

# Orange Grove Fostercare Yorkshire

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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<b>Inspector</b>	Stephen Smith
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<b>Responsible individual</b>	Mr Gareth Walton
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	N/A

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Orange Grove Fostercare is an independent fostering agency. It is a part of Partnerships in Children's Services, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sovereign Capital. Following a change of corporate ownership, the agency was registered in 2015 but had operated in a similar form for some years before this. The agency recruits, assesses and supports foster carers to provide a range of long- and short-term placements for children and young people on behalf of the local authorities who commission its services. The agency comprises the manager, three principal supervising social workers, five supervising social workers and three family support workers, as well as having administrative support and access to a psychologist for consultation and advice purposes. The agency's main office is situated in Doncaster and it has smaller area offices in Beverley and Leeds. At the time of this inspection, the agency was providing placements to around 75 children in 65 fostering households.

### 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: **Outstanding**

This is an outstanding fostering agency that provides an excellent quality of service to its foster carers and the young people they look after. Consequently it achieves outcomes for young people that transform their lives.

The agency benefits from ambitious and inspirational leadership and management that have a clear focus on promoting quality and continual improvement. This leads to a strong commitment to the agency and its work from its staff and foster carers. The agency undertakes all its key functions with a characteristic rigour and thoroughness. It maintains a forward-thinking approach, even when facing challenges and difficulties. Foster carers receive excellent levels of support, supervision and guidance and benefit from very good quality training. However, not all carers have achieved the Training, Support and Development Standards qualification within a year of approval.

Support for young people is outstanding. Staff from the agency work closely with them and know them well. Young people have a strong voice in the agency, which influences its practice positively. The needs of both fostered and foster carers' own children are fully recognised and met. Work undertaken with foster carers and young people is insightful and is based on a clear understanding of young people's needs. This means that fostered children live in stable placements and make progress that is often remarkable given their starting points. Work with foster carers' own children helps to equip them for and support them in their involvement with fostered young people living in their home.

In addition to its very robust practice in recruiting, assessing and supporting foster carers, and making secure, well-matched placements which meet young people's needs well, the agency has an impressive focus on further improvements and developments.

The agency uses a specific model of therapeutic care to deliver support to young people. This model is used as a framework to underpin all the agency's practice from the recruitment and assessment of carers to their supervision and training, as well as the way support is provided to young people by the agency's staff. This gives an impressive focus to the agency's work, which supports highly stable and beneficial placements and which helps young people to develop good relationships and grow in confidence and self-esteem.

Staff and foster carers from the agency are working with educational staff in schools to help to equip them to work in a way that addresses the attachment difficulties that young people who are looked after often face. The agency is also working to develop an innovative way of providing carers with a 'respite' and young people with a break that will feel more natural and take into account young people's and carers' established relationships and support networks.

Leaders and managers are thorough and realistic in their monitoring of the agency's work. Their detailed monitoring of outcomes achieved for young people ensures that their needs are prioritised and met. Operationally, the agency has detailed, effective and well-reviewed development plans that support its forward thinking approach effectively.

## **Areas of improvement**

### **Recommendations**

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

- 20: Learning and development of foster carers  
Ensure that foster carers have attained the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of approval. (NMS 20.3)

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

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

The lives of fostered young people are significantly enhanced by the work of this agency. It helps to achieve excellent outcomes for them and enables them to make really good progress. One carer described how using a therapeutic model as a framework for supervision discussions helped her to care for a young person in a way that provided for the development of secure attachments he had not experienced in his earlier life.

The agency works very closely with local authority social workers to match young people with the right carers for them. Information sharing is very good and great care is taken to ensure that placements meet young people's individual needs. The agency works hard to make sure that a young person's move to a new foster home takes place in a way that is sensitive and supportive.

Once placements are made, the level of support provided to young people from supervising social workers and support workers, as well as their carers, is outstanding. This means that young people enjoy very stable placements, which help them to make excellent progress and transform their lives. For example, 'missing from home' incidents, drug use and poor school attendance have dramatically reduced in some cases and many young people have raised their aspirations and significantly increased self-confidence. For example, a young person who took part in an activity provided by the agency has developed so much self-confidence and skill that he now helps as an instructor helping to train other young people in the same activity.

Young people develop really good relationships with their foster carers that nurture them and help them grow and mature. For example, young people said, 'I really love this family, I couldn't wish for a better place to live, I really fit in', and 'I wish (carer names) were my mum and dad.'

The agency uses a model of therapeutic parenting across the breadth of its practice to deliver an excellent quality of care to young people. This helps to ensure that all work with young people is focused on helping to meet their individual needs in a holistic manner. This approach helps foster carers to understand how young people's background and experiences affect their state of mind, current behaviour and

achievement. It also helps to structure all work done with a young person to ensure it is helping them to develop strong attachments and make good progress.

Foster carers are guided effectively in their work by the support and supervision they receive from agency staff. The agency's social workers and family support workers have an excellent understanding of the young people they are responsible for. They work effectively with children's placing authorities in a creative and insightful way, so that young people benefit from support that improves their lives greatly.

For example, work with one young person, over a period of time, transformed the young person's behaviour, relationships with his birth family and academic achievement dramatically and beyond anyone's expectations. In another case, very effective joint working and highly supportive work with foster carers resulted in a young person maintaining positive family contact and increasing her ability to understand and practice her faith and cultural heritage, while making great progress with her health, education and understanding of her situation.

Young people receive the primary healthcare services they need, along with specialist services when required. When these services are unavailable or delayed, the agency advocates strongly for young people and arranges alternative provision when necessary.

Foster carers and staff are proactive in, and committed to, the support they provide to young people. For example, foster carers worked with great persistence to ensure that one young person received a specialist health examination she needed. The support for young people's educational achievement is similarly excellent. Young people all attend school and the agency and its carers make great efforts to secure the best education possible. For example, in one situation the agency worked closely with a local authority virtual head teacher to ensure that a fostered young person was able to go to the best school for him.

The agency and its carers provide young people with excellent support to maintain contact with their families. Carers work hard to develop good relationships with birth parents so that young people experience positive relationships with their families. The agency supports contact by providing both practical support, including transport to meetings with family or the use of its rooms when needed, and high levels of emotional support for young people, in situations where contact may be emotionally challenging for them.

Young people have a real voice, which influences their own care and in the operation of the agency. Supervising social workers and family social workers know young

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people very well. They spend time with them doing direct work and also at events and activities arranged by the agency. This not only means that the agency is able to focus its work on young people's needs and wishes, but allows young people to have an input into how the agency operates. For example, the agency's fostering panel always includes a question for applicants attending foster panel that has been devised by young people. This means that matters important to young people are being considered when decisions about suitability to foster are being made.

The agency monitors very closely the outcomes being achieved by young people across all areas of their lives. This information is used to ensure that the care and support provided continues to make a difference in young people's lives and identify areas where additional support is needed. The agency's family support workers provide individual support to young people based on specific assessments of their need. This not only enables young people's needs to be met individually but gives them access to emotional support and a person to turn to should they have any concerns.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

This agency provides a high-quality service to its foster carers, young people placed and the local authorities it works with. This is based on its thorough and rigorous practice, clear knowledge of the needs of looked after young people and its forward thinking and innovation.

The agency has an extremely well-considered foster carer recruitment strategy and process. It understands the needs of local authorities and young people needing families and has well-developed strategies to recruit carers to meet these needs. The agency has seen a reduction in the number of its carers because of some organisational change and other external factors. The agency is now growing again in terms of foster carer numbers.

The agency's response to, and screening of, initial enquiries is robust. This means that both enquirers and the agency are able to decide, at an early point, whether they wish to continue with the assessment process. When applications are accepted, assessments are undertaken in a timely manner.

Assessments of prospective carers are thorough, robust and very well evidenced.

Applicants' suitability is rigorously checked and competence and attitudes towards fostering are closely scrutinised. The assessment process includes work with applicants' own children, if they have any. For example, they are included in part of the preparation training as well as being interviewed during the assessment. When necessary, children of people applying to be carers can access support and information about fostering from agency workers. Assessment reports are detailed and evaluative. They provide the agency's panel and decision-maker with excellent information on which to base their deliberations.

The agency's fostering panel gives close scrutiny to cases presented to it. The strengths and vulnerabilities of applicants are clearly identified and robust questions are put to presenting social workers and applicants themselves to explore these further. The agency's fostering panel includes questions developed by young people when talking to people whose application to foster it is considering. This enhances the panel's insight into applicants' suitability to foster, as it ensures that young people's experiences are at the forefront of its thinking. Panel minutes are detailed and support the recommendations of the panel by the inclusion of clear and detailed reasons. Decision-making is extremely robust and well evidenced. This provides additional scrutiny of the applicants' suitability to foster, as well as monitoring the practice of the agency.

The agency provides its foster carers and the young people they care for with outstanding levels of support. Carers know that support is available by phone and in person at any time of day or night. The quality of this support is enhanced by the excellent relationships that supervising social workers and family support workers have developed with the young people in foster placements. Foster carers speak highly of the agency and the support it provides. One described the agency's support as 'massive' and another said that it is 'an amazing agency'.

Processes for foster carer visits, supervision and reviews are undertaken with the agency's characteristic rigour. The agency's practice is efficient and is focused on providing high-quality outcomes. All this support work is carried out in line with the model the agency uses for therapeutic care-giving.

Records of the agency's work are detailed, and monitoring by the agency's management team is effective. This helps to ensure that work is of a consistently high quality. The agency provides its foster carers with some excellent training. As well as 'mandatory' training for all carers, in matters such as safeguarding and first aid, the agency provides a wide range of developmental training. This training includes: the agency's therapeutic parenting model; positive approaches to behaviour; contact; child development; child sexual exploitation; radicalisation;



honour based violence; permanence autism; life story work; and post-traumatic stress disorder in children. This means that foster carers are well equipped to meet the complex needs of the young people they care for. However, not all eligible foster carers have achieved their Training, Support and Development Standards, although all are working towards this.

The agency supports foster carers to be a full part of the team working with the young person. Foster carers' skills and their contribution to the agency's work are acknowledged and encouraged. For example, foster carers are fully involved in the agency's innovative work to develop a more child-focused model of providing respite care and support. They are also fully involved in the agency's attempts to support teaching staff in the schools that young people attend to understand young people's needs in relation to their attachment difficulties. This high level of support helps to engage foster carers, increases their skills and ensures that young people receive the support they need. A local authority social worker explained her confidence in the foster carers of a young person by saying that, 'The best thing I ever did was to get him to these carers.'

## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

Young people's safety is very well assured by the agency. Young people feel safe and well cared-for by their foster carers. The agency provides young people with excellent information in the form of its outstanding young people's guides. These age-related guides are highly attractive, age-appropriate and professionally presented. These help to ensure that young people understand about being fostered and know who to speak to and how to contact independent people if they are worried. All young people have a card containing contact details of a person employed by the agency, but outside the line management structure, whom they can contact at any time.

The agency provides young people with stable placements with foster carers who are well matched to their needs. Placements are only made when the agency is satisfied that foster carers, taking into account their current situation and the support provided to them, are able to meet a young person's identified needs. As one staff member put it, the agency 'prioritises matching over money'. The agency is proactive in seeking full information about young people before they are placed and throughout the course of their placement. Great care is taken when considering whether young people can be placed with other young people, which helps to ensure

their safety and that their needs are met. This means that the agency and its carers are able to provide care and support that continually meets young people's needs.

All young people have individualised safe-caring policies and risk assessments. These are very thorough, comprehensive and demonstrate an excellent understanding of the young person and their living situation. They are agreed with their placing social worker and are updated regularly. When identified as being necessary, child sexual exploitation risk assessments are developed in conjunction with the local authority responsible for the young person.

The agency's practice, and that of its carers, is underpinned by a framework that supports carers to provide therapeutic care to their young people. The resulting high-quality care that young people receive helps them to form positive attachments to their carers. These secure relationships help to keep them safe. This framework provides structure to foster carers' supervision, ensuring that young people's emotional security and physical safety are routinely considered. Agency social workers visit all foster carers on an unannounced basis at least once per year and regularly spend time alone with fostered children. The agency's family support workers get to know young people well, help to support their care and make sure that their views and worries are fed back to the agency for action. The agency provides placing social workers with regular written updates about young people's progress, which helps them to monitor their well-being.

The agency keeps up to date with the latest developments and research relating to young people's safety and well-being. It ensures that learning from research or reviews and other events is implemented in practice. Foster carers are very well trained, both before and after approval, in safeguarding matters. These include: working with young people who may have been abused or who may be at additional risk of harm; safe caring; online safety; child sexual exploitation; radicalisation and topics such as honour-based violence and female genital mutilation. This is significant in helping them to recognise and to take action to reduce risks that young people might be facing. There is proactive and well-coordinated work with other agencies to protect young people.

The agency and its carers understand the risks when young people go missing and take an active approach to discourage or prevent this behaviour. The high quality of care provided, and the very effective support provided to foster carers and young people, means that young people do not go missing from their foster placements often. In cases when this does happen, the agency implements its effective procedures to find out the reasons, keep all parties informed and ensure that young people are supported. It also works very closely with foster carers' and children's

social workers to reduce the likelihood of it happening again. For example, one young person who on placement had a history of going missing with great regularity, never goes missing now, and is fully engaged at school and in leisure activities. When young people are exposed to additional risks from going missing, including the risk of being exploited sexually, the agency works proactively with the young person and their placing social worker to keep them safe. Recruitment processes for foster carers, staff and members of the central panel list are robust and thorough. Thorough suitability and background checks are undertaken and thorough evaluation of applicants' attitudes and aptitudes take place.

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Outstanding**

This agency benefits from highly effective, proactive and inspirational leadership and management. There is an impressive focus on the quality of the service and managers implement clear and detailed strategic and operational plans to direct the agency's development and continued focus on improving its service further. The agency is positive in its approach. It listens and learns from its carers and events that have occurred and responds quickly, but in a well-planned manner, to address things. For example, when decisions made during the agency's change of ownership were found to be having a negative impact on the agency's stability, managers quickly took action to respond to this. They did this while maintaining a very high quality of service to carers and their young people and a forward thinking and innovative approach.

One of the agency's social workers described the agency as having 'drive and passion'. This is evident in the way it operates. Monitoring at both strategic and operational levels is thorough and detailed. Effective operational monitoring enables the quality of the agency's work and the impact this has on the fostered young people to be assured.

The agency works highly effectively to provide a service that is valued by local authorities. It is forward thinking and is working to improve continually by the innovative nature of its developmental work. For example, the agency has developed a framework for therapeutic parenting which will underpin all its work with foster carers to enhance the outcomes for, and experiences of, young people. It is also working to develop an innovative approach to providing carers and young people with respite care and leading work with educational staff to help them understand the needs of young people who have attachment difficulties. The agency's

development plan is detailed, comprehensive and reviewed on a very regular basis. This ensures that work to improve continually the agency's practice and the service it provides remains on track. This focus on the current and future quality of service is impressive and clearly apparent in the agency's work.

The agency works very well with the local authorities that place young people with its carers, both through the commissioning framework and at a practitioner level. The agency uses these positive relationships effectively to work with local authorities so that young people receive the correct help and support services. The manager uses these good relationships to challenge other agencies appropriately in cases in which support is not as it should be. The agency and its carers provide social workers with detailed information about the progress of the young people they have placed.

The high quality of leadership in the agency is reflected by the high level of commitment and excellent practice of the staff team. Supervision and appraisal systems are effective, and staff members undertake training which helps to maintain and develop their skills. The agency's staff members are committed to improving the service, and consequently the outcomes it achieves for its young people.

The agency makes timely notifications to Ofsted and ensures that appropriate action is taken in response to any significant events that take place.

## 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.