

Perpetual Care/ Perpetual Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector	Caroline Jones
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Responsible individual	Tahir Khan
Date of last inspection	26/09/2011

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is an independent fostering agency. It recruits, trains and supports a range of families and single people who provide both short and longer term placements for children and young people. Currently, there are 19 children and young people accessing the fostering service and 21 fostering households. This agency was registered in April 2005.

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 agency that strives to improve the outcomes of children and young people across all aspects of their development. Children and young people are making good progress and feel safe and settled in their foster placement. This is underpinned by high quality care built upon stable and successful placements, where unplanned endings are minimal. Foster carers comment: 'I can't imagine life without the children, they are part of the family.'

The agency is growing steadily and there are a range of carers available from differing backgrounds to meet the needs of children and young people. Foster carers are subject to thorough assessment, training and supervision processes that complement their skills in providing children and young people with the care they need to grow into confident young adults. Foster carers are genuinely dedicated to

their role, the majority of whom confirm high standards of satisfaction with the service.

Effective partnership working with other agencies enhances the services around children and young people to ensure their individual needs are met. Furthermore, foster carers feel very much a part of the overall team in meeting these needs. This helps to make positive matches in line with the aims of the agency's Statement of Purpose. Foster carers comment; 'The staff are excellent, the new manager is very knowledgeable and approachable.'

The Registered Manager and team manager provide clear leadership and accountability. The stable staff team feel exceptionally well supported and enjoy their work. The management team work closely with staff through regular, quality supervision, appraisal and team meetings. This further promotes the quality of care provided to children and young people in foster placements.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that unannounced visits are recorded in detail to demonstrate the quality of care provided and take into account children and young people's wishes and feelings (NMS 21.8)
- ensure that written records where a child goes missing, detail action taken by the foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away and any action taken in light of those reasons (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that the policy and practical arrangements for enabling children to remain with their foster carers into legal adulthood, are understood by foster carers. (NMS 12.4)

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

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people feel very much a part of their family. They live with their brothers and sisters, in line with the placing authorities care plan in stable placements. This is the foundation for the good outcomes achieved by them. Children and young people feel safe and are learning to trust their foster carers and develop secure attachments to them. Young people comment: 'I like them they care about me I am part of the family.'

Children and young people live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and social wellbeing is promoted. They have access to a trained clinical therapist to support them individually. Health care plans are in place along with

signed parental consent forms for medical treatment to ensure that children and young people receive the treatment they need when they need it. They engage in physical and social activities including football, quad biking, singing, dance and after school clubs. They pursue their individual interests and foster carers and the agency promote this. These practices make sure that children and young people enjoy good health and wellbeing.

Educational monitoring is now a key focus of the agency Children and young people attend school regularly and are achieving their potential. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection. Staff and foster carers successfully advocate for children and young people to secure school placements in instances where they have been out of education. Young people enjoy learning. Foster carers complement this through learning activities beyond the school day including extra tuition.

Children and young people's views are sought through various consultation methods, including meetings, such as the 'Boom Group' and questionnaires. Children and young people also have access to a children's rights officer, which provides the opportunity for them to raise any issues independently of the agency. Furthermore, young people understand their right to complain if they feel unhappy, concerned or bullied. Consequently, the voice of the child is listened to and responded to.

Children and young people stay in touch with their families where this is in their best interests. Foster carers actively support their contact with their brothers and sisters . Any issues arising are handled sensitively by foster carers enabling children to develop emotional resilience and an understanding of their background and identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The agency has a robust approach to the recruitment and assessment of foster carers, as outlined within their Statement of Purpose. There are processes in place to promptly follow initial enquiries and filter out unsuitable applicants at an early stage. Recruitment campaigns are on-going to ensure that foster carers have the skills required for the role. The assessments are conducted by qualified social workers and generally provide an evaluative account of prospective foster carers. This allows the agency to ensure they are suitable people to take on this important role. This further ensures the quality of care to children and young people.

Foster carers refer to the preparation, assessment, support and training as 'very good' and 'much improved'. They participate in 'Skills to Foster' preparation training and further training courses to enhance their knowledge of children living away from their birth families. Additionally, some foster carers are undertaking higher education courses, which demonstrates the agency and foster carers commitment to continued professional development. These opportunities help to equip foster carers with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the children and young people placed.

Foster carers benefit from good structured support through home visits and

supervision meetings. In addition supervising social workers telephone them regularly and there is a consistent out-of-hours service.

They feel very much a part of the team and are involved in placement planning. The vast majority of foster carers have achieved the training, support and development standards in foster care within a year of approval. Foster carers report high levels of satisfaction with the agency. Foster carers comment: 'I am very happy, feel well supported, we can contact the social workers at any time and they answer.' These practices assist foster carers in providing high quality care to children and young people.

Foster carers are committed to including children and young people within their family life and long-term arrangements are in place to provide permanence to young people. However, the agency's 'staying put' policy is not clear to foster carers. It does not enable them to understand the practical arrangements that are required to help children and young people to remain in their foster placement into adulthood.

The panel members have been recruited from a range of diverse backgrounds, knowledge and expertise, the majority are independent members including the chair. It provides a good quality assurance function and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker regarding the suitability of prospective applicants. Annual reviews of carers are referred to panel for consideration. The quality of annual reviews presented to panel is variable but generally provide an informed account of the quality of care provided by carers within the review period. This ensures that carers remain fit to undertake their role effectively.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **good**.

Children and young people are part of the family and confirm they feel safe and protected in their homes and in the wider community. They say that they do not experience difficulties with regards to bullying or intimidation. Safeguarding is a firm focus within the agency and regular case management meetings and risk assessment reviews take place. This contributes to managing and reducing risks to children and young people. Moreover, foster carers are proactive and work hard to ensure children and young people understand these risks and how young people can protect themselves. These practices promote the safety and welfare of children and young people.

Safeguarding, child protection and safer caring courses are all mandatory training for foster carers.

Up-to-date policies and procedures are in place to guide foster carers and social workers in caring for children and young people safely. Foster carers understand the significance of disclosures made by children. As a result of safeguarding training and support foster carers are aware of procedures to follow in these instances.

Allegations against foster carers are dealt with promptly and effectively to protect children and young people against potential harm, whilst also providing support to individual foster carers. External safeguarding agencies are involved appropriately. The agency works with them to bring about timely resolutions. Established procedures allow for consideration by the fostering panel when the approval of foster carers requires further appraisal.

An un-announced visits procedure is in place to protect young people. This stipulates a frequency of two visits per year and criteria to be evaluated during the visit. Although these visits have been undertaken, the children have not always been present and the reports do not provide a detailed or evaluative account of the information gathered to assure the quality of care. While shortfalls are identified these are not widespread and have not had a negative impact upon the welfare of children and young people to-date.

Recruitment and vetting procedures are thorough and apply to staff, foster carers and panel members. This ensures their suitability to work with children and young people.

There are relatively low incidences of children and young people going missing from home, substantially lower at 3.1 instances per child than the national average of 19 per child. However, records do not detail the full action and response to young people on their return home. Again, recording processes have become confused as some foster carers complete the records and others are told that the social workers complete them. The Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols are referred to in policies and procedures and copies from different authorities are available within the agency's electronic systems.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **good**.

The leadership and management arrangements have changed since the last inspection. The Registered Manager has been in post since February 2013 and has brought stability and improvement to the agency. A team manager is also in post and is an integral part of the management team. Together they provide leadership and accountability to enable staff to fully understand their roles and responsibilities. The new leadership team have extensive knowledge relevant to the role and have ambitious plans for the future of the agency. The service continues to develop and focuses upon promoting and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people.

The agency is operating in accordance with its Statement of Purpose and is meeting the conditions of registration. Additionally, there is a children's guide and welcome pack in place to provide information to children and young people. Both documents are shared with foster carers and placing authorities. These are also published on the agency's website. The agency has adopted the Foster Carers' Charter in consultation

with foster carers which reinforces their commitment to quality of care and support.

The agency is ambitious and has plans for the development of the agency. For example, an impact assessment is to be introduced to strengthen the evidence of matching. The four recommendations from the previous inspection have been fully addressed, for example improved monitoring processes are in place and gaps in information from placing authorities is rigorously pursued and secured by staff. All significant events are reported to the relevant bodies to ensure effective partnership working in the best interests of young people.

The management team work well with placing authorities to ensure children and young people's needs are met. Commissioners and social workers from placing authorities are on the whole very complimentary about the care provided to children and young people. They quote reputation, stability of placements and quality of care as the reasons for choosing the agency. Quality assurance processes are in place and reports provide a thorough review of the service to children and young people. Annual data forms are submitted to Ofsted promptly. These practices drive continuous improvement in outcomes for children and young people.

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.