Foster carers are described as being 'very proactive' and that they working 'tirelessly' to promote the best outcomes for children. The fostering agency has a good relationship with local authorities. Where possible they ensure that full information is always shared with foster carers prior to each placement. This includes tenaciously chasing the local authority for pertinent information, to ensure children receive appropriate care. Placement care plans are subject to regular reviews. This includes referring concerns to instigate meetings where there are specific issues.

Efficient, effective and consistent panel arrangements ensure all decision making is in the best interests of children. The panel is chaired by a very experienced social work professional. This individual brings a significant level of knowledge to their role. Panel membership is gender balanced and culturally diverse. The panel includes people from a wide range of professions and backgrounds; this includes medical and educational expertise. The fostering panel carefully considers each case and highlights the strengths and areas for development for each candidate. The panel undertakes a rigorous quality assurance function, which includes evaluating each panel and providing feedback to further improve agency practice. Panel members are described as being 'passionate about improving the outcomes for children'. The agency decision maker robustly considers recommendations in a timely manner. Plans to further strengthen the panel are imminent; this includes performance appraisals and further training opportunities.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children feel safe and they know how to complain. They benefit from the fostering agency's strong focus on safeguarding and child protection. The agency's safeguarding procedure complies with regulations.

Supervising social workers have safeguarding at the heart of their work and discuss children's welfare on their visits. Staff undertake annual unannounced visits to foster carers and routinely interview children, which offers them the opportunity to discuss

any concerns.

The agency manages any allegations or standards of care issues in an effective manner. This includes liaising with other agencies and referring cases back to the fostering panel. Decisions may include further training, development or terminating approvals. The risk-management system includes internal and external environmental risks and personal and internet safety. Risk assessments are carefully monitored, reviewed and evaluated by the agency to ensure that children receive the necessary protection and support.

Foster carers and staff receive comprehensive training which enables them to understand the various forms of abuse and the impact on children. Safeguarding training is extensive, covering a wide range of topics; this includes managing disclosures, child sexual exploitation, gang activity and religious extremism. The agency has very good links with the local and the neighbouring safeguarding children boards. This enables them to understand and raise their awareness of specific risks in the area. The agency is also able to access relevant training and keep up to date on current issues and practice.

Foster carers are fully aware of their duty to protect and promote the welfare of children. They promptly refer safeguarding concerns and regularly discuss personal safety and vulnerability with young people. Children benefit from a specialist countering bullying handbook which covers cyber bullying. Children do not generally report bullying as an issue. Children are happy within their placements and do not usually have unauthorised absences. Where instances do occur, foster carers go out and collect children from their whereabouts. The agency has a comprehensive procedure if children are missing from care.

Children receive protection from the agency's recruitment system. Staff and panel member recruitment and vetting processes are thorough and comply with statutory requirements. No one is able to work for the agency unless all the necessary checks have been completed. This helps prevent unsuitable persons from working within the agency. Social workers have the relevant registration with the Health and Care Professions Council, which ensures their professional status and accountability.

Strong and effective relationships with the local authority, the police and other agencies protect those children who engage in risk-taking behaviour. Foster carers and staff competently contribute to strategy meetings. Foster carers take a key role in monitoring and working with young people; this results in young people taking the necessary action to instigate change. A good example of this is work undertaken which resulted in the reduction of inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from an agency which has a strong commitment to improving the service and effectively meeting their needs. The agency feels their unique selling

point is their ability to provide a wide range of foster carers from different nationalities. Foster carers, staff and involved professionals express their satisfaction with the service. The agency is run in a very open and transparent manner. An example of this includes the holding of a specific event to celebrate foster carers and inform them of service development and organisational changes. Foster carers describe this as being a 'wonderful event'; they also express they are 'proud to work' for the agency. Staff and foster carers feel valued; staff highlight that leaders and managers are 'very supportive'.

The fostering agency has a very informative website which includes the comprehensive Statement of Purpose, the recruitment process and links to resources. The website also highlights national changes in fostering, which provide a useful update on developments within the sector. Children benefit from a selection of clear, age-appropriate guides. This interactive document provides children with the contact details of a wide range of national agencies. It also includes age-appropriate information on equality and diversity, which helps children to value and respect others. The fostering agency effectively meets the Statement of Purpose's aims and objectives.

The agency rigorously monitors and evaluates children's progress. The agency is currently creating a monitoring template which will enable the agency to better map and track children's progress. The agency regularly reviews their placement processes and takes any necessary action to improve the stability of placements and the progress children make. The organisation offers a wraparound service to children; this includes mentoring, befriending, educational and psychological support. The agency receives numerous compliments from children, foster carers and involved professionals. Children describe the agency as a 'good service' and they appreciate the care and range of support. Professionals highlight the agency's 'good working relationship'.

The agency demonstrates a positive commitment to providing a high quality service. The agency has adopted the Foster Carers' Charter, in partnership with carers. The charter highlights the importance of mutual respect, roles and commitments in respect of the agency and each foster carer. The agency is efficiently staffed; staff, managers and panel members are well qualified and very experienced. Staff receive regular and relevant training that enables them to effectively supervise and support foster carers. Staff training is extensive and includes attending national and local conferences and training events. This enables them to be competently aware of current issues and best practice. The agency has a strong emphasis on professional development and keeping up to date with new legislation, research and practice developments. Staff are effectively supported through professional supervision and performance appraisals.

The agency has a good reputation with placing local authorities; they are able to flexibly meet the needs of children. An example of this is offering discounts on a par with in-house provision to ensure placement stability and prevent another move for a child. This assists with securing good outcomes for children. The agency is forward thinking and demonstrates a commitment to sustained improvement. This is a small

organisation which enables the responsible person to be aware of issues and ensure that there is continued investment in the service. The agency is financially viable, well-resourced and there is a good service development plan. The plan includes a foster carer recruitment strategy.

The agency has effectively addressed all requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. The agency has a good capacity for continuing improvement. Quality assurance is an effective tool in helping to raise standards. The agency's monitoring systems meet regulatory requirements; there is a drive for continuous improvement. Quality assurance is centred on a clear vision and ambition to promote good personalised outcomes for children. The only minor shortfall relates to informing Ofsted of all notifiable events. There were two occasions when the correct action was taken but Ofsted were not notified. There was good liaison with other relevant professionals. The agency was unsure whether these incidents met Ofsted's threshold. The strengths outweigh this minor shortfall and there was no impact on safeguarding or promoting children's welfare.

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.