

Future Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Future Fostering Limited is an independent fostering service providing services for children and young people from birth to 18 years. The service is owned and managed by social work practitioners who are experienced in the fostering field. The agency is based in the London Borough of Bexley.

The service aims to provide a range of placements for children and young people to meet their diverse needs. At the time of inspection there were 25 approved fostering households and 27 children were placed through the agency. The agency is able to accommodate sibling groups and they can also facilitate supervised contact

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**.

Children thrive within an agency which offers stable placements and actively meets their individual needs. Children are happy, feel safe and have very good educational outcomes. Children, their birth parents and involved professionals provide positive feedback regarding the quality of care. Children benefit from strong attachments with caring, nurturing foster carers.

The agency has a high proportion of transracial and transcultural placements which effectively meet children's needs. Children's heritage is celebrated and they enjoy

sharing traditions with their foster family. Children have sensitively managed and constructive contact with their relatives. A sense of belonging, security and valued life story work positively contribute to their increased self-esteem, confidence and emotional resilience.

Children benefit from an effective panel which is dedicated to promoting their interests and safeguarding their welfare. The agency is actively working to recruit a wider range of carers. Foster carers receive a structured induction, ongoing training and a wide range of support, enabling them to effectively meet children's needs. The agency seeks to empower foster carers through coaching and raising their professional profile.

Children benefit from strong safeguarding arrangements. The agency has established good links with a local safeguarding children board and have access to a wide range of training. Staff within the agency have higher level qualifications in safeguarding and recent working knowledge of child protection work. Children receive appropriate guidance, boundaries and discipline, which contributes to their positive behaviour. There are currently no issues in relation to bullying or children being missing from care.

Children benefit from a service which is continually evolving to meet their needs. Leaders and managers take pride in promoting a caring family atmosphere. There is an acknowledgment that they need to be more strategic and they are ambitious about the future. There is a good capacity to further improve. There are three good practice recommendations, which focus on giving children a greater voice within the agency. This includes influencing the service, staff appraisals and ensuring their views are recorded in supervising social work visits.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- take the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them into account when developing the fostering service (NMS 1.7)
- ensure foster carer supervising meetings confirm that the foster carer is meeting the child's needs and taking into account the child's wishes and feelings (NMS 21.8)
- ensure staff appraisals take into account the views of children. (NMS 24.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children state that they are 'happy with everything'. They thrive within an agency which offers stable placements. Children feel valued and they enjoy being part of a family unit. They have positive relationships with their foster families and are included in family functions. Children state that their foster carers 'take good care of us and they give us lots and lots of love! They give us shelter and proper food'. Professionals comment that the agency is 'meeting the holistic needs' of children and ensure they 'achieve the best outcome'. Children benefit from increased confidence, security and a sense of belonging. Children have an opportunity to share their views during their statutory reviews, foster carers reviews and daily discussions. They currently do not formally influence the development of the fostering service. Leaders and managers are aiming to offer children an independent voice to facilitate this consultation.

Children have constructive contact with their relatives and other significant people. The agency successfully assists in keeping siblings together in suitable placements. Foster carers sensitively facilitate contact within their home, at specified centres or out in the community. Other staff members are also able to assist with supervised contact, where necessary. Professionals highlight that the agency is 'flexible' and work 'incredibly hard to support contact'. Foster carers are very mindful of birth parents feelings and enable them to have a fulfilling role in their child's life. Birth parents provide positive feedback, stating that foster carers are 'polite and respectful' towards them.

Children live with foster carers who meet their diverse needs. Placements take into account their age, ethnicity, faith, gender, language, religious belief, sexuality, emotional needs and any disability. When there is not a full racial, cultural or religious match foster carers receive additional guidance. Children benefit from their foster carers receiving dedicated training, which addresses culture and identity. Foster carers highlight that they 'do not find cultural differences a barrier'. Children enjoy sharing their traditions and give examples of sharing recipes with foster carers. Policies and practice incorporate equality, diversity and inclusion. Foster carers create memory books and contribute to life story work. Children make strides in understanding their past history which positively influences their emotional resilience and personal identity.

Children are excelling in school, foster carers highlight that children 'are now ambitious for their education'. All children are achieving their educational potential through regular school or college attendance or home tuition. Foster carers assist with homework, numeracy and literacy. They strongly advocate for children's needs resulting in improved educational outcomes. An example of this is supporting a young person's transition from a pupil referral unit to a mainstream school. Children benefit from English as an additional language classes, extra tuition and joining their local library. They also gain the confidence to return to education after a long history of non-engagement. The agency rewards children's achievements, which are also externally recognised by schools and placing authorities. Children also pursue awards dedicated to their personal development, such as the Duke of Edinburgh programme.

Children learn valuable age-appropriate life skills which prepare them for adulthood.

They take part in daily routines and household chores; these include making their bed, laying and clearing the table, assisting with their laundry, with cooking and gardening. Children receive help with budgeting, learning to manage their finances and savings. Professionals highlight that children learn the skills necessary for semi-independence. Children highlight that they 'like cooking' and 'helping around the house'. Three young people remain with their foster carers post 16 and they are all pursuing further education. They have positive aspirations for the future and have a solid base to make the transition into independence.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from strong attachments with caring, nurturing foster carers. Placing authorities give examples of 'amazing' placements and describe carers as 'brilliant' due to their ability to stabilise children in traumatic circumstances. They highlight that foster carers provide 'a warm, loving and supportive environment'. They comment on the 'positive and affectionate bond'. One of the agency's key strengths is placement stability. Placing authorities highlight there are 'no placement breakdowns' attributing this to the agency's 'very good matching process'. The only issue is that children's wishes and feelings are not always apparent during foster carers' supervisory visits.

The agency is actively working with placing authorities to recruit the range of carers they need. The majority of carers are from an Asian, African or Caribbean background. The agency is rigorously working to recruit a wider range of ethnicities. There is a realistic recruitment strategy and assessments are in progress for prospective foster carers. There is good foster carer retention and experienced foster carers comment that they find the 'agency excellent compared to other agencies'.

Children benefit from an effective panel which is dedicated to promoting their interests and safeguarding their welfare. Panel members positively influence the agency through their quality assurance function and skill set, contributing towards foster carers training. The panel is chaired by a highly experienced social care professional. Experienced social workers are well represented on the central list. The panel is relatively gender balanced and reflects a variety of cultures and religions. The panel has access to medical, educational and legal expertise. Assessments are promptly completed within the relevant time frames. Panel arrangements are efficient and the agency decision maker considers recommendations in a timely manner.

Foster carers receive a structured induction and ongoing training which enables them to effectively meet children's needs. Foster carers describe training as 'excellent', 'very informative' and 'useful'. They feel training gives them confidence and helps them reflect and 'be a better foster carer'. Foster carers have completed or are enrolled on the recommended vocational training course. The agency provides children's workshops in parallel during training events which effectively meet child care needs. These events are also an opportunity for children to interact with each

other. Foster carers receive guidance from their own handbook, regular supervisory visits and practice based support groups. They also have a buddy to assist with child minding duties, respite is also available on a case by case basis.

Children benefit from foster carers who have a strong commitment to meeting their needs. The agency feel that they go 'the extra mile' and an example of this is a foster carer having adaptations to their home, to accommodate a child's disability. The agency seeks to empower foster carers through coaching and raising their professional profile. This includes promoting delegated authority, in accordance with the wishes of the child's social worker. Foster carers express great job satisfaction highlighting that they are 'learning something new every day'. Foster carers describe their support as 'outstanding'. They give an example of the 24 hour on call system, stating that 'staff are always available day or night'. They also highlight the good support available for children, stating 'we are both looked after very well'.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from strong safeguarding arrangements. Foster carers ensure children feel 'safe and protected'. Fostering households have a personalised safer care policy which clearly identifies how they will manage everyday living. This policy outlines how they will show affection, praise, ensure privacy and addresses other topics including sexuality. Foster carers understand the safety of children is paramount and they make difficult decisions concerning this. An example being asking a relative with a conviction to leave the family home. The recruitment system complies with statutory requirements. No one is able to work for the agency unless all the necessary checks have been completed. This helps prevent unsuitable persons from working with children. Qualified social workers are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council, which confirms their professional status and accountability.

The agency has established good links with a local safeguarding children board and has access to a wide range of training. Staff within the agency have higher level qualifications in safeguarding and recent working knowledge of child protection work. The agency's safeguarding procedure and practices complies with legislation and guidance. Foster carers and staff are aware of current issues and benefit from recent training in child sexual exploitation. The agency effectively manages safeguarding concerns and child protection allegations. They appropriately take cases back to panel and efficiently monitor the quality of care. Foster carers benefit from an extensive range of training which enables them to safeguard children. Topics covered include physical interventions, managing challenging behaviour and first aid. Foster carers also receive at least one unannounced visit every year.

The agency's practice demonstrates a commitment to minimising the risk of harm and promoting children's well-being. Children learn the importance of personal safety and understand their vulnerability and potential hazards. There are currently no issues in relation to bullying or children being missing from care. Children are settled

and feel comfortable talking about past experiences, which includes disclosing historical abuse. Children are not displaying any ongoing behavioural issues in their placements. They are adhering to the guidance and boundaries and enabled to successfully manage their challenging moods. Foster carers work closely with a wide range of professionals to effectively implement interventions of support. Placing authorities highlight that foster carers are 'very good at encouraging positive behaviour'. There is a good risk management system and risk assessments are available for each child.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children benefit from an agency which is growing and continually evolving to meet their needs. The agency is run by social work professionals who pride themselves on providing a family-like service. Placing authorities state that the agency offers 'high standards of care'. They are impressed with the out of hours service, sibling discounts and the agency's responsive approach to care planning. They highlight that 'compared to other agencies, we do not get a lot of issues'. Foster carers feel valued and they enjoy an end of year party which rewards their achievements. Leaders and managers are aware of the areas requiring further development which includes evidencing consultation with children. An example of this is taking into account children's views in the staff appraisal process.

Leaders and managers are up-to-date on the new legislative changes within fostering. They cascade this information down to staff and foster carers, which ensures they are all aware of recent developments. The agency has a very comprehensive website which is able to translate information into various languages. The website includes the agency's aims and objective, Statement of Purpose, application forms and other relevant documentation. The website is very user friendly enabling foster carers and other interested parties to access pertinent information. There are innovative plans to introduce a social networking element for foster carers to further extend their levels of support. Children benefit from their own guide. This provides children with the contact details of a wide range of national agencies. It also includes a glossary of terms associated within being in foster care and other useful information.

The agency has strong links with several local authorities, universities and colleges. Leaders and managers positively contribute to the social care field by providing placements and apprenticeships to social work and social care students. This is an agency which promotes learning and professional development. Staff benefit from on-going training, supervision and annual appraisals. An example of this is the plans to sponsor social work training for unqualified staff. Senior leaders recognise more staff are needed and a practice manager post is being introduced. The agency has a good quality assurance system which clearly identifies how the service impacts upon children's lives. Placing authorities also undertake their own monitoring inspections which provide external confirmation of the positive outcomes. The agency values external oversight and contracts a social work professional to undertake an

independent reviewing officer role.

The agency has complied with the two recommendations from the previous inspection. Children benefit from a more robust approach to assessing foster carers suitability. This enables the fostering panel and decision maker to make an objective approval decision. The agency's leadership and management arrangements are more effective as the registered manager is currently completing the recognised vocational qualification. The registered manager has also increased their knowledge through undertaking relevant project management and performance appraisal courses. There is a strong commitment to building a sustainable service. The agency is financially viable and foster carers confirm they are paid on time. Leaders and managers are concentrating on their vision to create a more strategic service. This includes introducing a tailor-made computerised recording system which foster carers can access. In addition to developing more wraparound services to support each child, leaders and managers are united in their vision to improve lives and create a 'well-functioning organisation'.

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.