

# Family Foster Care

Inspection report for independent fostering agency

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC483928                                      |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 20/03/2017                                    |
| <b>Inspectors</b>              | Clive Lucas<br>Parveen Hussain<br>Rosie Davie |
| <b>Type of inspection</b>      | Full  |
| <b>Provision subtype</b>       | Independent fostering agency                  |

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| <b>Setting address</b> | 33a Highgate, Beverley, North Humberside HU17 0DN |
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| <b>Telephone number</b>        | 01482 870400                                   |
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| <b>Registered person</b>       | Granville Orange<br>Robert Rae<br>Colin Watkin |
| <b>Registered manager</b>      | Karen Gill-Rummens                             |
| <b>Responsible individual</b>  | Robert Rae                                     |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | N/A  |

## Service information

### Brief description of the service

Family Foster Care is an independent fostering service that provides foster placements for children and young people who are unable to live within their birth families. The agency provides long- and short-term placements, and parent and child placements. Young people also remain with their carers under 'staying put' arrangements. The agency currently has 26 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: **Requires improvement**

Most children have their individual needs met well and their welfare safeguarded, so that they can live in safe and stable placements. However, some children have had unplanned and sudden moves due to their placements being ended.

The agency has a plan for the continued recruitment of carers. It recognises the importance of timely responses to enquiries and good assessments. However, not all foster carer assessments and reviews are sufficiently detailed or thorough enough for the foster panel to make a recommendation on the foster carers' approval or, in the

case of review, their continued approval. Quality assurance processes do not always identify these issues before they are put to the foster panel for consideration.

Foster carers are an active part of the team working around the child, and their knowledge and experience of the child inform the plans for them. One carer said: 'I am part of a team that supports children to independence and beyond.' Most carers have professional and supportive relationships with the agency. This ensures that standards of care are high. However, some carers do not feel well supported and some supervising social workers do not always provide sufficient challenge to carers when required.

## Areas of improvement

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person must comply within the given timescales.

| Requirement  | Due date   |
|--|------------|
| The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))   | 31/05/2017 |
| The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent. (Regulation 26.1)<br><br>In particular, ensure that all assessments are of a suitable standard and that all required information is presented to the fostering panel. | 31/05/2017 |
| The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation. (Regulation 28(1)(5))<br><br>In particular, ensure that all reviews are of a suitable quality and that all first reviews are seen by the foster panel.   | 31/05/2017 |
| The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive an appropriate appraisal and supervision. (Regulation 21(4)(a))   | 31/05/2017 |

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| The fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering service is at all times conducted in a manner which is consistent with its statement of purpose. (Regulation 3(5))<br><br>This is with specific reference to who will undertake unannounced visits to carers.   | 31/05/2017 |
| The registered person's system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency, must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(3))   | 30/09/2017 |
| The registered person, in respect of an independent fostering agency, must establish a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency. (Regulation 18(1))<br><br>In particular, ensure that the complaints procedure is followed. | 31/05/2017 |

## Recommendations

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

- Ensure that children leave a placement in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel valued. (The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations volume 4: Fostering services, page 14, paragraph 3.1)
- Ensure that each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 21.8)
- Ensure that foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate and that these are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 21.5)
- Ensure that children are carefully matched to a foster placement. (Fostering

services: National minimum standards, 11.2)

- Ensure that the role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 21.7)
- Ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 26.2)

Specifically, ensure that all the required information is transferred to the new computer-based recording system.

- Ensure that records of supervision are signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 24.5)
- Ensure that there is a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the service's current operation and resource. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 18.2)
- Ensure there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 25.1)
- Ensure that children understand the nature of records maintained and how to access them. (Fostering services: National minimum standards, 26.3)

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

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Overall, the children placed with this fostering agency make good progress and achieve good outcomes. For some children, these are very good. However, a very few children have experienced sudden and unplanned placement endings which are likely to have been very difficult for them. There are many long-term placements in which children are doing very well. Commissioning officers from local authorities attribute the length and success of placements to the quality of the agency's matching procedures. They describe foster carers with this agency as 'flexible, creative and resilient'.

The children do well and make good progress in their education. The carers are proactive in supporting education and working with schools to ensure that children do well and receive the support that they need. Some children have additional tuition to help them, and carers spend time in activities such as reading with children. Some carers have advocated for children, for example when they felt that the children were being pushed into inappropriate courses. Some children are able to remain with their carers after their 18th birthdays. One young person spoke about how settled he has been with his carers. He has been with them for 10 years and is currently enrolled on an engineering course at college. He said that this would not have been possible for him if he had not stayed with his carers.

Children are routinely registered with primary healthcare services, and carers ensure that children also receive any specialist help that they require, such as play therapy and counselling. The agency also employs a therapist who works with children and carers. This helps to support each child's emotional well-being and resilience.

Some children have made notable progress in their health through being involved in more active lifestyles with their carers. Overall, this leads to better health outcomes for children and provides them with healthy lifestyles.

The agency seeks out and listens to the children's views. Support workers spend individual time with each child, as well as running children's consultation meetings. One carer described the agency's approach to consultation as: 'Really good and refreshing. The children feel like their voice is being heard.'

Children's views can also influence their care plans, in relation to contact with their families, for instance. As a result of this, one child was reported to be thrilled that

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her contact with her parent was increased, while another one was recorded as not being ready for contact with her parent to begin. This individual approach helps to ensure that children can have contact with family which meets their individual needs.

The agency and the carers have a strong focus on making children feel 'special' and valued. For example, the agency will send cards to children to recognise their achievements. One carer spoke about a child receiving a card when he had learned to ride a bike without stabilisers. Other children have had 'get well' cards. These are sent directly to the children so that they have the excitement of receiving their own post.

Children take part in a wide range of activities at their foster homes. These include everyday family activities such as going to the park and walking the dog, as well as pursuing interests and hobbies such as horse riding and drama. Having listened to children's views, the agency provided a range of activities aimed at different age ranges. These have included a Hallowe'en party, a trip to a pantomime, a 'high ropes' course and a visit to a trampoline centre.

## Quality of service

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

Many carers say that they have regular and helpful supervision delivered by social workers from the agency. However, in some cases there have been long gaps between supervisions, with some carers only having had two supervisions in eight months. In some cases, supervising social workers have not been robust in discussing issues of concern with carers. This results in some carers being unclear about their roles and not having the opportunity to discuss issues of concern. It also prevents the agency from having a strong overview of how carers are looking after children.

The majority of the carers report very good and appropriate relationships with agency staff, in particular their supervising social workers and the registered manager. However, some carers do not have positive relationships with the agency or understand clearly each other's roles and responsibilities. This limits the ability of the agency and carers to work together to meet the children's needs effectively.

The agency provides respite care for carers so that they can continue to maintain placements and meet children's needs. In many cases, carers have identified support from family members or other carers whom children know and feel safe with. This

helps to minimise any disruption for children. A few carers report problems in receiving respite care. In one case, an assessment has been completed which identifies the level of respite care which is needed. This level has been provided previously, but is not currently available and there are no plans to resolve the situation. This could leave the children's placement at risk of disruption.

Many carers spoke positively about how visible the senior managers are. A director attends all carer support groups and his telephone number is available for any carers to contact him directly. Most carers value the small, family-like feel which the agency has. They describe it as friendly and say that they can speak to anyone.

The majority of carers speak favourably about the training which is provided for them. They describe it as outstanding and say that they are supported to attend. In particular, they speak about how safeguarding training helps to prepare them for dealing with this issue. The annual reviews of foster carers generally have a focus on the training that the carers have undertaken. In some cases, supervising social workers have not monitored the training needs of carers. This means that some carers have not completed mandatory training or the training that they have identified as needing. While this is not the experience of the majority of carers, some are not receiving the training which the agency has identified as essential in order for them to provide safe and effective placements for the children.

Placing authorities and the majority of carers say that the matching of children to their foster placements is effective and leads to good, long-term placements. However, a small number of carers have questioned the effectiveness of matching, and records of carers' annual reviews identify some concerns about placements not being well matched. In one of these cases, the records of the matching decision were not on the child's file. While good matching has contributed to most children living with carers who can meet their needs well and provide them with stability, this has not been the case for all. This increases the risk of placement breakdown.

There is an effective foster panel that looks closely at the suitability of carers to provide good safe care for children. The foster panel is able to operate independently, and it provides valuable quality assurance information for the agency. Some assessments of prospective foster carers have not been fully completed before going to the foster panel for consideration. The panel identified these gaps in information and deferred its recommendation until this was provided. Consequently, while some assessments have lacked information, the impact on children has been minimised.



## Safeguarding children and young people

Judgement outcome: **Good**

Foster carers help children to take age-appropriate risks so that they learn how to keep themselves safe. This includes areas such as road safety, 'stranger danger', using public transport and safe internet use. Incidents of children going missing from care are infrequent. When they do occur, the carers respond appropriately and, when necessary, work with other agencies to help to keep the children safe. The local authority designated safeguarding officer confirms that the registered manager will contact her appropriately with any concerns and act on any advice given.

Foster carers receive safeguarding training and feel confident in dealing with any incidents of a safeguarding nature. They say that the children's plans address any issues of abuse or neglect. Having carers who are confident and prepared to deal with safeguarding matters increases the chances that, should any issues arise, they will be addressed in a way which protects children. The fostering staff and carers speak of an open culture within the agency, with access to a variety of managers. Staff and most carers feel that they would be listened to if they raised concerns.

A placing social worker confirmed that carers put good boundaries in place to help children to develop positive behaviour, commenting: 'The carers are providing good supervision and managing risks for the child well. They are fantastic carers and I cannot praise them enough.'

## Leadership and management

Judgement outcome: **Requires improvement**

The agency has a statement of purpose and children's guides aimed at different ages and abilities. The children's guides are written in a child-friendly way and provide helpful information for children, but they do not inform children that they can see their fostering records. The agency recognises that this is something that it needs to include.

The agency generally works to its statement of purpose. However, there is a shortfall in the way that the agency says, in this document, that it will undertake unannounced visits to carers. The statement of purpose records that unannounced visits to carers will be undertaken by a worker other than the one allocated to the carer. This is to ensure a 'balance and check' on the quality of care and the home

environment. In practice, this does not always happen, and some unannounced visits are undertaken by the allocated worker. While nothing would prohibit this, the agency should ensure that it works to its statement of purpose and, if necessary, review it. Further, some carers have not received unannounced visits within a 12-month period.

The statement of purpose also provides information on the complaints process, but this is not always followed as described. Following a recent complaint, no letter of outcome was sent to the complainant. It is important that such policies are followed fully to ensure a transparent process.

The agency has recently started to use a new electronic recording system. Most records have transferred satisfactorily, but some historic records have not transferred fully to this new system and are hard to locate. This means that it is sometimes hard to track the details of decisions that have been taken, or whether staff have received annual appraisals and regular supervision. It is not always clear whether staff have signed their supervision notes. This calls into question the overall effectiveness of this system.

The registered manager has a secure knowledge of the children who are placed with the agency, gleaned from regular updates from carers and supervising social workers. This provides her with a good overview of children's needs and progress.

The registered manager's monitoring of practice, recording and the quality of care provided needs further improvement. For example, although regular review of the quality of care takes place, this process does not take account of the views of children, and the views of carers and placing authorities are limited. Consequently, the information on which the review is based is not as complete as it could be.

Management has identified a number of matters relating to the running of the agency which need to be addressed, but these are not set out in a development plan. This limits the opportunities to identify and review the actions required to improve the functioning of the agency, set clear timescales and thereby further improve the quality of care for the children.

The agency has effective partnerships in place with placing authorities which describe good working relationships with it and its carers. Commissioning officers describe the agency as being approachable and working closely with them. Carers also maintain good contact and liaison with health and education services. This ensures that children receive the services and resources that they are entitled to.

## 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.