

# Eastern Fostering Services

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC437835
<b>Inspection date</b>	02/10/2015
<b>Inspector</b>	Joanna Heller
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Full
<b>Provision subtype</b>	

---

<b>Setting address</b>	Unit 1E, The Gattinetts, Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt, COLCHESTER, CO7 6QT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01206299775
<b>Email</b>	info@easternfamilyservices.com
<b>Registered person</b>	Eastern Family Services Ltd
<b>Registered manager</b>	Eleanor Vanner
<b>Responsible individual</b>	Trevor Jones
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	09/10/2012

---

© Crown copyright 2015

Website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This is a small privately owned independent fostering agency which specialises in providing local placements to local children. The agency has 10 fostering households. The agency currently provides support to 13 children and young people predominantly within the Suffolk and Essex areas. The agency was first registered 7 December 2011. The fostering agency is able to provide task centred fostering, parent and child placements, short breaks, and longer term placements.

### 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**

Eastern Fostering Services provides a good level of care for children and young people. Carers provide high quality individualised child focused care. Young people enjoy stable placements where they flourish making strong progress in relation to their health, education and well-being. They are growing in confidence, independence and maturity which contributes to improved self-esteem. Strong relationships develop in the fostering household which ensure young people feel happy, well supported and valued members of the family.

The experienced and competent staff place safeguarding at the core of all activities, as a result young people are well protected. Risk taking behaviours reduce and the agency staff work well in partnership with other agencies to ensure young people are effectively safeguarded.

An effective panel ensures that carer's capacity to provide good quality parenting is

core to any initial approval and subsequent review. The manager, however, has been requested to ensure that carers' annual reviews are presented to panel in a timely manner.

The agency has developed highly effective working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. Commissioning officers hold the agency in high regard. Social workers refer to 'marvellous carers who absolutely stick to the care plan' and who have 'exceptional empathy'. Carers are proud of the agency and say they wouldn't want to foster for anyone else. They refer to agency staff as people who are 'always trying to make it better for the child'.

Carers feel exceptionally well supported. They are provided with a wealth of training opportunities, however, the manager has been asked to ensure that all carers who have yet to complete safeguarding and first aid training do so.

Whilst quality of care is strong, on occasion some regulations have been breached. As a result the manager has been asked to ensure they notify Ofsted of all significant events and ensure that no placements in excess of 'the usual fostering limit' occur unless an exemption has been approved. In order to improve the service further the manager has also been asked to formalise a development plan, review the statement of purpose and improve the quality of some record keeping. There was no impact for children and young people in respect of these requirements. The manager provides effective leadership and is passionate about delivering high quality care for children and young people.

## 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.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
Children Act 1989	A person may exceed the usual fostering limit if he is exempted from it by the local authority within whose area he lives. In particular; arrange for the placement of no more than three children in a fostering household without an exemption having been formally approved. (Children Act 1989 Schedule 7 (4)(1))	02/12/2015
28 (2011)	The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent. A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year. The fostering service provider must on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration. In	20/12/2015

	particular; ensure that on the occasion of the first annual review that the report of the review of the foster carer's suitability is referred to and considered by panel within a suitable timeframe. (Regulation 28 (1) (2) (5))	
36	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 indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table. In particular; ensure Ofsted is informed of any significant incident. (Regulation 36 (1) Schedule 7)	20/12/2015

## Recommendations

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

Ensure the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. In particular; ensure that the statement of purpose details the agency is registered with Ofsted, includes a summary of the complaints procedure and outlines the support for parent and child placements. (NMS 16.1)

Ensure the registered provider has a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service. NMS (18.2)

Ensure appropriate training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. In particular; ensure all carers undertake appropriate training in first aid, child sexual exploitation and safeguarding. (NMS 20.8)

Ensure staff, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained. There is a system in place to monitor 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**

Young people benefit from positive parenting in nurturing homes where they thrive. They receive highly individualised care and support which meets their particular needs. They grow in confidence, independence and maturity which contribute to their increased self-esteem. Young people are healthy and progressing well.

Assessments and matching processes are strong which minimises the risk of placement breakdown and promotes stability. Where carers of the same background are not available and cross cultural placements are made, full consideration is given to how their needs can be effectively met.

The young people receive bright child friendly welcome packs which include information about, and photos of, the fostering family. The packs also contain information about the agency and how to complain, this is translated into other languages where required. The fostering social workers regularly spend time with the young people, which helps them feel confident to raise any issues of concern.

Strong bonds develop within the foster family, and young people describe feeling they are very much part of the family. They enjoy all extended family festivities together, their artwork, awards and photos are displayed equally alongside those of the birth children. One young person referred to enjoying 'being the older brother' and being part of a 'nice family with a nice house'.

All young people are attending suitable education unless there is a clear reason which is in their best interest. The vast majority of young people are making strong or exceptional progress in their education. Those who speak English as a second language have become fluent in a short time and schools refer to pupils having 'come on tremendously as the carers do so much with them'. The vast majority have excellent attendance; they are encouraged to understand the importance of education, with some achieving very high grades. One school spoke of a child showing 'amazing improvement' having moved from three years behind the national average in reading to now almost in line. They attributed this to the absolute commitment and support of the carer.

Young people know that there will be someone there to support them when key events happen, such as, sports days, plays and parents' evenings. They feel safe, loved and know they will be helped to deal with any issues of bullying including discriminatory comments. One head teacher commented that young people experience 'absolutely astounding commitment' from their carers and that genuine 'love is shown'. A psychologist commented they were 'struck how sensitive and understanding carers were of the child's emotional needs and how well they

supported them’.

The strength of these relationships has enabled some young people to maintain contact and support from carers sometime after they leave, on occasion repairing fractured relationships when placements have broken down. This has helped some young people re-engage with services when trust had broken down, which promotes their long term outcomes. Social workers describe how carers have helped young people ‘develop trust’, ‘open up a lot’ and ‘begin to face and learn how to deal with their problems’. This helps young people develop their emotional resilience.

Young people experience positive parenting and family life. Social workers say that carers are ‘a great support and guidance’ and have been crucial in giving parents ‘the freedom to look after their child so they very much remain mum’. For young parents this has helped them mature, develop their emotional resilience and in turn provide improved parenting to their child.

Young people refer to ‘awesome’ carers and having ‘amazing’ and ‘fun’ times which have provided them with positive childhood memories to treasure.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Assessment processes for prospective carers are thorough ensuring that only suitable carers are approved. Staff are wholly aware of the essential gatekeeping role they perform and only present applicants in whom they have absolute confidence to panel.

Panel processes are effective with membership drawn from a variety of professional backgrounds and life experience. Panel members are well supported through regular training, appraisal and good administrative systems. The on-going suitability of carers is reviewed annually with the report of a carer’s first annual review presented to panel. There is, however, sometimes a significant time lapse between the manager’s review of suitability and the presentation of the review report to panel. On one occasion there was a delay of five months. Such delays without good reason are not in the spirit of the legislation and inhibit the effectiveness of this additional required level of independent scrutiny.

Well thought out matching ensures stable placements and promotes good retention of foster carers. Carers’ state there is never pressure applied on them to take placements. When one young person was asked what could be better about the agency or their carers, they said ‘nothing its brilliant’.

Carers understand their role and are well supported through regular focused

supervision from the agency social workers. They work well in partnership with the agency, parents and professionals to ensure young people's individual needs are met. Placing social workers say 'carers are competent, well trained, practical grounded and on the ball'. Head teachers value the excellent partnership working which has helped them effectively support pupil's successful integration into school. For example, one head teacher referred to carers and fostering service social workers as having 'held the schools hand' helping them understand how to best help young people settle and sharing strategies for behaviour management.

The vast majority of young people accompany carers on family events and holidays, the use of respite services is therefore infrequent. When respite occurs it is well planned, agreed with the placing authority and suitable checks are in place. However, on one occasion within the past year a young person was temporarily placed with carers in excess of the usual fostering limit. However, the legally required exemption for the carers having four unrelated young people in placement, therefore exceeding the usual fostering limit, was not obtained on this occasion. This was a positive arrangement for the young person as the carers were known to them and were able to provide stability, however, this potentially placed the carers at risk of committing an offence of operating an unregistered children's home.

Fostering staff act to ensure placing authorities undertake their statutory duties, and actively chase outstanding local authority documentation. They also advocate on young people's behalf where the authority does not listen to their views and wishes. On one occasion this prompted the obtaining of a court order to allow the whole fostering family to enjoy a holiday together, something which was extremely important for the young person.

All carers complete the training and development standards within their first year of approval. The agency provides a variety of useful training and support which equips carers well to meet the needs of young people. However, a number of carers have not undertaken further appropriate training in key areas, such as, child protection, first aid and child sexual exploitation. This means they may not be up-to-date with changes in statutory guidance and best practice. However, the potential impact is reduced due to the excellent support carers receive from the fostering agency social workers.

Carers refer to an 'outstanding agency' and having 'exceptional support from the start'. They feel respected and core to the professional decision making. Carers feel that agency staff know the whole fostering family extremely well and provide 'excellent' support to the entire household. Carers comment 'it's like a little family', everyone is 'very friendly' and 'there is always someone there when you need them'.



## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Safeguarding is at the core of all activities within the agency. The young people feel safe and are able to talk to their carer or identify someone they can talk to about anything which is worrying them. The agency social workers are familiar to the young people and make sure they regularly see them without the carers present, including during unannounced visits.

Robust recruitment practices protect young people from unsuitable people gaining employment with the agency. All staff and panel members are subject to checks on their suitability which are in line with both regulatory and best practice guidance.

The young people are supported to take age appropriate risks and enjoy spending time with friends, camping with scouts and engaging in activities, such as, canoeing, majorettes and cycling. Good-quality risk assessments and risk management plans guide carers in how to keep them safe. Where incidents occur carers are integral in developing the signs of safety plan which is appropriately shared with the young person, promoting their understanding of keeping safe.

Carers receive clear guidance and reinforcement of the importance of safe care. As a result foster carers understand it is one of their most important responsibilities to keep young people safe and act appropriately to do so. However, some carers have not undertaken training in child sexual exploitation or safeguarding. Where carers are not abreast of the latest developments and guidance regarding key safeguarding issues this has the potential to undermine a robust response in cases of emergency.

The majority of young people placed are safer as a result of living with their carers. Levels of missing from care decrease and improve their ability to make safer lifestyle choices. Levels of missing from care are low, however, carers do implement local protocols effectively when incidents occur and young people understand this. Clear good quality guidance for carers is provided in the missing from care pack which helps carers understand the wider safeguarding context.

Carers and agency social workers work well in partnership and social workers, commissioners and schools have absolute confidence in the carers to keep young people safe.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The appropriately qualified and experienced registered manager has been in post since the agency was registered. They are one of the directors of the company and are therefore in a good position to provide effective timely decisions about the operation of the service. The manager provides competent oversight and is a highly visible member of the agency well known to all carers and partner agencies.

The enthusiastic and committed manager inspires their small staff team with their passion to deliver a high quality child focused service. Staff feel highly valued and well supported, their opinions are valued and they contribute to service development. The service is well resourced ensuring staff have sufficient time to reflect on their practice and provide excellent levels of support to carers. Staff are well-qualified and knowledgeable which is recognised by carers and placing authorities.

Staff know all of the carers and the children and young people, whether fostered or not. Individual outcomes for fostered young people are monitored during supervising social worker visits. The progress of young people and how effective their carers have been in promoting positive outcomes is assessed as part of each young person's and carer's review.

The agency has developed highly effective working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. All of whom spoke of highly responsive and competent carers and staff who have young people's interests very much at heart. Commissioning agencies hold the agency in high regard. All partner professionals comment positively on the stability of placements and the quality of care provided. Equality and diversity is threaded through the service ensuring young people, carers and staff's individual needs are met.

The statement of purpose and children's guides are useful documents which outline the general services available. However, there is little information regarding parent and child arrangements and the statement of purpose does not identify that the agency is registered or the process for raising any concerns with Ofsted. The manager has arranged for the children's guide to be translated into alternative languages.

There have been no complaints from carers. Any issues raised by placing authorities are dealt with transparently and effectively within a timely manner in partnership with other agencies where appropriate.

The manager is aware of the need to notify Ofsted of significant incidents, however, this did not happen on one occasion where a child sustained a traumatic fracture through a road traffic accident. There was no impact on the safety and welfare of the child on this occasion as the carers and agency ensured that they received all appropriate support. Ofsted, however, is unable to make informed judgements to ensure the safety of young people when it is not provided with important information.

Staff and carers generally maintain good quality records, however, on occasion these

lack detail or clarity. For example, panel minutes on occasion do not clearly document changes of approval and records of physical intervention are not always clear about individual events and the actions that carers have taken. Particularly in relation to physical intervention, poor recording may impact on the development of effective behaviour strategies and have the potential to undermine any investigation should a concern arise.

The manager has clear vision on how they wish to develop the service; however, this is not documented to enable effective sharing with staff, carers and directors. The gradual measured development of agency has very much kept the quality of the agency and its focus on young people and carers at the fore. The provider has taken suitable action to address the requirements and majority of recommendations made at the previous inspection and as a result the quality of care and support has improved. Breaches of regulation identified at this inspection are an exception to the norm and have had no impact on the care of children and young people. The manager has a sincere desire to provide an outstanding service and recognises that as the agency develops, the systems used within the agency will need to keep abreast of such growth.

---

## 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.