

# Be My Family Fostering Agency

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	17/02/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Be My Family is a privately owned, independent agency. It provides a wide range of fostering placements, including emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent, respite and supported lodgings. It provides placements for children with additional and complex needs, and placements for siblings and for parents with children. It has 17 approved foster households. Five of these households were approved in the last 12 months. The total number of approved placements is 43. At the time of the inspection, it provided foster care to 27 children and young people.

### 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 registered persons have created a working culture in which the social care practice that consistently has children and young people at the heart of it, is an expected norm. Through high quality fostering placements, the agency contributes towards foster children and young people having a safe and enjoyable childhood. Children and young people have good opportunities to overcome any obstacles to reaching their potential and to continue to learn and grow.

They receive highly individualised, holistic care and support that fully addresses all their needs. They are looked after exceptionally well by foster carers who in turn, are themselves very well supported by the agency. Children and young people develop

safe and secure attachments with caring adults who have excellent parenting skills. This has a tremendously positive impact on them and particularly, on their confidence and their feelings of belonging and self-worth.

Amongst the most pronounced strengths of the agency are the promotion of the voice of the child, valuing diversity in all its forms and excellent professional relationships with partner agencies. Together with its foster carers, the agency makes a crucial positive contribution to the integrated delivery of the care plans and to the effective corporate parenting. It is effective at making a positive difference in the lives of foster children and young people and their families. Children and young people make good and in some instances, excellent progress across different aspects of their development.

Any safeguarding concerns are addressed effectively and within the multi-agency framework of working together.

The inspector recommends that in the interest of further improvement and development of the agency, the role of the manager is reviewed.

## **Areas for improvement**

### **Recommendations**

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

- review the role of the manager within the agency. (NMS 25.4)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

All seven children and young people who responded to the Ofsted on-line survey commented very positively about their experience. When asked about what was good about it, they said, 'everything'. They then went on to explain what was that they particularly liked about living with their foster carers.

Children and young people benefit from having developed trusting and emotionally warm relationships with the carers. One child wrote in the survey that they 'loved' the carer. The foster carers who spoke to the inspector, talked about the children in their care with great affection. One carer said that, when the child came to their family, 'it was like he was born to us'. Another carer talked about loving the foster child as if they were their own.

The inspector observed healthy affectionate interactions between the carers and foster children, during the visits to the homes of foster families. The agency also demonstrated that in situations, when it was in the best interest of the child, the

foster carers were able to genuinely, 'let go' of the placements.

Children and young people are fully included in the foster carer's family life. They experience a good family life and all the joys and tribulations, it brings. They have developed a deep sense of belonging and self-worth. Through the agency's own consultation papers, a child wrote about their foster family life: "We are always joking about, like a normal family". These are some of the comments from the Ofsted survey: "My foster carer helps me with my education and she helps me if I have any arguments with my friends"; "They always care about me and they are like my family"; "They consider me as part of their family. My foster carer helped me when I had problems in my college and health"; and "The foster family is very comfortable and I like living with the family."

Children and young people have their complex needs met and their welfare consistently promoted. Their confidence and social skills have grown exponentially. They are learning to take more responsibility for their behaviours. Children and young people are able to present themselves in more positive ways. They have developed good manners, more constructive behaviours, more positive attitudes and better communication skills. This includes children and young people with profound disabilities, communication difficulties, seriously challenging behaviours and other complex needs.

All children and young people have good opportunities to express their wishes, views and feelings. They are heard, respected and well cared for. They know that they have a choice in life. Their views influence what is happening to them. The carers sensitively and firmly guide children and young people allowing them to develop their identities and learn respect for other people's choices.

Children and young people receive effective emotional, physical, psychological and therapeutic help when they need it. They have a wide range of opportunities to achieve positive outcomes across different aspects of their development. They lead active and healthy lives. They go on holidays. They engage in a good range of leisure and recreational activities.

School attendance is very high and children and young people are making good educational progress. This includes young people who came to the agency with fractured educational histories and poor school attendance and those to whom English is an additional language.

The resilience and independence of children and young people is growing. They are being prepared effectively to become successful adults and to contribute positively to society. One young person who left care, regularly visits their foster family to share their experience of being at University. They continue to enjoy having a sense of belonging and of having a stable positive attachment with the foster family.

## **Quality of service**

Judgement outcome: **outstanding.**

The professionals who contributed to the inspection process were exceptionally complimentary about the quality of care provided by the agency. They gave the examples to the inspector of the agency's practice that went beyond the usual standard of good. The word that they most commonly used to describe the quality of the agency overall was, 'impressive'. Some professionals said commented that, they could not think of anything else to say about the agency but the highest praise. They identified the agency's proactive and collaborative way of working with other professionals as the particular strength of the service. This approach secures effective joint early interventions resulting in positive outcomes for children and young people.

The professionals who work with the agency also commented extremely positively about the quality of the agencies foster carers. The analytical, evidence-based, robust approval process and the excellent on-going supervision, support and training ensure that the carers are highly skilled in their roles. They have in-depth understanding of the needs of children and young people who are in care. Foster carers present as genuinely caring, thoughtful and nurturing people with excellent parenting skills. They have the utmost commitment towards improving the life-chances of children in their care.

They also have a strong commitment to their own continued learning and development. They are eager to learn how they could be more effective at helping children and young people to achieve more positive outcomes. All foster carers achieve the training, support and development standards within one year of approval.

They continue to learn through the agency's bespoke post-approval training. The manager has specifically created the training to take into account the learning needs of the carers and the challenges of their placements.

An effective fostering panel and the agency's experienced decision-maker provide further quality assurance regarding the quality of the fostering service provided by the agency.

Foster carers fully understand their role and those of the fostering agency, the placing authority and other partner-agencies. They have excellent communication skills and the ability to advocate for the rights of children. They make significant contributions to the care planning process and effective corporate parenting. They are strong players in the team that is working around the child.

Children and young people experience highly individualised, holistic care and support that fully addresses all their identified needs. This includes the most complex needs and in some cases, profound disabilities. Some carers have also been instrumental in ensuring that their foster children are appropriately assessed and diagnosed, even when other professionals missed the signs that indicate additional needs. The foster carers' interventions in those cases meant that children and young people started to receive the specialist support they needed.

A virtual school improvement officer commented that they were most impressed by the way the agency dealt with education from day one of each placement. Carers are highly ambitious for their children and young people. Working in partnership with others, they consistently provide encouragement and practical support to enable children and young people to make progress in all aspects of their learning. The agency ensures that the achievements and attainments of children and young people are consistently celebrated.

The carers have good understanding of family dynamics. They work in close partnership with the parents of children and young people whenever that is possible. One of the mothers who had initially been unhappy with a fostering arrangement for their child, wrote to the foster carer saying that they were impressed by the progress their daughter has made.

The agency's matching process focuses on the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). Any additional support is planned and provided early and for as long as required to manage the challenges identified and to enhance the stability of placements. The agency openly shares with foster carers all the information that they have about the prospective placements. Foster carers are confident that their views and decisions are highly valued by the agency. The feeling that comes across when the carers talk about the agency and when the management talks about the carers is one of the utmost mutual respect.

A placement officer from a local authority commented that the agency accepted the most difficult, challenging placements and turned them around into stable ones. This person recognised the agency's excellent support to the carers as the vital contribution to the exceptionally high effectiveness of the majority of the placements. In their discussions with the inspector, a number of foster carers said that would not have coped with some difficult situations had it not been for the consistent, high quality support from the manager. The support included highlighting a wide range of different strategies, giving step by step guidance and promoting the confidence of the carers. Carers told the inspector that they never felt alone in their role. They know that the management is always fully behind them.

## **Safeguarding children and young people**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are placed with safe families. They are regularly seen by the agency to ensure that they are safe and well, that they are listened to and have the support they need to continue to make progress.

Thorough vetting of all staff and other systems that protect and promote the welfare of children and young people ensure the agency's robust safeguarding practice.

By having a strong focus on safeguarding when recruiting, assessing, approving, supervising, training and reviewing the continued approval of foster carers, and when making placements, the agency operates a consistently safe fostering service.

The fostering panel's diverse membership in terms of life experiences and the areas of expertise amongst the members makes a significant contribution to the rigorous safeguarding practice within the agency.

Foster carers have a good understanding of the impact of abuse and neglect on children and on their feelings, self-beliefs and behaviours. They are sensitive to the child's often fast changing moods and presenting needs. They are able to go underneath the child's behaviours and to empathise with them. They consistently provide an emotionally supportive, accepting and non-judgemental environment, which at the same time is orderly and with firm expectations and boundaries. The trusting relationships that the carers are able to build with the children and young people in their care act as a strong protective factor. It empowers children and young people to build on their confidence, resilience and the ability to comply with any safety plans that have been agreed with them and the professionals involved in their care. The incidence of them going missing, being subject to negative influences, and exposing themselves to the risks of sexual exploitation and to other risks, reduces as they spend time in the placements.

Foster carers feel comfortable disclosing to the agency if they need further support to manage any situation. The culture of transparency within the agency and the trust that the carers have in the management enhance the safeguarding of children and young people. Any welfare and safeguarding concerns are identified early and followed by comprehensive early interventions.

The agency's effective working relationships with the local authorities, the police, health services, schools and other agencies protects children and young people and ensure that their welfare is consistently promoted. This includes situations when they put themselves at risk.

Any suspicions or allegations against the foster carers are referred immediately to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for child protection in the area where the foster family lives. The LADO who contributed to the inspection process talked about the agency being keen to make sure that child protection procedures were followed up swiftly, tightly and fully. The agency is always eager to identify any learning points. One of the foster carers who had had an allegation made against them, told the inspector that they completely understood the process and the reasons behind it. They felt fully supported by the agency during a difficult time for the family.

## **Leadership and management**

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The registered persons of this agency are visionary, inspiring, highly competent and effective. They have created a culture in which enabling foster children and young people to have a safe enjoyable childhood and to progress in life is at the core of all the activities. Promoting the voice of the child and valuing diversity in all its forms are particular strengths of this agency.



The Responsible Individual's expertise in system-management and her background in education contribute to the efficient data management and the agency's systematic focus on learning. The Registered Manager's substantial and wide-ranging experience in direct social work and in the management of social work teams contribute to the outstanding quality of the social practice.

The agency has only one other staff member. The qualified social worker receives regular high quality supervision, support and an annual performance review. This enables her to carry out her duties to a high professional standard.

The agency has recently moved its offices to another area. This was partly in response to where the foster families are and where there is an increased need for placements. The management is flexible and responsive to the needs of the communities they provide a service for.

The administration systems are efficiently organised. All information is kept electronically and securely. The management has created streamlined data systems. These systems ensure that the records kept provide a meaningful 'story' of the child's life while being fostered. The records focus on the needs and outcomes of children and young people and facilitate easy monitoring. Annual quality and performance data forms, as well as the notifications of significant events are regularly submitted to Ofsted.

The agency is able to clearly demonstrate that it has made a positive difference in the lives of children and young people. The effective partnership working with all those involved with children and young people ensure that any barriers to their continued growth and development are systematically removed.

The agency is committed to learning and developing the fostering social work practice further. A comprehensive service development plan is in place. The agency aims to stay relatively small in size and instead of expanding wants to focus on developing further the reflective and research-based practice to the highest quality.

The Statement of Purpose has been put on the agency's website and the children's guide has been updated with the current contact details for Ofsted. These actions were taken in line with the requirements raised at the last inspection. The guide has also been translated into another language. This is due to an increased number of fostering referrals received by the agency for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people coming from a particular country.

The agency is efficiently run. It is financially viable and stable in terms of people involved in running it and working for it. The Registered Manager has been in post since the agency registered, in 2009. Due to the agency's size and the preferred leadership style, the Registered Manager assesses, supervises, supports, reviews and trains foster carers, in addition to managing and monitoring the service. There has been no observable negative impact of this. He receives regular supervision from the Responsible Individual. The agency is compact and cohesive, with a strong fostering

panel and the decision maker who is completely independent from the agency.

In the interest of the further improvement and the development of the agency, the inspector recommends that the professional roles of the management are reviewed.

## 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.