
Lika Family Fostering

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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Inspector Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Provision subtype Independent Fostering Agency

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Date of last inspection N/A

Service information

Brief description of the service

Lika Family Fostering is an independent fostering agency that first registered with Ofsted in September 2015. The office is based in Croydon, South London. This is the fostering agency's first Ofsted inspection.

The agency aims to provide high-quality substitute family care for children looked after. The fostering agency's ethos, philosophy and basis of care are firmly embedded in therapeutic ideas, namely systemic therapy.

The fostering agency aims to offer a range of placements. These include emergency, short-term, bridging, long-term, short breaks, care for disabled or chronically ill children, respite, parent and child, sibling, young people aged 16+ and staying put and separated unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. The agency undertakes the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of foster carers.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency has four approved foster caring households with one child 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 fostering agency has made a promising start since its registration with Ofsted in 2015. The agency provides good quality of care and the outcomes for children are positive. Children make good progress while living with their foster carers. Placements are secure and stable, and children's individual needs are well met. Staff's use of a systemic family therapy model supports this success. Children are able to express their views and opinions, and they have influence on the day-to-day care they receive.

Safeguarding is at the heart of this agency. Managers ensure that there are effective systems in place to keep children safe. The service's preparation of potential foster carers is sound and the staff complete comprehensive foster care assessments. These are evidence-based, analytical, and assess applicants' competencies in providing safe care.

The training, supervision and support of foster carers are excellent. Staff are equally well supported and supervised, and their partnership working with internal and external professionals is very effective. The fostering panel is well organised and efficiently run.

Foster carers are part of a team working with the child, and they contribute well to the care planning and decision-making process. They benefit from supportive relationships with the fostering agency and with representatives of the local authority.

The leadership and management of the agency are strong and the fostering agency is managed effectively and efficiently. Managers have a clear vision for the future of the agency, and there is a business plan in place that is both ambitious and realistic in supporting the service's continual improvement.

The inspection notes some shortfalls. The recruitment of foster carers is not sufficiently effective. As a result, the agency cannot offer a good range of foster care placements that are able to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. This is not in line with the aims and objectives as outlined in the service's statement of purpose. In addition, the fostering panel does not include a representative from child health, while appraisals for managers are overdue.

Areas of improvement

Recommendations

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

- Ensure that the fostering agency recruits a sufficient range of foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service, as outlined in the statement of purpose. (NMS 13.1)
- Consider recruiting to the fostering panel a representative experienced in the field of child health. (NMS 14.8)
- Ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. (NMS 24.6)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Children benefit from the service's focus on promoting effective relationships and ensuring that children have positive experiences. As a result, children's progress and outcomes are good.

Children receive individualised care that is tailored to meet their specific needs. Foster carers work hard to develop nurturing relationships with children. They are fully committed to making them feel loved and a part of the family, and they help children reach their full potential. A local authority social worker comments, 'The foster carers have been emotionally supportive of my young person. Positive family life is a new experience for X and she's finding it challenging.'

A member of the local authority's commissioning team says of the same placement, 'The placement is going well. The carers have been able to stabilise the young person in a short space of time and she's now making significant progress.'

Children are safely cared for and staff ensure that their holistic needs are fully explored prior to placement negotiations. This is a strength of the service. Managers are clear that they are able to provide placements that meet care planning objectives and can offer safe care. Staff are careful to ensure that comprehensive information is available to foster carers about potential placements before negotiations start.

Foster carers confirm that staff encourage them to seek as much relevant information about children prior to making any decision to agree to a placement. A local authority commissioner says of staff's management of referrals, 'The staff are thorough and matching is really important to them. They were asking for a lot more information than most other agencies and shared good information about the foster carers, their skills and so on. I had a really good feeling about this one.' The agency's robust matching process ensures that children's needs and placement objectives are fully understood by all parties from the outset. This promotes placement stability.

Children's identity needs are addressed well by the service. Staff ensure that they obtain clear information about issues of identity, including age, gender, religious and cultural considerations. Children benefit from this process. For example, they have the opportunity to attend their chosen places of worship, eat culturally appropriate food, engage in community events and participate in the leisure and recreational activities that they prefer. The agency is also able to offer expert care to children and young people living with disabilities. Foster carers and staff help children to understand their backgrounds and events that have happened to them.

Children have good opportunities to share their views, wishes and opinions. The

fostering agency continues to develop methods and strategies to enhance the participation of children looked after in influencing the shape of the service.

Children's communication with the fostering agency is effective and supported by the service's commitment to promoting relationship building and positive connections. Staff have devised creative methods to ensure that children understand the agency's commitment to listening to their views. As a result, children make extensive use of texting as a frequent method of communication, and they engage in meaningful sessions with supervising social workers. Managers have plans to develop a 'Young Person's Council' and to involve children and young people with the recruitment of new staff. This is to help increase children and young people's influence in the development of the service.

Children receive accessible information about making complaints, and are aware of individuals or agencies that they can approach if they have concerns or are unhappy. No complaints have been made against the fostering service.

Children lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers promptly register them with primary care services and children have access to any specialist health services they may require. Some approved foster carers offer specialist care for children and young people living with disabilities. A local authority social worker comments, 'For the first time in her life, X has been able to follow through on her dental treatment plan. She now has a good treatment regime that she's keeping to. This has never happened before.'

Children benefit significantly from the attention paid by the fostering agency to their emotional and psychological well-being. Staff and foster carers receive training and expert support to sensitively communicate and explore with children their emotional state. Staff and foster carers continually explore how the placement can enhance children's emotional well-being and resilience. The fostering agency employs family therapists and clinicians to help foster families develop safe strategies to communicate effectively and engage positively with children. This is in line with the systemic family therapy model, which forms the basis of the fostering service's practice.

Children benefit from the service's promotion of their educational attainment. As placements progress, children's attendance at school improves, as do their learning outcomes. A local authority commissioner says of a young person in placement, 'She attends the same school. The virtual school is impressed she continues to attend! There is a real sense of continuity where her education is concerned.' It is clear that children make positive progress due to their foster carers' keen interest in helping them meet their learning objectives. This is further supported by the managers' tracking of children's academic progress. Children receive support at home with their completion of homework and foster carers are, for example, open to facilitating home tuition to further support children's educational attainment.

Children are encouraged to develop practical skills and emotional strategies to support them to take personal responsibility for their actions and behaviour. Foster

carers understand and make appropriate use of boundary setting and negotiation to promote positive behaviour. A foster carer comments, 'The changes we have seen may be small, but to X they are massive.' The supervising social worker is also a trained clinician and is available, through negotiation with the placing authority, to work directly with children and young people to help explore difficult issues.

Children have access to their brothers and sisters, parents, friends and significant others if it is deemed safe for them to do so. Fostering agency staff and foster carers support and facilitate agreed contact arrangements that encourage children to develop and maintain positive family relationships. Foster carers work hard to develop good working partnerships with parents, and parents are greatly appreciative of this approach.

Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering agency provides good quality care and, as a result, children make good progress in secure, stable placements. However, the recruitment of new foster carers has not been effective, as although there are high numbers of initial enquiries, these do not result in a significant increase in the pool of approved foster carers. At the time of the inspection, staff were completing a number of foster carer assessments to help address this. The agency has a clear foster carer recruitment strategy in place and aims to offer a range of foster care placements to meet the diverse needs of children looked after, as outlined in the statement of purpose.

The fostering agency ensures that the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers are robust. This is to ensure that they are well equipped to meet the needs of children safely. Applicants' preparation is thorough and conducted with appropriate depth and rigour. Staff complete foster care assessments that are comprehensive and analytical, and identify the strengths and competencies that foster carers have or need to develop. Foster carers understand and appreciate staff's careful collation and analysis of assessment information. One foster carer said, 'When I read the assessment I thought, my gosh, that's my life. I'm going to keep the assessment report and share it with my children and grandchildren. It's that good.' Staff complete assessments and approvals in a timely manner; foster carers are clear about their roles, and the roles of the agency and placing authority.

The fostering panel functions efficiently and effectively in making recommendations about the suitability of potential foster carers. However, to date no foster carer has had an annual review completed. The central list of panel members comprises qualified and experienced individuals in appropriate childcare fields. This, however, does not include a representative from child (physical) health. This means the fostering panel lacks experience, particularly in considering placement issues of children with medical conditions or those living with

disabilities.

The fostering agency has relevant panel policies and procedures in place. Members of the central list participate in an induction and have access to all agency training. The fostering agency ensures that the vetting of panel members is robust, making sure that they are suitable to participate in the process. Panel meetings are appropriately quorate and its administration is sound. The agency decision-maker is a qualified, experienced social worker. There have been no issues considering panel meetings' recommendations.

Training opportunities for foster carers are impressive. Children looked after and foster carers benefit from the fostering agency's extensive training programme. The training explores ideals of systemic theory and its relevance to the foster care task. The training programme meets well the training needs of foster carers, equipping them with knowledge and skills in order for them to provide safe and nurturing care. The training programme is wide ranging in scope. The programme includes, for example, the three-day skills to foster training, child development and the introduction to attachment, and narrative therapy ideas within the fostering role. All approved foster carers are on schedule to complete the training, support and development standards within the 12-month timeframe.

Foster carers feel that the quality of training provided is excellent and are appreciative of their learning. A foster carer said, 'The training is excellent. They mix it up. It's very interactive and never boring. Afterwards, the reflection makes you think even more. The training highlighted the need for me to be calmer and I used this learning when working with my young person.'

Foster carers receive an outstanding level of support from the staff team. They are very much valued within the agency and they feel that the exceptional level of support that they receive is a key strength of the service. A foster care says of the agency's support, 'It's excellent. There's a combination of formal supervision, group supervision, consistent communication, checking in via texts and phone calls, and even online groups for support.' Staff ensure that communication between themselves and foster carers is regular. Home visits are frequent and explore a range of placement issues. Where there are no children in placement, foster carers say support from staff remains consistent and meaningful.

Foster carers attend monthly group supervision facilitated by a systemic family therapist. The sessions provide foster carers with a forum to explore collectively placement challenges and to discuss and offer strategies to resolve difficulties. Foster carers also have the opportunity to consult with the therapist individually to help explore particular placement issues.

Foster carers are particularly appreciative of staff's consideration of the impact of fostering on their own birth children. In addition they praise the agency's efforts to involve them with placement decision-making and the development of the fostering service. A child of a foster carer told the inspector, 'They were interested in what I thought. They took us (birth children) out for a meal as part of my parents' assessment and asked what age range we would be comfortable with and

to tell them what worries we might have about fostering.'

The fostering agency works very effectively with involved professionals. There is close partnership working with children's social workers to ensure that placements are in the children's best interests. A local authority representative comments, 'I'm very impressed with this organisation and its carers. They are efficient in getting information across promptly, which helps with my decision-making.' A child's social worker reflects, 'The staff are calling me with good suggestions. It's refreshing to have a foster care agency working with the parents. For the first time with this young person, there is a united front amongst all of us, and the young person knows it.'

Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The fostering agency staff team and foster carers ensure that the safety and well-being of children is paramount. Foster carers are aware of the vulnerabilities of children and are well-informed of the underlying causes of behaviour that children can exhibit. The protection of children is robust at all levels. This is a clear strength of the service.

Children benefit from the fostering service's clear and comprehensive child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. Foster carers have good access to these policies together with relevant local authority safeguarding protocols. Children receive good information about how to complain and whom to approach if they feel unsafe or unhappy.

Foster carers receive regular and consistent child protection training. Staff ensure that they routinely explore safeguarding issues in supervision sessions and in all other foster carer forums. There have been no allegations against foster carers, standard of care issues, complaints or restraint of a child or young person. There have been no accidents.

Managers and leaders monitor effectively, have good oversight, and reflect and report on any safeguarding incident. This is particularly the case for when children are missing. Foster carers and staff take effective action to promote the protection of children and their safe return in each instance. Staff ensure that placement plans and risk assessments highlight known and anticipated risks. Managers and staff review and update key documents regularly to reflect children's changing needs and circumstances. This helps keep children safe.

The fostering agency has strong and effective working partnerships with other agencies such as children's social workers, school personnel, the police and children's advocates. This helps protect children and young people who engage in risk-taking behaviour. This successful collaboration promotes an effective coordinated approach to safeguarding children looked after.

A child's social worker comments, 'My young person's missing episodes have effectively stopped since her placement with their foster carers. As a result of this, her risk of child sexual exploitation scaling has decreased significantly. The foster carers are emotionally resilient and they have coped with significant challenging behaviour from my young person whilst always ensuring that the young person feels welcomed and supported in her placement.'

The fostering agency's recruitment and vetting of staff, panel members and consultants are robust and in accordance with safe recruitment practices. The process is well-organised and comprehensive. Managers ensure the completion of appropriate checks, which confirm that staff and others are suitable to work with vulnerable children and young people.

Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Good**

The leadership and management of the fostering agency are effective and strong. Leaders have an ambitious, strategic business plan in place to improve practice and set the future direction and expansion of the fostering service. However, the agency has yet to complete the registered manager's annual appraisal.

The fostering agency's statement of purpose is comprehensive and up to date. It describes the service's aims and objectives and is available to interested parties via the agency's website. The fostering agency provides clear and creative information to children and young people in age-appropriate language. The agency is financially sound and its business plan outlines plans for the service's future. In order to meet fully the aims and objectives of the service's statement of purpose, the agency needs to increase the pool of approved foster carers.

The management of the fostering agency is efficient and the agency is well run. The registered manager is highly skilled, well qualified and experienced to manage the agency with positive effect. Stakeholders both within and external to the fostering agency identify overwhelmingly both the registered manager and responsible individual as skilled, compassionate and strong advocates for children looked after. This is the view of staff, foster carers, consultants and external partners. A child's social worker says of the service, 'It's an energetic, motivated and highly professional fostering agency. The supervising social worker is an exceptional practitioner with a wealth of experience in supporting the foster carers and myself!'

The consultant family therapist says of the managers, 'My impression? They're diligent, focused, assertive and have passion. They work hard for better placements. They never sleep; they work crazy hours, and are dedicated. 24/7. I know the manager's work. When they branched out I wanted to support them.'

Foster carers also have high praise for the leaders of the fostering service. A foster carer told the inspector, 'The team are very positive, reassuring, enthusiastic and

passionate, with lots of energy. They want to train us to be the best foster carers we can be.'

Staff are appropriately qualified. The supervising social worker is social work trained and a qualified clinician. Staff share the vision and enthusiasm of their managers and are extremely committed to providing effective support to children and their foster families. Staff receive excellent support through consistent training, supervision and reflective practice. A member of the staff team says of the managers, 'They are two incredible women, passionate about what they are doing. The best thing about my role is being a part of a team. We talk every day, its constant; we have a good level of trust and a closeness. Support and supervision is excellent.'

The fostering agency has extensive, effective monitoring systems in place for most aspects of the service's operation. These include the review and revision of key policies and procedures, the review and evaluation of its training programmes and the regular review of safeguarding strategies devised for individual children. Managers are consistent in their completion of quarterly overview reports. As a result, leaders have very good insight into the quality of the fostering agency, including areas for improvement.

The fostering agency is well organised. Leaders have ambitious yet realistic plans and a clear vision for the service's future development. Leaders demonstrate a genuine commitment to improvement and to delivering very positive outcomes for children.

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.