

Fostering People Too Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

This agency registered with Ofsted on 28 September 2005. Based in Essex, Fostering People Too is a small privately run independent fostering agency with one office location near Braintree. The agency provides support to 39 children and young people. There are 27 approved to foster households offering a combination of emergency, short term, long term, and parent and child placements. The agency works with a range of placing authorities and recruits carers in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, and North and East London.

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: **Outstanding**

This bespoke agency recently celebrated its 10th Anniversary. The celebrations involving children, carers, their families and staff took place on one of the foster carers land.

Children receive an excellent level of care and are positive about their experiences. One young person said: 'Fostering People Too are great. They are always on the ball. Whenever anyone is in trouble, they are on the case straight away.'

The registered manager brings continued continuity and consistency for children, carers, and staff. As a result the agency has gone from strength to strength. There are exceptionally low rates of placement breakdowns, amounting to 7% since the agency began in 2005.

The team primarily, but not exclusively provide, long term, stable family based experiences for complex, challenging children and sibling groups. The introduction of parent and child placements enables those carers assessed, to contribute towards the local authority's assessment of parenting.

Children thrive and flourish. Supported consistently by the agency, foster carers persevere and integrate the children into the fabric of their family. The agency and the carers work hand in glove to understand each individual child. Together they identify how to approach the key agencies to draw resources to ensure that each child's emotional well-being, safety, education, health, and social needs receive priority. Their combined attention to detail ensures that plans are progressed towards helping each child to reach their potential. This results in many children achieving more than was expected in all aspects of their lives.

Dedicated, committed, and experienced social workers carefully and skilfully recruit, assess, and support foster carers from a range of diverse backgrounds. Foster carers feel highly valued and commend the staffs' collective approach to their unconditional round the clock support. Carers speak highly of the agency. One carer said: 'I cannot speak highly enough of the support that my family and I consistently receive from my worker and all of the staff.'

Leaders and managers are proactively involved and visible in the service. They use their knowledge and experience of social work practice to lead by example. They are highly committed to making a difference to the lives of children and to ensuring that the vision and ethos of the agency continues to be enshrined in all aspects of service delivery.

The agency has met in full the recommendation made at the last inspection regarding unannounced visits. This inspection raises no regulatory 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.

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children flourish. They are valued as unique individuals, becoming part of the fostering family. As children naturally come of age, the agency is seeing and welcomes, a steady rise in the number of 'staying put' arrangements. One experienced carer, new to this agency said: 'I have never experienced anything like this, when we are together I can't tell who is the looked after child and who is the foster carers own child.' The carers spoken to for this inspection all described the children they care for as: 'part of the family'.

Colourful and informative foster carer welcome booklets enable children who are moving into placement to have a visual insight into what awaits. This helps them to feel confident enough to ask curious questions. They receive memory boxes and create photograph albums to help them to track their own progress and record happy experiences. Examples include holidays abroad, day trips, and moments of personal, social, and educational achievement. This raises self-esteem, helps children to feel valued, and encourages them to invest in their placement.

The children's guide is colourful and in addition to the required information it offers them alternative ways of recording their opinions about their experiences. They know how to complain and can identify their safe people. Creative consultation with children by the agency enables them to share their views and experiences of their day to day care. In addition children contribute to the annual foster home review process. One child said: 'The managers are always asking us what we think.' This ensures that children and their wellbeing are at the centre of practice. More than one carer and agency consulted said: 'the children are the focus of this agency.'

Children living in foster care have experienced trauma. This can impact significantly on their health and result in complex and challenging scenarios. Carers offer patience and understanding to nurture change. As a result there are few incidents because children learn to take responsibility for their behaviour. One agency said: 'The carer lets him know that it is okay to feel angry but it is not okay to behave aggressively.' When staff working alongside carers identify that additional external services would be beneficial they ensure that services such as CAMHS become involved. One child said: 'I can get a bit angry and hit. X comes to see my carers and me. It helps a lot to learn new ways to get feelings out.'

Children receive appropriate help from their carers to develop friendships both within the wider group of children cared for by the agency and within their respective local neighbourhoods and communities. As a result, they have the opportunity to take appropriate age related risks, experience sleep overs and to feel confident about inviting their friends into their home. One young person said: 'Fostering People Too want children to collaborate with one another, to get on and be friends.' This helps children to practice skills in building safe social networks.

Reflecting the local authority plan, a number of the children benefit from the

experience of living with a sibling. This provides stability and strengthens family relationships into adulthood. Children whose ethnicity or first language is different to their carers receive high levels of practical and emotional support to empower them to learn a new language and access cultural resources. This enables them to feel secure and maintain their identity. One young person living with her sister said: 'Our carers give us lots of love and attention. They do their best for us and always try and help if we have a problem. If they can't do it they will come up with other solutions.' This means that children can and do rely on their carers for help, support and guidance.

Children of school age make steady and sure progress in education. Attendance exceeds 98%. Each has a Personal Education Plan. They receive help with homework and where need is identified, receive additional tutoring. The agency provides them with a laptop. This helps them to do research and learn new skills. A number of young people exceed expectations from their starting points. For example; learning new communication skills, attending college, becoming head pupil and achieving A* at GCSE level. With positive results, the agency goes above and beyond to galvanise stakeholders to spotlight the individual needs of children who are out of education as a result of moving area. Consequently, children know that their foster carers are working with the staff to prioritise their education; that they will advocate for them and want them to succeed. One young person said: 'It feels great to be learning new things.'

Placing local authorities speak highly of the progress children make. They recognise that through perseverance, the constancy offered is making a life changing difference. One agency worker said: 'The carers are brilliant. The children have high needs so can be very time consuming but the carers have kept their best interest and need for stability at the heart of their work with them.'

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The agency's primary method for selection and recruitment is word of mouth. Skilled and knowledgeable social workers undertake methodical and meticulous assessments of prospective carers and their families. They deliver a four day intensive research based pre-approval training programme. The complete process is exceptionally robust. This ensures that only those who have resiliently demonstrated suitability to care for children with challenging behaviours and complex social backgrounds receive recommendation for approval to the fostering panel.

The social workers carrying out the assessments of prospective carers go on to support the approved carers. This enhances the thoughtful and considered matching process. They focus on gathering and sharing all available information in partnership with the potential carer. They arrange introductory meetings with other professionals

and pre placement visits for the children wherever this is possible. This helps children to feel welcome and as a result placement breakdown is rare.

Foster carers understand their role within the agency and their responsibilities to the children. They diligently support sibling and family contact, at times working through adversity to achieve positive outcomes. An elder sibling of a child living with carers from this agency wrote to them in thanks: 'I just don't think I could put into words how special and how blessed we feel to have someone as amazing as you in our lives.'

Without exception foster carers receive regular and consistent supervision. The small team of qualified supervising social workers deliver this to provide support and to assist carers in remaining focused on the emotional wellbeing, and experiences of the child. They document the progress made by each child. They share the information with placing authorities. One representative said: 'Communication is very good; we receive updates if there are any issues and highlights of the positive changes noticed with the children.'

The managers and supervising social workers deliver the accessible and efficient out of hour's service. More than one carer spoken to said: 'At times I could not have done it without their support.' This means that there is always a member of staff available who is aware of the carers circumstances and has knowledge of the children placed. Carers can access respite. Managed sensitively, the child's emotional well-being is at the heart of plans. This results in carers feeling exceptionally valued. A number of carers said: 'I cannot speak highly enough of the staff. There is always someone available to speak to day or night. All of the staff know the carers and all of the staff know the children.' This consistent level of support builds carers confidence in their own ability to provide support to children and to persevere through times of challenge.

Foster carers know they are part of the team around the child. The agency ensures that child by child, the carers understand the authority delegated to them through the local authority. One carers said: 'While we as foster carers are the focal point, we look after the children in partnership with the agency, the placing Local Authority Social Worker, school, health and all the other agencies who also have responsibility to ensure this child achieves.' This means that carers work with the agency to play an active role in advocating, and influencing plans. A representative from one local authority said: 'In two years they have never missed a review meeting. The quality of the care is exceptional.'

All carers timeously complete the training and development standards. Staff and managers within the agency deliver core training. Managers also commission external training from other agencies, for example, the NSPCC and the Who Cares Trust. This meets the range of diverse interests across the carer group. Training is delivered at times to maximise attendance. For example, at weekends or in the carer's home. This ensures that in two carer households, both remain up to date with core training and current themes in social care practice such as child exploitation, internet safety, and extremism.

The panel carries out comprehensive quality assurance. Clearly recorded minutes reflect a well organised and robust process which prioritises safe caring. Member's personal and professional experiences pertinently reflect a broad range of expertise across the social care spectrum. The current panel chair was a foster carer with another agency. This results in a child centred, thorough, yet sensitive approach to the preapproval and re approval process. The rationale for recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker, are clear which enable him to make decisions based on robust information. These checks and balances enable the agency to make decisions based on children's best interests.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Children say that they feel safe living with their foster families. They are able to identify a range of adults to approach should they feel that they need to share worries or make complaint. For the children represented in this inspection, they identified their foster carers and members of staff from this agency as their safe people.

The agency places safeguarding at the heart of practice. Looked after children and children who foster are provided with opportunities to come together to discuss and develop their understanding of risk taking. For example, they recently met to share and explore views about social networking and internet safety. This creative approach to peer learning inspires children to be more receptive to acting on key messages about staying safe on line.

Agency policies, procedures, and training make clear the expectations of carers and staff in working together to reduce the likelihood of incidents of missing. The agency rigorously monitors children's experiences through carer recording, carer supervision, tracking outcomes, meeting with the children and talking to other agencies. Incidents are rare and are isolated to children who have gone missing previously. The frequency of incidents reduces. One carer said: 'My child did have a period of going missing, usually after family contact but he has settled really well. I think he thought for a while that I would give up on him too.' Carers have experienced the agency's proactive approach to inviting other agencies to review the plans for children who place themselves or others at risk of harm. The agency is committed to holding other agencies to account to ensure that they speak to children following any incidents. They have shared their policy with authorities in the surrounding geographical location in an effort to forge partnership working towards keeping children safe in the wider community.

Recruitment, assessment, supervision and training of all foster carers consistently emphasises a collective responsibility for safeguarding and protecting children. As a result, carers are sensitive to the impact of the trauma caused from their experiences. They are attune to the children and ready to offer support in the event of disclosures. Placement plans identify the child's strengths and the areas where the individual is likely to experience difficulties. This encourages carers to be perceptive

and to understand the triggers for challenging behaviour.

The agency concludes enquiries where it is assessed that prospective applicants or their circumstances are unsuitable. The assessment process is robust and evaluative. The households recommended for approval to panel complete safe caring policies with their worker. Updated annually, and with the household, these are exceptionally thorough. The documents record general expectations of best practice and additionally identify the action required in the named household to prioritise caring safely for each child placed. The named children receive help to understand the importance of the family safer caring policy and the significance of their role in it. The frequency of supervising social workers contact with the household combined with detailed risk assessments and unannounced visits means that there is a clear overview of the key issues for the child. This provides additional checks and balances towards keeping children and fostering families safe. One agency said: 'We work with a number of independent agencies. This one is exceptionally good.'

The recruitment and vetting processes for staff and panel members are thorough and robust. Pre-employment checks and reference verification ensure that those working in the agency are appropriately credible. 360* appraisals which include feedback from foster carers, ensure the continued suitability of those working in the agency.

There have been no allegations or suspicions of harm raised in relation to foster carers since the last inspection. The agency reviews its approach to child protection practice to ensure that it does not become complacent in this area.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The manager worked as a supervising social worker in the agency and registered with Ofsted in 2013. He is a qualified Social Worker and has significant relevant experience of working with children, young people, and foster carers. The children and carers know him well. They feel confident to approach him when they see him at training, in their homes or at agency events. He is motivated and dedicated to driving improvement and ensuring that children reach their full potential.

The agency has fully met the recommendation from the last inspection.

This small agency has a flat structure. Reflected in the agency business plans and timely decision making about the allocation of resources has a significantly positive impact for children and carers. For example, the children influence the shape of the agency outings, events and parties which means that they have fun and experience meeting other children living in foster care. Since the last inspection directors and leaders have re invested substantially in the agency. They have purchased and

redeveloped the office base. The lilac building is easily identifiable from the main road. The refurbishment of the interior reflects the needs of the business. Drawings from children around the office evidence that individuals are at the heart of this agency.

The managers and leaders are an integral part of the daily operations. The agency decision maker is no longer directly involved in day to day functions, which provides objectivity in the process of approval. The reviewing officer is independent of the staff configuration. This provides additional checks and balances and contributes to ensuring children remain well placed with adults who continue to grow and anticipate their needs.

The registered manager submits annual data to Ofsted. He completes quarterly reports and collates statistical and descriptive information. These are presented at intervals throughout each year to the foster panel. The reports provide a clear overview of the agencies activities and outline the progress made by each carer and child placed. The systems in place are effective in reviewing, monitoring, and evaluating the agency performance in meeting regulation and national minimum standards.

One of the directors, a qualified social worker, who began the company and was previously a foster carer continues to work directly with carers. One family said: 'We really can't believe how fortunate we are to have had the same worker for almost nine years.' Managers know each child by name and the detail of their care plan. They speak proudly of achievements children make and can describe their journeys. They know each foster carer's family circumstances and the support they are likely to need to provide nurturing experiences for children. One of the founding Directors said: 'my passion is never to get so large that we don't know the plan for the children.'

Managers and leaders are significantly effective in anticipating the resources required to drive improvement across service. They are continually thinking of new ideas to make a positive difference for the carers, staff, and children. The small and experienced team of supervising social workers and administrators work side by side to ensure that all aspects of the service run seamlessly. They meet regularly together with managers to discuss operations and to forward plan. This ensures attention to detail, for example, in providing personal gifts for all children for their birthdays and significant cultural celebrations. This helps children and carers to feel embraced.

The statement of purpose is available on the agency website. It clearly sets out the aims, objectives, and ethos of the service which is to provide children well matched, nurturing, family placements. Feedback about the agency included : 'they are a great agency; one that can be relied on to help ensure we make the right match and the right decision based on the young person's needs. They are a pro-active, with the outcomes for young people at the heart of everything they do. They are very responsive, professional, and organised in their approach as well as working well in collaboration with us as a local authority to achieve the best for 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.