

Shining Stars Fostering Agency Ltd

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Service information

Brief description of the service

Shining Stars Fostering Agency Ltd is an independent fostering agency that registered with Ofsted in March 2016. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for individual and sibling group placements, emergency, short- and long-term placements and placements for asylum-seeking children and young people. The company comprises two directors whose roles include responsible individual and the registered manager.

The agency's statement of purpose identifies one of the service's key aims as to, 'focus on the security and well-being of children by placing them in families that want to bring about positive change in children through a stable and nurturing home environment.'

The agency's offices are situated in the London Borough of Croydon. At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency had eight approved fostering households with 11 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 registered with Ofsted in March 2016 and this is the service's first inspection since registration. The fostering service has made a positive start in meeting the placement needs of children. The service provides good quality care, and outcomes for children are very positive. They have developed attachments with their foster families and have a sense of belonging. This is particularly important for children who are seeking asylum in a new country. They grow in confidence and quickly settle into their new life. Children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs. The service pays good attention to issues of equality and diversity.

Children are the primary focus of the agency. Extensive support and training are provided to carers, ensuring that they meet the needs of the children placed with them effectively. Carers are highly appreciative of the support offered to them.

The recruitment, assessment and preparation of carers is robust and thorough. Experienced and highly skilled independent social workers complete carers' assessments. The panel makes sound judgements on fosters carers who are able to provide quality placements for children.

Children report feeling safe and protected from harm. This is due to the commitment and skills of foster carers, who ensure that any areas of concern for children are addressed promptly. Placing authorities report high levels of satisfaction with the services provided for children. Agencies report noticeable and significant improvements in health and good outcomes in education for children placed with the agency. Children report feeling very much part of the fostering families and are able to contribute their wishes and feelings on the care and support provided for them.

Leadership and management of the agency are good. Managers have developed robust systems to track performance across all areas of the service and have clear development and strategic plans in place.

Foster carers report very high levels of satisfaction with the support provided to them by the managers. Foster carers state that this agency appealed to them due to its ethos and passion to provide quality support to achieve the very best for children. They feel that the levels of training and support offered ensures that they continue to provide high quality care to children with specific needs.

Areas of improvements

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Regulation 35 (2011) Ensure any report under regulation 35 provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (3))	01/03/2017

Recommendations

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

- The service must implement a proportionate approach to risk. This particularly refers to ensuring that individual risk assessments take into account known and potential risks and implementing strategies to prevent these to ensure that children’s welfare and safety is promoted. (national minimum standards 4.5)
- Foster carers should take reasonable precautions in assessing the degree of risk, making informed judgements about when to allow a child or young person to take a particular course of action. They should be supported to ensure that they are able to assess risks appropriately within the expectations of the fostering service and responsible authority. (Volume 4, statutory guidance, page 24, paragraph 3.64)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children are carefully matched with foster carers who warmly welcome them and fully integrate them into their families. Children report being happy in their foster placement, feel part of the foster family and that they are listened to. A young person said, 'I have only been there for seven weeks, but already I feel part of the family. My foster carer does everything possible to ensure I am happy.'

Children respond positively to this nurturing warmth and stability. They develop a sense of belonging to their foster families, build trust in adults and become willing to be soothed and accept help from them. This is particularly important for children placed with this agency who in the main are unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. These are examples of the improved emotional attachment that allows children who have experienced trauma to move on with the next stage of their lives.

The agency and foster carers are diligent in ensuring that children have access to education that can meet their specialised needs. Children are achieving and on occasions exceeding expectations, particularly when language and cultural differences affects their emotional development. Foster carers have provided children with stability and a secure base allowing for this progress. A social worker commented, 'Prior to this placement X would not engage at any level and we had serious concerns for his health and behaviour. The foster carers quickly understood his need for nurturing and a secure base. As a result of providing this, his health has significantly improved and we now have no concerns about his behaviour.'

Following placement, health outcomes improve for children. Long-standing health problems are addressed. Timely health assessments are undertaken, contributing to children leading healthy lives. Children are learning to enjoy their new lives and have opportunities to develop their interests and explore new activities. By attending swimming, football and youth clubs, they become integrated into their local communities and extend their friendship groups.

Children know the staff in the agency well. This enables them to feel confident that their views, wishes and feelings are listened to and considered important to the carers and the agency. The agency is working hard to develop their engagement with children, in particular for children to help shape the development of the service.

Managers have developed a children's participation policy and are working with an independent agency which provides child-focused training for children on putting forward their views and opinions on the support offered by the agency. Children receive good information about how to make complaints.

The agency staff and foster carers help children to maintain access to family members when this is possible and it is safe for them to do so. Foster carers work well with birth parents and manage arrangements for contact carefully, ensuring that the focus remains on children's well-being and supporting them to maintain good relationships.

Quality of Service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The agency understands the emotional and practical needs of the children it is being asked to provide placements for. The stability of placements is primarily due to its successful recruitment of committed and skilled foster carers who can meet the diverse needs of children, who in the main are unaccompanied minors seeking asylum. The rigorous matching and admissions process also ensures that young people are placed with carers who have the right experience and resources to meet their individual needs.

The agency screens enquiries carefully before applications are invited. Once an application is made, assessments are carried out in a timely manner and provide a good evaluation of the applicant's capability, competence and attitude for fostering. Throughout the process, training provided is of a good quality, which means that, when approved, foster carers are well prepared for what fostering entails and the challenges they will face in supporting vulnerable children. A carer stated, 'The quality of training we receive is excellent. This reassures me, makes me feel secure and shows that the agency is passionate about the care and support it gives to children.' The assessment process is rigorous and robust in evidencing applicant's suitability to care for and support vulnerable children.

A strength of the agency is the fostering panel. The panel is well organised, quorate and has a diverse and experienced membership. It is an effective gatekeeping mechanism, committed to safe, stable and secure placements for children. The panel chair is an experienced, competent social work professional who ensures good scrutiny of the cases presented to the panel and robust management of recommendations on prospective carers. Panel minutes provide the agency decision-

maker with clear recommendations on the panel decision-making processes. Panel members have access to a range of appropriate training.

Support and supervision of foster carers is excellent. This ensures that young people are provided with high levels of care and make good progress. Foster carers say that they are listened to, valued and respected by the agency. A foster carer commented, 'You never feel alone, there is always someone available to help or give advice.' Another carer commented, 'We are like a large family where everyone has an equal voice.' Foster carers have developed a professional and trusting relationship with managers, with a focus on the safety and well-being of children. Supervision is reflective with clear action plans to progress outcomes for children. Out-of-hours support is effective and is managed in a consistent manner by the registered manager. The development of the carers' buddy system ensures that carers never feel isolated.

The agency is establishing a culture of ongoing training and an expectation that carers, during their fostering career, will continually update their knowledge and skills. An annual comprehensive training and development programme is in place that includes training in key areas, such as understanding the needs of unaccompanied minors, resilience and trauma, safeguarding, radicalisation and behaviour management. Foster carers confirm that the standard of training is excellent and enables them to have good insight into the needs and difficulties that many children experience.

The manager meets with children regularly. This helps to ensure that their needs are being met and to provide any additional support they need. Children describe the manager as a caring, fun person who participates in a range of activities with them. This results in children feeling safe and confident to discuss any matters of concern or complaints that may arise for them. The agency supports foster carers to advocate on behalf of children and to play a full role in the team around the child.

The agency understands the importance of working in partnership with placing authorities and other relevant professionals. A local authority commissioner describes the agency as, 'Extremely supportive, professional in its approach, ensuring the needs of the child are paramount.' A social worker comments, 'I can honestly say this agency stands out compared to other agencies used by us, particularly for unaccompanied minors. Their safeguarding culture is very strong both for the child and for the foster carer.' The agency works effectively with placing authorities to make and support good placements and persists in gaining all relevant information from the local authority when this is not forthcoming.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The safety and well-being of children is prioritised by this agency, which places a high priority on robust safeguarding practices. Foster carers receive a range of safeguarding training, which starts from their 'skills to foster' preparation course and continues during their time as carers. This includes training on missing procedures, the risk of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and internet safety. This ensures that carers have good insight and understanding about the impact that trauma and abuse has on children's development and behaviour. Foster carers demonstrate a robust understanding and knowledge of these issues and their responsibilities as carers. As a result children who have experienced high levels of exploitation are helped to 'make sense' of their previous experiences and provided with much needed reassurance and nurturing. A social worker commented, 'The foster carers' understanding of the trauma experienced by my young person resulted in him not feeling excluded for his challenging behaviour. They provided understanding and security, which has resulted in significant improvement in his overall well-being.'

Placement planning is robust and addresses all aspects of risk. Safe care plans are individual to each child and are based on a detailed understanding of their experiences. The service operates within a 'safer caring' framework. However, it needs to take a more proportionate approach to risk assessments. This will enable children to live full, active lives with carers working alongside helping them to develop effective strategies and practices to keep themselves safe. Placement plans do not fully identify known and potential risks or address strategies to reduce risky behaviour. Behaviour management plans are developed to provide carers with effective strategies to address behavioural issues with children who may present with challenging behaviours. There is a good response for children that go missing. Appropriate support and protocols are in place to combat these risks. Foster carers are clear on their roles and responsibilities and the procedures to follow. Liaison takes place with placing authorities to ensure that protocols are followed and staff will challenge any lack of response.

The agency has robust systems in place to ensure that the recruitment and vetting process for foster carers, panel members and staff promotes the safety and well-being of children. In addition, the agency's clear and comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures keep them protected from harm.

The monitoring of significant events by managers ensures that they are followed up quickly, with management oversight to prevent drift. Each incident is carefully analysed, looking at lessons learned to prevent reoccurrence. Ofsted receive all notifications in a timely manner.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Highly skilled practitioners who demonstrate the commitment, experience and knowledge to manage a quality fostering service manage this agency. This knowledge is highly visible throughout the service. Managers have devised efficient systems that closely monitor and track the performance and delivery of the fostering service. For example, children's individual outcomes trackers are reviewed at least monthly. This review ensures that foster carers and staff understand individual progress and quickly identify any shortfalls that may have an impact on achieving better outcomes. Managers have completed regulation 35 quality of care monitoring reports evidencing the agency's internal quality assurance review. This provides an evidence-based overview on the continual developmental aspect of the service. However, the report fails to evidence the contribution of young people, carers and professionals in this process.

The statement of purpose is clearly written and describes in detail the aims and objectives of the agency, which is financially viable and is readily available on the website. The agency has a number of children's guides so that information is available in appropriate formats to meet the differing linguistic needs of children to enable them to understand what to expect from the service. The foster carers' charter is implemented in practice, as carers are seen as an integral part of the fostering team whose views and opinions are valued and respected.

The agency is still somewhat in its infancy. The registered manager, who also performs the function of supervising social worker, carries out the day-to-day management of the service. Leaders and managers are well qualified and have extensive experience of fostering and managing staff. Managers are in the process of recruiting a skilled, qualified and experienced bilingual supervising social worker who shares their enthusiasm, vision and ambition for the development of the service. The premises and administration are adequate to meet the agency's current needs. There are rooms available for training, meetings and supervision.

The agency has an action plan in place that identifies areas the service wants to develop. Managers stated that they would like an, 'organic growth for the agency, we want to focus on supporting foster carers and progress positive outcomes for children.'

Feedback from commissioners and stakeholders confirms that the service is building positive relationships and is well regarded. A local authority placing manager commented, 'This is a new agency for us. They have commended themselves by being extremely supportive, child-focused and shown a professional approach in working with us. Communication is exceptional.' Foster carers value the high level of support provided to them and said, 'They invest in us and make us feel valued and appreciated. Managers demystify everything; they explain and make you feel comfortable in what you are doing. We are like a big family working and supporting children throughout their lives.'

The agency places children at the centre of all it does and this supports its capacity for continual improvement.

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.