

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Mr Clark
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Provision subtype Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

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Date of last inspection N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

SWIIS Fostering Service (Bristol) operates from an office in central Bristol. It is a privately owned independent fostering agency, which is part of a national organisation with other separately registered offices in England and Scotland. The agency assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of placements for children and young people, including mother and baby placements. There are currently 23 approved foster carer households with 16 young people placed. The agency was registered in January 2014 and this is the first inspection since registration. The Bristol office covers the South West of England. The registered manager manages one Senior Supervising Social Worker and two Supervising Social Workers. The agency use a number of independent social workers to conduct foster carer assessments. The agency use an Independent Review Officer to conduct foster carer reviews. The agency employ a Carer Recruitment Officer who oversees the agency's recruitment strategy. There is an independently chaired panel and the registered manager acts as a non-voting panel advisor. There is a small team of administrators who support the service.

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 fostering service provides a good level of care for children and young people, many of whom have complex and challenging needs. With a few exceptions, placements are stable and long term and young people report that they feel safe and well cared for.

Children and young people make good progress educationally and in the development of their social and behavioural skills. This is achieved in part by the agencies commitment to support young people's education and to ensure that young people are referred to good therapeutic care when this is necessary. Young people enjoy and benefit from a range of activities in the local community with the support of carers and agency staff.

The fostering households have a range of skills in meeting the needs of young people who might be otherwise difficult to place due to the good levels of support they receive from the supervising social workers. Carers report that they have good access to training and that regular carer's forum meetings really support them. Carers are actively involved in placement planning and review and their views are taken into account with regard to service development.

Supervising social workers feel well managed, trained and supported. The registered manager and the responsible individual are actively involved in the day to day running of the service and practitioners feel that they are visible, available and approachable.

The registered manager is required to achieve a management qualification in order to meet current management regulations. It is recommended that the agency should only suggest prospective foster carers to local authorities in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way.

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

Judgement outcome:
Good

Placing authorities and young people benefit from the full and descriptive accounts of the agency's fostering households which describe in clear detail the foster home and the people that young people are proposed to be placed with. This informs young people about their futures and enables them to make choices about proposed placements. The agency ensures that carers are given all the available detailed information about the young person to be placed and this helps young people and carers to be appropriately matched. The majority of carers are approved to take emergency, short term or long term placements. Although the overwhelming number of placements are stable, disruption has occurred when more challenging young people have been placed with inexperienced carers in an emergency situation and when no other placements were available. On the rare occasion that this did occur it did not ensure the best outcome for the young person.

Supervising social workers (SSW) meet regularly with young people individually and in participation group meetings to ensure that they can participate in and have access to social, leisure and recreational resources within the community. This introduces them to opportunities that otherwise might not be available to them and provides them with good life experiences. The group meetings also serve as consultation forums for young people and this gives them a voice in service provision and development.

There have been few instances of young people going missing from foster care. The agency has a protocol in place with local police to ensure that young people will be quickly sought should any such incidents occur and a return to home interview is undertaken to find out where they were and who they were with.

The agency have only been registered since January 2014 and during this time they have recruited a significant number of foster households who have gained a good knowledge of the agency and who have established good supportive networks amongst themselves. This has been supported by a respite care arrangement wherein carers can call upon others for support. Foster carers report that they have regular and ongoing training in all key areas of their work and that supervision and support is of a high standard. The preparation for fostering course is comprehensive and provides new carers with a good knowledge and understanding of the effects of attachment and loss on children and young people. This helps to provide young people with a level of care that ensures good outcomes. Several of the carers have skills in working with children and young people with disabilities and they report that they are given additional training in this regard.

The agency inform placing authorities when they consider that children and young

people may require additional support such as the services of a therapeutic agency to conduct one to one work with individual young people. This helps to promote young people's psychological and emotional health. All children and young people are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician and receive routine check-ups. This helps to promote good health.

The overwhelming majority of young people attend full time education and many have made educational progress in relation to their starting points. The agency have good links with virtual head teachers and they ensure that personal education plans are in place for each young person and that pupil's premiums are used to effectively support young people with their education. All of these measures help to ensure that young people's educational needs are well supported.

Where appropriate, foster carers will promote and support young people in their contact arrangements with their birth families and birth parents are always invited to attend their child's review meeting, unless this will be detrimental to the wellbeing of children and young people. This helps young people maintain a link to home and to keep them aware of any issues affecting their birth families.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome:
Good

In the short time since registration the agency has established a number of fostering households with a good range of skills, such as supervising mother and baby placements, and caring for more challenging young people. Placements are generally stable and young people are usually well matched with carers who can meet their needs. Placing authorities hold the agency in high regard for the quality of their work. One commissioning officer commented, 'the placement is very successful. The supervising social worker is very prompt with paperwork and there is a good level of communication from them. The foster carer provides a daily record of the placement and is always available. They are a good agency.' Another commented, 'We consider them a very good agency and have had no placement breakdowns with them. Placements are stable.'

The agency has a recruitment strategy which aims to recruit new carers who are able to meet the needs of children and young people who may be difficult to place, such as older young people or children with disabilities. Carers report that they feel they were well prepared for the fostering task and that ongoing training is always available and is promoted. They feel that they are regularly supported by the supervising social workers and the regular carer's forum meetings. Additionally, carers report that their 'out of hours' support is excellent. Although respite arrangements are available for carers, few take this up preferring to maintain placement consistency.

Carers actively contribute to young people's care and educational reviews. Independent reviewing officers report that placement plans are well constructed and are effectively reviewed, and that the quality of carers in this agency is good.

The fostering panel meets regularly and is independently chaired. Panel minutes identify that assessments receive a good level of scrutiny before recommendations of approval are made to the Agency Decision Maker. The panel will access medical, educational and legal expertise outside of the panel membership when this becomes necessary. There are panel members with personal experience of being fostered. There are no panel members from a black or minority ethnic group and this may limit the panel's awareness of specific issues of race and exclusion. As previously stated, the majority of carers are approved to provide emergency, short term or long term placements and this may mean that inexperienced carers may receive emergency placements shortly after approval.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome:

Good

In questionnaire survey returns and in direct interviews young people told the inspector that they feel safe and that they know where they can go to seek help or share any concerns about their care. The agency provides young people with a range of information documentation and guides which advise them where to seek help and keep themselves safe. This includes clear descriptions of the agency complaints procedure. Additionally, the young people's participation group meetings provide another avenue of support. Young people also regularly meet with their placing authority social workers and independent reviewing officers who will always ask young people at reviews if they feel safe or have any concerns. The main placing authorities also have an advocacy service that young people may access.

Supervising social workers conduct at least two unannounced visits to fostering households and there are periodic health and safety checks of fostering households and annual review. Risk assessments are in place for individual young people if there are any known issues that may affect their care or wellbeing and carers are trained in methods of safe caring. Risk assessments are shared with schools and other appropriate professional groups where appropriate. The agency notifies the placing authorities and the regulatory body about any incident involving the safeguarding of children and young people. The Local Authority Safeguarding Officer (LADO) states that the agency will keep them informed about any issues of concern and will follow appropriate policy and procedure. They have no current safeguarding concerns about this agency.

The agency has a clearly written safeguarding children policy which is reviewed annually and which is known to all staff and which forms part of foster carers training. Foster carer's assessments are rigorous and will explore any concerns about potential carers and their likelihood of causing harm to young people.

Appropriate recruitment and vetting procedures are followed for all foster carers, agency staff and panel members appointed and personal files for each are well ordered and up to date. Carers and managers and staff receive safeguarding training appropriate to their position and this training is regularly updated. All of these measures help to ensure that children and young people are protected from any adults who might harm them.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome:

Good

The registered manager of the service has a professional social work qualification and has many years of experience in child care practice and is therefore suitably qualified to manage the agency. They do not have a management qualification and they must achieve this qualification within a period agreed by the regulatory body. All supervising social workers are professionally qualified and have membership of the relevant professional body. All report that they have good access to ongoing training, and that they receive regular supervision and that there is a strong sense of team. All management and staff undertake an annual performance appraisal which identifies their training and development needs. Good supervision, training and support helps to ensure that young people are provided with good quality care.

The agency has good working relationships with placing authorities, schools and other professional groups who comment that they provide good levels of communication and will seek additional services in order to meet children and young people's assessed needs. Reports are of a good quality and the agency is actively involved in the review of individual young people's care plans.

The statement of purpose and children's guides are clearly written, comprehensive and up to date to ensure that all stakeholders have the latest information about the service. Internal monitoring and service review is timely and reports of the same are sent to the regulatory body as required by regulation. These reports and reviews are conducted in consultation with young people and all stakeholders and there is evidence that the agency will draw upon recent research to guide service development. The management conducts reviews on all key policies and procedures annually.

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.