

Mosaic Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Joanna Heller
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Registered person Mosaic Foster Care Limited
Registered manager Robert Pearce
Responsible individual Rosslyn Parsons
Date of last inspection 10 August 2011

Service information

Brief description of the service

Mosaic Foster Care provides specialist solo therapeutic family placements for young people looked after who have experienced trauma and require specific assessments or treatment-led placement, or both. The service provides needs-led therapeutic placements for young people with the underpinning principle of planning for permanency.

This fostering service is provided by a small private provider that also operates a school and a therapeutic young people's home. Both are registered with Ofsted.

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 agency with outstanding features. It provides consistently excellent, highly individualised therapeutic care for children and young people. The young people enjoy stable placements where they flourish, individually making excellent progress. They are growing in confidence, independence and maturity, which contributes to their improved self-esteem. Equality and diversity is threaded through the therapeutic milieu of the service, ensuring that young people's, carer's and staff's individual needs are exceptionally well met.

The young people are well protected through regular safeguarding meetings and a comprehensive approach to risk management. Risk-taking behaviours are reduced. The agency staff work well in partnership with other agencies to ensure that young

people are effectively safeguarded.

The agency ensures that only suitable people are approved as carers. An effective panel ensures that carers' capacity to provide good quality parenting is at the core of any initial approval and subsequent review. Carers are well trained and work as core members of the team at an enhanced level, delivering the therapeutic daily support outlined in the agency's statement of purpose. Weekly therapy is delivered as an integral part of the young person's care plan.

Carers said that they have been 'overwhelmed with the amount of training' and that they 'experience a constantly learning environment'. They are exceptionally well supported, and benefit from clinical supervision and therapy. Carers are proud of the agency and say they would not want to foster for anyone else. Comments include, 'The agency has always been there for us and we enjoy being employed by them because of the support they give us.' Carers refer to agency staff at all levels as people who are always looking to improve the services and are wholly committed to the young people.

The agency has developed highly effective working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. Social workers say that carers are extremely committed and resilient.

The views of the young people are central to all aspects of the agency. The young people are fully involved in the development and review of their risk management and support plans. There is a clear partnership approach and they build positive relationships with all staff at the agency. They are able to raise any concerns, confident that their views will be listened to. Young people say the support they receive from the agency is 'excellent' and '100/100'.

The manager provides effective, visible leadership and is passionate about delivering high-quality care to young people. Whilst the overall effectiveness is strong, the manager has been asked to ensure that all visitors to the agency, unless known, are required to provide evidence of identity. In order to improve the service further, the manager has also been asked to improve the young people's guide to provide accessible and clear information to young people on the services provided, clarify the payment arrangements for respite care and improve the systems for monitoring overall outcomes for young people across the service as a whole. There is minimal impact on young people in respect of these requirements.

Areas for 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 must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person in respect of an independent fostering agency must ensure that the welfare of young people placed or to be placed with foster parents is safeguarded and promoted at all times. In particular, ensure that the identity of all visitors to the agency is verified. (Regulation 11 (a))	11 April 2016

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the young people's guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for young people, how they can find out their rights, how they can contact Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors and how to secure access to an independent advocate. In particular, ensure that contact information for Ofsted is current. (NMS 16.4)
- Ensure that, where a child or young person requires it, the young people's guide is available through suitable alternative methods of communication. In particular, provide a young people's guide which is accessible to the variety of ages and understanding of young people placed. (NMS 16.6)
- Ensure that all foster carers are able to evidence that the training, support and development standards have been attained within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)
- Monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. (NMS 25.2)
- Ensure that the written policy and the current level of payments are provided annually to each foster carer and commissioners of the service. Ensure that the foster carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable, and how to access them, before a child is placed. In particular, clarify arrangements for payment of respite care and allowances. (NMS 28.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The fostering service provides young people with stable, secure and nurturing environments in which they thrive. They receive exceptionally high quality, individualised care and support which meets their particular needs. The vast majority of young people improve upon and develop new skills. As a result, they grow in confidence and self-esteem.

Placement breakdowns are rare and only occur when there is a genuine need for more support than fostering arrangements can provide. On occasion, young people have benefited from the ability to move between residential and foster care with the company, according to their changing needs. This has provided ongoing stability of relationships, health and education. In accordance with their care plan, the vast majority of young people are not placed with brothers and sisters, yet contact arrangements are clear and robustly adhered to. Young people experience positive parenting and develop exceptionally strong bonds with their carers. Some have lived with their carers for many years and choose to call foster family matriarchal figures 'Nanny'. One showed the inspector the mother's day card they had sent to their carer, in which they had written 'You are like a mum to me'.

Families highlight the positive attachments that young people form with their foster families, and the difference that these make. One family commented about a child that this had been a 'life-changing experience and their lives are very different as a result' of being placed with these carers.

Placements are well planned and meticulously matched, which helps young people settle. Social workers state that carers show young people that they care by 'really good stickability and commitment'. Others said that the young people that they have placed have made 'phenomenal progress' or that their child 'has absolutely really flourished'.

The young people feel safe, welcomed and loved, and are better able to understand some of the risks they have previously placed themselves in. As a result, they improve their personal safety and that of the people around them. They know that their carers and therapists will help them deal with any issues of concern. They said 'my carers are always there to listen and are always there for me'.

Young people are healthy and receive excellent support to lead healthy lifestyles. They receive excellent emotional support and say that having therapy every couple of weeks both helps them to deal with their past and to be stronger in the future. The therapeutic approach permeates through the service at all levels, providing a secure base from which they are able to access appropriate therapeutic support consistently. Young people reflect on how they have matured and become more

skilled in managing their own behaviour. One said, 'They have made me feel like myself'.

All young people have excellent attendance at school or college and are progressing well in their education. Individual carers receive advice and guidance from the school headteacher. This assists them in promoting young people's literacy skills through the use of specific reading aids and approaches. One young person said that their carers 'nag me regarding education but I do feel they really care'. The organisation is imaginative in helping them to understand their schoolwork. For example, on one occasion the organisation arranged for a Holocaust survivor to give a presentation and meet with the young people.

The young people enjoy a variety of activities, which provide opportunities to develop their interests and experience new things, such as snorkelling, cadets, holidays and ski trips. They said, 'we do lots of fun things and laugh a lot'. Young people particularly enjoy participating in 'the challenge', an Outward Bound-type programme. Enrichment opportunities are explored and young people respond positively to the encouraging attitude of their foster carers. Those with talents are able to pursue these, for example joining local dance and drama clubs, or football teams. These experiences build memorable moments and increase young people's confidence and resilience.

The young people are encouraged to develop appropriate independence skills. Most move on to supported living arrangements organised by their placing authority. However, they always know that there will be someone there for them. For example, a vulnerable adult in their twenties, in crisis, rang their previous carer for help. The fostering service acted on their behalf, formally advocating for the local authority to provide this person with additional support.

One young person described an enduring fond memory which he will always have, of the 'kite's challenge', when one director gave another a fireman's lift across the beach on a holiday. Without exception, the feedback from young people about their carers was highly complimentary and can be summed up in one young person's comment, 'it's like I have two families'.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The service recruits foster carers with a variety of backgrounds and experience who are able to meet the complex therapeutic needs of young people placed. Young people said that their foster carers are 'nice people' who 'have helped me a lot'. The agency has been creative in its use of community organisations to reach new audiences of potential carers in an attempt to widen the ethnic diversity of carers available.

Assessment processes for prospective carers are thorough, ensuring that only applicants in whom they have absolute confidence are approved. Panel processes are

robust, with clear roles. Membership is drawn from a wide variety of professional backgrounds and life experience. Panel members are well supported through regular training, appraisal and good administrative systems. The panel is clear on the key quality assurance role it performs and the high expectations placed upon carers. Panel meetings are appropriately challenging to ensure the therapeutic parenting capacity of those approved.

Meticulous matching and planning of placements, conducted in partnership with the various disciplines employed by the agency, ensure stable placements and promote good retention of foster carers. There is never pressure applied on carers to take a placement. Carers fully understand and embrace their role as therapeutic carers. They are very well supported through regular, focused supervision by agency social workers, as well as regular clinical supervision and therapy. This helps to maintain their resilience.

The agency provides an admirable breadth of training to carers, staff and panel members. This promotes their professional development. The vast majority of foster carers have completed the training and development standards within time frames, are well trained and have a good working knowledge of fostering. The agency is in regular dialogue with the extremely small number of carers who have not. They have undertaken all relevant training, ensuring the impact on their practice is minimised. The therapeutic team provides regular targeted training to all carers at an advanced level on the 'secure base' and 'trauma assessment pathway' models of care utilised within the service.

Carers work well in partnership with the agency, parents and professionals to ensure that young people's individual needs are exceptionally well met. Comments from placing social workers include, the 'carers are fantastic, very involved and very in tune with the child and good at keeping boundaries'. Placement breakdowns are rare and the agency is proactive in putting in additional support to prevent this occurring. One placing social worker said: 'I was really impressed with the commitment of the agency to put together a plan to support the carer and prevent the placement breaking down.' Another said, 'The carer has tried their absolute hardest and they have gone beyond what an agency and carers would normally offer.'

The use of respite services is utilised and planned according to the needs of each placement, in order to maintain and promote stability. The young people feel an integral part of the family, accompanying carers on family events and holidays, and together enjoy celebrations such as birthdays and Christmas. Positive partnership with families has, on occasion, meant carers are invited to birth family events with the young people.

Carers refer to an 'outstanding agency' where they have had excellent support from day one. One commented, 'the agency couldn't have done more'. Another said: 'There hasn't been one gap in support from the agency. I've had all of the support I

have needed.' They feel respected and valued. One referred to being an essential part of the 'jigsaw of support to the child'. Agency staff know the whole fostering family extremely well and provide 'excellent' targeted support to the entire household. Carers said, 'it's all one big happy family and everybody's really approachable' and 'without the complete package and support that I have, I don't think I could have supported the child in the way that I do'.

The young people rated the agency as 'excellent' and, when asked about improvements they would make, were unable to suggest any.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Safeguarding is central to all practice within the agency. Carers, young people and key agency staff all understand the individualised 'traffic light' risk assessments and the levels of supervision required. Regular safeguarding meetings take place with the young people fully involved where appropriate.

There are low levels of risky behaviour, such as going missing, and safeguarding incidents. However, when these occur the agency acts robustly, liaising with partner agencies to promote young people's safety. Young people feel safe and well protected by their carers. They reflect that they are much better aware of the risks that they used to place themselves in.

The manager is an active member of the local multi-disciplinary safeguarding forum. This ensures that he is aware of key local issues. The local authority designated safeguarding officer referred to agency staff as being 'proactive in safeguarding'.

Carers provide consistent boundaries and routines, which the vast majority of young people consistently adhere to. Any concerning or unsafe behaviour is fed back through effective dialogue to the therapy team, enabling thoughtful discussion of risk. This helps young people to understand why they act in the way they do and to begin to change their behaviour.

Rigorous recruitment practices protect young people from unsuitable people gaining employment with the agency. All staff and panel members are subject to appropriate checks on their suitability. However, the vetting arrangements for pre-arranged visitors to the agency require improvement to protect fully against unsuitable people meeting young people. For example, the inspector was not requested to provide evidence of identity during the inspection.

Carers receive clear guidance and reinforcement of the importance of safe care. Detailed household safe caring guidance relevant to the individual child is kept under constant review. As a result, foster carers understand that keeping young people safe is one of their most important responsibilities. Agency staff conduct a minimum of one unannounced visit each year to foster carers and routinely meet with the young people in placement. One of the strengths of the agency is everybody's transparency and accessibility. This means that young people know everyone and

have the confidence to raise any concerns directly at the highest level.

Placing social workers said that they have absolute confidence in the safeguarding processes of the agency. One said that their child received all possible support, reflecting that 'the carer had a difficult job'. They referred to the 'excellent communication from the agency', which promoted effective multi-agency working. One family member stated: 'There is no doubt in my mind that they are happy and safe. I'm a million per cent happy that they are well cared for.'

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The appropriately qualified and experienced registered manager has been in post for many years. The directors of the company, who work closely in partnership with the manager, are also qualified social workers with many years' experience. Together, they provide competent, highly visible oversight and are well known to young people, carers and partner agencies alike.

Regular steering group meetings ensure that information and aims for the service are shared well, enabling responsive, effective and timely decisions to be made. The enthusiastic and committed management team together inspires the staff and carers with its passion to deliver a high-quality, child-focused service. Staff feel highly valued and well supported, and they contribute to service development.

The service is well resourced, ensuring that staff have sufficient time to reflect on their practice. Together with the therapy team, they provide excellent levels of support to young people and their carers. Staff know all the carers and the young people, whether fostered or not. The welfare of the whole fostering family is constantly monitored, with targeted support delivered wherever beneficial. One carer said, 'It's like being in a bubble together, completely wrapped around with support and therapy'. Another said, 'I love it, the support is excellent'.

The payment mechanism to carers is clear and reliable. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding respite payment arrangements, in particular whether additional allowances such as activity money or pocket money should be given. Carers highlight that this is particularly frustrating, as the money is paid directly between carers and affects the amount that each carer and young person receives.

Individual emotional well-being outcomes are monitored effectively and young people are progressing well. However, management information on the holistic outcomes for young people across the agency is not so clearly or effectively monitored and documented. This has no impact on individual young people, as staff and the manager have excellent knowledge of their individual needs and progress. However, as the agency has grown and continues to grow, systems need to keep pace to enable the manager to monitor patterns and trends effectively.

The agency has developed highly effective working relationships with local authorities and partner agencies. All of these spoke of both highly responsive and competent carers and staff, who have young people's interests very much at heart. One commented that this is an agency which 'really has done everything they possibly can'.

The statement of purpose and young people's guides are useful documents, which outline the general services available. Over the last few years, the fostering service has widened its age range and the level of need presented by young people, and the children's guide does not reflect the service's need to be accessible to a wider audience. Furthermore, it contains significantly out-of-date information on how to contact Ofsted.

Staff and carers maintain good quality records. There have been no complaints, and any issues are resolved before they become significant. The manager ensures that Ofsted and other agencies are appropriately notified of any significant incidents.

The manager has a clear vision on how the agency wishes to develop the service. The gradual, measured development of agency has very much kept at the fore the quality of the agency and its focus on young people and carers. The service has taken suitable action to address the recommendations made at the previous inspection. As a result, the quality of care and support has improved. The one breach of regulation identified at this inspection is an exception to the norm and has had no impact on the care of young people. The manager and directors have a sincere desire to provide an outstanding service. They recognise 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.