

Regional Foster Placements

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Mrs Lucy Chapman
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Setting address Unit C3A, Knoll Business Centre, Old Shoreham Road, Hove, BN3 7GS

Telephone number 01752 220109
Email admin@regionalfosterplacements.co.uk
Registered person
Registered manager Ms Elizabeth Barnes
Responsible individual Mr John Catterall
Date of last inspection N/A

Service information

Brief description of the service

Regional Foster Placements Ltd is a privately owned, independent fostering agency based in Brighton and Hove. It undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment, approval, supervision and training of foster carers. Foster carers provide a wide range of placements, including emergency, short term, long term, and parent and child.

At the time of this inspection, there were nine registered foster carers, and 13 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**

The registered manager of the agency is dedicated and experienced. She demonstrates child-centred thinking and decision making, and a strong commitment to achieving the best outcomes for young people.

Agency staff are well trained and experienced. Supervising social workers provide valued support to foster carers. Open, trusting relationships between foster carers and the agency underpin thoughtful and reflective supervision, focused upon young

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people's needs.

Skilled and experienced foster carers know young people well and understand their needs. Through their commitment and understanding, foster carers meet young people's individual needs and safeguard their welfare.

The agency places emphasis on placement stability and works hard to maintain this; placement breakdown levels are low. Young people develop safe and secure relationships in their placements and say that they feel valued as part of their foster carer's family.

The recruitment of new foster carers is thorough, with a commitment to recruiting high-calibre foster carers, able to meet young people's complex needs. Abundant ongoing learning opportunities for foster carers mean that they are skilled and confident. Individualised training for foster carers accompanies placements where young people present specialist needs.

The agency demonstrates effective working with partner agencies. Specialist agencies provide support to meet young people's individual needs and advice and support for staff and foster carers. Highly effective working relationships with local authorities mean that they are keen to place with this agency.

There are shortfalls, but these do not impact upon the safety and welfare of the young people:

- Despite safeguarding checks being complete for all employees of the agency, personnel files do not contain all of the information required by regulation.
- Management monitoring is thorough but it does not include the views of the young people, foster carers and stakeholders.
- The agency missing from care policy does not align with statutory guidance in respect of return home interview timescales.
- Supervision of the registered manager, although effective, has potential for conflict of interest; new supervision arrangements await implementation.
- Not all staff and foster carers are aware of mandatory reporting duties in respect of female genital mutilation.
- The agency values its foster carers, but is yet to adopt The Foster Carers' Charter.

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 within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that no person works for the purposes of a fostering service unless full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20(3)(c))	28/02/2017
Ensure the registered person maintains a system for monitoring; this must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(3))	28/02/2017

Recommendations

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

Ensure the fostering service's missing from care policy and procedures are compatible with local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures, particularly in respect of return home interviews. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 15, paragraph 5.6)

Ensure suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', page 49, paragraph 24.3)

Ensure the learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and updated where necessary, particularly in respect of new mandatory reporting duties for female genital mutilation. ('Fostering Services:

National Minimum Standards', page 47, paragraph 23.2)

Foster carers have a challenging and key role to play within a foster care service. They need skill, knowledge, expertise, self-awareness, commitment and the ability to work as part of a team, providing a high quality, effective service to vulnerable children. To undertake this role successfully, it is essential that their contribution to improving outcomes for children looked after is appropriately recognised and acknowledged, their status respected and their levels of authority clearly defined so that they can give children in their care a full experience of family life, safeguard them and help them to grow and reach their potential. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', p.11, paragraph 2.4.) In particular, adopt The Foster Carers' Charter.

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The safety and welfare of young people is central to all care provision. Careful transition planning means that, from the outset, young people feel valued. Wherever possible, young people learn about their placement before they move in. On arrival, the agency provides a thoughtful welcome pack containing toiletries, a young people's guide and home-made quilt. Nurturing care supports young people to settle into their new placements.

The majority of placements are stable, resulting in long-term placements where young people can stay for as long as they need. Young people become a valued part of their carer's family. One young person said, 'I just love it here, she's lovely.' A local authority social worker said, 'He's the closest thing to a dad that he's had.'

Foster carers know the young people well. They support their interests and enable them to take part in activities that they enjoy. They proactively support young people's family contact and friendships. A local authority social worker said, 'The carers support contact with his birth family really well. They want him to know he has two families that love and care about him.' Such care provides young people with the emotional support they need to understand their situations and to engage successfully with contact.

The agency, and foster carers, listen to the young people; they value and respect their views. Young people's views influence their care. An independent reviewing officer said, 'Her foster carer is 100% proactive; she encourages the young person to come to reviews and supports her views.' Where young people are unable to express their views, or feel unheard, advocates represent their views in decision making. Creative and thoughtful care, encompassing all professionals, facilitates effective communication and partnership working to support young people's goals and progress.

Young people can identify trusted adults with whom they can share their concerns. One young person said, 'I feel safe; I talk to my foster carer about everything.' Young people know how to complain; they have made no complaints.

Foster carers respect and value young people's culture and heritage. A local authority social worker said, 'His carers understand and meet his cultural needs, and have a good understanding of his identity.' Despite the non-racial matching of many current placements, foster carers demonstrate thoughtful practice to meet young people's cultural needs.

Foster carers understand and promote young people's physical and emotional health and support them to develop healthy lifestyle choices. Young people access specialist

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therapeutic and physical health services and foster carers are equipped with specialist training and equipment to meet young people's specialist health needs.

All young people attend education or training suited to their needs. Effective partnership work with the virtual school and young people's educational establishments supports their educational improvement. A virtual schoolteacher said, 'They are a very supportive agency; they get behind and support young people's education.' Foster carers go to great lengths to promote educational opportunities for the young people; their belief in young people's ability to achieve and ongoing educational support enable young people to make substantial educational progress.

Preparation for independence goes at the young person's individual pace, providing young people with the support that they need to learn required skills.

Overwhelmingly, young people who move on maintain relationships with their foster carers; this provides them with ongoing support as they move to independent living.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Foster carer recruitment demonstrates a commitment to approving only high-calibre foster carers. Fostering assessments are thorough and carefully explore issues; only applicants assessed to meet the complex needs of young people progress to panel.

An experienced and able chair leads a well-inducted and trained fostering panel. Considered and pertinent panel questioning adds additional scrutiny and quality assurance to the assessment process. Panel recommend only suitable applicants for approval. Panel membership includes a range experience and expertise, but lacks diversity; this is recognised and addressed in ongoing recruitment plans.

Thoughtful and considered placement matching ensures the exploration of only good potential matches. A placing authority representative said, 'They are really responsive and offer really good matches. They work really hard at getting matching right and filling in any gaps.' Such attention to detail in matching gives young people the best opportunities and promotes placement stability.

The agency works cooperatively with placing authorities to review and update young people's care plans. It demonstrates commitment to meeting the aims and objectives of placing authorities, while recognising and advocating for young people's wishes and feelings in decision making.

All foster carers speak highly of the support they receive from the agency. One foster carer said, 'It's refreshing, my supervising social worker always keeps in touch; she is

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always there when I need her. It's a pleasure working with them.' Agency support includes the wider family. A foster carer said, 'They know us, our kids and our family. Support is there for our whole family and that helps.' Foster carers value their relationship with the agency and feel listened to. In this environment, foster carers can contribute effectively to care planning and decision making, and are an effective component of the professional team around the young person.

Foster carer supervision is supportive and practical. One foster carer said, 'We take a look at each of the issues and work out what we can do about each issue; my supervising social worker brings good insight.' Proactive supervision addresses issues as they emerge, promoting placement stability and positive outcomes for the young people.

Training provision for foster carers is diverse and extensive. Flexible training including workshops, research conferences and online training, complements traditional training provision. Responsive training enables all foster carers to access the training they require. Foster carers speak highly of the quality of training and demonstrate the impact that training has upon their practice and confidence.

Staff and foster carers have not received training in respect of mandatory reporting of female genital mutilation, and not all are aware of their professional reporting duties; a recommendation addresses this issue.

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Young people are able to identify trusted adults with whom they can share their concerns. One local authority social worker said, 'She talks to her carer about anything and everything; there is a good mix of nurture and boundaries.' Another said, 'She says she feels safe, and that's significant for her.' Through the development of trusted relationships, young people learn to share their concerns and receive the help and support they require.

Foster carers protect young people, while enabling them to take age-appropriate risks. Foster carers carefully equip young people with the knowledge that they need to develop their independence and provide thoughtful supervision in line with young people's individual needs. This enables young people to develop independence skills safely.

Risk assessments address young people's known needs. Foster carers understand young people's risks and respond proactively to keep young people safe. A local authority social worker said, 'The agency supports foster carers to understand young people's situations and to manage their risks.' Risk evaluation and management is an

ongoing discussion between the agency and foster carers; this ensures that risk minimisation strategies remain in line with young people's needs.

The agency has strong relationships with specialist safeguarding agencies, including the local area police 'Prevent' team, substance misuse services and local police missing person coordinators. These relationships provide specialist advice to staff and foster carers, and result in well-informed decision making to protect young people.

Incidents of young people going missing are low. The agency's going missing policy guides foster carers to take immediate and effective action should young people go missing. A local authority social worker said, 'He has made some risky decisions; they were on it and take safeguarding really seriously.' The agency's going missing policy is not in line with statutory guidance in respect of return home interviews; a recommendation addresses this issue. When local authorities fail to provide return home interviews, agency staff visit young people to ensure their well-being and explore reasons for their going missing behaviour.

Upgraded safeguarding training includes protecting children against child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, as well as online safety. Staff and foster carers appreciate the need for safe care and follow safeguarding procedures. They understand required actions in respect of allegations; there are no allegations to date.

The registered manager has good oversight of all safeguarding incidents, ensuring effective notification and follow-up. Unannounced visits to fostering households are twice yearly; this provides good quality assurance of care provision.

Safeguarding checks of all staff employed are complete and up to date. However, staff recruitment information is not fully in line with regulatory requirements. This fails to take every opportunity to promote safeguarding and to ensure that staff meet agency employment requirements.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The registered manager is well qualified and highly experienced. She is committed to achieving and sustaining high standards of care, and demonstrates child-centred thinking throughout her decision making.

Feedback from placing authorities is consistently complimentary. One placing authority representative said, 'They are very responsive. It feels as though they do everything they can to mitigate problems with placements; they are really easy to work with.' Another professional said, 'They are an agency with integrity that we

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trust.'

The registered manager demonstrates good oversight of agency functioning, which includes regular reviews of young people's progress. Swift action addresses any concerns that monitoring highlights. Although the registered manager encourages young people, foster carers and stakeholders to express their views, the current systems for management monitoring do not review or evaluate this feedback, as regulation requires.

The statement of purpose accurately describes organisational provision. Alongside this, a young people's guide provides age-appropriate information for children and young people. Both documents clearly describe the complaints procedure. Foster carers and young people know how to complain; there have been no complaints made.

The agency provides excellent opportunities for young people to participate and have fun; for example, meals out, pottery painting and family barbecues. Through such activities, young people are able to develop trusted relationships with agency staff. Young people are confident to give their ideas and share any concerns, knowing that their views are valued. A young person said, 'If I speak to her [supervising social worker] she really listens to me and takes me seriously.'

Foster carer retention is excellent; foster carers are extremely happy and settled with the agency. One foster carer said, 'I'm proud to work for them.' Another said, 'I'm really happy, it feels like the whole agency and other carers are there to support you.' Currently, racial diversity in the agency is limited; recruitment plans acknowledge and address this issue.

Although foster carers feel valued by the agency, and are so, the agency has not adopted The Foster Carers' Charter. This fails to recognise formally the work of foster carers and their professional status.

All staff are highly experienced, with a commitment to their ongoing personal development. Staff are well supervised and supported in their roles. One supervising social worker said, 'Supervision is valuable; it feels useful and allows time for focused discussion about my practice.' Staff appraisal is annual, with a focus upon current working practice and future development needs; this promotes staff development. Current supervision arrangements for the registered manager raise potential conflicts of interest; the exploration of new supervision arrangements is under way but await implementation.

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.