

Moments

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Moments is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in Whitstable, Kent. During the twelve months prior to this inspection carers in seven households had retired or resigned, but 13 new fostering households had been approved. This has resulted in a nett increase of available placements. At the point of this inspection 76 approved foster carers in 41 separate fostering households offered 67 placements. A large majority (78%) of these placements were filled. The service provides emergency, short, medium and long-term, or permanent foster placements for children and young people. Other services include bridging or pre-adoption placements, parent and child placements and respite.

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 and young people are carefully matched with competent foster carers who meet the individual and sometimes complex needs children and young people have. A strong focus on long term or permanent placements leads to extended periods of stability in the lives of many children and young people. They thrive as a result of the consistent and continuous care they receive. Placing social workers confirm the outstanding progress children and young people make. The negative effects of early life experiences followed by frequent placement breakdowns are frequently overcome by the loving care provided by committed and passionate foster carers.

Children and young people are positive about the care they receive. They are proud of their achievements and the changes they see in themselves over time. They build strong attachments with their foster carers and others in fostering households. This helps them to feel safe and confidently express themselves. Carers and staff work hard to help children and young people understand that their opinions count and that they can influence decisions that affect them.

An enthusiastic and professional staff team value the support provided to them by a knowledgeable and nurturing Registered Manager. Research is used to inform best practice and opportunities are taken by individuals that support their continued professional development. In turn this is utilised in providing good quality training and support to foster carers. This enables foster carers to understand and undertake their role effectively, working together with external agencies to recognise and meet the needs of children and young people.

A strong leadership and management team demonstrate good oversight of the service that promotes a sound understanding of areas for development and specific strengths. Their knowledge is supported through dedicated use of an online system that centrally records information from carers, staff and managers in one place. This helps to track progress and outcomes for children and young people.

An effective fostering panel is presented with good quality assessments and reports. Reasons for recommendations are clearly recorded by each panel member. Together with formal minutes these documents inform prompt action by the Agency Decision Maker. Qualitative feedback from panel members informs practice and helps to maintain and at times raise the standard of assessments.

Two regulatory shortfalls are identified through this inspection. These relate to the recording of an employment check and the prompt notification of a significant event. The impact of these upon children and young people is minimal and leaders and managers took immediate action to rectify matters. Consequently they do not significantly influence the judgements for the service. A recommendation is made to ensure that leaders and managers always keep up-to-date with any changes in regulation or national minimum standards and ensure the agency's work is always consistent with these.

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
20	ensure that they do not employ a person to work for the	27/02/2015

(2011)	purposes of the fostering service unless satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1 (Regulation 20(3)(c))	
36 (2011)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of Schedule 7 takes place, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. (Regulation 36(1) and Schedule 7)	27/02/2015

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and national minimum standards, in particular that managers keep up-to-date with any changes in legislation. (NMS 25.3)

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Within this agency there is a strong emphasis on enabling children and young people to benefit from remaining with the same family for extensive periods. Sixty-two per cent of all children and young people currently placed with the agency have been in the same placement for more than one year. Of these, more than a third (35%) have been placed for more than three years. The majority of all placements with the agency (58%) are categorised as long-term or permanent. This longevity, consistency and continuity brings real benefits to children and young people. After difficult and challenging events in their early lives they grow and develop through positive experiences of family life. For some they experience significant stability following numerous placement breakdowns. Whenever it is possible and appropriate, brothers and sisters are enabled to stay together. At the point of this inspection sibling groups living together represented nearly a quarter (22%) of all placements. This helps further to assist children and young people to know continuity and consistency in their lives.

Positive changes in the lives of children and young people are evidenced well through excellent use of online recording systems. A wide range of outcomes relating to individual children and young people are consistently tracked. While some children and young people exercise their choice not to involve themselves in this process others actively engage and honestly reflect on how things have changed for them. This contributes to their understanding of how aspects of their lives improve through the care they receive. They enjoy reflecting on daily experiences and are actively encouraged to take responsibility for making further progress.

Children and young people say and demonstrate that they are able to share their wishes and feelings in ways that contribute to their daily lives. This enables them to

know and feel that they play an integral part in the lives of their fostering households.

Children and young people whose behaviour in school previously put them at risk of permanent exclusion remain in the same schools and make demonstrably exceptional progress. They enthusiastically share awards they receive for effort, attainment and attendance. They are rightly proud of their achievements. Children and young people benefit from strong values relating to education that exist within the agency. This leads to almost all (96%) eligible children and young people being in an education placement that has been identified to meet their individual needs. For the very small minority who do not have a school placement, clear plans are in place to rectify this situation swiftly.

The physical health needs of children and young people are carefully considered and effectively met. Through close liaison with appropriate health professionals, identified medical conditions are managed well. When appropriate this includes formal reviews of medication that result in positive changes for children and young people. While the agency does not provide any formal therapeutic services internally, children and young people access these through provision in the community to meet their specific needs.

Children and young people access and engage with a wide range of activities in the communities where they live, either individually or together as a family. Through involvement in clubs and groups children and young people develop new hobbies, skills and interests. They grasp opportunities to socialise, making new relationships. Foster carers appropriately use authority delegated to them to support the development of positive friendships. Children and young people develop further through new experiences when holidaying together with foster households. As a result children and young people are included in family events and at the same time, absorb new and different cultures when travelling abroad.

Placing social workers speak convincingly about the positive impacts that result from the care children and young people receive. One commented, 'The care they receive has led to a stabilising influence'. Another said, 'She appears to be doing really well and is progressing all the time.' Further comments from placing social workers include, 'I have seen him become far more settled' adding later, 'I have watched him mature.'

When changes are necessary, for example when foster families move house, children and young people are fully engaged with this process. Careful consideration and planning by foster carers enables children and young people to manage new experiences and learn to positively accept changes in their lives.

At the outset of any new placements with this agency children and young people are helped to settle. They are provided with written and pictorial profiles of fostering households to help visualise the families identified for them. Whenever possible, visits take place prior to placements. This helps children and young people to prepare to move. Comprehensive, but age appropriate guides are produced that

inform early experiences and set out what children and young people can expect. While it was found that contact details for Ofsted were missing from these documents, leaders and managers acted immediately to rectify this. This prompt action taken during the inspection negates the need for a requirement to be made.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are very positive about their experiences. They make comments like, 'This is the best family ever.' They describe their carers as 'nice' and 'fun'. They qualify this saying, 'They take me out everywhere.' Placing social workers describe foster carers as 'Very dedicated and committed to caring for [young person].' Others identify that children and young people are fully integrated into their new families through inclusion in family occasions, celebrations and holidays. Another described specific foster carers as 'very high quality' and praised what she saw as the innately therapeutic nature of the care offered by them. For some children and young people this high quality care helps to overcome difficult early life experiences followed by numerous placement breakdowns. As a result children and young people thrive and their placements are sustained.

The agency recruits carers with the skills to offer the range of services set out in its statement of purpose. The majority of approved carers are from a white British ethnic background. Consequently a high proportion of the children and young people placed by the agency also come from this background. Leaders and managers highlight that this is an accurate reflection of the demographical areas where the agency currently recruits. However, they actively seek and welcome applications from people representing all parts of these communities.

A dedicated team ensures that children and young people with complex needs and who exhibit challenging behaviours are matched carefully with foster carers. This task is taken extremely seriously and placements are only offered when the agency genuinely believes that they can and will meet the needs of children and young people. As a result, less than 1% of all referrals made to the agency during the past year have resulted in placements. This contributes to the stability and longevity of placements and supports the consistency of care children and young people receive. One placing social worker commented, 'I am absolutely clear that these are the right carers for the child; the match is absolutely perfect.' Unplanned endings do occur, but only as a last resort. Significant efforts are made in conjunction with placing authorities to avoid this whenever possible. Invariably children and young people transfer to other carers within the agency, but when necessary they move on to more specialist services when such a need is identified.

Without exception foster carers spoken to through this inspection were positive about the support they receive from the agency. They build close and effective relationships with supervising social workers over time. Regular monthly supervision visits help carers to understand their role and the part they play in delivering positive change in the lives of children and young people. Close liaison with placing

authorities supports individualised care planning processes. One local authority social worker described the quality of communication from the foster carers to them as 'absolutely brilliant'. Supervising social workers pro-actively respond to requests for help in circumstances where difficulties are experienced. Foster carers genuinely look forward to attending local support groups each month. They utilise opportunities to express their feelings and emotions, seek advice and guidance from others or simply to share positive experiences, information and advice. This augments the direct support from supervising social workers and serves to develop positive practice in the agency.

Foster carers are well trained to deliver good quality care to children and young people. Attendance at training is good. Foster carers see training as important in enabling them to meet the needs of children and young people. Consequently they make a commitment to attend. The agency ensures that all training delivered during the daytime is repeated during evenings. This enables full time carers to attend while children and young people are at school, but also allows other carers to attend after work. Carers describe the quality of training as good, but acknowledge that some courses are less interesting than others. They say that they provide feedback after each course. Leaders and managers confirm this and utilise this feedback to influence positive changes to future training plans. The vast majority of foster carers have attained the recognised Training, Support and Development Standards that are set out in national minimum standards. Very few fostering households are out of time in completing this in stipulated timescales. Where this is the case a clear action plan is in place to ensure this is rectified.

An effective fostering panel functions well. Clear arrangements for chairing panels are in place with a chair and vice chair who bring significant knowledge and experience. The quality assurance function of the panel is fully understood. Through providing evaluative feedback, assessments of new foster carers are written to a good standard in an informative, but accessible style. The central list of panel members includes independent people from a variety of backgrounds with a range of skills. This augments panel members from within the agency. Quality of care issues are picked up by the panel and addressed accordingly to ensure that the overall standard of care within the agency is maintained.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people say they feel safe and demonstrate this through their presentation, their interaction with carers and through the progress they make. Social workers from placing authorities say that the care children and young people receive helps to keep them safe. They identify that children and young people develop from the point of not being able to express how they feel. This progress is achieved through building trust in their foster carers. This helps them to know and understand that it is safe to open up to others. Foster carers and staff work hard to help children and young people realise that their views count.

Managers and staff work closely with placing authorities to ensure they have all relevant information. This assists in planning to care safely and ensures that the unique needs of each child or young person are known and understood. Foster carers produce safer caring plans to reflect these individual needs. A child focused ethos coupled with an open culture within the agency supports a willingness to recognise when there are concerns or improvements are required. Issues relating to the quality of care foster parents provide are referred to the agency's fostering panel. This helps to maintain good standards. If required appropriate referrals are made to external safeguarding agencies. This helps to promote the safety and well-being of children and young people.

Supervising social workers and the Registered Manager demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding in identifying risks relating to the potential sexual exploitation of children and young people. When necessary they pro-actively share concerns with relevant external safeguarding agencies. This helps to secure referrals to inform processes that safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

Foster carers and staff recognise the risks and vulnerabilities that result from children and young people going missing. They demonstrate good awareness of formal protocols relating to children who run away or go missing from home and care. Any subtle differences in protocols between placing authorities are addressed at initial placement planning meetings. Constructive work with local authorities and the positive relationships foster carers form with children and young people help to minimise risks. Clear documentation helps to inform this work through the completion of risk assessments. As a result the incidence of children and young people going missing is reducing over time.

A robust policy sets out measures to prevent children and young people going missing and the expectations of all concerned should this happen. However, leaders and managers acknowledged that they were unaware of the revised requirement to share this policy and have it agreed by local police. This was promptly addressed during the inspection. Consequently a statutory requirement is not made. While a formal response had not been received from police to confirm they had agreed the policy, leaders and managers had opened communication with relevant specialist officers.

Recruitment practices in respect of staff and panel members are usually robust. Templates clearly set out the practice expected to evidence that regulations and national minimum standards are met. However, the inspector found one example where a second reference could not be evidenced for a member of the panel. There was no actual impact from this shortfall and the potential impact was tackled through prompt action by leaders and managers to address the matter. However, a requirement is set to ensure the necessary standards are consistently met in future.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

A knowledgeable and nurturing Registered Manager leads a passionate and committed team. She is supported by an active and visible leadership team consisting of the responsible individual and other directors. The Registered Manager's breadth of experience is strongly valued by supervising social workers who consult the Registered Manager and draw upon up-to-date research to inform their practice. One said, 'The Registered Manager encourages you to learn and she has tremendous resources.' Opportunities for the continued professional development of all staff are identified and met through effective supervision. Newly qualified staff are enabled to complete their first Assessed and Supported year in Employment (ASYE). More experienced staff are able to access external courses to support and develop their practice and learning. All these factors contribute to the formation of a competent and professional workforce who demonstrate a clear understanding of the challenges of caring for vulnerable children and young people.

A clear statement of purpose concisely sets out the aims and objectives of the service in a straightforward and accessible format. The child focused nature of the document helps to ensure that actual and potential users of the agency are clear about the services provided.

Leaders and managers develop and maintain positive working relationships with officers and commissioners from placing authorities. This includes discussions around the identification of future requirements of local authorities. This augments the intelligence the agency gathers around emerging trends and patterns of referrals and helps to develop plans for future. For example, leaders and managers are seeking to expand the opportunity to deliver more parent and child placements having identified this as a growing need.

Rigorous and effective monitoring of the service is aided by comprehensive use of a recognised online information system. This is used by carers and staff alike to record all aspects of the agency's work and to track the individual progress of children and young people. By providing all with relevant access, information is shared more effectively and efficiently. For example, supervising social workers are able to review daily records completed by foster carers in advance of supervision visits. This helps them to maintain awareness of significant developments and to support carers appropriately. Records of supervision visits can be accessed by foster carers as soon as they are completed. This enables foster carers to be clear about advice or direction given to them by supervising social workers during visits. Leaders and managers have close links with the software manufacturer and are able to influence positive changes in the system. All users have access to technical support to assist when problems occur.

Financial monitoring of the service is also comprehensive. Clear planning and robust oversight ensures the financial viability of the service and ensures that sufficient reserves are maintained. The financial security of the agency allows for future plans to be considered, made and carried through.

Effective action was taken to respond to the three recommendations made at the previous inspection of the agency. Training for foster carers in the management and

administration of medication is now an integral part of foster carer training. The inspector found that foster carers adhere to clear policies and procedures relating to this. A written record of each supervision meeting with staff members is now made. These reflect that supervision takes place regularly, often more than once each month. Records refer to casework held by supervising social workers, but also address the future development needs of foster carers and staff alike. A formal organisational plan has superseded the development plan that was produced and shared with Ofsted soon after the last inspection. Regular, monthly management meetings now take place which inform all future plans for the service. As a result, leaders and managers have a sound understanding of the service, its strengths and areas where improvement or development is required.

During this inspection the Registered Manager acknowledged that she was not aware of recent changes in legislation affecting the agency. A consequent lack of understanding of action required in relation to the agency's policy on children and young people going missing is addressed elsewhere in this report. However, the changes also required the agency to notify external agencies, including Ofsted of any concerns relating to a child or young person who is suspected of being involved in sexual exploitation. One example was identified where Ofsted had not been notified appropriately. While the agency rectified this shortfall during the inspection there had been a delay in forwarding this notification. Consequently Ofsted was not able to effectively monitor or review the concerns. The impact of this shortfall was mitigated by the robust and proactive work of the supervising social worker in sharing concerns with other agencies. The nature of such an effective response serves to promote the safety and welfare of the young people concerned and others who may be affected. However, a requirement is made to ensure that all notifications are made without delay in future. A recommendation is also made to ensure that leaders and managers keep up-to-date with future changes in legislation.

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.