

Shared Care Services Limited

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Shared Care Services (Fostering Division) is an independent fostering agency. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for disabled children. The service provides in individual and sibling group placement, bridging, emergency and short- and long-term placements. The agency also runs and manages a well-established domiciliary care service for children living with disability. This can act as a support service to its fostering service.

The agency's aim is to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of looked after children living with disability and complex medical needs. Currently the service has four approved fostering households, with three children in placement.

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 fostering service offers foster placements to children and young people living with disability and/or who have complex medical needs. Children receive care that meets their very specific needs; their welfare is promote they are well protected from harm or abuse. The fostering agency provides children with stable placements that enable them to thrive and develop safe and secure relationships.

The preparation of potential foster carers is good. However the fostering service currently has a small pool of approved foster carers, which currently is insufficient to meet the diverse needs of looked after children requiring specialist placements. The

quality of foster care assessment reports is variable, this is an area identified for improvement.

Foster carers are very much valued by the fostering service and external professionals. They have very good knowledge and experience of caring for children with complex medical needs and are fully involved in making plans and decision-making about children’s lives. The fostering service’s collaboration with partners is highly effective.

The leadership and management of the fostering agency is strong. Managers are passionate and committed to promoting the best possible outcomes for children they care for. The Registered Manager and Responsible Individual are both qualified social workers with extensive experience in the field of child protection, fostering and disability. Stakeholders greatly appreciate their ‘hands on’ approach to managing the service and their effective support of foster carers and children.

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
Keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose. (Regulation 4(a))	01/01/2016
Ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate supervision. (Regulation 21 (4)(a))	01/01/2016
Ensure that all people employed receive appropriate appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))	01/02/2016

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Implement an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to the current and predicted future demands on the service. (NMS 13.1)
- Ensure that fostering panel meetings have regular representation from a child health professional. (NMS 14.6)

- Ensure that assessment reports are analytical and include evidence based on information that distinguishes between fact and third party information. (NMS 13.7)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children receive highly personalised care that meet their individual needs; this is particularly the case in meeting their often-complex medical needs. They feel safe with their foster carers and share a true sense of belonging. They engage well with their foster carers, foster carers' immediate and extended family members also. The fostering service's matching process is sound and children experience strong attachments. As a result placements are sustained and successful. Unplanned endings do not occur.

The fostering agency does not accept emergency placements and so placement starts are planned and carefully co-ordinated at the pace of the child. Children receive good information about the service and what to expect. Child-friendly creative information is contained in the children's guide which is available in varying modes of communication and community languages. This promotes easy access to key information.

Children have the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings using a range of appropriate communication methods. For example, the service has invested in widget software for children's feedback forms and for their contribution to foster carers' annual review process. Staff encourage children with the aid of their parents, to highlight their likes and dislikes. This is to ensure the care provided is in accordance with known preferences. Staff of the fostering service meet periodically with children to observe their engagement with their foster carers and ascertain their opinions about placement progress and issues. Children receive information, in appropriate forms about how to make complaints; the service has not received any complaints to date.

Carers support older children to develop key practical skills that promote their independence. For example daily living skills such as attending to personal hygiene tasks, making snacks and tidying up after themselves are encouraged by the foster carers and the service.

Children are largely well behaved. Where this is not the case, carers view challenging behaviour as a consequence of children's disability. Critical incidents are rare. Children have not gone missing from their homes; none are involved or suspected to be involved in child sexual exploitation. There are no concerns about drug or alcohol use. Foster carers have a very good understanding of children's behavioural traits and are skilled in managing any challenging behaviour.

Children are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. This is particularly important as all the children have a diagnosis of one or multiple disabilities. They have access to primary and specialist health care services as required. These typically include speech and language services, occupational therapy, consultant paediatricians and specialist community nurses. Some children receive services to address their emotional and psychological health via child and adolescent mental health services

(CAMHS). Some children are living with profound multiple physical disability and receive health care at specialist hospitals such as Great Ormond Street. Foster carers are committed to ensuring children receive high quality, expert medical care. They are very open to and receive specialist training to ensure they can safely meet children's health care needs. For example as required, foster carers receive training in gastric feeds, physiotherapy and the safe management of epilepsy. Children benefit significantly from having their carers skilled in providing the health care required to maintain their well-being safely and in their own homes.

Children's attendance at school or college is excellent. This supports their general and social learning. The fostering service and foster carers advocate on behalf of the children to ensure their learning needs are met appropriately. For example, in order to avoid extensive daily travel to and from school, managers of the service strongly and successfully advocated for a child's change of school. Staff have advocated the use of taxi travel with an appropriate escort to ensure the safe travel of a young person to college. Foster carers share a consistent and successful relationship with educational professionals to promote children's educational and social achievement and development.

Children have a very strong sense of belonging with their foster families and this contributes to the success of placements. Children share clear attachments with their carers and participate in a range of social, educational and recreational activities. Often, these are together with their fostering families. For example, one foster family is currently planning a second holiday to Jamaica, the location of the child's family origins. Other children attend various family and community events, including places of worship.

Children enjoy meeting with their brothers, sisters and other birth family members. Parents and grandparents remain actively involved in the lives of the children; staff of the fostering service encourage this ethos. Children's access to their birth families enhance their experience and understanding of their heritage and identity.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency has four fostering households. Managers and leaders are committed to recruiting high quality foster carers, skilled in providing safe and successful placements for children living with disabilities and complex medical needs. Managers acknowledge the need to recruit additional foster carers in order to meet the demand from placing authorities. The successful recruitment of additional foster carers features in the service's development plan.

The fostering service's preparation, support and training of foster carers is highly effective. This ensures that prospective and approved foster carers have good insight into the needs of disabled children and how best to meet these needs. The assessment of prospective foster carers is thorough and comprehensive. However,

the quality of some assessment reports require improvement. Some written assessments are very descriptive in nature and lack sufficient analysis. This is important to support panel recommendations and subsequent decision-making about the suitability of applicants.

Foster carers are aware of their role and those of staff and local authority representatives. Foster carers share a positive relationship with parents and promote contact with family members where this is the best interests of children. The legal guardian of one young person says of the fostering service, 'They are a Godsend to me. I thought there would be problems, but x loves her foster carer who is absolutely wonderful. She bends over backwards to help x and treats her more like her own. x needs someone like that. I can't praise the agency high enough.'

The fostering service provides effective training that covers a wide range of fostering issues, and training specific to caring safely for children living with complex health needs and profound disabilities. Typically, training provided to foster carers includes paediatric first aid, the safe administration of medication, child protection, moving and handling and challenging behaviour. In addition, foster carers who are caring for children with highly complex medical needs have access to specialist health care training. Foster carers value training opportunities offered. A foster carer says of training, 'It's very involved, very interactive with play role. They make it fun and you can't hide. Everyone has to share their opinions.' To date, all but one foster carer has completed the training, support and development standards within the specified 12 months.

Foster carers receive excellent support from staff of the fostering service, in particular the Registered Manager. This is a clear strength of the service. Foster carers require effective support to perform well a highly demanding, caring role. Feedback from foster carers is consistently positive about the nature and quality of support provided by the fostering service. One foster carer states, 'I had a fantastic supervising social worker. I was very comfortable. She really listened and offered great advice.' Children benefit from the support and effective working relationship foster carers share with health care professionals in particular.

There is a well-managed fostering panel with strong leadership via the chairperson. There are clear written procedures in place that support practice; annual panel training is provided. Members of the central list have extensive experience in their chosen fields of expertise. However, the representative of child health does not regularly attend panel meetings. This is not in best interests of children, particularly as recommendations about applicants and existing approved foster carers is likely to explore issues of caring for children with complex medical needs. Panel meetings are well organised and panel members increasingly have developed a quality assurance role. For example, the service is in the process of implementing new feedback forms to social workers presenting at the fostering panel. This focuses on improving the quality of assessments and panel presentations.

Foster carers and staff of the fostering service work in effective partnership with external professionals. This is to establish placement objectives and determine collectively how best to meet children's needs. Local authority commissioners and

social workers are positive about the quality of placements provided by the fostering service. A local authority placements manager comments, 'They are a good service and one of few that target disabled children. They are the first port of call when we require a placement for a disabled child. I know what I'm going to get; their carers come with expertise and I'm able to bounce off ideas with the Registered Manager.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children are safe and protected well from harm and abuse. Staff and foster carers are knowledgeable about the impact of disability and foster carers are vigilant in their supervision of children. They share trusting relationships with the children they care for and offer good support if children appear unhappy. Foster carers work effectively with children to raise their awareness of risks and how to help keep themselves safe. For example, when using public transport in the community.

The fostering service ensures that there are appropriately detailed placement plans and risk assessments in place that are tailored to meet the very specific needs of children. Risk assessments highlight known and anticipated risks posed to each child. This is in an effort to anticipate dangerous or challenging behaviour. Strategies are largely effective and there has been a significant reduction in the challenging behaviour of some young people. Managers review care plans and risk assessments periodically to ensure they take into account any changing needs or issues. Staff and foster carers work effectively with other professionals, such as health and school personnel to help keep children safe.

The fostering service's recruitment, assessment, preparation and supervision of foster carers has a strong focus on keeping children safe. This is also the case for training offered. Foster carers receive regular training in safeguarding and child protection. Training routinely explores the safe care of children living with disability, acknowledged as being an extremely vulnerable group. Staff supervisory visits routinely include discussions about safe care and child protection.

Children benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that focus on safeguarding. Staff consistently undertake annual unannounced home visits to fostering households as required. Foster carers have the fostering handbook, which contains key written guidance in relation to the fostering task, including child protection and the management of allegations. There have been no allegations made against any foster carer or staff since the last inspection. Standard of care issues are very infrequent and where these arise are appropriately managed. No significant event has warranted notification to Ofsted.

All staff and panel member recruitment and vetting is conducted in accordance with safe recruitment guidelines. This is to help prevent unsuitable people from having the

opportunity to harm children.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Leaders of the fostering service are ambitious for change and many aspects of the leadership and management of the service are sound. Identified shortfalls highlighted at the last inspection have been satisfactorily resolved. The service has a realistic business and development plan in place to support the service's continued improvement, in particular the recruitment of additional foster carers.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is a detailed document that outlines the aims and objective of the service well. However, the document is in need of revision to ensure the information is accurate about the types of placements offered currently. The children's guide has been amended since the last inspection to include the written word in English, key community languages and in symbolic form. This makes information easily accessible to children in a fun and creative way. The fostering service is financially sound and well-resourced to meet the aims of the service.

The Registered Manager is highly experienced, qualified social worker in the field of fostering, child protection and disability. Since the last inspection, the Registered Manager has successfully achieved the required qualification in management. This acts to enhance the knowledge and skills of the Registered Manager.

The fostering service has good monitoring systems in place to assist with service improvement. In particular, there are systems in place that chart children's overall progress while in placement. The Registered Manager produces an annual review report of the service functioning and provides Ofsted with monthly quality assurance reports as required. The Registered Manager also ensures that quality and performance data forms are promptly completed and forwarded to Ofsted.

The fostering service is a fair and competent employer. For example, the organisation currently employs a supervising social worker who prefers to work on a part-time basis. Staff training opportunities and support is good. Managers provide regular, meaningful supervision to the staff team; however, the organisation is yet to provide formal supervision to the Registered Manager. This is to ensure all staff receive appropriate supervision to enhance current practice and develop individual areas of interest. Additionally, the organisation does not conduct annual appraisals for panel members. This is important to ensure the adequate monitoring of individual panel member's performances.

The service has a clear vision for its developmental path and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the outcomes for children remain positive. Identified shortfalls do not negatively impact on the safety, progress and experiences of children, which are good.

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.