

FosterCare UK

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Lucy Chapman
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Service information

Brief description of the service

FosterCare UK Limited is an independent fostering agency offering family placements for children and young people from birth to 18 years of age. Placement provision includes: short term, long term, emergency, bridging, respite, assessment, therapeutic, disability, sibling group, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, residential transition, and parent and child placements. In August 2015, FosterCare UK Ltd had 37 foster carers with 55 children placed.

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 are in settled placements with committed foster carers. They develop trusted relationships with their carers, share their concerns and receive the support and advice that they require. The agency supports staying put arrangements, enabling young people to stay with their carers for as long as they need to.

Children and young people, including those with the most complex needs, have their individual needs met. Partnership working as a team around the child safeguards and promotes their welfare. The agency works to ensure that relationships with partner agencies are effective.

Outcomes for children and young people are good. They attend school or college and participate in clubs and activities that give them a sense of achievement and develop their self-esteem. Children and young people receive the specialist health services

that they require, including access to in-house therapeutic assessment and support.

The agency is committed to listening to the views of children and young people; their views influence decision-making. For example, they interview fostering applicants during skills to foster training and contribute to the review of the agency’s policies.

Foster carers are extremely happy with the agency; they receive excellent support and feel valued. The agency has exceptional foster carer retention. Recruitment of new carers demonstrates a commitment to approving high calibre carers able to meet the needs of complex young people. New carers meet stringent panel requirements. Well-trained and supported supervising social workers provide highly valued support to foster carers.

A diverse training programme equips foster carers with wide-ranging skills to meet the needs of young people. Some carers do not proactively engage with training, inaccessible and unsuitably timed training limits attendance of others. The agency is reviewing training provision after consultation with its carers; despite these positive steps, some carers still lack key training, particularly de-escalation techniques.

Committed and innovative managers have good understanding and oversight of the agency. However, management oversight of foster carers’ file recording lacks robust scrutiny. Recording of foster carer supervision is inconsistent and does not reflect the support that carers receive. Unannounced visits are undertaken regularly, however, recording lacks detail and does not include discussion with children and young people, diminishing quality assurance and safeguarding.

There is a lack of effective integration of information held in the agency's case files and those of the responsible authority; some placing authorities have not provided the agency with children’s essential documentation. While it is evident that the agency is pursuing required documents this has not been escalated to the highest level and some key documents required for effective care remain outstanding.

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 |
|--|------------|
| Ensure the fostering service provider provides foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them, in particular training in de-escalating problems and disputes. (Regulation 17(1)) | 18/12/2015 |

Recommendations

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

Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to quality assure written records and ensure that records are up to date. (NMS 25.2)

Ensure the agency works with the responsible authority to ensure effective integration of information held in the agency's case files and those of the responsible authority. Where placing authorities do not provide documentation the agency escalates requests for information to the highest level. (NMS 26.8)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people receive comprehensive information about their foster carer's home and family before they move into placement. An effective children's guide provides information about the agency; it includes information on advocacy services and complaints. Children and young people's involvement in the design of this document ensures that it is child focussed.

Up to date care plans guide children and young people's care. They understand their care plans and contribute to their care planning meetings. Long-term stable placements are an unquestionable strength of the agency; well-resourced, creative support packages reinforce placement stability. Young people stay with their carers for as long as they need to; the agency supports staying put arrangements.

Young people engage in a wide range of opportunities and talk with pride about their achievements. One young person says 'I do Cadets and have completed first aid training and got some badges; in the last year I've boosted my confidence'. Other young people have completed their schooling and moved on to college, university or gained employment. Young people receive support to build positive futures.

Wherever possible, children and young people benefit from positive relationships between their parents and foster carers. They have contact with their friends and family and develop a positive sense of identity.

Children and young people engaging in unsafe behaviours receive help. Partnership working with the team around the child leads to robust action planning to minimise risk. Foster carers receive purposeful supervision and advice that supports challenging placements. One foster carer says 'I have a complex little girl. The support of the agency has been fantastic, for me and the child; it has kept the placement going'. Foster carers advocate for the children and young people in their care; their views are valued as part of the professional team.

Effective behaviour management plans help foster carers to understand children and young people's behaviour and to respond effectively. This is a no restraint agency; foster carers do not use physical intervention to manage behaviour.

Recent introduction of in-house therapeutic support enables responsive provision of specialist assessments and ongoing therapeutic support. Qualified and registered therapists provide direct therapy to children and young people and consultation to their carers. One carer says 'We've had therapeutic consultation for six months; I find it really useful in thinking about her needs. It has helped me not to feel so stressed and to step back and deal with things in a calmer way'.

Children and young people are in school or college full time. They attend well and make educational progress. For newly placed children and young people the agency links with the virtual school to identify suitable schools and arranges tuition during

any interim period. Proactive advocacy in respect of young people's education minimises educational drift and delay.

Children and young people say they feel safe and happy living with their foster carers and that carers listen and respond to their wishes and feelings. A young person says 'I get input as most parents would want for their children'. A local authority Social Worker says 'she is part of their family; they really do care for her'.

A new planning for independence programme improves independence preparation. Young people involved, understand this programme. One young person says 'we had a chat about things that I need to learn, I can work a washing machine and cook but there's stuff I still need to learn'. Despite independent assessments being completed and implemented for young people they are not all up to date, resulting in missed opportunities to monitor and support young people's progress.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The agency places emphasis on recruiting diverse foster carers able to meet children and young people's individual needs. Newly recruited foster carers speak highly of their skills to foster training; this comprehensively prepares applicants for the fostering role. An independent assessing Social Worker says 'the agency are selective, they know the type of families they want for their young people'. A commitment to high quality recruitment and counselling out unsuitable applicants ensures the agency approves robust and resilient carers to look after complex children and young people.

A robust foster panel with diverse membership approves only suitable applicants as foster carers, considering terms of approval carefully. Panel provides stringent oversight of foster carer approval and takes effective action to challenge poor practice, including, in exceptional circumstances, de-registration. The recent addition of a panel member with specialist knowledge around gang membership provides valuable perspective where gang involvement is an identified risk factor for children and young people.

Overwhelmingly carers speak positively about the support they receive from the agency. One carer says 'I'm getting the day to day support I need to foster; you say you need help and they're there like a shot'. Carers build positive relationships with their supervising social workers. One carer says 'my supervising social worker is so supportive, she gives me advice in what to do, and she is my support more than anyone'. Trusted relationships between foster carers and supervising social workers facilitates open communication about foster carer's support needs, this leads to the provision of required support. Foster placements have high levels of stability in this agency. High quality, responsive support for foster carers enables them to sustain placements throughout periods of difficulty.

A qualified social worker oversees placement matching. Good quality matching results in stable placements with carers equipped to meet children and young people's needs. Foster carers comment that they receive full information prior to the placement of young people; where they have questions, the agency is proactive in seeking additional information.

The agency values and supports the whole fostering family. Birth children have access to Skills to Foster training, agency events and counselling; they understand fostering and receive support as children and young people who foster. Birth children attend the 'speak' consultation group alongside fostered children and young people; the agency values the views of all children and young people.

High quality agency training, covering diverse subject areas equips carers to meet children and young people's needs. Agency support to carers to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards has a positive impact; carers complete their TSD within timescale. Carers give positive feedback about the training they attend. One carer says 'I've had a lot of training, its good quality, I went to the 'Fostering Changes' training course and that was really helpful'.

Despite comprehensive training provision some carers lack mandatory and specialist training. Carers report that training venues and timing are unsuitable; poor foster carer enrolment results in some course cancellation. Procedures to oversee carers who do not attend training are not sufficient, leading to drift in some carers completing mandatory training. The previous inspection highlighted the need for all carers to complete training in first aid and de-escalation. Carers now have up to date first aid training, however, a high number of carers lack or have out of date de-escalation training, meaning that they may not be equipped to manage the complex and challenging behaviour of children and young people they care for. The agency is reviewing training provision after consultation with carers, aiming to improve the accessibility of training; however, the current training of a significant number of carers does not meet agency stated requirements.

Children and young people's placement plans receive six-monthly review, ensuring that care responds to their developing needs. Some care planning documentation, particularly delegated authority, is lacking from young people's files; this hinders foster carers' ability to respond to young people's needs. The agency actively pursues the placing authority for required information, however requests for documentation are not escalated to the highest level and key documentation required for children and young people's effective care remains outstanding.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Trusted relationships between children, young people and their carers mean that

they can share their concerns and receive the advice and support they require. They speak to their placing authority social worker and agency supervising social worker regularly, providing additional opportunities for them to share any worries. Children and young people know how to complain but have not made any complaints.

A proactive commitment to staff training means that social worker safeguarding skills are up to date; one supervising social worker has recently completed a Masters qualification in advanced child protection. Well-trained social workers deal effectively with safeguarding issues. They provide effective advice to foster carers that keeps children and young people safe.

Children and young people have individual risk assessments with action plans to minimise identified risks. Foster carers contribute to risk assessments and demonstrate a working knowledge of risk minimisation plans in place. An agency child sexual exploitation (CSE) checklist helps to identify young people at risk of CSE; identification of CSE results in robust action planning to protect young people.

An agency CSE champion leads a proactive approach to CSE and online safety. An updated e-safety policy provides interactive advice with hyperlinks to specialist advice agencies. Excellent training equips carers to understand CSE and online risks. Foster carers and staff demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep children and young people safe online, as a result, children and young people learn how to keep themselves safe.

All foster carers complete safeguarding training, which includes child protection, safer care, CSE, online safety, self-harm, first aid and medication training. They have a good understanding of safeguarding and effectively report safeguarding concerns. Regular foster carer supervision builds upon training knowledge, putting knowledge into practice to keep children and young people safe. Supervision has a strong focus on safeguarding. One foster carer says 'we always have an in depth discussion about her safety. We always get the advice we need'.

There have been no allegations against staff. Allegations against carers are infrequent, when they occur, the agency responds appropriately and foster carers receive support. The agency links with the local authority designated officer (LADO) to seek safeguarding advice. The LADO reports effective safeguarding management and reporting by the agency.

The agency forms effective relationships with professionals in children and young people's networks; there is an emphasis on partnership working. A foster carer says 'we linked with the police missing person's officer and they came out to meet her. We had network meetings and worked together to develop a strategy; her missing behaviour has reduced'. Multi-agency working with police, youth offending teams, schools and health services helps to keep children and young people safe and supports their positive development.

Staff and panel recruitment meets regulatory requirements; safe recruitment helps protect young people from harmful adults. Agency safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and provide effective safeguarding guidance. A well-

known and understood whistleblowing policy provides additional safeguarding assurance.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

An energetic Registered Manager committed to achieving high standards for children and young people leads this agency. She is a qualified social worker, holds a Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management, and has been Registered Manager of the agency for four years.

Full consistent staffing enables trusting open relationships to develop between supervising social workers and foster carers. Supervising social workers with extensive experience bring knowledge and understanding to their role. Agency support for continuing professional development ensures that staff training is up to date, particularly in respect of safeguarding.

Managers develop effective working relationships with placing authorities and social workers to improve the care and outcomes for young people. Commissioners comment on strong partnership working. A Social Worker says 'the agency are great, they send me reports and keep me updated anytime something happens. We are a tight multi-agency network jointly working to meet the young person's needs'.

The agency makes extensive efforts to listen to the views of young people; their views influence decision-making. The 'Speak' consultation group have recently contributed to the agency's smoking policy and interview fostering applicants during skills to foster training. Children and young peoples' views are highly valued and they can see the difference their input makes; as a result, they are empowered and their confidence grows.

Regular management monitoring of the quality of service includes the views of children and young people, foster carers and stakeholders. Managers have a good oversight of children and young people's progress. A baseline assessment maps children and young people's strengths and difficulties on placement; monthly outcome tracking monitors ongoing progress and enables swift action where there is any progress decline. Responsive agency support for children and young people enables the additional provision of services where monitoring highlights this need, as a result children and young people make good ongoing progress.

Management oversight of foster carer file recording lacks scrutiny, this means that in some areas recording standards are not to agency expectation. Recording of foster carer supervision is inconsistent and does not effectively record the support that foster carers receive; this does not provide carers with an effective record of

supervision. Unannounced visits are undertaken regularly, however, recording lacks detail and does not include discussion with children and young people, diminishing a quality assurance and safeguarding opportunity.

Highly qualified and experienced supervising social workers provide foster carers with excellent support. The agency has exceptional foster carer retention; foster carers are immensely happy with the agency. They say 'We are happy, we've never had a problem with the agency, they are always there and are approachable and professional' and 'They are fantastic; they go over and above in their support'.

All staff receive regular effective supervision that offers both support and professional challenge. Staff value supervision and say 'supervision is a nice balance, we think about carers and the support they need, and the children, and how the work is impacting us'. A new format for staff appraisal includes an emphasis on future development targets. Appraisal includes children and young people and foster carer feedback, improving quality assurance.

The last inspection of the agency was in 2013 when the overall effectiveness of the agency was judged as good. The agency has effectively addressed the two requirements made. Improved management monitoring now includes consultation with foster carers, young people and their placing authorities. Enhanced systems for notifiable events mean that managers report all events requiring notification without delay.

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.