

# Reach-Out Care Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

---

**Unique reference number** SC036188  
**Inspection date** 12/10/2015  
**Inspector** Stella Henderson  
**Type of inspection** Full  
**Provision subtype**

---

**Setting address** Reach Out Care, Hope House, Burnhope, NEWTON AYCLIFFE, County Durham, DL5 7ER  
**Telephone number** 01325 310 009  
**Email**  
**Registered person** Reach-Out Care Ltd  
**Registered manager**  
**Responsible individual** Mrs Carole Moffat  
**Date of last inspection** 03/12/2012

---

© 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 independent fostering agency is owned by a private 'not for profit' company and was registered in 2003. The agency provides long term, short term, permanence, respite, emergency, parent and child and bridging placements. It also offers 'staying put' arrangements for older teenagers. The agency currently has 33 approved households.

### 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 and young people live in stable, nurturing fostering households where their needs are clearly met. They make good progress across all aspects of their development and they are safe in their placements. Children and young people think their lives have improved since they have been in foster care and they speak fondly and affectionately about their foster carers.

This agency has many strengths. These include the quality of support afforded to foster carers, effective participation for children and young people and good partnership working with other agencies.

Leadership and management requires improvement, particularly where monitoring is concerned. Minor deficits are also identified in other judgement areas, but none of these have an adverse impact on the welfare or safety of children and young people. The provider took immediate steps to address 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
<p>5: Fitness of provider                      Ensure a person must not carry on a fostering agency unless –</p> <p>(1) (d) in the case of an organisation carrying on a fostering agency, where the organisation has given notice to the Chief Inspector of the name, address and position in the organisation of an individual ("the responsible individual") who is a director, manager, secretary or other officer of the organisation and is responsible for supervising the management of the fostering agency, the responsible individual satisfies the requirement of paragraph (2) as to fitness.</p> <p>(2) The requirements are that-</p> <p>(a) the person is of integrity and good character                      (b) the person is physically and mentally fit to carry on the fostering agency, and                      (c) full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1 (Regulation 5 (1)(d)(2)(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>18/11/2015</p>
<p>20: Fitness of workers                      Ensure that the fostering service provider must not –</p> <p>(1) (a) employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>(3) For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person –</p> <p>(a) is of integrity and good character                      (b) has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,                      (c) is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform, and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1</p>	<p>18/11/2015</p>

(Regulation 20 (1)(a) (3)(a)(b)(c))	
24: Meetings of fostering panel  Ensure that the fostering panel makes a written record of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations (Regulation 24)(2))	18/11/2015
35: Review of quality of care  Ensure that the registered person maintains a system for - (a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and (b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency (3) The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority) (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(3))	18/11/2015

## Recommendations

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

### 16: Statement of Purpose & child's guide

Ensure that the Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights and how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer. (NMS 16.4).

### 20: Learning and development of carers

Ensure that foster carers are able to evidence that the Training Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook. (NMS 20.3)

### 21: Supervision and support of carers

Ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year (NMS 21.8). This is with specific reference to ensuring that

children and young people are given the opportunity to be seen without their foster carers

#### 25: Managing effectively & monitoring

Ensure that managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined (NMS 25.4)

#### 25: Managing effectively & monitoring

Ensure that the executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:

- a) receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months;
- b) monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- c) satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration (NMS 25.7)

#### 29: Notification of significant events

Ensure the registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend (NMS 29.1)

#### 31: Placement plan and review

Ensure that the foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. (NMS 31.2) In particular escalate any concerns to an appropriately senior level within the local authority.

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Careful matching helps children and young people to get off to a good start in their foster homes. It provides them with the foundation they need to blend into their foster family and develop secure attachments. One young person noted, 'I feel like I fit in with my foster family.'

This is not at the expense of their own culture or identity. One young person appreciated the fact that his foster family, 'liked doing the same kind of things as my family', such as going to horse fairs.

Children and young people are helped to feel good about who they are. This sense of acceptance, security and stability means that they can get on with their lives, invest in themselves and in relationships with others.

Children and young people feel their lives had improved during their time in foster care. They described foster carers as being very supportive and have formed very affectionate ties to them. One young person said, 'my foster carer is brilliant.'

All children and young people have educational placements. They are provided with additional support in their education when required, such as specific tutoring or support with homework.

Children and young people recognise their own achievements. One young person said, 'I was a year behind in my reading age last year and now I am two years ahead'. Another young person said they had been able to complete more challenging maths questions at school.

Outside of education, the majority of children and young people lead very busy and fulfilling lives. They have pets to look after, after school clubs to attend and friends to socialise with. They go on holidays at home and abroad and engage in a wide range of sporting and leisure activities such as horse riding, badminton and swimming. This positively impacts on their emotional and physical health. It also helps them to learn how to use their spare time constructively and develop their social and friendship networks.

Children and young people have ample opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings to the agency. Their views on being fostered contribute to their foster carer reviews. Children and young people also have the opportunity to actively engage and participate in the running of the agency, for example in contributing to the interviews of new staff. This conveys to children and young people that their input and views are valued and respected.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency has a sufficient number of foster carers who have the skills and abilities to provide good quality care for children and young people. They say they feel like valued members of the 'team around the child', and their professional view is respected.

Foster carers provide secure placements for children and young people, over several years in some cases. They get to know the children and young people they care for very well; their histories, personalities and needs. They stick with them through the hard times and celebrate their achievements.

Foster carers work effectively to ensure that any barriers to progress are challenged. They have a very clear understanding of each young person's needs and integrate well with other professionals to make sure care planning decisions are implemented.

When care planning documentation is not provided by local authorities, the agency follows this up but does not always escalate this to a senior enough level within the local authority. Good quality communication between professionals and foster carers means the occasional gap in written information has not had a detrimental impact on the welfare or safety of young people.

Foster carers say they get effective support, advice and guidance from their supervising social workers and find forum groups very helpful. Their practice also benefits from direct support and advice from professionals in educational and mental health services. They supplement their own skills and knowledge by research and reading.

A small number of carers have not completed their 'Training, Support and Development' portfolios within recommended timescales. This has no direct impact on the care and safety of children and young people but would help to further demonstrate that foster carers remain competent for the task.

Assessments for prospective carers and annual review reports of existing carers are thorough. The fostering panel applies considered analysis to each case, particularly where there may be grounds for de-registration. This ensures that only good quality carers, who can provide safe care, are available to the agency.

Panel administration is efficient ensuring that papers are delivered in a timely fashion and that timescales are kept to. Although panel minutes are of a high standard, they do not always specifically record the reasons for the panel's recommendations for foster carer approval. This is a procedural shortfall that has no impact on children and young people.



## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people say they feel safe with their foster carers. These are the people they would turn to if they were worried about anything, along with teachers and their own family. One young person said, 'My carers look after me. I feel safe with them.' Local authority social workers also confirmed that the agency provides very safe placements for children and young people.

Children and young people are protected because the assessment, preparation, supervision and review of foster carers has a clear focus on safeguarding. Foster carers confirm that unannounced visits are undertaken and health and safety checks are carried out. Children and young people are often seen during unannounced and planned visits. Safeguarding could be further strengthened by supervising social workers offering to speak to children and young people on their own during these visits.

Challenging behaviour is managed well by foster carers. Specialist practical advice from therapeutic and behaviour support workers assists with this. Children and young people are supported to find constructive and rewarding things to do in their spare time. As a result they feel no need to involve themselves in risk-taking behaviours such as running away or involving themselves in substance misuse. Very few young people have been at risk of child sexual exploitation. Where this has been identified immediate action has been taken by their carers to protect them.

The vetting of people working for the agency is generally robust in all respects. Some minor shortfalls were identified in checks for panel members. These were procedural and as panel members have no contact with children and young people this has no detrimental impact on their safety or well-being.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

There is currently a vacancy for the registered manager's position. The provider has ensured this vacancy has quickly gone out to advert. The provider has appointed an interim manager who took up her appointment during the course of this inspection. She has suitable qualifications and experience and has already identified several areas of practice for further development.

Care provided for children and young people in their individual foster homes is good and they achieve a lot. Monitoring at a strategic level is not robust enough to identify shortfalls in practice or emerging patterns and trends, including capturing what the

agency does well. This limits the agency's ability drive forward further improvement for children and young people.

For example, monitoring information is sometimes inaccurate and so cannot always be relied upon. The views of children and young people and other stakeholders are not included. Quarterly monitoring reports go to the director, but there is then no feedback to confirm that the service is effective and achieving good outcomes for children.

Additional shortfalls contribute to leadership and management requiring improvement. For example, notifications have occasionally been delayed because of inefficiencies in the agency's administration. This limits the ability of the regulator to take action in a timely manner should this be required.

A new Responsible Individual has been appointed. Although highly competent, the provider has not been able to fully demonstrate the steps taken to satisfy itself that the Responsible Individual is suitable for the post.

Some actions and decision-making by staff, although well-intentioned and meant to be supportive, blur the boundaries of the professional role. For example, joint visits of business and support staff have occasionally been made to foster carers. This sometimes risks compromising the confidentiality of foster carers and young people.

A recommendation from the last inspection to include additional information in the Children's Guide has been met. The role of the 'independent reviewing officer' has been misinterpreted. A recommendation is set again to address this.

The agency works well with commissioners, who rate the agency positively. Overall there is effective partnership working with everyone concerned with children and young people, including their parents.

Foster carers feel they get 'excellent' support from their supervising social workers, who, 'are available 24/7'. They find supervision helpful and sometimes challenging. They understand that this is to ensure that children and young people are being fully supported and safeguarded.

---

## 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.