

Capstone

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| Responsible individual | Mrs Yvette Schemet |
| Date of last inspection | N/A |

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Capstone Foster Care (North) Limited is part of Capstone Foster Care, an independent fostering agency with branches across the United Kingdom. The North fostering agency's head office is based in Oldham with the other offices of this service located in Barnsley and Preston.

The service recruits, approves, and supports a range of carers providing short and medium to long-term care for children of all ages. This includes babies, sibling groups, and adolescents. They also have carers who can accommodate Parent and Child.

At the time of this inspection, the fostering agency provided 64 fostering households with 68 children and young people in placement.

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 vast majority of children and young people benefit from stable placements. This enables them to feel secure, thrive, and make consistently good progress in achieving positive outcomes in their lives. Safety and welfare is central to the agency's practice. Children and young people feel safe, well cared for, and happy within their placements. Young people spoken with during the inspection were exceptionally positive about their foster placements. One young person said 'I am really settled here and living with this family is really special. They encourage and support me with everything I do and always want the best for me. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.'

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers is comprehensive. Strengths of potential carers with regards to the fostering role are established along with identifying and facilitating additional training needs. This ensures they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children and young people placed. The vast majority of foster carers who responded to surveys, or who spoke with the inspector say they feel supported within their role. Where there have been identified shortfalls, the agency has addressed these by reviewing and changing practice. For example, the fostering panel receives all required information prior to the panel meeting enabling them to make clear recommendations.

Experienced social workers who provide effective support, guidance, and direct work with foster carers staff the fostering agency. Carers say, they feel valued as part of a team working in the best interests of children.

Young people share their views with the agency. They speak with supervising social workers regarding their opinions about foster carers and the support given to them by respective supervising social workers, and have recently devised interview questions for potential supervising social workers.

The agency does not currently have a registered manager in post. A manager recently recruited is in the process of submitting information to Ofsted as part of the registration process. The manager has a good understanding of the strengths of the agency, along with the areas for further development to further promote positive outcomes for children and young people. Monitoring and oversight of the agency is undertaken, however, some areas of monitoring were not as robust as required. This included a delay in the reporting of a small number of significant events to Ofsted in a timely manner. This is a breach in regulation. However, the agency has taken steps to address this and there are no negative impacts identified on children and young people as a result of this.

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 |
|------|--|------------|
| 36 | Ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies identified in respect of the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 36 (1)). | 31/07/2015 |

*These requirements are subject to a statutory requirement notice.

Recommendations

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

- Ensure each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority (NMS 3.9)
- Ensure children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9) (NMS 11.2)
- Ensure foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity to attend and be heard at Panel meetings at which their approval is being discussed (NMS 14.5)
- Ensure that records are monitored for the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed (NMS 26.2)

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

Judgement outcome: Good

Children and young people receive care and support tailored to meet their individual needs. The agency has a good understanding of the strengths of their approved carers and strives to ensure appropriate matching of young people with carers who are able to meet those needs. On a small number of occasions, there have been some unplanned endings to placements. When this has happened the agency has undertaken disruption meetings to address the issues and to understand why the placement was not appropriate and learn from this.

The agency provides details about foster carers to young people prior to placement. One young person said, 'I was able to visit my carers prior to moving and they had a book that told me about them with pictures of my room. This made me feel happy about my move.'

The vast majority of foster carers confirmed they received information about the young people they care for. However, some carers reported the lack of paperwork initially made it difficult to initially provide the levels of support young people required. The agency requests full information from placing authority social workers but acknowledges sometimes there is a delay in receiving information. To minimise this occurring, the agency makes it clear to placing authority social workers which information and paperwork is required. Foster carers say their supervising social workers discuss the young people's individual care needs with them. Young people say they feel safe and fully included within their foster family. One young person said 'I am very happy here. I know my carers really care about me and support me. They have helped me to take part in lots of activities that I enjoy and they encourage me to do well at school. I really feel part of this family.'

Young people's health care is well supported and promoted. This includes registering with health care professionals and access specialist health care services if required.

Young people make good progress overall at school and college. The agency has two education staff who provide guidance and further support to young people to help them to achieve their educational goals. They also provide support in identifying suitable educational establishments when young people move to their placement thereby enabling effective promotion of education.

Foster carers have a good understanding of the importance of attachments and contact arrangements with families. The agency provides training around the issue of attachment and contact and one carer said, 'it helped me to understand the importance of this for the children I care for and provides them with an understanding about their background.' The agency has recruited a number of carers to provide placements for sibling groups. This enables young people to remain with their brothers and sisters, and providing them with additional stability.

Young people take part in a diverse range of activities. For example, taking part in outdoor pursuits, attending local community based scouts, guides and ranger groups, learning to play musical instruments as well as enjoying going swimming and playing football. One young person said, 'I have lots of interests and my foster family fully encourage me to try different things. It has helped me make lots of friends as well.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: Good

The agency has developed and grown since the previous inspection, joining with a larger agency and expanding the number of carers it has. A clear development and recruitment strategy is in place to continue to recruit carers from a range of backgrounds to meet the diverse needs of young people requiring safe and effective placements within nurturing homes.

Potential carers receive information about the agency, including a copy of the statement of purpose. Initial training provides further information about the role and function of foster carers. The agency is clear about the role of fostering, undertaking a robust assessment process. Not all initial applications progress to the assessment stage and the agency provides clear reasons for this. Assessments completed are comprehensive, with a range of safeguarding measures in place. This includes obtaining references, enhanced disclosures from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), local authority and background checks. An established fostering panel evaluates all assessments, making recommendations to the agency decision maker for approval.

A suitably qualified and experienced practitioner, who has a wealth of knowledge of fostering, chairs the fostering panel. Panel membership has representatives from health, education, legal and fostering backgrounds in addition to social work representatives from the agency. This enables the panel to have a holistic overview of potential applications and provide robust scrutiny to make recommendations regarding approval. As well as making recommendations for initial approval, all first reviews and changes to approval return to panel. Foster carers can attend these. However, on at least one occasion, foster carers who made themselves available to attend panel were subsequently not seen due to lack of information being presented. This does not ensure full transparency of the role and function of the panel. The agency is aware of this shortfall and ensures that all information is available to panel members prior to their meeting and foster carers invited have the opportunity to attend and discuss their approval. The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker for final ratification and agreement.

Following approval, foster carers access a range of training and development opportunities. This includes mandatory training, including safeguarding and child protection. The agency has also enables specific bespoke training to enable foster carers to gain skills required to meet individual young people's diverse needs.

Specialist support and training via therapeutic services is also available to foster carers. This enables them to look at strategies to incorporate into their practice to further enhance the care and support they provide to young people.

All foster carers have a supervising social worker who provides them with regular supervision and support. Foster carers speak positively about this and value this input. One carer said 'my supervising social worker challenges me well and this enables me to reflect on my practice and the care I provide to the young person placed with me. I see this as a positive thing because I want to provide the best care I can to any young person living here.'

Young people's social workers say the agency and carers work in partnership with them, keeping them informed of progress made by young people. One placing social worker said 'since (name) has been living with his carer, he has settled in really well. He is making excellent progress at school and thriving within the placement. This placement has now been made long term due to the positive care, support, and commitment from the carer.' Another social worker said 'the young people have formed really positive attachments to their carers. The support they receive is of a high standard and the progress they have made is excellent.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: Good

The agency is committed to ensuring young people live within safe, nurturing homes that provide them with the opportunity to experience positive outcomes. Young people spoken with during the inspection say they feel safe and happy at their homes. Foster carers demonstrated an understanding of the role they play in maintaining the safety and well-being of all children and young people placed with them. Safe care policies in place reflect this. Regular safeguarding training covers a wide range of issues, including, e-safety and child sexual exploitation. Where carers have concerns, they are aware of the policies and procedures to follow. They work in partnership with the agencies supervising social workers, children's social workers and other agencies charged with safeguarding children and young people. The agency operates an out of hours support service. This enables foster carers to seek advice and support when the main office is closed. Foster carers who have used this service say it is reassuring to have someone to speak with when they need some additional support or guidance.

All fostering households have safe care policies in place. These are working documents, reviewed regularly to ensure they reflect the current household. Supervising social workers undertake regular planned supervision visits to discuss the support carers are providing and to review all maintained documentation. In addition to planned visits, a minimum of an annual unannounced visit is also undertaken. This visit provides further oversight of the fostering household and the support provided to children and young people.

The agency has systems in place to monitor any incidence of a young person missing from home or potential child sexual exploitation. Although there have been some missing from home incidents, the agency has followed procedures and notified placing social workers and police. When a young person returns to the placement, foster carers ensure they are welcomed back and have the opportunity to speak with an independent person to establish if there is a specific reason for their absence.

Robust recruitment and vetting procedures for all foster carers, staff, and panel members are in place to further protect and safeguard children and young people.

Where there are any allegations of harm or poor practice, the agency follows clear procedures and informs the local authority where the young person is living plus the placing authority social worker. The Local Authority Designated Officer for the area stated the agency followed procedures well and kept all relevant parties informed to support and promote the safety and welfare of young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: Good

The agency has had a change of ownership since the last inspection and a further change of registered manager. Interim arrangements in place provided oversight of the agency whilst recruitment for a new manager was ongoing. This manager is in the process of submitting an application to Ofsted to be registered. She holds appropriate qualifications and has relevant experience within social work and fostering, having previously worked as the senior social worker for the agency.

There is a clear development plan in place for the service. The agency now holds all records electronically. This enables greater oversight of the service. Future plans include the facility to enable foster carers to add their recording directly onto the system to keep supervising social workers updated on children within placement. On-going training is available to carers by carers who have previously used an electronic recording system. However, for the carer who prefer maintaining written records, the regular visits by supervising social workers enables on-going monitoring of records.

The manager undertakes monitoring of the service, completing quarterly reports to demonstrate the progress of the agency and the impact for children and young people. However, greater detail is required to the report to confirm where there has been a shortfall, and the action taken to address this. The agency has reflected on this and updated the reports to provide focussed analysis of the agency.

The agency provides notifications of significant events to relevant people as identified within regulations. There has been a delay in submitting some notifications to Ofsted in a timely manner which does not enable effective oversight by the regulator. However, the agency maintains clear audit trails of actions taken to safeguard young people.

Supervising social workers are experienced and knowledgeable about their role and responsibilities. They continue to support their professional knowledge base by undertaking training and further development opportunities. This, supported by regular supervision ensures they have the skills to provide effective support to carers. Annual appraisals take into account the views of carers and young people in placement to further inform their practice.

The agency is active in gaining the views of the young people. This is through discussions and involvement during planned activity days as well as during supervising social workers visits and through their carers reviews. The agency is considering developing a young people's group to meet formally, following further consultation with young people.

The vast majority of local authorities, who place young people with this independent fostering agency, say the agency works in partnership to promote positive outcomes. Where there has been a shortfall, the agency is proactive in addressing this through open and transparent dialogue. This ensures the children and young people are at the forefront of all practice.

The agency continues to be financially viable and work in accordance with its Statement of Purpose.

The manager has met the recommendation raised at the previous inspection in relation to the children's guide being in a suitable format for all children and young people.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to inform 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 and 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. inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of independent fostering agencies.