

# Foster Care Associates Yorks and Lincs

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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**Inspector** Paul Clark  
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**Registered manager** Mr Timothy Clayton  
**Responsible individual** Mr David Oldham  
**Date of last inspection** 13 November 2012

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## Service information

### Brief description of the service

This agency is part of a nationwide fostering service. The registered manager is based at a regional office in Sheffield and oversees five area offices. There are six area teams, each of which has a team manager, a team of supervising social workers and administrative staff. Children and young people's support service (CYPSS) workers, educational officers and therapists are attached to specific offices.

A range of fostering placements are provided, including emergency, short-term, long-term, and parent and child. The agency is currently supporting 297 fostering households, and there are 338 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**

The overall effectiveness of the independent fostering agency is good. The agency is good at recruiting, preparing, supporting and providing long-term and stable placements for children and young people with the most complex and challenging needs. Children and young people are generally happy in their placements and say that they feel safe.

The arrangements for the provision and monitoring of foster carers' assessments are good, and these assessments are of a good quality. The fostering panel looks at these assessments with rigour before making recommendations to the agency decision maker.

There are good arrangements in place to support children and young people with their educational progress and with their therapeutic care. Additionally, a team of family support workers enable children and young people to engage in community resources and activities, both individually and in groups. Together with supervising and placing authority social workers, they meet in a team parenting model, this means that there is collective oversight of how well a young person’s care needs are being met and what can be done to improve them. For children and young people, meeting with support workers also provides them with an opportunity to express their views on the quality of their care. Similarly, frequent foster carers’ forums include consultation on how the service can be developed.

The manager of the service effectively reviews the quality of care, has effective working relationships with placing authorities, and ensures that staff are well supervised and supported.

However, where concerns about a foster carer’s practice escalate, the agency should return concerns back to the fostering panel for greater scrutiny and review.

Foster carers should have a copy of young people’s personal education and pathway plans, and they should be aware of how pupil premiums are being used to support young people’s education.

The statement of purpose should provide a correct and up-to-date description of the agency.

## 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
Regulation 12 The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which- (1)(b) sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect (3) The procedure under paragraph (1)(b) must, subject to paragraph (4), provide in particular for – (e) consideration to be given to the measures which may be necessary to protect children placed with foster parents following an allegation of abuse or neglect (Regulation 12(1)(b), (3)(e)(5)).	01/04/2016

## Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose. Specifically, that the information contained in the statement is correct and up to date. (NMS 16.1)
  
- Ensure that children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational or training goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's education provider to maximise each child's achievement and to minimise under achievement. Specifically, to ensure that foster carers have a copy of the young person's personal education or pathway plan, and that they know how the pupil premium is being spent. (NMS 8.4)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The experiences and progress of, and outcomes for, children and young people are good because placements are generally stable and long term. There is a placement team, which ensures that children and young people are carefully matched with carers who can meet their needs, and this enhances placement stability. The agency is able to accommodate sibling groups, older young people, and young people whose needs may be more complex and challenging. Placing authorities report that there are very few placement breakdowns.

Family support workers organise both individual activities and group forums for children and young people, and on these occasions they consult children and young people about their views of their individual care and the overall service provision. This means that this is one of several avenues where children's and young people's voices can be heard, and where they can express their views about the fostering service. The support workers also arrange a host of recreational activities, which children and young people can engage in in the community, both individually and collectively. This means that many of them have the opportunity to experience activities that might otherwise not have been available to them. This enhances their enjoyment of life and feeling of self-worth.

Supervising social workers work with foster carers to produce detailed profiles of fostering households. One local authority commissioning officer commented, 'Foster carers' pen pictures are good and our social workers really appreciate the photographs of carers and the fact that the profiles are regularly updated.' Another said, 'We receive full and accurate foster carers' profiles.' Additionally, the agency produces child-friendly profiles of fostering households, some of which are in the form of DVDs. This allows children and young people to have a clear view of proposed placements, and to make informed choices about where they are going to live.

Foster carers ensure that children and young people are registered with a general practitioner, dentist and optician and that routine check-ups are carried out in a timely way. Any concerns about a young person's emotional well-being or mental health are shared with placing authorities and a referral is made to the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The agency has a team of professionally qualified therapists who provide consultancy to supervising social workers, and who can work directly with foster carers. The therapists are also a key element in team parenting groups, which become involved in supporting fostering placements that are in danger of breaking down, or which require additional support. The agency also provides children and young people with a 'health passport', which serves as a record of their illnesses, accidents, inoculations and adverse reactions. These provisions mean that children's and young people's physical and mental health needs are well supported.

The agency's education officers work closely with virtual school headteachers to

ensure that all children and young people placed will have a school placement very early into placement. The overwhelming majority of children and young people are attending mainstream school or other educational provision. Foster carers attend personal education or placement plan reviews, although not all of them are aware of how pupil premiums are being spent in support of the education of the children and young people placed with them. In spite of the agency chasing local authority social workers, not all foster carers have a copy of the personal education or pathway plan.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The quality of the service provision in this agency is good. A marketing officer has a recruitment responsibility for recruiting carers who are interested in and able to care for children and young people who have more complex or challenging needs. This means that the agency recruits carers who can meet the diverse needs of children and young people who are looked after. The agency also has an assessment and panel manager who oversees the work of a team of fostering advisors who conduct initial visits to people who have expressed an interest in fostering. In addition to providing interested people with comprehensive information materials about fostering, preliminary health and safety checks of households are carried out. Also, the advisers conduct a motivational assessment of the potential carers. This helps to ensure that only the most suitable and well-motivated people are considered for assessment, preparation and approval. The assessment and panel manager oversees and supervises external assessors who conduct the carers' assessments. They also monitor the quality of the assessments before they are presented to the panel. Consequently, the assessments seen during this inspection are of a high quality and are both analytical and descriptive in content, and they properly inform the decision making of the fostering panel. Panel minutes indicate that there is rigorous analysis of foster carer assessments and that deeper insight is given to recommendations of approval.

Carers undertake an extensive four-day preparation and training course during their assessment period, which introduces them to the key areas of fostering. This includes training in safeguarding children and young people, attachment theory and safe care. The course programme includes the challenges involved with fostering, and foster carers report that they felt well prepared after attending the course. One carer reported, 'We found the course a real eye-opener and made us realise what we were taking on.' The overwhelming majority of carers have completed the training, support and development standards within the first year of their approval. This means that carers have an in-depth understanding of their roles and the way that they are to support children and young people.

As previously mentioned, the agency promotes a team parenting model which involves the meeting of placing authority social workers, supervising social workers, foster carers, therapists and education officers. This ensures that each element of a child's or young person's care is mutually supportive and placements are appropriate, planned and meets the needs of children and young people.

Local authority care plans for children and young people direct the placement plans constructed by the agency, and these plans are reviewed frequently. The placement plans clearly assess children's and young people's needs and define how the agency is to meet these needs. Foster carers complete development reports on children's and young people's progress and return them to supervising social workers weekly. These are in line with the placement plan. This means that the agency has good oversight of how children's and young people's needs are being met and if additional resources are needed.

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The way that this agency safeguards children and young people is good. Information documents given to children and young people clearly indicate avenues of support and how they may raise complaints. Examples were seen of how the agency has responded positively to complaints received from children and young people. Young people may also raise concerns with independent reviewing officers during their periodic reviews, or in any of their group forum meetings coordinated by family support workers.

Placement plans clearly indicate the impact of any abuse or neglect that children and young people have experienced, and risk assessments are in place which direct foster carers' oversight of individual children's and young people's care. Although there are few reports of children and young people going missing, protocols are in place with local police which direct the action to be taken in the event of a child going missing. Carers and supervising social workers receive training on safeguarding children and young people and this training is updated annually. Carers also receive training on supporting children and young people who may be in danger of child sexual exploitation. These measures help to ensure that children and young people are kept safe.

All vetting of staff, panel members, external assessors and foster carers is thorough and complies with statutory requirements. This helps to ensure that unsuitable people are prevented from having the opportunity to harm children and young people.

Foster carers receive at least two unannounced visits from supervising social workers per year. Any suspicions of harm by foster carers are immediately referred to local authority child protection services and there are examples of how the agency has scrupulously followed the directions of local authority designated officers following such allegations. The agency will also conduct a review of a foster carer's approval following such events.

The agency has clearly written policies on safeguarding and child protection practice and these policies are reviewed annually.



## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Leadership and management within this agency require improvement. The agency follows due process when allegations have been made about foster carers, and reviews of carers have been conducted by management. However, on occasion there has been some delay in escalating concerns and returning reviews to the fostering panel for greater scrutiny. This may mean that the agency does not have full oversight of a foster carer's practice.

Although there is a statement of purpose in place, which is reviewed annually, this contains some factual inaccuracies and requires updating. This may provide stakeholders with misleading information about the service.

The acting manager of the service has many years of experience in fostering and childcare practice and is appropriately professionally qualified. A recent interview conducted by the regulatory authority found them to be suitable person for the role. However, the reference from their last employer is still outstanding and this has significantly delayed their registration as manager.

There are highly effective working relationships with placing authorities, who speak positively about the service. One placing authority social worker commented, 'An absolutely fantastic placement. The foster carer acts as the young person's advocate. The agency links well with school and really pushes the bar for him educationally. The education officer links well with me to discuss his progress.' Another said, 'The placement is going incredibly well. He has settled in really well and has made some really good progress. He is now much more vocal and smiling, which I haven't seen before... I get really good communication from the agency's supervising social worker.' A commissioning officer said, 'We have a good relationship with this agency. They are easy to work with.'

The manager conducts quarterly reviews of the quality of care and there is evidence that the views of children and young people, foster carers and professional stakeholders have been taken into account in the construction of these reviews. This gives them a voice in service development. The agency has clear plans for service developments, which focus on the care and support of children and young people.

All staff, managers and panel members are appropriately qualified and have membership of their related professional bodies. All undertake an annual performance appraisal which identifies their training and development needs. Staff say that they have easy access to any training they require, and that they have regular supervision, which they feel is of a good quality.

Notifications of events under schedule 7 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 are sent to the regulatory body and these contain descriptions of

actions taken by the agency to prevent such incidents from reoccurring.

The agency has implemented each of the four recommendations made at the previous inspection and now: all panel members' annual appraisals are up to date; the overwhelming majority of foster carers have undertaken the training, support and development standards, or there are valid reasons why they have not; the audit of key records is now routinely done; and case files for both children and young people and carers are properly formatted.

## 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.