

# Pyramid Care CIC Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Setting address</b>	Unit 16/K&L, Top Barn Business Centre, Worcester Road, Holt Heath, WORCESTER, WR6 6NH
<b>Telephone number</b>	01905 622322
<b>Email</b>	pyramidcarecic@gmail.com
<b>Registered person</b>	Pyramid Care Community Interest Company
<b>Registered manager</b>	Yaf Yafai
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Anthony Sloane
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	09/11/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Pyramid Care Community Interest Company was established in March 2012, and the fostering element was subsequently added in November of that year. It is a non-profit making organisation based on the outskirts of Worcester. The fostering service offers a number of different types of placements for children and young people; emergency and unplanned, respite, long-term placements, specialist placements for children with disabilities and parent and child placements. They currently have 9 approved foster carers with 8 children placed.

### 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**.

Pyramid Care is a newly registered agency with a small but experienced staff team and a team of foster carers who are highly committed to fostering. Children and young people are at the heart of this agency's practice and this is demonstrated throughout the service. Everyone in the service is valued and feels totally part of a team. The Registered Manager uses relevant research, feedback and his past experience in fostering to establish, and continue to develop, a good fostering service. They are successful in meeting their aim to achieve good outcomes for young people and to help them succeed in placement.

The fostering agency is non-profit making and reinvests any profits back into the

agency. Pyramid Care meets the complex individual needs of young people well. As a result they settle well, are safe, make secure attachments and thrive. The agency provides a significant amount of direct work with young people. This includes work by the supervising social worker as well as the link workers. This in turn supports improved outcomes and good overall progress.

The agency's preparation, assessment and training of carers is thorough. All foster carers' assessments are undertaken within eight months of their application. The agency recruits competent foster carers and families who have good insight into the needs of young people who might come to live with them. Foster carers feel they have clear delegated authority, are actively involved in the life and development of the agency, really feel valued, well informed and well supported by the supervising social worker and link workers. Foster carers have said, 'They go the extra mile and nothing is too much trouble.' 'It is like being part of a family.'

Safeguarding practice and monitoring is at the heart of this fostering agency. There are effective systems in place to ensure that young people are kept safe. Thorough assessments of foster carer's skills are conducted and robust risk assessments and safer care plans are carried out. These ensure that young people's welfare is promoted and that they experience positive outcomes.

Leaders and managers know the young people very well and regularly monitor the progress they are making. They are exceptionally committed and care deeply about the service they are providing. They are accessible and approachable for carers, staff, and young people. They are ambitious for the service and continually want to improve and develop.

Three shortfalls have been identified as a result of this inspection, which relates to ensuring the agency is proactive in obtaining feedback from the Independent Reviewing Officers, that young people are included in appraisals and that due to the size of the agency there is continued thought given to any conflict of interest that may occur.

## **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 the views of the Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child's care (NMS 1.4)
- ensure staff appraisals take into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 24.6)
- in considering the suitability of any foster carer to also work for the fostering agency, care must be taken to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest, if they might have inappropriate influence over matters relating to their fostering

task. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 4.12)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Most young people settle well in their foster placements very quickly. This is because they are made to feel welcome by the whole family, including the birth children. Young people have access to child-friendly, good quality, informative profile of their foster family prior to moving in. This helps to familiarise the young people in advance. These booklets include photos, and where appropriate, symbols for young people with communication or learning disabilities and larger font for those children who have sight difficulties. Where possible placements are planned and introduction visits are organised. All young people have their own bedrooms and are supported to personalise them. Young people commented, 'I like it here.' 'I'm definitely happy with my carers.'

Young people's experience of living in foster care is 'normalised' because delegated authority is properly addressed so that carers can make day-to-day decisions. This is continually reinforced with new carers.

Young people are cared for very well and their needs are fully met by their carers, with additional support where necessary. They are safe, happy and develop very positive attachments to their foster families. Carers comment that the young people have, 'Really made progress.' One Independent reviewing officer commented, 'He is so much happier and much more confident since coming into this placement.'

Young people have a positive self-view and are enabled to have a good understanding of their background. Foster carers are proactive in supporting young people to have contact with their friends and families. Young people also establish successful new relationships and friendships through play groups, school, clubs, social activities and hobbies.

All young people have up-to-date health assessments, which clearly outline their health needs. Health care plans are in place, along with signed parental consent forms for medical treatment. This ensures that young people gain the treatment required when they need it. Some young people who have poor or unstable health when they are first placed with a foster carer, receive appropriate treatment which result in their health improving or their needs being addressed. There are clear examples of young people coming into placement with poor dental health and sight issues. Regular attendance at appropriate health services and fosters carers commitment has ensured these areas have been successfully addressed. Staff and foster carers are in regular contact with community nurses, speech therapists, occupational therapists and school nurses in relation to meeting children's individual needs.

A key strength of this agency is the sensitive support foster carer's give to young

people who have complex health needs. For example, a child who needs to be supported during frequent visits to hospital. Specific equipment has been put in place to address the needs of a child with disabilities in relation to safe play. This enhances the child's opportunities in a safe way.

The agency is very active in promoting education. This has resulted in young people benefitting from attending schools which meet their needs. Foster carers initially support development and learning through play and pre-school settings; they then support young people to attend appropriate or special schools. Foster carers are confident in meeting the educational needs of young people and are supported in this task by the supervising social worker and link workers who are also knowledgeable in early years. Significant progress has been made in that a young person came into placement with no attendance at school, has now received an award from the school for 100% attendance. Foster carers support and encourage education and celebrate achievement and success. They attend parent evenings and other school activities, ensuring school attendance, facilitating homework as well as liaising with other professionals connected to education provision within the county.

Consultation with young people is a strength of this service. The young people are provided with ample opportunity to raise any issues or talk about their care at the various social events that are put on by the agency. Young people visited certainly could name all the staff and events that they enjoy.

Young people are able to pursue interests and are supported and encouraged to engage in new leisure, educational and community activities. This helps them make friends and establish positive links in their local community. Foster carers actively involve young people in a wide range of family activities including fishing, gardening, swimming and walking. Older young people also spend time socialising with friends in their free time. In addition, link workers befriend and help young people identify and pursue hobbies and interests.

The agency makes sure that young people are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their full potential. Foster carers provide all young people with opportunities to take measured risks and to learn independence skills. These are appropriate to their age and ability.

## **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency ensures prospective foster carers are robustly recruited and assessed to ensure they meet the diverse needs of children. Assessments are comprehensive and analytical and identify the competencies and strengths foster carers have or need to develop. Preparation and assessment is thorough and conducted with appropriate depth and rigor. All assessments and approvals have been completed within eight months of the foster carers' application. Foster carers understand their role and those of the agency and local authority. They have all said, 'I feel part of the team around the child and feel as professionals we are all there to ensure progress and

better outcomes for them.'

Foster carers are well informed because the agency provides them with good advice, support, guidance and training. For example, foster carers receive excellent support to ensure high quality care is given when looking after young people with complex health needs. All foster carers undertake an established programme of training, and all have completed their skills to foster training within one year of approval. In addition to this mandatory training, further specialist bespoke training is also provided linked to each child's and foster carer's needs.

Foster carers receive good quality support from staff through regular visits, telephone calls, supervision and monthly forums. Foster carers feel highly valued within the agency. They feel a key strength of the agency is the tremendous support they receive to achieve positive outcomes for young people. All feedback received from foster carers has been extremely positive with comments such as: 'They go the extra mile.' 'The monthly forums are invaluable.' 'There is a strong emphasis on this being an agency that is still developing and all opinions are valued.'

Young people are carefully matched to their foster placements to ensure that individual needs are identified clearly and met. This process successfully identifies any gaps and provides additional support, resources and training that are needed to support the foster carers and the young person's placement. The agency works well with the Local Authorities to ensure that full information is shared with the foster carers prior to placement so that appropriate care can be provided. Birth children are fully engaged with the process.

The fostering panel provides an effective quality assurance function to support safe and secure placements. The panel chair and vice-chair are extremely experienced and knowledgeable. Both provide effective leadership in encouraging members to challenge and rigorously consider approvals, reviews and deregistration. The panel administration is extremely efficient and members receive the papers in good time so they can give them their full consideration. Decision making is robust, prompt and effective.

Foster carers work in partnership with the agency to achieve the best outcomes for young people. They communicate regularly and effectively with children's social workers and other professionals. They are actively involved in planning for the child or young person and ensure they are working towards the wishes of the child and their placing authority's plan. A local authority social worker stated: 'Communication has been good. The supervising social worker is a good advocate for the foster carer.' Foster carers are clear around delegated authority and specific arrangements are effectively dealt with at the start of the placement. Young people benefit from this team around the child approach. By attending reviews, producing regular progress reports and advocating for the young people in their care, staff and foster carers contribute to future planning. The service provides regular social events and groups in which young people learn about their rights and how to influence decisions about their care.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The service ensures that foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people with whom they are working and are well informed about the underlying causes of the behaviours they can exhibit. All foster carers and staff receive effective training on trauma, attachment, child protection, safe caring, child sexual exploitation and internet safety. This is supplemented by written guidance in their handbook so carers have immediate access to information about how to respond to disclosures or safeguarding concerns.

Young people have not gone missing from their foster families. If this ever occurred the agency would work closely with other agencies to ensure young people are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return. There is a policy and procedure in place if children go missing from care. Foster carers are aware of the procedure to follow and report that they feel confident in following them in the event of this happening.

A key strength of this service is the in-depth knowledge they have of supporting young people with disabilities. They are sensitive to each individual's complex needs and effectively balance the need to safeguard with the need to promote independence.

Placement planning is comprehensive and addresses all aspects of risk. Safe care plans are individual to each young person and based on a robust understanding of the impact of previous experiences. These are implemented and regularly reviewed in line with presenting and assessed risks. Young people take age-appropriate risks to enable them to develop their own understanding of how to keep themselves safe. One young person said, 'If I didn't feel safe I wouldn't be here.'

Young people have access to a range of adults with whom they feel able to raise any concerns or issues. They have good relationships with the foster carers' supervising social worker, who ensures she sees both foster children and birth children alone on most of their visits so they can develop a meaningful relationship. Young people also see their own social workers and independent reviewing officers, have access to the complaints procedure and attend a variety of social events run by the agency. Unannounced visits take place at least once a year and follow a clear format so that they are consistently implemented.

There are clear, robust safeguarding policies, procedures and guidance that underpin recruitment, staff vetting, assessment, preparation, supervision, induction and on-going training of foster carers and staff. The agency also has positive working relationships with local authorities. This partnership work, in line with multi agency protocols, focuses on meeting the specific needs of each young person and ensures they are kept safe and supported to change any high-risk behaviours.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

This is a service that has been operating for just over 12 months and has a dedicated team of workers who are passionate about the service and about its Community Interest perspective. The manager is clear about the agency's ongoing development and how they will grow at a slow pace in order to maintain the quality of the service.

There are two agency decision makers, one being the Registered Manager and the other the Responsible Individual. Staff also take on additional roles and there needs to be complete clarity regarding any conflict of interest.

There are robust processes for monitoring all areas of the agency's operation and practice and monthly monitoring reports are scrutinised for any patterns and trends. There is very good management oversight of young people's progress or lack of progress. This means that workers are kept informed about a young person's development and individualised support can be provided. There are additional visits made monthly by the Responsible Individual to provide even more support to the carers. This also enables him to have a real understanding of the needs of the young people placed. There is a strong focus on promoting the safety, progress and well-being of young people. Computer based surveys are deployed at regular intervals to ascertain the views of the young people, foster carers and placing authority social workers about the service's performance. The information obtained is used to identify any concerns and inform developments that will further improve outcomes for young people. However there are no formal consultation processes for obtaining the views of Independent Reviewing Officers.

Staff are appropriately qualified and extremely committed to providing good support to children and families. They are supported through access to good training, regular supervision, appraisals and reflective practice. The agency currently does not engage young people in the appraisal process. The agency is committed to supporting, valuing and developing staff, for example, through changing working hours or supporting access to professional qualifications. In relation to accessing a specialist course on emotional therapy to enhance her practice with families a supervising social worker commented, 'This will really consolidate my practice.'

People are informed about what services the agency provides through a comprehensive Statement of Purpose and an informative website. There are a range of policies and procedures that are known by, and easily accessible to, staff and foster carers. These documents, as well as the agency's website and the Foster Carers' Charter, ensure staff and foster carers understand the aims and objectives of the service.

There is a complaints procedure in place and there has been one complaint about the agency since they were registered. The complaint was investigated by an independent worker and outcome clearly recorded. Complaints are seen in a positive light and as a way of improving practice.



## 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.