

# Credo Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	25/10/2011

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Credo Care specialises in foster care for disabled children and young people. They offer short and long-term placements and short breaks. The main office is in Kent, with a further sub-office in the Midlands.

At the time of this inspection there were 68 approved foster carers supporting 37 children and young people in placements. This agency does not offer short-breaks.

### 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 provides good levels of care to children and young people. The strength of the service is that they are able to ensure children and young people make good progress from their original starting points in education and their overall health and well-being. Children and young people whose complex physical needs may be challenging at times are supported well and their overall needs and welfare is safeguarded.

The agency's particular strength is ensuring the matching process is assessed thoroughly at each stage thereby ensuring that children and young people enjoy the stability of long-term placements. In some cases this is extended into adulthood through the 'stay put' scheme, managed by the placing authority.

Decisions on delegation of authority are on a case by case basis and take into account the permanence plan for the child, the child's needs and the best manner in which their needs can be met within the placement. The agency ensures this is completed robustly and sensitively assessed to ensure all areas of needs for the child and young person are managed effectively.

Foster carers manage complex health care needs very well and safeguarding processes are sound. Overall, children are being placed within safe, nurturing households and receive the very specific care they need.

Foster carers are part of the team working with the child and are required to use their knowledge and experience of individual children and young people to inform planning and decision making. Therefore, children and young people benefit from a professional, supportive team who know them and can meet their overall needs.

Foster carers receive good support from a stable staff team, which is effectively managed under strong leadership. Staff members are competent and suitably qualified, but would benefit from a more structured approach in terms of their own professional development and training needs. There are omissions with regards to some areas of foster carers' training in relation to physical intervention, fully capturing the voice of the child, as well as ensuring all records are consistently monitored effectively. The service demonstrates a keen desire to improve and raise standards.

## Areas for improvement

### Recommendations

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

- ensure children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the Children's Rights Director (NMS 1.5)
- 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 the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring (NMS25.2)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people succeed in their placements because of the meticulous attention to detail given to preparing both the child and foster carer for a new placement. In some cases placements are planned so children and young people are welcomed into the home in a sensitive manner, already feeling they belong and are valued and wanted. The same attention is paid to transitions from the foster home when they are ready to move on.

Children and young people are healthy and live in a healthy environment which meets their needs. Carers demonstrate a solid commitment to ensuring positive healthcare outcomes for children and young people. It was observed that children and young people interaction with carers was healthy, caring and warm in relation to their overall well-being and welfare. Carers ensure that children and young people have a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. Children and young people receive the appropriate support from all medical professionals that they require, such as very specific specialist medical care. The agency ensures that this is in place and this is appropriately monitored. The agency sources and funds such specialist support where it is felt that it will be of significant benefit to the child. Training is provided to carers in key areas such as promoting health, first aid, medication and food and nutrition especially where a child dietary needs is very specific such as peg-fed.

Children and young people's school attendance rate is very high. They make very good progress and achieve in their learning and development, taking into account their abilities and original starting points. Foster carers contribute to the assessment of each child's education, ensuring that at each stage of planning and review the central focus is on the child and young person. The agency helps to support the children and young people in their education by doing additional work with them when necessary. Placing social workers made very positive comments about this, such as, 'The carer has high expectations for them.' Another commented that the agency is very proactive in ensuring that children and young people are having the very best support possible in school and is always willing to advise staff about their educational needs.

Children and young people have a wide range of opportunities, support and help to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes. One young person attended one of the first aid courses with their carer and is now a qualified first aider. When children and young people do not live with their brothers and sisters, they are supported to keep in touch where this is in their best interests. This has enabled them to maintain their cultural connections and identity. Children and young people have life story and pictorial books which help them with memories and maintain records about their life.

Children and young people are able to express their wishes and feelings and carers are very good on acting as their advocate on their behalf. However, there is no clear

system within the agency to capture the voice of the child when communication for them may present as challenging. The agency is looking into different ways to support and engage with children and young people, using alternative aids appropriate to their needs and understanding.

Many of the young people in placement will not be able to prepare for independent living effectively. However, all the children and young people are encouraged by their foster carers to develop skills appropriate to their age and understanding, with responsibility for household tasks. The agency has written guidance and training for foster carers on preparing young people for independence and transitions. The support some young people receive goes beyond 18 plus.

### **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Carers said that they found the 'skills to foster' training very valuable. The carers said that the training helped to prepare them to become foster carers. Consequently, carers are reliable and consistent and understand the needs of each child or young person in their care. Respite care is only provided when this is assessed as being in the child's best interest in order to stabilise a placement with a foster carer.

Carers receive good quality support and supervision. Carers praise the quality of support from the supervising social worker and the Registered Manager. The needs of children and young people are the focus within this agency. During the supervision of carers the supervising social worker always looks at the needs of the child or young person and how they are progressing in the placement. The agency has high expectations of its carers and only approves carers who demonstrate that they are committed to caring for children and young people and will continually develop and update their knowledge and skills.

Children and young people's placement plans are written in the voice of the child throughout.

Carers are very clear about the importance of making children and young people feel part of their families. Children and young people demonstrated this during visits to the different homes and they are treated as members of the family. This helps them to feel valued and settled in their placements and allows them opportunities to form strong secure attachments to carers. Foster carer's homes are welcoming and help children and young people to settle and see themselves as becoming part of the family; this means that children and young people are included in decision making as well as being fully involved with the domesticity of home life.

The agency may at times provide care and support to children or young people who may have life limiting expectancy or may need palliative care. The agency is good at providing carers with specialist training on attachment and bereavement. When necessary counselling is offered not only to the carers and their families, but, to parents, other carers and all staff. This ensures the care around the child is well

supported and appropriately managed.

A social worker also spoke very highly about the management of the agency and their efforts to improve the outcomes for children and young people. Partnership working is effective and accountability and responsibilities are understood. Foster carers work professionally with the child's social worker within the agreed delegated authority; this leads to effective day-to-day decision making for the child. Social workers commented very positively about the quality of the care in all cases.

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

All relevant information about the child or young person is shared with foster carers prior to placing the child. This allows the foster carer to make informed decisions about accepting a placement into their home. The agency ensures that carers are well informed about the underlying causes of the behaviours and disability children or young people can present. Risk assessments and behaviour strategies are formulated to help support and maintain placements. Carers describe the agency as being 'reliable' and said it can be 'counted on' in a crisis. Carers said that they have access to staff 'no matter whatever the time of day or night.' Carers say that they feel they are part of the team working to meet the needs of the children and young people.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are placed with carers who are appropriately prepared and supported to meet their needs. Services for children and young people are personalised. Carers are assessed and receive induction and ongoing training to ensure that the welfare of each child placed is safeguarded. Particular attention is paid to the matching process in relation to each child's disability, ethnic and cultural background. Where an appropriate match is not possible support is arranged to ensure the placement can meet overall individual need. Carers are informed about each child's health, their behaviour and their family backgrounds. Where necessary, carers are supported to acquire specific equipment or adaptations needed to support a placement. The policies, procedures and information available to carers assist them to provide safe care. Specialist help and treatment is available to support placements and to minimize the effects of any previous significant harm suffered by children or young people. The agency works in partnership with the various local safeguarding boards, children and families teams and other agencies, to ensure that children are

safeguarded.

The agency has a good range of policies and procedures related to safe care, child protection, and bullying and behaviour management. There is a foster carer's handbook detailing how to deal with allegations and complaints, and how to report children who go missing from care. Carers confirmed that they receive comprehensive information on child protection which is followed up by additional training.

Complaints are dealt with thoroughly and the Registered Manager ensures that if any element of a complaint is founded improvements are identified and made. Carers say that the management team very approachable and deal with issues promptly.

The number of incidents relating to missing person is very low. The policy regarding missing persons was reviewed recently following one incident. Foster carers say that the agency has very clear step by step guidance for dealing with children who do not return to their placement. In addition, there are support and debriefing strategies in place. The agency has worked proactively on reducing these events and there have been no incidents of missing children since last year. This shows a clear reduction over time and the positive impact the attempts to reduce risk taking behaviour have had. There are strong working relationships with other agencies such as the placing social workers, safeguarding teams and the police to help protect children who engage in risk taking behaviour.

As part of the matching process the agency considers the risks associated with each child or young person. The composition and needs of individual family members are always considered. Foster carers' homes are subject to regular health and safety checks which ensure environments remain safe. Risk assessments, including pet assessments, are also completed. Detailed placement plans provide guidance for foster carers on how the risks associated with each young person's behaviours should be managed. All plans are subject to regular reviews and are updated in response to incidents and changing circumstances. In addition to the monthly supervisory visits, the Registered Manager undertakes unannounced visits to carers at least twice a year. Children and young people are seen without their carers to give them opportunities to share their views.

The agency has in place an assessment process that ensures that only those individuals who have successfully undergone the rigorous assessment process and relevant safeguarding checks are recruited and trained as foster carers. The selection of staff and the recruitment of panel members are equally robust and focus on individuals who are committed and subscribe to the ethos and philosophy of the agency. There are comprehensive vetting processes to reduce the likelihood of unsuitable individuals gaining access to the children and young people in their care. The performance of foster carers is monitored through their personal development plans, by the supervising social workers. Any standards of care issues that are identified are immediately addressed.

## **Leadership and management**



Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency is well managed. The Registered Manager and the senior management team have developed very strong working relationships with placing authorities. Social workers say that the agency gives an honest response in helping them to find well matched placements. This evidence that partnership working is good and is working for the needs of the children and young people placed.

Carers spoke positively about the support they receive from the agency and confirmed that they are provided with regular formal supervision and opportunities to reflect on their practice. The agency places great emphasis on the development of its foster carers. They have listened to the views of carers with regards to the annual training programme. The training programme was reviewed from the last inspection and is now linked to outcomes following individual training requests or needs identified via their Personal Development Plans. The training programme had mixed reviews in the initial stages, due to location and timing of events. However, now carers are pleased with the variety of courses provided as it relates to their work practices. There is an expectation that all carers will continually update their knowledge and skills in order to respond appropriately to the changing needs of the children and young people being referred. Carers all stated that this was happening.

The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are comprehensive and easily understood. The children and young people's guide is also presented in a pictorial style to appeal to those children with communication difficulties. As a result all children, young people, parents, relatives, staff and foster carers are clear about the aims and objectives of the agency.

There are good monitoring systems in place to ensure that any difficulties arising within a placement are identified early and additional support is provided. All significant events are notified consistently. This demonstrates that the agency is taking appropriate action to promote the welfare of children and young people in their care.

The Registered Persons and panel members are professionally qualified with a proven track record in children's services, child protection and safeguarding. The agency has a good induction training programme in place for all staff. The manager receives supervision regularly with the managing directors and panel members are appraised annually. This helps ensure the development of the agency positively impacts on children and young people's achievement.

There are good systems in place to ensure that there is effective monitoring of the agency. This helps to ensure high standards of care to drive improvement to provide good, safe placements. A quality assurance system ensures that all aspects of the service contribute to continuing improvement. The agency has in place an annual consultation, review and development plan which is available to stakeholders. The agency holds a central record of all concerns, complaints and compliments which informs improvements in the care provided to children and young people. Regulation

35 monitoring reports are sent to Ofsted quarterly. The agency has a development plan in place that shows that the agency has the capacity to develop. However, where trends and patterns have emerged the agency has not effectively monitored this, especially in relation to what further lessons have been learnt and what are the improvement now in place, if any. The service remains financially viable.

## 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.