

Ccats Fostering Ltd

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Westbourne House, 3 Lockwood Avenue, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 7AB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was registered by Ofsted in July 2016. The main function of the agency is to undertake the recruitment, assessment and training of foster carers and to provide care and support to children and young people. At the time of the inspection, there were nine children and young people in placement with six approved fostering households.

The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- Emergency
- Short term
- Long term
- Respite

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 May 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection:

Enforcement action since last inspection

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because

- This is an effective child-focused fostering service. Children and young people's life chances have been significantly enhanced due to the care and support they receive from committed, skilled and nurturing foster carers.
- The number of approved fostering households is small and the majority of approved carers have transferred from other agencies. Carers report that they moved to this agency due to the good levels of support they receive from the supervising social worker and the registered manager.
- Children and young people are positively engaged in education and are making good progress.
- Foster carers spoken with during the inspection say that they feel valued and part of a team around the child. They have regular supervision and support visits from an appropriately qualified social worker, whom they hold in high regard.
- The underpinning ethos of this agency is one of care, nurture and protection. Children and young people enjoy trusting relationships with their carers and say that they feel safe and happy.
- There is a good focus on safeguarding within the agency. The safety and well-being of children and young people are embedded in policy and procedures and underpin every aspect of the service, such as the recruitment, assessment, approval and supervision of foster carers.
- Foster carer assessments are robust and demonstrate that applicants have the necessary skills to be a good foster carer.
- A wide range of training is offered to foster carers, some of which is delivered by the in-house clinical team. This ensures that foster carers have the skills they need to meet the needs of the children in their care.
- The fostering panel promotes safe and secure placements.
- Children and young people benefit from visible and effective leadership and management. The registered manager has high expectations and is passionate about delivering good quality placements to children and young people.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development

- Missing from home records do not fully evidence whether the child or young person has had the opportunity to speak to someone independent following their return to placement. The manager has acknowledged this shortfall and is in the

process of reviewing current processes to ensure a more robust system in the future.

- Young people are achieving appropriate levels of independence, in accordance with their age, ability and understanding. However, individual independence and life skills plans lack a comprehensive assessment of the young people's needs and abilities. For those young people who are rapidly approaching adulthood, this has the potential to create unnecessary anxiety during a very crucial time.
- Improve procedures for monitoring the activities of the service to enable good strategic oversight of children's experiences and outcomes. In particular, ensure more robust evaluation of information listed in schedule 6, and maintain a thorough overview of children and young people's progress to identify patterns and trends and inform service development.
- Currently, panel membership does not appropriately reflect the diversity of the local community; nor does it benefit from a member who has experience of being in foster care themselves.

What does the independent fostering agency need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing detail action taken by foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, and any reason given by the child for running away from the foster home and action taken in light of those reasons. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 5.10)

With particular reference to ensuring robust oversight of independent return home interviews.

- Ensure that there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence, and that these are reflected in young people's relevant plans. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 12.3)
- There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This specifically relates to having a robust system to assess and evaluate the matters set out in schedule 6 and the experiences and progress that children and young people make. (Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 25.1)
- Fostering panel membership should appropriately reflect the diversity of the local community. In addition, people who are, or have previously been foster carers are likely to make a valuable contribution to panel discussions, as are their sons and daughters and people with experience of being in foster care themselves. ('The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services', page 39, paragraph 5.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people thrive in their foster placements and are making good progress because they feel safe and secure. They establish meaningful and lasting relationships with their carers and report that they like living with their foster families. Examples of comments made by children and young people include:

- 'I'm over the moon living here. I know that [name of carer] really cares for me.'
- 'I really like it here and I am doing really well.'
- 'This is a good family, they are really nice and we do lots of nice things together. I'd give it 10 out of 10.'
- 'Living here has made a real difference to me. I am well cared for, I'm part of the family and I am happy.'

Children and young people develop a strong sense of identity and experience positive personal achievements that build self-esteem. They are encouraged to pursue individual interests and a number of them spoke with enthusiasm about activities that they are involved in, for example swimming, cadets, sports, drama and dance groups, and after-school clubs. They also have a wide range of hobbies and interests which they pursue with their foster families and on their own. One young person said, 'I like living here; we go on holiday all the time, we had about 20 holidays last year! We also do things every weekend; last weekend I went on a steam train, it was brilliant!'

Children and young people form positive friendships and are active within their local communities. They have sleepovers, days out with their friends and enjoy experiences similar to that of their peers. One young person said, 'I understand that checks need to take place to make sure I am safe, but these have never prevented me from doing the same things as my mates.'

Children and young people are making very good progress in their education. All have appropriate educational placements, and the majority achieve above expectations as they settle and engage. School attendance is high and educational success noticeably improves as placements progress. For those children and young people who require further support, additional tuition is sought so that their chances of succeeding are maximised. As a result, children and young people speak positively about their education and have clear aspirations to proceed on to higher education, skills-based education or university. This undoubtedly enhances their self-esteem, confidence and overall life chances.

All children and young people have access to the necessary health services and resources so their health needs can be met. Children and young people also lead healthy lifestyles. Foster carers work hard to ensure that children and young people enjoy a well-balanced, nutritious diet and lead active lives. Foster carers have been provided with specialist training opportunities to support children and young people

with specific health needs. The agency also supports foster carers in sourcing additional services where there is an identified need. This ensures that ongoing health matters are addressed accordingly.

The fostering service continues to develop strategies to enhance the participation of children looked after in influencing the service's approach. For example, the service has a number of new initiatives such as children and young people developing questions to ask new foster care applicants, setting up a children and young people's forum and the implementation of a 'children's pledge'.

These initiatives provide children and young people the time and space to speak freely about what is important to them. Consequently, children and young people feel listened to and valued by those around them.

Children and young people develop life skills in line with their age and development. Foster carers support them to learn about travelling independently, budgeting, cooking and doing their own laundry. However, individual independence and life skills plans lack a comprehensive assessment of the young people's needs and abilities. This means that there is no clear framework to assist and assess progress. For the young people who are rapidly approaching adulthood, this has the potential to create unnecessary anxiety during a very crucial time.

Foster carers value and promote contact for children and young people with those that are significant to them. Foster carers are acutely aware of the emotional impact that contact can have upon children and young people and support them sensitively at these times. This support ensures that family contact is managed in a safe, enjoyable and positive way.

Foster carers are approved to take emergency, short-term or long-term placements. The vast majority are experienced carers who have transferred from other agencies with children and young people in placement. This means that the majority of children and young people enjoy stable and long-term placements. However, disruption has occurred when more challenging children or young people have been placed in an emergency situation. On the rare occasion that this has happened, the agency worked in partnership with the placing authority and provided additional resources to ensure the best outcome. Following placement disruption, the manager undertakes effective reflective discussion with foster carers and learn from what's happened. This has proved effective in shaping future practice.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children and young people's life chances have been significantly enhanced due to the care and support they receive from committed, skilled and nurturing foster carers. Their safety and welfare are central to the childcare practices and children and young people spoken with during the inspection say that they feel happy, settled and safe.

There is a good focus on safeguarding within the agency. This is embedded in policy and procedure and underpins the recruitment, assessment, approval and supervision

of foster carers. The agency strives to balance the safety of children and young people with their need to develop and take age-appropriate risks. This enables children and young people to develop an understanding of risk, become more resilient and make more informed choices about their personal safety.

Regular consultation with children and young people's families offers transparency in the behaviour management process and evidence gathered during this inspection highlights that behaviour is very well managed, not only by the foster carers, but by children and young people themselves. Children and young people recognise that they are steadily becoming more able to regulate their emotions, talk about their worries and take responsibility for their actions. One young person said, 'I know I can talk to [name of the carer] about things that worrying me. She [carer] listens to me and helps me figure things out.'

The agency has effective links with a therapeutic service and makes provision for foster carers to undertake additional therapeutic training. The clinical team provides foster carers with consultation, support and guidance that reinforce the agency's therapeutic approach and strengthens foster carers understanding of trauma which is presented in children's behaviour. Foster carers confirm that this support is invaluable. One carer said: 'The training and support has been excellent and I have a great deal of access to professional advice and guidance.' Another said: 'The therapeutic service offered by the agency has given a new dimension to the care we provide and gives us the opportunity to understand behaviours in more depth.'

Risk assessments and safe caring family plans are individualised and reflect the diverse needs and personalities of each of child or young person. They provide a good overview of behaviours and identify where children and young people have more complex risks such as child sexual exploitation, safe use of the internet or going missing from care. Children and young people are involved in discussions which identify the actions that foster carers and staff take to reduce risks. This has proved effective in supporting most children and young people to reduce or stop harmful and high-risk behaviours.

Missing from home episodes are extremely rare, as most young people are settled in their placements and are making better choices in relation to their personal safety. On the rare occasions when children or young people have either been missing or had an unauthorised absence from their placement, it has been dealt with promptly and in line with agreed protocols. However, the agency could be more proactive in ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to speak to someone independent following their return to placement. Currently, records do not demonstrate if and when an independent return home interview has taken place. This has the potential to hinder the manager's ability to routinely reflect on and review the outcomes of these interviews to inform future practice.

Supervising social workers conduct at least two unannounced visits to fostering households a year, and there are periodic health and safety checks to ensure that households remain safe. Foster carer supervision visits are robust and child focused. Children and young people are often present when visits take place and they are fully involved in discussions. These visits provide an opportunity to observe

interaction and for children and young people to talk to staff about any issues they have, which may include child protection matters.

Allegations against carers are taken seriously and are acted upon appropriately in consultation with safeguarding agencies. Records demonstrate that the agency works effectively to protect both the child or young person and the foster carer when an allegation is made.

Vetting procedures for staff, panel members and foster carers are sufficiently robust. This ensures that as much as possible is done to help protect the young person from unsuitable adults.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

This is an effectively led fostering agency. The registered manager of the service has a professional social work qualification and has many years of experience in childcare practice and management. The manager demonstrates real care and ambition, and is passionate about children and young people achieving and doing well. His enthusiasm and commitment have helped to inspire and shape the overall ethos of the service.

Without exception, foster carers spoken with during this inspection were positive about the support they receive from the agency. They confirmed that the agency values them as professionals and that the agency views them as 'part of the team'. Many positive comments were received during the inspection. Examples of these include:

- 'It's not about going the extra mile, this agency goes an extra 10 miles for children.'
- 'Support is excellent; someone is always at the end of a phone.'
- 'We are part of a fostering family here, with the children at the centre of everything.'
- 'I can honestly say that if it was not for the support we have received, I don't think I would have managed to stay fostering for so long.'

Training is described by foster carers as 'excellent' and 'informative'. Carers confirmed that their views about training and development opportunities are constantly sought. One said: 'We are consulted about our views and we have been actively involved in shaping the training programme to ensure our skills are enhanced. Training is delivered at the right level and enables us to meet the specific needs of the children.' It is evident that the agency has recognised that therapeutic training is essential in order to support children and young people. This is an area that the service plans to develop further to strengthen the package of support available to foster carers, children and young people.

The staff team is cohesive and supportive, and all of its members have a variety of different skills that are valued and acknowledged by the manager. The team works very closely together and members share positive and supportive relationships with

each other. The leadership team values the individual strengths and skills brought by each member of staff and offers a supportive environment where practice can develop. Professional development is embraced and encouraged. Staff have access to regular training that helps them to develop their knowledge of specific issues relating to the children and young people in foster care. The supervision of social workers is regular, purposeful and progressive. Staff confirm that they feel very well supported in their role. They are helped and encouraged to expand their competence and confidence in all areas of work. Consequently, this is a staff team whose members remain motivated and well equipped for their roles.

Appraisals of staff performance are undertaken annually by the manager. Records demonstrate that professional development and competency are a key focus throughout. Appraisals also take into account the views of foster carers, children and young people. This provides an opportunity for a more holistic review of professional practice.

Some monitoring systems are in place but these are not fully embedded in practice. For example, the system to analyse and evaluate the experiences and progress of children and young people is not established and is therefore ineffective. This is an issue the manager has identified and is in the process of introducing a new electronic systems to help him identify patterns and trends and track children and young people's progress.

The preparation, training and assessment of foster carers are good, with a strong emphasis on safe care and safeguarding. Despite the relatively low numbers of fostering households, the agency has a clear recruitment strategy and is hoping to recruit a diverse range of foster carers to meet children and young people's needs. Foster carers have been consulted about the agency's recruitment strategy and are keen to assist with recruitment events. There is a shared goal among staff and carers alike to grow and develop for the benefit of children and young people.

Assessments are completed by a qualified social worker and reports are presented to panel in a timely manner. The fostering panel works effectively to ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of its members' discussions. The panel chair is independent of the agency and is suitably experienced. Although the panel is relatively new, it provides a rigorous quality assurance function to ensure that only those people who are suitable to foster are recommended for approval, or continue to be assessed as suitable. The central list consists of members with a variety of professional experience. However, panel membership does not appropriately reflect the diversity of the local community; nor does it benefit from a member who has experience of being in foster care themselves. The manager has acknowledged this shortfall and is in the process of recruiting a more culturally diverse mix of people for the central list.

Panel minutes are robust and the administration is extremely efficient, thereby ensuring that members have the papers in good time to give them their full consideration. There is an effective process for agreeing the panel minutes that avoids delay in the decision-making process. A decision about an applicant's suitability is therefore made within required timescales.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the independent fostering agency knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards.

Independent fostering agency details

Unique reference number: 1236901

Registered provider: Ccats Fostering Ltd

Registered provider address: Westbourne House, 3 Lockwood Avenue, Poulton-le-Fylde, Lancashire FY6 7AB

Responsible individual: William Grace

Registered manager: Garry Williams

Telephone number: 01253 896744

Email address: GarryWilliams@ccatsfostering.org.uk

Inspector

Ceri Evans, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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