

# Welcome Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Inspector** Mr Lee Kirwin  
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**Registered manager** Vacant  
**Responsible individual** Mrs Alison Sargent  
**Date of last inspection** 27/11/2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Welcome Foster Care is a private limited company incorporated in August 2007. The agency is situated in a business centre in Stratford within the London Borough of Newham. The agency provides short term, emergency, parent and child, and long-term placements. As of 31 March 2015 the agency had 61 fostering households and 76 children were in place.

### 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 say they are happy in their placements. They describe how they are supported well when they arrive and made to feel welcome. They feel that one of the most important things that has improved for them since moving in with their foster carers is that they 'learnt to like their foster carers'. They feel that their placements are well matched to ensure their cultural needs are met. Those whose first language is not English are pleased that their foster carers are able to speak their language.

Foster carers feel well supported by the agency. They value their supervision from the supervising social workers and report that the agency 'is always there for them'. The quality of supervision experienced by foster carers is not always matched by the supervising social workers' quality of recording. Foster carers feel that the agency is caring. They value the relationships they have with all of the staff in the agency,

including the managers. They have a good network of support among carers and are able to access respite breaks from other carers who are known to them and to the children. Foster carers play an active role in supporting children to maintain family contact.

The agency has a range of resources to support placements. They have a children’s champion who undertakes direct work with children and provides them with a safe space to explore their feelings. She advocates for children to ensure that any concerns they raise are addressed. The agency commissions services from an agency who specialise in working with children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation to provide extra support to children and foster carers.

Foster carers are suitably assessed, supported and well matched to the children who are placed with them. The agency provides a robust challenge where care falls short of the high standards expected and use feedback from young people when reviewing foster carers. Not all foster carers have completed the Children’s Workforce Development Councils Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, within the required timescales.

The Registered Manager recently resigned to take up another position in the agency. There is an interim manager in place; she is currently supervised by the previous Registered manager and performing well in the role.

Children consistently report that they do not get enough information about foster carers prior to placement and they are not actively encouraged to access records about them. This has no significant impact on children’s experiences or outcomes, but the agency would further strengthen practice by addressing these shortfalls.

## Areas of 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.

Requirement	Due date
If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in schedule 7 take place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the schedule. In particular Ofsted should be notified of all serious illnesses or accidents involving a child (this includes incidents self-harm where hospital treatment is needed). (Regulation 36 (1))	25/07/2015
The registered provider must appoint a Registered Manager.	

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(Regulation 6(1))	
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## Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendations:

The agency must ensure that the service has and implements clear procedures for introducing children into the foster care placement, to the foster carer and to others living in the household which cover planned and emergency admissions. The agency must ensure that children have information prior to placement to help them understand what to expect from living in the foster home. (NMS 11.1)

The agency must evidence that all foster carers have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards for Family and Friends Foster Carers within 12 months. (NMS 20.3)

Records of foster carers' supervision should be included in foster carers' files. (NMS 21.8)

Ensure that children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements. (NMS 26.6).

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

There is a strong culture of promoting educational achievement in the agency. Children make excellent progress from their starting points in education and are placed near to their schools whenever possible. Foster carers make good use of school diaries to communicate with teachers and ensure that there is consistent approach between school and home. Children have excellent attendance and a positive attitude to learning. Those whose first language is not English are provided with extra support and make rapid progress in developing language skills.

They enjoy a range of trips, activities and are encouraged to join clubs and groups in the community to pursue their interests and hobbies. One young person said living with his foster carers 'is the best, because I get to go everywhere'. They go on holidays with carers and also have activity weekends away with community groups. The agency provides extra funding and support to ensure that children can enjoy a wide range of holiday activities.

Children develop close and nurturing relationships with foster carers. This helps them feel safe and enables them to stop or reduce behaviour that is unhealthy or unsafe. Foster carers receive specialist training and support from supervising social workers to manage challenging behaviour. Children have clear boundaries and are supported to behave well using positive strategies such as rewards and encouragement, rather than sanctions.

Children are looked after in accordance with their care plans and foster carers prepare children well for their statutory review meetings to make sure that their views are represented. When children do not feel listened to or are unsettled, the agency provides extra support from the children's champion to make sure that the children's experiences remain central to care planning.

There is support to maintain contact with their families and, when possible, siblings are invited to stay overnight in the foster carer's home. This is an area of particular strength; foster carers go the 'extra mile' to ensure children enjoy family contact, even when this is challenging. One child said that he wished his family could come to live with him at his foster carers as he 'likes them both the same'. They experience positive relationships with the foster carer's birth children who help them feel welcome and included in the family. If children are struggling to settle and do not feel part of the family, this is quickly addressed with support from the supervising social workers and the children's champion.

Children who need looking after for a short while are supported to return to their families or to other placements that are assessed to meet their needs. Placements are seldom ended at short notice and children are helped to make positive transitions when they move on. Children who need long term placements are carefully matched with carers who have the skills and qualities to help them thrive. When they leave,

they often continue to visit their foster carers and participate in family life. Some children can and do stay on with their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday and they continue to be supported by the agency.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency recruits foster carers from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and has significantly improved in this area since the last inspection. This means that nearly all children placed are well matched with carers who are of the same culture and religion and can speak the same language. When it is not possible to do this, foster carers are able to deliver care and support to ensure that children's cultural and spiritual needs are met.

The agency provides foster carers who are experienced and skilled to look after children with complex needs. There is a placement officer who makes carefully considered matches based upon a sound knowledge of the experience, qualities and skills of each carer and their family. Specialist training is provided when this is needed to meet children's particular needs, such as working with autism, child sexual exploitation and Makaton training. The agency provides training sessions specifically for men who foster and this is helpful as it provides a safe space for them to explore issues that are particular to their gender and role.

Supervising social workers work closely with carers and children to make sure that children are safe. They provide constructive challenge to placing social workers when necessary. They support foster carers to share their expert knowledge with the professional network to inform care planning and intervention.

Foster carers have a positive experience of the assessment and recruitment process; they feel that their induction prepares them well for the challenges of the role. They particularly value the support from the agency and feel that they are listened-to by professionals who genuinely care about them. Foster carers are recruited in line with effective safeguarding procedures.

The fostering panel make recommendations to approve foster carers based upon comprehensive reports and assessments. They challenge and defer decisions if they feel the information presented is incomplete. The panel consists of a diverse range of members and makes use of a broad range of perspectives to inform decisions. Children's views and past performance are always considered at annual reviews and, if necessary, the numbers and categories of children that carers are approved for are reduced.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children feel safe and secure in their placements. The agency listens to children if they have complaints and concerns. They also access independent people to listen to them and advocate on their behalf. The foster carer's home is inspected regularly by the agency and any hazards in the physical environment are quickly identified and made safe.

Children reduce the number of times they go missing from their starting points in placement. When children go missing, foster carers are proactive in trying to find them and return them safely. They follow clear guidance and risk assessments to ensure that the agency, placing social workers, parents and the police work in partnership to protect them.

Children at risk of sexual exploitation are protected. Foster carers and supervising social workers have specialist training in this area and children can access specialist workers to offer them direct support. The agency provides additional support to carers and children who are at risk. This produces resilient placements that can safely manage high levels of risk for children with complex needs. They advocate strongly for children and escalate concerns to senior managers in the placing authority if they feel children are not safe. If, despite their best efforts, it becomes clear that a placement cannot look after children safely, they will work with the placing authority to make a planned move.

Supervising social workers are skilled and experienced; they provide training and consultation to carers to ensure that the child's journey into becoming looked after and past experiences are understood. This understanding of the impact of trauma and loss helps ensure that the foster carers provide care which helps to address the underlying causes of risk-taking and challenging behaviour. Children are registered with local health services and health issues are dealt with promptly. They receive specialist help from child and adolescent mental health professionals.

Supervision of foster carers provides space for them to reflect on and explore the emotional impact of the role, while at the same time maintaining a strong focus on child protection. Unannounced visits take place and foster carers' practice is subject to robust scrutiny during placements and at annual reviews.

All staff and panel members are recruited safely; they are subject to strict vetting procedures to ensure they are suitable to work with vulnerable children. All staff employed by the agency are suitably qualified and experienced for the roles they perform.

The agency reports any serious complaints about the conduct of foster carers to the local authority designated officer (LADO). Concerns are investigated in accordance with safeguarding procedures and dealt with promptly, though not all serious



incidents are notified to Ofsted as required. The LADO reports that she is particularly impressed that the agency seeks early advice promptly, carries out actions and 'they don't lose sight of things'.

The foster carer's handbook contains detailed guidance on a comprehensive range of child protection areas. This ensures that carers can recognize behaviours which might indicate that children are at risk, and have clear direction as to how to report and respond. Safer caring guidance and training ensures that the family home is a safe environment where privacy is respected.

Children are protected from bullying and discrimination. There is a strong ethos within the agency which promotes and protects children's rights. They live with carers who are able to meet their cultural needs and who support them to practice their faith, if any.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has recently changed hands and is now part of the Capstone fostering group; this enables the agency to benefit from shared resources and brings new investment to develop the service.

Due to changes in the management structure, the agency does not have a Registered Manager. The vacancy is covered by an interim manager; she is well supported and suitably experienced to undertake the role. She has developed an ambitious service development plan which aims to build on strengths and develop foster carers' practical and professional skills of foster carers. The leadership and management understand that one of the agency's key strengths is the close relationships with carers and they are keen to ensure that expanding the service adds to, rather than takes away from, their core values and ethos.

The agency has an office in Bradford that supports and supervises 16 carers and has 20 children in placement. There is a concern that this office carries out a significant amount of independent activities which may require it to be registered as a separate branch. The quality of care and the support to children from this office is good and the issue of registration will be further explored outside of the inspection.

The manager adopts a values-based approach that keeps the best interests of children at the centre of service delivery. She has robust monitoring systems in place to ensure that the quality of care is of a high standard and that children are safe. Where standards of care fall short, she intervenes to challenge poor practice and takes steps to improve performance. This inspection finds some weaknesses in foster carer supervision records and this area is insufficiently monitored.

Supervision of agency staff is reflective and offers clear support and direction. Annual appraisals inform areas for learning and development and take into account feedback from foster carers and children. The interim manager make full use of the disciplinary procedures to tackle poor performance. She encourages an open culture, where children, foster carers and staff are encouraged to voice their concerns. Supervising social workers feel supported and valued by the manager of the home. They feel she listens to their concerns and consults them about service development.

The manager seeks feedback from a range of professionals to help improve the service. Placing social workers comment that the agency makes excellent matches when placing children. They also remark that cares are committed and compassionate and that the interim manager is very responsive when concerns arise.

The agency strives to get the best possible information about children when accepting referrals from placing social workers. When this is not forthcoming, the manager escalates concerns to ensure that all known information is shared. There are still occasions when referral information is not complete at the point of admission and this area would benefit from further scrutiny at a strategic level.

The interim manager develops effective relationships with partner agencies and supports the supervising social workers to provide a constructive challenge when necessary. She maintains a strong child focus and takes ethical decisions in situations where there may be financial or resource implications. An example of this is that the agency continues to provide support to foster carers and children who stay beyond 18 years of age, even though the agency does not receive payment for these placements.

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## 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.