

Attachments Fostering Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Responsible individual	
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Attachments Fostering Ltd is an independent fostering agency, based in Snodland, Kent. Qualified, permanent staff are employed and the agency also uses a regular bank of qualified independent social workers for additional assessment and review work. The agency has its own established fostering panel, chaired by an independent person.

The agency currently has 15 approved fostering households supporting 14 children and young people, situated across a small area within the Kent region. Services offered include emergency, short term and bridging placements, long term and parent and child arrangements. Within this, the agency also offers assistance with contact, therapeutic interventions, and support with education and life story work.

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**.

This fostering service offers a good quality service to looked after children. However, leadership and management is judged as requires improvement. The outcomes for children and young people are positive. The fostering service provides stable placements which are well supported. There are very few unplanned endings of placements. Children and young people are well matched with their carers and their individual needs are generally very well met. Children and young people are

effectively supported in line with their local authority plans and are making good progress.

The fostering service facilitates effective consultation with foster carers and other stakeholders but the service is aware that they need to improve their consultation with children and young people. This ensures that they are heard and listened to.

Safeguarding practice and monitoring is a priority in this fostering agency. There are effective, proactive systems in place to ensure that children and young people are kept safe from harm or abuse. Thorough assessments of foster carers' skills are conducted and robust risk assessments are carried out. These ensure that children and young people's welfare is promoted and that they experience positive outcomes.

The support of foster carers is excellent. Equally, the staff team are well supported and supervised to ensure placements fully meet the identified needs of children and young people. Staff's partnership working with internal and external professionals is effective and this promotes the careful co-ordination of care. Staff and foster carers have access to quality training opportunities, which enhances their existing skills and knowledge. The fostering panel is highly organised and efficiently run.

Leaders and managers provide sound leadership and have a clear vision for the service. The fostering service is well managed, and there are strong quality assurance systems in place.

Six recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. These are mainly in relation to monitoring of the records in relation to education, panel performance, the decision makers role, risk assessments and updating the safeguarding procedures.

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 that children and young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities and this should be reflected in their risk assessment when any change to their behaviour occurs (NMS 3.4)
- ensure early years provision can play an important part in helping young children to develop normal skills, and foster carers should be given maximum support to take advantage of a pre-school place where this is identified in the care plan or early years PEP (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Service section 3.113)
- ensure that the fostering service provider's decision-maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the

recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes (this is in relation to the agency decision maker reviewing their role) (NMS 14.9)

- ensure that each panel member's performance, including that of the chair, should be reviewed annually against agreed performance objectives. The service's decision-maker should review the performance of the panel chair, and for this purpose may attend a proportion of panel meetings but only as an observer. Views about the chair's performance should be sought from other panel members and from those who attend panel meetings, such as prospective foster carers and social workers who present reports to the panel. For all other panel members, the panel chair should conduct the performance review (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Service section 5.15)
- ensure that the fostering service's procedures on safeguarding is updated to be in line with Government guidance and requirements, including the duty to refer information to statutory bodies. These procedures should be known to foster carers, fostering service staff, volunteers and children (NMS 22.2)
- ensure that there is regular monitoring of 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 (NMS 25.2)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are well cared for. Their needs are fully met by their carers, with additional support where necessary. Consequently, they make good progress overall from their original starting point.

Children and young people benefit greatly from the rewarding relationships that they enjoy with their carers and they feel that they are fully included in their foster carers' families. The quality of those relationships is evident from the many positive comments about carers that they made during the inspection. For example, one young person said 'this is home and they are happy because it is like family, if they have any concerns the carer is always there'.

Children and young people have a good level of attendance at school or college, with almost all consistently achieving over 90% and a number of children and young people regularly achieving 100%. As a result, their level of attainment improves greatly. Children and young people performed well in their end of year tests, the majority reaching the expected level for their age and ability. Children and young people have genuine aspirations for their future which will improve their chances in later life. These include further and higher education and apprenticeships. Young people develop independent living skills in order to equip them to move into their own accommodation when they leave care. Some young people choose to remain

with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements to support their transition into adulthood. Foster carers are aware that early provision play a significant role in a child's life, however, records of what has been achieved for each pre-school child is not consistently recorded or monitored to evidence all children's development achievement from the start.

Children and young people are enthusiastic about the wide range of activities that are available to them. These include guides, youth groups, sports and swimming. Involvement in these activities have broadened children and young people's experiences, helping them to make and sustain friendships and to develop a wide range of skills, all of which has increased their self-confidence. Children and young people also enjoy holidays with their carers both locally and abroad. This supports their sense of belonging to their foster family and helps them to feel settled.

The care children and young people experience with their carers helps them to develop self-esteem and confidence and this is evident in the way children and young people engage with carers when visited. Children and young people enjoy good health. Their physical and emotional health needs are well met in their foster placements and they are encouraged from an early age to learn about healthy lifestyles. All children and young people, including those with complex health needs, have access to any additional services they might need to promote their good health.

Children and young people confirm that they are given opportunities to express their views about every aspect of their care at reviews and they contribute to carers annual reviews. This encourages children and young people to feel that they are listened to and their views matter.

Children and young people remain in touch with their family members, when it is safe and in their best interests to do so. This benefits them emotionally and helps to support their sense of identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a clear strategy for the recruitment of foster carers and the manager and staff work very effectively with commissioners to ensure that they recruit carers who are able to meet the needs of the children and young people commissioners seek to place.

The agency has good arrangements in place for the preparation and assessment of carers, with a clear emphasis on safe care and safeguarding. Assessments of prospective carers are undertaken by qualified social workers who present detailed reports to the fostering panel. The agency has developed a central list that is sufficient to ensure each panel is suitably constituted. This is made up of a number of independent professionals from a variety of backgrounds and includes a legal representative who is contactable when needed, a medical advisor and an experienced independent foster carer. The foster panel is chaired by an independent

professional with a sound background in children services. These arrangements ensure that foster panel members have the knowledge and expertise to make effective recommendations that are focussed on ensuring the safety and welfare of children and young people. However, each panel member's performance, including that of the chair is reviewed yearly but, not consistently against agreed performance objectives.

Excellent training opportunities enable carers to further develop their knowledge and skills so that they can better support the young people in their care. Carers are enthusiastic about the broad range of training that the agency offers and report that they particularly value being encouraged to help to deliver some of this training themselves. In addition to working with groups of carers, the agency regularly provides training on an individual basis to carers to help them to meet the complex health, emotional and communication needs of the young people they look after. For example some carers have been able to study for a specialist award in supporting parent and child placements. The overwhelming majority of carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster care, within the required timescales. This is significantly above the national average.

Children and young people are carefully matched to carers. The agency works hard to obtain detailed information about children and young people to ensure that they are placed with carers who can best meet their identified needs. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service works with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training or resources that may be needed. The fostering service prides itself on retention of foster carers and stable placements.

Placing social workers are sent a pen picture of carers so that these can be given to children and young people before they are introduced to their foster families. This supports children and young people at a time of transition. Foster carers and supervising social workers work very effectively with placing social workers. Carers are fully involved in the care planning and reviewing processes. They attend all reviews and other meetings that are held about young people and advocate on their behalf when they need to, demonstrating a clear commitment to ensuring that young people achieve positive outcomes.

Foster carers feel valued by the agency and report that they are respected as important members of the team working with children and young people. They are enthusiastic about the support they receive from their supervising social workers and the agency generally. They report that the agency's approach is 'to spend whatever time is needed out of hours' with carers, children and young people to ensure that carers are supported to maintain placements for young people. The success of this work is indicated by the stability of placements generally. One carer commented 'it has been an amazing experience fostering and this agency is ever so supportive,' and another said 'they are so impressed with the level of training we have received and even though I have taken a number of the same I always learn something new'. This enables carers to continue to provide an excellent quality of care. The agency also provides really exceptional support to foster carer's own children, which supports stable family life. This aspect of the agency's work is recognised and valued by

carers.

The manager and staff work very effectively with placing authorities to ensure that children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding children and young people is high priority in the service and there are effective arrangements to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse. Vetting procedures for staff and panel members are thorough, ensuring those individuals are safe and suitable. The process for assessing and approving carers is rigorous ensuring that the service recruits carers who are safe. The agency provides a comprehensive range of training for carers on safeguarding matters which covers issues such as sexual exploitation and children missing from home. Carers and staff reported that the agency works in a transparent way sharing all information openly. This promotes a culture of open communication which helps to ensure the safety of children and young people.

The manager has good links with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for child protection. Any investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled effectively to ensure that there is support and protection for children and young people as well as information and support to carers who are the subject of allegations. Where there are concerns relating to standards of care, foster carers care is reviewed with the panel to ensure that these concerns are appropriately addressed for the best interest of the carer and future placements.

Although, the safeguarding policy has recently been updated, it is not in-line with the current 'Working Together to Safeguard Children March 2013 guidance.

Comprehensive care plans ensure that foster carers have the information they need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children and young people in their care. Thorough risk assessments are undertaken as part of the matching process to ensure that all possible areas of concern for children, young people and carers are considered. Foster carers prepare a safe care policy that addresses all aspects of household routines and safety. These are kept under review by carers and their supervising social workers to ensure that they remain relevant and effective.

Supervising social workers undertake very regular visits to carers. They see young people in placement during some of their visits. This enables them to develop meaningful relationships with young people and ensures that young people have additional adults who they can talk to if they wish. Unannounced visits to foster carer's homes take place twice a year and health and safety risk assessments are regularly reviewed. These arrangements ensure that the safety and well-being of young people is closely monitored by the agency.

There is a low incidence of children and young people going missing from care. The likelihood of this is carefully considered when a child or young person is placed and is identified in their plans. The agency has a clear protocol for managing such incidents. Carers have a good understanding of the protocol, which is incorporated into their handbook. Consequently, they know what action they should take to protect children or young people if they do go missing.

Foster carers take reasonable precautions in assessing the degree of risk, making informed judgements about when to allow a child or young person to take a particular risk or follow a particular course of action. They should be provided with training to ensure that they are able to assess risks appropriately, within the expectations of the fostering service and the responsible authority.

The number of incidents of physical interventions may be deemed statistically high for a small agency. However, the recorded incidents related mainly to a few young people whose behaviour can be challenging at times. All foster carers are training in undertaking physical intervention. Reports evidence the outcome of all incidents following a physical restraint and how it was managed. However, the risk assessments, although in place, did not consistently reflect all updates or changes to the child or young person's behaviour or how they felt.

The agency helps children and young people to learn about personal safety in various ways. They know who they can talk to about any concerns they have. They said that they know how to complain, and that they would feel able to do so. Children and young people feel confident that they will be listened to and that they will be supported. Children and young people reported that there is no bullying in their foster homes.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **requires improvement.**

Many aspects of leadership and management are sound. The management team have a good working relationship. The Registered Manager undertakes the majority of the roles and responsibilities within the agency due to its size; this includes the role of the safeguarding officer, training co-ordinator and the agency's decision maker. The Registered Persons are aware that they need to review the manager's role and responsibilities and have put some actions in place to address this. However, the impact of this could not be fully measured at the time of this inspection.

The fostering agency is growing and there is a clear vision on how children and young people's need are being met. Where the agency has made exceptional progress is the training programme for carers. All carers have completed the CWDC training. The agency supports parent and child arrangements and ensure carers under takes an extensive training to ensure all aspect of safeguarding is managed appropriately. However, this part of the service provided by the agency is not reflected in the current Statement of Purpose.

There is a clear and robust management structure in place. The Registered Individual has recently retired and new person has been appointed. This application is in progress. Although the majority of the staff are new, they all work well together and are passionate about the work they do for children, young people and the foster carers. They all said that communication within the team is strong and this was reiterated by foster carers. The management team is also very flexible, knowledgeable and understand their roles and responsibilities within the agency. The changes have enabled the service to ensure that children and young people's overall safe is improved and managed effectively by foster carers.

The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the fostering service to run smoothly. Currently the fostering agency is working towards implementing of an improved IT system to better meet the recording and data needs of the service. Managers anticipate that improvements to the IT system will assist in streamlining and improving staff's documentation of information.

The fostering agency is well resourced and is financially viable. The agency's has continued to develop the fostering services in the direction of parent and child arrangements. This has been successful and illustrates the service's capacity to further expand while continuing to offer a quality service as the service continues to grow.

The fostering agency's practice is reflective, and takes into account any changes to legislation, good practice guidance and up-to-date research. This is reflected in the fostering agency's website and systems in place.

The fostering agency produces a report which indicates what has improved and where improvement can be made, with regards to maintaining good outcomes for children. However, the report does not take into account all the matter that should be reviewed following the guidance. The Registered Persons are aware of the current market trends within the organisation's location. This is linked to the recruitment of foster carers and used as part of the agency marketing tool to obtain contracts.

The fostering agency has a good track record of successfully addressing shortfalls identified at previous inspections. The service has a clear vision for its developmental path and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the outcomes for children and young people are positive. The service has realistic plans in place to support its efforts to continue to offer quality care and enhance improvements to service provision.

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.