

Active Care Solutions

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Suzanne Young
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Service information

Brief description of the service

Active Care Solutions is an independent fostering agency based in Sandwell. It is a majority owned subsidiary of Core Assets Group Limited. The agency provides placements for children and young people of multiple faiths with foster carers who can meet their cultural and religious requirements. The agency currently places children and young people throughout the West Midlands and parts of the North West of England. It offers a full range of placements and undertakes recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers. At the time of the inspection the agency supported 18 approved fostering households with 25 children and young people 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 is the first inspection since the agency's registration in June 2015. Although the agency is small, it is part of the wider Core Assets Group and is able to access the resources and facilities of Core Assets. The agency is a faith-based organisation which embraces all cultures, faiths and religions. It is also inclusive to those who have no religion. To achieve inclusivity, the agency recruits a diverse range of foster carers from all faiths and backgrounds. This ensures that all children and young people are placed with foster carers who can meet their cultural and religious needs. Managers and staff work closely with religious and faith communities to raise awareness of fostering in different religious communities.

Leadership and management are strong. Effective monitoring ensures that managers have a clear vision for the development of the agency and for the children and young people placed with foster carers. The registered manager is well qualified and the agency is effectively resourced. There is a small but skilled and experienced staff team. Managers, staff and foster carers have developed effective working relationships with placing authorities and other professionals to ensure that children and young people are well cared for. The fostering panel and agency decision maker make well-informed decisions based on sound reasoning.

Children and young people are well matched to their carers and feel safe in their fostering households. They have their individual needs well met. They are well cared for and do not engage in risk-taking behaviours. They are supported by their foster carers to attend education and to lead healthy lifestyles. As a result, children and young people are making good progress.

Four recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. None of which have a significant impact on children's and young people's experiences, outcomes or progress. These relate to recruitment procedures, the administration of medication, the children's guide and training.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication (national minimum standards, 6.10)
- ensure that children and young people are provided with a children's guide which is available in their language and chosen form of communication (national minimum standards, 16.6)
- ensure that telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references for all those working for the fostering agency. This refers to members of the fostering panel (national minimum standards, 19.1)
- ensure that each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance (national minimum standards, 23.1).

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people are having good experiences with their foster families. They are living in safe, healthy and nurturing environments. Staff and foster carers support children and young people well to ensure that they settle into their placements and achieve good outcomes. Foster carers support unaccompanied sanctuary-seeking children and young people to understand British culture and learn the English language. This helps to ensure that they are able to do well in school. Children and young people generally feel secure and are able to develop in confidence and self-esteem. This is because careful matching results in good stability for the vast majority of placements. One young person reported that the foster carers, 'Are very understanding and kind and make me laugh'. Another stated he was, 'Very happy in placement and happy in school'.

Children and young people are well cared for. They are supported by their foster carers to lead healthy life styles. They attend routine and specialist health appointments to ensure that their health needs are met. All children and young people have health passports that record all health information, such as illnesses, immunisations and appointments. This ensures that they have a clear knowledge of their health history when they leave care. Children and young people are making good progress in their education. This is because education is given a high priority, both by foster carers and the agency. All but two children and young people are in full-time education. Those who are not in full-time education are receiving home tutoring by the local authorities and are well supported by their foster carers. Education is championed both by the agency and by foster carers. For example, the registered manager monitors education attainment and ensures that foster carers access the pupil premium for the children and young people they care for. Foster carers challenge schools to support children and young people appropriately and to help them at home with reading, writing and mathematics. One foster carer has enrolled on an adult learning mathematics class to ensure that she is well able to support the child she has placed with her.

Children and young people are supported to express their wishes and feelings. Supervising social workers speak to them during home visits to their foster families and when conducting individual direct work. One placing social worker stated, 'The children have a good relationship with their support worker and the supervising social worker has been fantastic'. The agency engages the services of a translator for those children and young people who do not speak English. This ensures that all are able to communicate their wishes and feelings effectively. One young person felt pleased about his progress and commented, 'I had a translator but do not need one any more.' Although children and young people receive a children's guide to explain about being in foster care, this guide is not translated into their own language. This may hinder them being able to contact anyone to complain and prevents them

having a full understanding of their placement. There is active engagement and participation of children and young people. The agency employs a support worker who works with children and young people on an individual basis, conducts group work and organises a range of activities. All children and young people speak positively about how the agency supports them and engages with them, including birth children. For example, one foster carer's birth son stated that he feels fully included in decision making and is invited to all activities arranged by the agency.

The agency does not currently have any young person living with foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements. All young people approaching adulthood have pathway plans in place and are supported by their foster carers to develop the skills they will need in adult life. An independent living workshop activity weekend is planned by the agency to reinforce this further.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The preparation and assessment of foster carers are timely and assessments are generally of a high quality. The agency's fostering panel and agency decision maker's quality assurance processes are effective in identifying any shortfalls in assessments. The agency decision maker makes timely and appropriate decisions which promote the welfare of children and young people in foster care. The fostering panel has a good balance of gender, age and culture and includes someone who has previously been 'looked after'. This ensures that the panel is able to have a full understanding of the diverse range of foster carers they recruit, from all faiths and backgrounds, to meet children's and young people's needs. The independent chair has considerable experience of working with children and young people and of fostering. Panel members receive induction training but have not attended any other training to ensure that their knowledge is current and to enable them to inform their decision making processes.

Children and young people are well matched to their carers. The vast majority of foster carers feel that they are provided with adequate information when children and young people are placed with them. When local authorities are slow to provide information to foster carers, the agency actively challenges them to ensure that care plans and documents are obtained in a timely manner. One local authority commissioner stated, 'Matching is good. They always ask in-depth questions based on a care decision... Breath of fresh air.'

Foster carers benefit from professional and supportive relationships with the agency. They highly value the input from the support worker and receive a high degree of support from supervising social workers, which includes out-of-hours support. The agency runs a monthly foster carers' forum where carers can meet and share information. Staff and managers have developed good partnership working with

foster carers who feel they are considered part of the team around the child. One foster carer commented, 'I'm so glad I am part of a great team. I cannot fault Active Care Solutions. Their support is invaluable.' Another stated, 'Really happy with our support worker. She is absolutely amazing.'

All foster carers have either completed or are currently undertaking the training development standards. The agency has a training programme for foster carers covering a variety of core training requirements, and which they are required to complete in their first 12 months following approval. However, this does not include required training in the management and administration of medication. Until recently the agency did not provide foster carers with training to be able to physically intervene and stop a child or young person from harming themselves or others. This had the potential to place both the child and foster carers at risk of unintentional harm and possible future allegations. The agency has recognised this shortfall and has taken measures to ensure that all foster carers now receive training in de-escalation and low-level restraint techniques.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children and young people feel safe in their fostering households and are safe. There is an open culture within the agency which supports the reporting of any concerns. Children and young people do not engage in risk-taking behaviour. They are not at risk of sexual exploitation or regularly go missing from their foster placements. There has only been one incident of a young person going missing in the last 12 months. Staff and foster carers are aware of the joint police protocols for missing children.

There is a good focus on safeguarding within the agency. This is embedded in policy and procedure and underpins the recruitment, assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers. Foster carers receive a variety of safeguarding and safer caring training, which includes internet safety. Foster carers have received training and information on the 'Prevent' duty which will be ongoing and will inform the fostering panel.

Managers have developed effective relationships with other agencies, including local authorities, to protect children and young people. They have good working relationships and communication with designated officers and other professionals. The registered manager is also active in engaging with the police to prevent the radicalisation of young people. There has been one safeguarding allegation which was reported appropriately to the local authority. There have been no formal complaints from children, young people or foster carers.

Unannounced visits are conducted by the agency, and all foster carers have safer caring plans established, which are reviewed on the placement of children and young people. This helps to ensure that all are effectively supported and protected.

There are robust recruitment and vetting procedures for staff working for the agency. However, panel members' records do not demonstrate that telephone verification of references have been taken up. The impact of this is minimal as they do not have direct contact with children and young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

This is the first inspection since the agency's registration in June 2015. It is part of the wider Core Assets Group and as a result is able to access the resources and facilities of Core Assets. The registered manager is a qualified social worker with many years' experience in fostering. He is currently undergoing his level 5 diploma in leadership and management.

Leadership and management are strong. Managers have a clear vision for the development of the agency and for the children and young people placed with foster carers. They monitor the service and the progress of children and young people through internal monitoring systems and processes. This ensures that continuous improvement in the delivery of service provision is achieved, which improves outcomes for the children and young people in their care.

The agency's strength is in its diversity. It is a faith-based organisation which embraces all cultures, faiths and religions. The agency recruits a diverse range of foster carers from all faiths and backgrounds to meet children's and young people's needs. This ensures that children and young people from all backgrounds are provided with placements which can meet their cultural and religious requirements. Managers and staff work closely with communities to raise awareness of fostering in different religious communities. For example, managers have met with faith communities in Yorkshire to raise awareness about fostering Syrian refugees. Managers are involved in research opportunities with universities and other agencies. They have taken part in television documentaries to raise awareness of fostering for Muslim children and young people.

The views of foster carers, children, and young people are sought through regular consultation and group activities. Children and young people are involved in the recruitment of foster carers. They have devised questions to ask prospective foster carers at the agency's fostering panel. As a result, they are beginning to influence developments within the agency.

The partnership approach taken by the agency is strong. The agency works well in partnership with placing authorities and other professionals. Staff effectively challenge professionals to ensure that clear action is taken to improve the experiences and outcomes for children and young people in their care. Managers, staff and foster carers have developed effective working relationships with placing social workers and commissioners. All those spoken with said that communication is

good. One placing social worker commented that there is, 'Good communication from the supervising social worker through emails and phone calls... The agency supports and cares for young people very well. The supervising social worker would respond with an interpreter if any issues in the early days to seek young people's views... Overall I am very happy with the agency.'

The agency is effectively resourced. There is a small but skilled and experienced staff team. Staff attend foster carer training, and managers are happy for them to source outside training when they feel it is relevant to their work. Staff feel well supported. One supervising social worker stated, 'It is a fantastic environment to work in.' Another commented, 'We have very experienced managers who treat us with dignity and respect. They are approachable, open and honest and encouraging.'

Record keeping by foster careers and supervising social workers is of a high standard. The statement of purpose is easily accessible on the website and accurately reflect the functions of the agency and the service offered.

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.