

Liberty Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC397846
Inspection date	01/08/2014
Inspector	Bridget Goddard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	

Setting address	Passfield Business Centre, Lynchborough Road, Passfield, LIPHOOK, Hampshire, GU30 7SB
Telephone number	
Email	duty@libertyfostercare.co.uk
Registered person	Liberty Foster Care Limited
Registered manager	Madhavi Lata
Responsible individual	John Alexander Harper
Date of last inspection	08/09/2010

© Crown copyright 2014

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

Liberty Foster Care Limited is a private company and is owner managed by the Responsible Individual and the Registered Manager. This small agency will shortly have nine fostering households, and currently has four children in placement.

Liberty Foster Care provides foster care placements for children and young people aged between 0-18 years on a short, medium and long term basis.

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 small agency is effectively led with an emphasis on measured growth to help ensure high quality placements. Young people make good progress in their foster homes, and are well-supported by involved and committed foster carers. Young people are involved in their day to day care, but are insufficiently involved in the development of the service. Carers are recruited, assessed, and approved within appropriate timescales.

There is a strong panel which helps ensure good quality assessments are made and approved. The panel's central list is broadly appropriate but lacks some key representatives. Foster carers are well-trained and well-supported but do not have routine peer support. They prioritise keeping young people safe, and while practice

in responding to missing children is sound, insufficient attention is paid to following local police protocols. The Statement of Purpose has not been sent to Ofsted, which limits external scrutiny.

The leadership team have a strong ethical vision, and have demonstrated this by their child and carer focused actions since the last inspection. The agency is planning sustained, steady growth in the near future and has good prospects for maintaining a high quality standard of care and further improvements.

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
3 (2011)	ensure that a copy of the statement of purpose is supplied to the Chief Inspector. (Regulation 3 (2))	15/09/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure that peer support and/or self help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported (NMS 21.4)
- ensure that the number, skills knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider (NMS 14.8)
- ensure that if a child is absent from the foster home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child is missing), the fostering service's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where each foster home is located. (NMS 5.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Young people are generally well settled in their foster homes. They are sensitively cared for, and all make significant progress in their foster homes. Their needs are well met and some young people say, 'they understand why I do what I do; they don't give up on me; they make me feel like a member of their family'. Other young people appreciate being able to have their friends over for sleepovers, which helps them integrate at school. Most young people have strong relationships with their carers and this helps them develop appropriate attachment behaviour with others. They do influence their day to day care for example, administering their own medication under supervision or making food choices. However, young people are not yet involved appropriately in developing the fostering service.

All young people attend education routinely, and for some this represents a major improvement. Some young people were already high achievers, and they have continued to sit key examinations and win prizes for their special skills. Others are being imaginatively supported to improve their core skills, and this helps give them more choices in later life. Young people are also encouraged to have fun. They enjoy family parties or doing web or sports based activities with their foster carers.

Generally young people lead a healthy life. Their emotional needs are well met, they receive effective advice and support about their sexual health needs, and their medical needs are sensitively and thoroughly provided for. Most aspects of young people's health have improved since being in their foster placements. Where there are concerns about young people not making healthy choices, these are promptly assessed and strategies developed to reduce risk.

Young people are at different stages in learning to take responsibility for their behaviour. Some are not yet able to do this, but others now understand that they can take control of their responses to situations. This means that they are more able to cope with the stresses and anxieties of everyday life.

Following persistent efforts by foster carers some young people are now able to have increased contact with their families. Others are helped by their carers to sustain existing bonds. This helps young people to sustain key relationships that may help support them in adulthood.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good.**

Foster carers are well prepared for the fostering task and understand their role in relation to the local authority and the agency. This fostering agency carefully recruits suitable carers and, through effective assessment, training and support, enables them to offer high quality care to some challenging young people. Local authority commissioners note that the agency works well with young people with complex needs, and further comment that the agency, 'sticks with placements'. Social workers confirm that foster carers, 'maintain their commitment to young people', even when behaviour is persistently challenging.

Training and professional support are particular strengths of this agency. Carers are unanimous in their high praise of post approval training feeling that it helps them see, 'what lies under the behaviour they are showing'. They also find the flexibility of the training programme supportive of their needs with a particular placement. For example, specialist planned courses are delivered earlier if necessary to support particular placement needs. Carers are also extremely positive about the professional support offered to them by the agency. They say they receive, 'great supervision and support 24/7'. They also say that they are never made to feel that, 'they are wasting people's time' when seeking reassurance about a course of action. Some foster carers do feel that they would additionally benefit from regular peer support from other foster carers. However, overall the agency's package of high quality training and supervision helps placements to be both more stable and more effective in promoting young people's welfare.

Social workers see foster carers as part of the team around the child and praise them and the agency for their effective communication, matching and flexibility. They also note how young people are integrated into their foster families and now get, 'loads of really good attention'. This is helped by the agency's effective matching process, which is based both on a thorough knowledge of their foster carers, and useful discussions with local authorities about the level of detail required to share with them.

The agency has a strong fostering panel in place chaired by a highly experienced and knowledgeable chair. The panel is appropriately trained, and panel members and the chair are routinely appraised. This helps promote a positive approach to professional development. There were some early teething troubles with both the quality and the pace of applications to the panel, and these were effectively resolved by the agency and the chair working together. Effective quality assurance is now in place pre-panel for Form F assessments and the panel chair has devised bespoke check lists for scrutinising applications. These measures help ensure a thorough approach. Clear minutes accurately reflect panel considerations, and the agency decision maker works to appropriate timescales. Although panel members represent a satisfactory range of diverse skills and experience, expanding the central list would further enhance effective scrutiny.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Safeguarding considerations are rightly central to the work of this agency. Foster carers say that safeguarding is a golden thread starting at their initial interview and running strongly through to their face-to-face safeguarding training. As a consequence they have a good knowledge of general safeguarding risks and what action should be taken. This is confirmed by local authority social workers who have confidence in the agency's approach to safeguarding.

Following approval, fostering families put together an individualised safer caring plan, which is amended to accommodate the needs of particular young people in

placement. Training is also effectively geared to relevant safeguarding issues, for example foster carers receive a useful course on internet safety. Unaccompanied visits by the agency, frequent individual meetings with young people, and personalised and regularly updated risk assessments also help to contribute to keeping young people safe. Young people say, 'I love living here; I feel safe and happy and I haven't felt that in a while'.

Young people are encouraged to take age-appropriate risks. For example, they have internet access on their phones and laptops, and foster carers give them the information necessary to keep themselves safe online. They also monitor their usage using parental controls; this whole package appropriately balances risk with educating young people to keep themselves safe.

Some young people do occasionally go missing from their foster home. Carers keep to the individualised plans for young people in these situations, including following them and keeping in touch. They are aware about which point to escalate the search for the particular young person, and they follow agreed agency procedures. However, the agency is insufficiently aware of local protocols for young people who go missing. Overall, there is sound practice for young people who go missing but their welfare is not fully promoted.

Staff and panel member recruitment and vetting are thorough and compliant with statutory requirements. This helps keep young people safe from contact with unsuitable people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Leaders and managers have developed effective working relationships with local authority commissioners and social workers all of whom have a positive view of agency performance. For example, some local authority professionals describe the overall service offered by the agency as, 'fantastic'.

The registered manager is appropriately protective of both her new foster carers and particularly about the good progress young people in placement are making. This means that she is cautious about accepting new placements. As a consequence the growth of this new agency has been steady and carefully measured. This has been positive in securing effective placements that promote young people's development while at the same time ensuring financial viability. Sensible business plans have a realistic programme for careful growth, and the agency is set for the steady expansion of carers and staff in the next year.

The agency has effective electronic systems which enable staff and panel alike to have prompt access to essential information. These systems also enable the registered manager to have useful scrutiny of placements on a regular basis. This scrutiny is linked with detailed and regular staff supervision sessions. The small size of the agency ensures managers have thorough knowledge of young people's

progress and the agency are already planning how they will continue this as they expand. Further scrutiny is built in by a consultant independent reviewing officer presenting carer's first reviews to panel. This consultant has also recently conducted a feedback exercise with foster carers which confirmed their positive view of the agency. This well-developed monitoring of the service demonstrates a positive approach to continuous improvement.

The agency has a large number of policies in place, some of which have minor shortfalls; this also applies to the recently reviewed Statement of Purpose. Neither it nor the Children's Guide have been sent to Ofsted. The Registered Manager was quick to put these matters right during and just after the inspection. At the last inspection in 2010 four requirements and five recommendations were made. The agency has thoroughly addressed these and none are repeated in this inspection. All notifications have been appropriately made and followed up.

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.