

Foster Careline

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Foster Careline Limited is an independent fostering agency, which is a limited company. It operates from an office base in Hooton, just outside Ellesmere port. The agency provides foster care services for children with a broad range of needs and placements are available on a long-term, short-term and emergency basis. It also specialises in providing parent and child fostering placements. It provides placements for a number of local authorities in the North West of England and in the Greater Manchester area. At the time of the inspection the agency had twelve children and young people living with nine fostering families.

The agency's staff team comprises of the manager, two full time supervising social workers, as well as an independent fostering assessor, panel chairperson and Agency Decision-Maker. The agency also has a full-time administrative support staff member.

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 is a good fostering service, which is well managed. It specialises in providing mother and baby placements and has been highly successful in supporting mothers to develop their parenting skills and to effectively care for their baby. This has enabled both mother and baby to return to their community and continue caring for their child.

It also provides children and young people with a variety of fostering placements to meet their needs. The agency's foster carers provide young people with exceptional care. This enables them to make outstanding progress and achieve excellent outcomes during their time in foster care.

The agency makes sure that any assessments undertaken are thorough and robust. This ensures that carers are suitable, well prepared and equipped to look after children and young people. Ongoing support to foster carers is very good and the agency provides them with a high standard of training. This means that carers are able to provide a good standard of care to children and young people and good relationships develop between them.

Young people spoken with said, 'They feel safe' and they are able to make progress in their foster placements. Placements are well monitored by the agency. Appropriate risk assessments are in place and safe caring practices implemented. The agency usually works well with placing authorities to ensure children and young people are well matched with foster carers, who require a placement.

The agency is well managed. Its management team is totally committed to providing an excellent service and together with the staff are focused on the continuous improvement and development of the service. The management, supervision and training of staff is good and as a result they are able to carry out their roles effectively. Staff and foster carers are consulted and able to influence the development of the agency. The agency is also looking at ways to engage children and young people more effectively, so that they are able to influence developments in the service.

During the inspection specific elements of the agency's practice were not as strong as they could be. For example, although the agency's safeguarding practice is usually highly effective there was an issue in relation to a young person going missing from home. This was because, despite strenuous efforts by the agency to obtain comprehensive information regarding the young person, the full information was not shared with the agency at the time of placement. Consequently, effective strategies were not put in place to reduce this risky behaviour. As a result, this impaired the agency's ability to keep young people safe. The agency though has now effectively addressed this. As a result, the child sexual exploitation (CSE) policy and procedure, as well as the missing from home procedure have been amended. To improve the agency's service, changes have also been made in relation to the agency's procedures when notifying applicants that their application to foster is not going to be progressed. The agency is also amending the children's guide so that children and young people can obtain the contact details of the independent reviewing officer, should they wish to make a complaint.

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
27 (2011)	ensure the fostering service having regard to any information obtained, notifies the applicant in writing, giving their reasons as to why their application is not progressed. (The amendment of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 by The Care planning , Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, Regulation 26(1B)	31/01/2015

Recommendations

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

- ensure the children's guide contains details as to how a child can contact their independent reviewing officer, if they have any concerns (NMS16.4)
- ensure 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.

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

Judgement outcome: **outstanding**.

Young people fostered by the agency are very effectively supported to make exceptionally good progress and achieve excellent outcomes in all areas of their development.

Young people are given as much information as possible about their carers before they are placed, even in emergency situations. Careful introductions take place that helps young people to understand and influence what is happening to them. The agency's young person's guide is produced in different formats to make it accessible to children and young people of different ages.

Young people are carefully matched with very well trained and supported carers who are fully assessed for their suitability. Carers have a very good understanding of their individual needs and they go to great lengths to ensure they are met. Children and

young people develop extremely good relationships with their carers. This enables them to experience a positive family life, whether this is on a short or long term basis. They also receive exceptional care and are able to experience and enjoy a variety of extremely positive experiences. This enables children and young people to make considerable progress and achieve excellent outcomes in their lives. Placement stability in this agency is very good with only one un-planned placement ending in three years.

A number of professionals spoke extremely positively about how well matched the carers were with the young people. Some said, 'It is an excellent match.' The carers are excellent, as is the placement'. Another social worker said, 'The placement is fantastic, the best carers that (the name of the young person) has ever been with'. Another social worker said, 'it is a fantastic placement, I could not have asked for anything more'. Two parents said, 'The placement is brilliant, it is totally meeting her needs. They are doing a great job'.

Young people receive any medical help and support they need. They are registered with all primary health services and are encouraged to have their annual medical checks. They are also supported to access any specialist health provision that they may need. Young people take part in a wide range of activities which increase their skills and self-confidence and they are encouraged to keep fit and healthy. In situations, where young people have specific health needs, foster carers work effectively with a wide range of health professionals to ensure they are met. As a result, young people's health significantly improves while in foster care. For example, one young child, who prior to being placed with the foster carers was failing to thrive, is now reaching their developmental milestones.

Young people make excellent educational progress and are achieving at a high level, given their educational starting point. They are provided with a great deal of encouragement and support to attend school and achieve well. As a result, school attendance levels are very high, for example, 100%. The agency and carers carefully monitor children and young people's attendance and achievement. The agency, together with its carers work with other agencies, wherever necessary, to address any educational issues or to provide any additional support to young people so their educational needs are met. The agency and its carers place great importance on young people's education. They are also ambitious for young people and this helps young people have their own aspirations and to work towards these.

Young people are well cared for and fully involved in the family life and activities of their foster carers. Their lives are improved by the work of their foster carers and the range of activities that they undertake. Young people are supported to have contact with their families, if this is appropriate and in accordance with their care plan. Foster carers fully understand the importance of young people's contact with their families and work hard to facilitate it. They also monitor contact arrangements to ensure they are beneficial for the young person and offer good practical and emotional support. Foster carers usually develop positive relationships with the young people's birth families. Consequently, contact is a positive experience for young people and enables them to maintain their relationships with their family.

Young people who are approaching adulthood receive very high levels of support in order to ensure that they develop the necessary skills for independence. As a result, a number of young people who have returned home or to their community are successfully living independently.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency's foster carer recruitment process ensures it is able to assess and approve the right sort of carers for the young people who need families. People who are considering fostering, are provided with detailed information, at an early stage, about what they can expect. This allows them and the agency to make an early decision as to whether fostering is for them. Rigorous screening at this stage helps to ensure the suitability of people who are making an application to be assessed as foster carers.

The agency's work to assess and prepare prospective foster carers is thorough and robust. Suitability checks are rigorous and the preparation and training process is effective in considering applicants' competence, attitudes and motivation to foster children. Assessments are carried out in a timely manner. They are thorough; evidence based and ensure that carers have the competence and aptitudes needed. This means that carers who complete the assessment process and are approved are able to provide high quality foster care to the young people placed with them.

The agency's fostering panel is correctly constituted with members with a suitable range of appropriate backgrounds and skills. Panel processes are effective with information being made available to panel members in a confidential and timely manner. Panels held are quorate with minutes clearly recording who is present. The Panel gives careful consideration of the cases presented and makes well-judged recommendations to the agency decision maker. The quality of assessments and accompanying information presented to panel is of a high quality. Once the panel has made its recommendation, applicants are informed verbally of the recommendation made that day. The decisions to approve foster carers are usually made promptly and applicants are informed of the outcome in a timely manner. However, on one occasion, this was not the case and the agency decision-maker did not make the decision within the required time scale.

The agency provides its foster carers with a high standard of supervision and support. Supervision and support visits are very frequent and well recorded. Supervision covers the foster carers' own development as well as monitoring and guiding the care provided to, and outcomes being achieved by, the young people. Agency workers maintain close involvement with young people in placement. They meet them regularly to ensure their needs are being met and they are able to express their views. The agency involves foster carers in various aspects of its work and consults with them about future developments. Foster carers are actively

listened to by the agency and any difficulties or concerns raised by foster carers are promptly addressed.

Foster carers have development plans in place and a range of mandatory and optional training is provided to them. A very large majority of the agency's carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. The agency carefully monitors carers' training and considers this in their annual reviews. These reviews include the views of young people, who are in placement, the supervising social workers and the children's social workers. This ensures that the agency obtains a comprehensive, robust picture of the foster carers' work and their ongoing suitability to foster.

The agency works well with placing authorities to match young people and their foster carers in a careful and considered manner. Full information about the young person is crucial to this process. The agency therefore works very hard with local authorities to achieve this and to address any shortfalls of information or support. This careful matching and very good ongoing support for placements mean that young people benefit from stable foster homes which meet their needs.

The agency and its carers maintain good communication with young people's social workers and keep them fully informed of young people's progress. Agency staff support foster carers to advocate for the young person in placement and to be a full part of the team working with the young person. Delegated consent arrangements are identified when placements are made and the agency works hard to ensure that carers are aware of and supported to work to these arrangements. This helps ensure that young people receive the care they need.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency works very hard to obtain comprehensive information about young people when they are placed. However, despite the agency's sterling efforts, such comprehensive information is not always provided and this can impair the agency and the foster carers' ability to keep young people safe.

Clear risk assessments are developed, regularly reviewed and updated. Foster carers have safe caring guidelines in place based on each young person's needs. These help ensure that care is provided to young people in a way that helps to keep them safe while allowing them to take age appropriate risks. Young people feel safe and well cared for in their foster homes. When asked about their carers one young person said, 'They are fantastic; I want to stay here forever.'

The agency's young person's guide gives young people clear information about how they can make a complaint or express any concerns they may have. Supervising social workers visit young people in placement regularly and spend time alone with them in order to seek their views and ensure that they feel safe.

Young people rarely go missing, or are absent without authority, from their foster homes. Where the agency or its carers identify that there is an increased risk of a young person going missing; there is now an effective recording system and procedures in place to proactively address this.

The agency now has good policies and procedures in place to ensure that young people are safeguarded. The agency works closely with placing authorities and those in which young people live with their foster carers. The agency keeps copies of the various authorities' safeguarding, child protection and missing from home and care procedures and protocols. Where safeguarding or child protection concerns do occur the agency responds promptly to these. Notifies the relevant agencies and cooperates with any action required to ensure that young people are safe.

The agency's recruitment processes for foster carers, staff and panel members, are robust, with thorough checks undertaken in respect of their background and suitability. This helps to ensure that those people who have contact with young people or sensitive information about their whereabouts, are suitable to work with them. This helps keep young people safe.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency's statement of purpose clearly describes its operation. It is available on the agency's website, as well as being provided to all interested parties. The agency's children's guide provides information for young people about being fostered who they can speak to and how to complain. However, it does not contain information about how a child can contact the independent reviewing officer. The guide though is accessible to children of different ages and reading ability.

The agency has good working relationships with the regional commissioning bodies and works well with placing authorities to ensure that the care delivered meets young people's needs and is in line with their local authority plan of care. This helps ensure that young people get the support and are able to access the services they need.

The agency works well with its foster carers to ensure that young people benefit from and are involved in the care delivered to them. Foster placements are well monitored and the work of carers is well supervised and reviewed. Foster carers are valued and feel they are very much part of a team. There is a strong commitment to participation and inclusion in the service, which is genuine and purposeful. This enables all who are connected with the fostering service to feel and be part of the service development. For example, foster carers are fully involved in the agency's service development through their one-to-one supervision sessions and regular support groups. This ensures foster carers are valued, respected and work effectively in partnership with agency staff and other professionals involved with the children and young people.

Children and young people's views are also highly valued and respected, The agency is currently looking at ways of engaging young people more effectively so that they are able to influence developments in the service.

The agency monitors outcomes for children on an ongoing basis and strives to ensure the very best outcomes are achieved for them. The agency's recording system is good and both foster carers and children's records are of a good standard. Information from the record systems is also easily obtained. For example, the number and reasons for unplanned endings to placements, the reasons young people go missing from their foster home and the ethnicity of some young people and their carers.

The agency is well organised and managed. Both managers and staff demonstrate a real commitment to providing a high standard of care to all children and young people placed with the agency's foster carers. They all work to a high standard, have a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of the service and are constantly looking at ways to further improve the service.

The agency has systems in place to monitor the activities of the agency. At times though, these are not sufficiently robust. For example, in one case the agency did not confirm in writing to the applicant the reasons why they were not progressing the application from Stage one assessment to Stage 2. This matter has not been addressed and the learning from this has resulted in some changes to the agency's procedures.

Staffing levels are appropriate for the size of the agency. Social workers are well managed, supervised and have access to good training opportunities. Workloads are suitable to enable social workers to spend time getting to know the young people, seek their views and to ensure that suitable care is being provided to them. Good administrative arrangements are in place which fully supports the operation of the agency.

The agency ensures all notifiable events are submitted to Ofsted within the required timescales and any action is followed up by the Registered Manager. This demonstrates that the agency is taking appropriate action to promote the welfare of children and young people in their care.

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.