

Regional Foster Placements Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Tracy Murty
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Regional Foster Placements Ltd is a privately owned, independent fostering agency based in Nottingham. It undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval, supervision and training of foster carers, who provide a wide range of placements, including emergency, short term, long term and parent and child.

At the time of this inspection there were 11 fostering households, and 12 children and young people 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**

This is a good fostering agency which provides positive, safe placements for children and young people, most of whom have very complex needs. Its strengths include the stability of placements and ability to place sibling groups. This enables children and young people to make positive attachments and develop in confidence. They have their needs met fully, develop strong and positive attachments to their carers, and as a result, they achieve, in many cases, extremely positive outcomes.

The agency places the needs of each child and young person at the centre of their practice and provides high quality care. Matching of potential placements is carefully considered by staff and managers, with carers feeling no pressure to accept placements if they do not feel they can meet a child or young person's specific needs. This has led to good placement stability and carers who feel highly valued and well supported at all times.

Foster carers provide excellent standards of care and demonstrate a commendable insight into the needs of those children placed with them. This is attributable to the good training and regular support they receive. A placing social worker said: 'My young person is very settled and has made very strong attachments to the carers who really advocate for her and she wants to remain with them.' Carers work very closely with other agencies and act as positive and strong role models and advocates at all times. Agency staff similarly support carers and routinely challenge placing authorities and other involved agencies, if they feel a child or young person's needs have not been met.

The management of the agency is strong and provides exceptional structure and support to both staff and carers. A carer stated: 'I have been very impressed with the manager, she has pre-empted any issues for us and there is a very positive chemistry between the manager and carers.' Staff similarly report very high levels of satisfaction in their roles and support provided to them by the manager. A member of staff commented: 'I love my job so much, I have excellent support from my manager and am so pleased that I moved to work at this agency.'

Minor shortfalls identified as a result of this inspection do not have a negative impact on outcomes for children and young people. The current statement of purpose refers to some services which are not currently being provided by the agency. The record of the agency decision maker should reflect the decision-making process in more detail.

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 that the statement of purpose consists of a statement as to the services and facilities provided by the fostering service. Regulation 3(1)(b))	03/03/2016

Recommendations

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

ensure that in reaching a decision or making a qualifying determination, the decision maker should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM (2009)* and approach a case accordingly (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering

Services 5.40)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people experience very stable and positive placements with carers in this agency. They form strong and meaningful attachments to their carers and develop in confidence and emotional well-being as a result of the excellent care and support they receive. There have been no unplanned endings of placements since the agency was registered in April 2015. This is largely attributable to the good matching processes in place when considering new placements with carers. A carer said: 'Agency staff are excellent in sharing information with us. There is careful consideration of our own birth children in the matching process and our ability to meet a child's needs. This leads to secure and appropriate placements being made, which then succeed.'

Children and young people receive a welcome box prior to moving in with their carers. This contains a copy of the statement of purpose, the children's guide and information on how to make a complaint. It also contains a stress ball, pen and paper and a 'worry bag' for them to put any comments in and a handmade quilt. Such attention to detail ensures that they feel welcome and valued from the start of their placement and know how to raise any concerns or issues they may have.

Children and young people develop secure attachments to their carers and feel very much part of the fostering family. A young person commented: 'It has been nearly a year since my life changed massively. I love living where I do now, I wouldn't want to move or have to leave...even if I was offered £1000 I'd say no.' Carers demonstrate a commendable commitment to those they care for and act as very positive and strong advocates for them. They routinely challenge placing authorities and other agencies for missing documentation and information, evidenced by their detailed case recordings. Carers demonstrate real tenacity, especially when caring for children or young people with extremely complex needs.

A high priority is given by both carers and agency staff to education. All children and young people placed with this agency have formal educational provision in place. Carers and agency staff work very closely and proactively with education providers to ensure needs are known and met. An education provider stated: 'The carer is amazing. She comes to all meetings and is in regular contact with us. The young person has been inspired by her carer and it shows in her progress. The supervising social worker also goes over and above her role and is absolutely brilliant to work with. I cannot say enough positive things about the carer or the agency staff member.' The agency also regularly tracks and monitors educational information and has robust systems in place to ensure that reviews and meetings take place at agreed times. They challenge placing authorities when any areas of concern have been identified. This reflects the commitment of the agency to ensuring that education is seen as a high priority. The manager has plans to further improve this, with clearer systems to record the educational attendance, attainment and history for each placed child and young person. This will further strengthen the current positive systems and provide even better

information to support educational needs.

The agency commissions the services of a range of therapeutic and specialist workers to support children and young people with their complex needs. For some children, this has led to noticeable improvements in their behaviours. A teacher for one child receiving such additional support via the agency stated: 'He is making real and positive progress in school. His behaviours have really improved. Weekly therapy has been put in place by the agency which takes place in school. Aggressive behaviours have stopped and he is much more settled.'

Children and young people benefit from having regular contact with family members and significant others. Carers fully support them with agreed contact arrangements and, where appropriate, invite family members to visit their children in placement. This promotes a real sense of being valued and reflects the commitment of carers to their roles. Children and young people form positive and meaningful peer relationships, as they settle into their placements and education provisions. They engage with the local community and access a wide range of social resources with their carers and independently. As the agency has only been operating for a short time, there have been no staying put placements made as yet. Carers spoken with during this inspection all stated their commitment to providing long-term and secure placements, beyond the age of 18 if needed.

Children and young people feel well supported and listened to by their carers and agency staff. Their views, wishes and feelings are sought and acted upon. No complaints have been received by the agency since it commenced operating last year. Feedback from placing social workers is all positive and demonstrates that children and young people feel settled and happy. A placing social worker commented: 'My young person is happy in her placement, she has come on a lot. She is very strong willed and would let me or others know if she was not happy with any aspect of the care and support she receives.'

Children and young people enjoy good physical and emotional health because their carers and agency staff access appropriate services and advocate to ensure these are provided as necessary. Carers receive training on mental health, administration of medication, drugs awareness, health promotion and first aid. Their skills and commitment to ensuring the holistic health needs of children and young people placed with them is clearly evident and confirmed in feedback from placing authorities and stakeholders.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency recruits a wide range of foster carers who are able to meet the complex and diverse needs of children and young people placed. Most have complex needs and challenging behaviours, with the agency providing very good support and training to its carers. There is a real focus on ensuring that carers can meet the identified needs of

each child placed with them. A carer stated: 'I have had training on epilepsy in order to be able to care for one child. This is really positive and means that I feel very confident and competent in being able to meet their complex needs at all times.' The agency has also offered placements to sibling groups with very positive outcomes evident. For some children, this has led to them being able to remain together successfully, due to carers skills and the additional therapeutic support put in place by the agency.

The process for the preparation, assessment and approval of carers is thorough and timely. All carers spoken with during this inspection praised the agency for its thoroughness during the preparation and assessment process. One stated: 'We learned so much from the skills to foster course and assessment process. It was handled very sensitively from start to finish and prepared us well for our role.' Assessments of prospective carers are analytical and detailed. They focus on the competencies required to be a foster carer and demonstrate competent assessments being undertaken by agency staff and independent assessors. Reviews take place in a timely manner and fully consider and identify any additional training or support needs for carers. Carers met with during this inspection demonstrated a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as those of the agency and placing authorities. This is supported by the good quality training and development opportunities they receive. One carer stated: 'The training we get is really good and makes me feel even more confident in my role.'

Carers undertake the training, support and development standards in foster care and all are on track to complete this within the required timescales. A detailed and comprehensive training and development programme is in place. Carers have full access to a wide range of training opportunities, relevant to their caring roles. Mandatory training is completed following approval relating to first aid and safeguarding, with clear plans in place for each carer for other training options. The agency also proactively seeks out and sources bespoke training for carers, dependent on the needs of those children and young people placed with them. This promotes an efficient and effective carer group, able to meet complex needs with skill and competence. Support and supervision to carers is a key strength of this agency. Carers receive very regular formal supervision, which is very child focused. They state that the out of hour's service is very good, with staff and the manager responding quickly to them. A carer said of their supervising social worker: 'She is excellent and I could not ask for better support 24/7. If she were to leave, I would panic, as she means that much to me.'

Carers work very closely with the agency and placing social workers to ensure the needs of those placed with them are met at all times. They act as strong and positive role models and advocates and demonstrate a real commitment to those children and young people placed with them. There is also very positive evidence of them challenging placing authorities, with agency support when key documentation is missing or information is not forthcoming. Carers receive training on recording and use this to ensure that detailed records and accounts are made of their attempts to secure or share information. One placing social worker said: 'The carer is very good at keeping me in touch or chasing me for missing information. She emails me regularly and always follows up when I have not been able to get back to her.'

The fostering panel provides effective oversight of the work of the agency. The central list includes members with a wide range of skills and experience, relevant to their role. Membership includes health, education, foster carers, ex-care leavers and qualified social workers. Such relevant experience is evident in the quality of the minutes produced from each panel meeting. Panel members' challenge and robustly question assessors and applicants, in order to make informed recommendations. The administration of the panel is efficient and effective and assists the decision maker to make an informed and timely decision. However, the decision is not currently recorded in line with statutory guidance, although the process is robust and child focused.

There is very careful consideration of all referrals received by the agency and attention to ensuring that matching of children and young people to carers is appropriate and can meet their identified needs. Agency staff and managers routinely challenge placing authorities and commissioners for missing information and have shown real tenacity in their attempts to secure information, support and services.

Carers are consistently positive about working for this particular agency. One said: 'I love that it is a small, family run business and that we all support each other and feel so valued for what we do. I would recommend this agency to anyone considering becoming a foster carer.' Carers fully embrace their roles and include children and young people placed with them fully into their own family lives. They include them in social activities, holidays in this country and abroad and actively support them with contact. One young person said: 'I would like to say a huge thankyou to my carer for being the best figure of a mum ever. It means a lot to know I have someone who wants to care for me and other young people. Ever since I moved here I have seen quite a big change in me, thankyou a lot.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Agency staff and carers demonstrate a clear and commendable commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of all children and young people placed with them. Carers receive good quality training in relation to child sexual exploitation, missing from care, safeguarding, allegations and complaints. They actively implement the learning from such training into their daily work in supporting children and young people. Carers demonstrate a very detailed and clear awareness and understanding of actual, or potential, safeguarding issues and present as highly confident in how they respond to such concerns. The training plan for the coming year includes courses on radicalisation, internet and e-safety and safer caring for family members and back-up carers. This reflects the commitment of the registered manager to ensuring carers have the skills and competence to respond to any safeguarding issues.

Carers work sensitively to balance the need to ensure children and young people remain safe, whilst encouraging them to take age-appropriate risks. Safe care plans and risk assessments provide carers with guidance as to how to respond to any actual or potential concerns, with them demonstrating real insight into the specific needs of

those children and young people placed with them. Carers work closely with agency staff and placing authorities to share information and seek advice or guidance when concerns emerge.

There have been relatively few incidents of young people going missing from care since the agency was registered last year. It is evident that carers respond to such situations with a calm and confident manner, following agreed risk assessments and plans fully. They communicate promptly with agency staff and placing authorities to ensure that full information is shared. There is very close and proactive working evident with local police and an adherence to joint missing from care protocols. The registered manager ensures that notifications are made to Ofsted in a very timely manner and has good monitoring and tracking systems in place.

There have been no allegations made in relation to carers within this agency to date. All carers undertake training on allegations and complaints following their approval. They demonstrate a detailed and clear awareness and understanding of the processes to be followed, in the event of an allegation being made against them. Similarly, agency staff also have a clear understanding of the allegations process and their roles and responsibilities, including ensuring that carers would have independent support made available and the need for detailed and clear recording and close working with placing authorities of all children and young people placed with that carer.

Carers receive a comprehensive range of training and development opportunities, which focus on safeguarding and abuse. They present as confident and very knowledgeable in relation to those children or young people placed with them and their histories. They understand the need to be supportive, but not ask leading questions when any disclosures are made and in the importance of reporting such matters to the agency and placing authority as a matter of priority. Agency staff visit carers unannounced at least once a year and always ensure that they see children and young people on their own. They also attempt to see carers' birth children and other household members alone. Children and young people therefore develop positive and secure relationships with the agency's staff and feel able to discuss any issues or concerns they may have directly with them.

The recruitment of all staff and panel members is thorough and in line with statutory requirements. This ensures that those working directly with children and young people or having access to their information is safe and suitable.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The registered manager of this agency is inspirational, confident, ambitious and innovative and provides outstanding leadership and management. Since the agency was registered in April 2015, she has made significant developments to improve the care provided to children and young people. She is supported by a highly confident and competent workforce, including supervising social workers, foster carers and administrative support. In a relatively short period of time, this has led to exceptional

progress and experiences for several children and young people placed with this agency.

The manager has devised and implemented excellent recording and monitoring systems to oversee and track all aspects of the care and support provided to children, young people and carers. Such systems are also attributable to the excellent administrative support provided to the agency, by a highly dedicated and efficient agency administrator. Management monitoring reports are produced quarterly and sent to Ofsted. These reports demonstrate the excellent attention to detail in monitoring and tracking all aspects of the care, support and services provided to children and young people. The manager constantly strives to improve such systems and there is real and positive learning ethos apparent within the agency and its staff.

The addition of a support worker to the agency is proving to be very successful. This person is able to provide direct work and support to children and young people within their placements on such areas as improving educational attendance and engagement, peer relationships and preparing for transitions to adult life. The worker has also devised forums and social events for children and young people for the coming year. Flyers have been sent out, encouraging them to attend, in order to share their views, wishes and feelings as to how the agency supports them now and into the future. This reflects the agency's commitment to involving children and young people in all aspects of their care and placing them at the centre of the agency's practice.

A key strength of the agency and its management relates to how well it challenges placing authorities and others to provide the services and support children and young people need and deserve. This is evident in the tireless attempts to secure missing information, documentation and in the manager having robust oversight of all placements and their changing needs. This also contributes to the excellent placement stability and improved outcomes for children and young people.

The agency has a clear and child-friendly statement of purpose in place. It currently refers to some services, which this agency is not providing, such as male carer support groups. There is a need for it to accurately reflect the actual services and facilities the agency is providing. Children and young people receive a copy of the children's guide as part of their welcome pack on arrival at their placement. This provides them with clear and useful information on the services they will receive, how to make a complaint and other relevant information.

The manager has a clear and detailed development plan in place for the agency. This reflects the plans for expanding the number of carers they approve, increasing agency staff numbers and the financial viability and projections for the agency. Retention of carers is good, with five applications currently going through for prospective new carers and recruitment plans in place to widen the services across the east midlands.

Staff, managers and panel members are appropriately qualified, experienced and supervised. Staff report very high levels of satisfaction in their roles and the support they receive from the managers within the agency. Supervision of staff is regular and provides them with an opportunity to consider case work issues, as well as their own personal and professional development. One supervising social worker stated: 'I love

working for this agency, the support I get from the manager is great, as are the training and development opportunities. I feel really valued here and part of a small and family-based company. We place the children and young people at the centre of everything we do, with full support and backing from managers.'

A commissioning officer from one placing authority said: 'I have been very happy so far with the agency. They have been able to provide placements at short notice when asked. They are very responsive and communication is very good with staff and managers. They have provided good care for our children and young people and their outcomes have improved in the care of this agency and their carers.'

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.