

Wholistic Fostering Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

Unique reference number	SC476942
Inspection date	09/02/2016
Inspector	David Morgan
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Agency performing the function(s) of LAs

Setting address	50 Bradford Street, Walsall, West Midlands, WS1 3QD
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Registered person	Wholistic Fostering Limited
Registered manager	Patricia Nettleford
Responsible individual	Michael Dennis
Date of last inspection	N/A

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Service information

Brief description of the service

A small private company operates this new fostering agency. No children have been placed. Three households with four carers have been approved. Care is intended for children who need long term, bridging, short term, emergency, or respite care or are seeking asylum.

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: **Requires improvement**

This inspection is the first since Ofsted registered the service in June 2014. Unanticipated changes to the business plan caused delays to the launch of the service. The original intention to work closely with another fostering agency did not transpire. As a result, there are no children in placements. However, three households with four carers have been approved and panel members, chair and agency decision maker appointed. As a result, this inspection is unable to judge the care of children or the progress they make.

The manager has a clear vision for the service and is endeavouring to set high standards throughout. This is reflected in documents, publications, and recording systems. Suitable processes are in place to ensure that children are safe and carers are supported well. The actual assessments of carers are robust although initial difficulties arose with the timeliness of decision-making. This inspection also identifies shortfalls in the quality of the business premises, the statement of purpose, and certain other matters. Such shortfalls have minimal impact on carers.

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 statement of purpose is kept under review and, where appropriate, revise it. This includes making amendments to the information about Ofsted and implementing the Foster Carer's Charter (Regulation 4(a))	28/03/2016
ensure that the registered manager manages the fostering agency with sufficient care, competence and skill. This is with regard to passing the recommendations from panel to the decision maker in a timely way, and with regard to the presentation of the kitchen and toilet facilities in the office building (Regulation 8(1)b)	28/03/2016

Recommendations

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

ensure the panel chair verifies that the written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover key issues and views expressed by panel members (NMS 14.7)

ensure that on approval, foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources, which cover policies and procedures and which is updated regularly. This is with regard to the policies and procedures clarifying the family relationship between the responsible individual and the manager (NMS 21.10)

ensure there is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, that staff are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. This is with particular regard to the agency decision maker. (NMS 23.1)

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

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Carers have not yet received any children so it is not possible to inspect their experiences and progress.

Consultation processes are in place. The use of information technology is comprehensive and accessibility is of an exceptionally high standard. Methods of receiving and giving information are extremely user-friendly. Links to a wide range of relevant materials are available to children and carers as part of the policies and procedures. This includes information about preparing children for transitions, such as greater independence. The manager is currently refining this information into a clear guide for carers to work through with children.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The recruitment of more carers has been postponed until children have been placed with the existing carers. Teething problems arose with the decision-making process and the approval of new carers, which led to substantial delays and changes to carer's terms of approval. This contradicts the written procedures. The appointment of a new agency decision maker has addressed this.

The manager undertook the carer assessments herself. Her reports are thorough and provided panel with substantial information on which to make recommendations. The reports clearly address the personal circumstances of carers, their religious and cultural circumstances, and how they are likely to care for children from diverse backgrounds. The manager did not have the benefit of a second opinion during the assessment processes. However, third party input to assessments will occur in the future because the manager will oversee the work of independent assessors.

The office used by the service is adequate. However, the shared kitchen and toilet facilities are not sufficiently hygienic for carers, staff, or children. This is a health issue and gives a poor impression of the service to other visitors.

The constitution and management of the panel are satisfactory. However, the quality of the work completed by the panel is not fully demonstrated by the minutes. The minutes are confusing in places and the panel chairperson has not adequately checked them. This creates uncertainty about the quality and accuracy of the panel processes. On the other hand, carers are pleased by the way they were treated by panel members. The new agency decision maker has undertaken certain tasks but has not yet received satisfactory induction training. The current process does not prepare staff for the complexities of their jobs, particularly when they are new to the role. This creates a potential risk to the service.

The matching of carers with children is taking longer than anticipated. This is putting the carers and the service under some pressure. The commissioning arrangements pertaining to new fostering agencies are part of the cause. Consequently, the manager is taking steps to widen the number and geographical range of local authorities with which the agency seeks contracts. New children and their social workers have access to on-line video footage of carers and their homes. This imaginative use of technology is an important contribution towards helping new children move into foster households in a positive way.

Carers receive good support from the manager. They feel valued and know that they are a critical part of the service. One said, 'It's all fine – I can't think of any way to improvement it.' They receive regular face-to-face supervision and effective training. Wide-ranging resources are available to them on line. However, the policies and procedures, including the statement of purpose, are not sufficiently transparent about the family relationship between the responsible individual and registered manager. These two people are operating all aspects of the service on a day-to-day basis. Clarity is desirable to prevent embarrassment for third parties and to define the lines of accountability, for example in the event of a complaint about one of them.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Suitable safeguarding procedures are in place, including measures to protect children from unsuitable adults. The manager has a thorough background in child protection services. She has made contact with relevant local agencies, for example, those who help children who go missing or who need translation services. The responsible individual stays up-to-date with current issues in the safeguarding field by being a lay member of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board.

The risks and potential risks that carer's identify in their homes are identified and addressed to ensure their homes are as safe as possible. Appropriate risk assessment processes are in place for children too. Carers receive training and have access to guidance about keeping themselves and children safe, for example, regarding acceptable methods of behaviour management.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The manager has a social work qualification and substantial experience of working in fostering services. She is currently completing a management qualification. The first twenty months of the service have presented a range of challenges and delays. She has overcome these difficulties with enthusiasm and the service is now ready to accept children. The agency has relatively low overheads and remains financially viable during this period. The manager has addressed minor issues arising from the registration process and endeavours to integrate best practice into the service. A

quality assurance process is in place to identify patterns and trends so that shortfalls can be addressed promptly.

The statement of purpose remains an accurate representation of the service. However, it has been amended but not reviewed since registration. As a result, minor corrections are required, for example, to the information about Ofsted. The service is obliged to integrate the Foster Carer's Charter into its policies and procedures but this discussion has not been undertaken with carers. These are minor shortfalls with minimal impact on the service. At this stage, the agency does not employ any social work or administrative staff.

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.