

Diverse Care

Diverse Care (UK) Ltd
399-401 High Street, London E15 4QZ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Diverse care is a privately owned fostering service. It provides a full range of fostering services, including emergency placements. It has 63 approved foster families and currently provides fostering placements to 73 children and young people.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 May 2017

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 18 November 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- This fostering service helps numerous children and young people to turn their lives around and improve their life-chances.
- As a result of the excellent quality of care that they receive, children and young people have made exceptional progress across different aspects of their lives.
- Children and young people have developed close and trusting relationships with their foster families. They feel listened to, seen and supported. They have developed deep feelings of safety, connection and belonging.
- There is a strong and highly robust safeguarding culture. The fostering service ensures that children and young people receive safe, nurturing care from highly competent foster families.
- The risk management practices are exceptionally effective. They are proactive and firmly based in effective partnerships with the network of professionals.
- This fostering service is highly effective in promoting children's and young people's learning and educational attainments.
- Children and young people are confident and optimistic about their future. They feel loved, understood and supported.
- The contact between children and their birth families is exceptionally well managed.
- The arrangements for health and safety in this organisation exceed the usual good practice.
- An ambitious vision, passionate drive, appropriate resources and high standards of professional competence are evident at all levels of this organisation.
- The service has a strongly embedded culture of continuous improvement and learning. It follows closely, supports and disseminates current research findings. Leaders and managers are committed to reflecting and learning from the practice of foster carers and the experiences of other professionals.
- This is an exciting, innovative and progressive fostering service. It is a service that thrives on innovation and challenge.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Develop further the skills of staff in writing succinct and insightful management summaries and quality overviews.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The fostering service provides children and young people with an exceptional quality of care. Taking into account their starting points, the level and breadth of the progress made by children and young people are outstanding. The support and intervention provided by the fostering service and its foster carers have helped children and young people to make significant changes and turn their lives around.

The vast majority of children and young people thrive in their foster placements. They report having very positive experiences of being in care and enjoying their lives. Children and young people benefit considerably from living in extremely stable foster care families. This helps them develop and improve their feelings of safety and belonging. Children and young people are particularly proud of what they have achieved. They gave numerous examples of their excellent progress across different aspects of their lives, in particular in receiving help to address their most difficult childhood issues.

Children and young people say that they are highly appreciative of the support and care that they receive. They commented that they felt accepted, respected and loved. One young person said: 'Who I am hasn't changed. What is different is that I am now accepted and loved for who I am.'

Foster carers display excellent nurturing attitudes, fostering skills and professional resilience. As a result, children and young people have developed close and trusting relationships with their foster families.

Children's and young people's attitudes towards learning are very positive. As a result of the high standards of care they receive, most of them have developed and improved their self-belief. Consequently, children and young people now have high aspirations. Those children who had rarely attended school before moving into their foster families now attend regularly and engage wholeheartedly. For example, some children and young people who had previously avoided lessons now ask for extra tuition. Young people obtain excellent educational levels that put them in a good position to enter a university of their choice. For example, one young person attained 10 GCSEs. Others are working steadily to make up for the time lost while they were out of education. The fostering service's children's education and development adviser ensures that all children and young people benefit from the full range of educational and vocational opportunities. This approach ensures that they are consistently provided with learning and training programmes that match their individual circumstances. For example, some young people receive professional training on the job, such as working in a restaurant, with the opportunity to obtain a catering qualification.

Children and young people are confident and optimistic about their future. Those who were previously involved in criminal behaviours have been helped to stop offending. For instance, some children and young people talk about how they exchanged a lifestyle immersed in drugs, alcohol and violence for one that now focuses on the

positives. A large number of children and young people reflect on the significant progress they make. For example, children and young people who used to regularly self-harm or have suicidal thoughts receive excellent support and intervention. This has led to a significant reduction in the times that they act out their difficult feelings in a negative way. A young person said: 'Without this fostering service, I probably would not be here.'

The great majority of children and young people have been helped to enjoy good health. Those children and young people with specific health conditions receive all the support they need to manage them safely. A young person said that his foster parents helped him more with his mental health than the specialist hospital where he stayed for almost 18 months. A baby discharged from hospital with limited life-expectancy, due to serious health conditions, continues to do extremely well as a result of the care they receive from their foster carers.

All children and young people have excellent opportunities to develop their interests and hobbies. They enjoy access to an exceptionally wide range of social and recreational activities with their foster families. Children and young people also benefit from highly successful and enjoyable social events.

The fostering service ensures that children and young people have excellent opportunities to share their opinions, feelings and anxieties in a safe and respectful atmosphere. As a result, they have developed friendships and improved their social skills. Children's and young people's forums are held in the comfortable surroundings of the fostering service offices. This relaxed space is also used for children and young people to have family contact.

The fostering service facilitates and supports children's and young people's contact with their birth families exceptionally well. A number of placing authority social workers highlighted as an area of excellence the way in which the foster carers managed contact in very difficult circumstances.

The out-of-hours service is another area that many local authority social workers fully appreciate. The fostering service has employed a highly experienced and competent social worker to provide this service on a full-time basis. In addition, managers are always available for consultation out of office hours. As a result, emergencies, including the provision of 'urgent' placements, are managed extremely well.

Local authority placing officers report that the appropriate matching of children and young people to foster carers who can meet their specific needs is 'always good'. Foster carers are able to access full referral information directly on the service's own information system. A placing officer said: 'They are the first fostering service I would ring. They read referrals properly. They are not frightened to say no... they make informed decisions.' A young person notes: 'They (the fostering service) made a great choice pairing me with my foster family. I love X as if she was my own mother.'

This fostering service works extremely well alongside placing authorities to stabilise placements. This excellent approach extends to helping children and young people to move on in a planned way, when that is in their best interests.

Children and young people are well prepared for the transition to adulthood. When appropriate, they stay with their foster families after their 18th birthday. Many of the children and young people who have moved on stay in touch with their foster carers. As a result, they continue to draw strengths from the positive bonds that they have developed with their foster families.

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

Excellent and innovative safeguarding practices have made an exceptional difference to the safety and welfare of children and young people.

Many children and young people have made outstanding progress in developing feelings of safety, security and confidence. They report feeling very safe and protected by their foster family and the fostering service. These feelings, trusting relationships and excellent support enable children and young people to adopt increasingly safer behaviours and attitudes.

The fostering service has a strong safeguarding culture. This culture encompasses everybody in the organisation. The safety and well-being of children and young people are paramount. Direct safeguarding work with children and young people ensures that they are involved fully in finding creative strategies that help them to live safer lives. They understand the purpose of these strategies and are prepared to work towards keeping to them. This means that children and young people take ownership of the plans to keep them safe and engage fully with them.

Risk management is exceptionally effective. It is not limited to only protecting children and young people. It also includes guiding, teaching and enabling them to take increasing responsibility for keeping themselves safe while embracing life and the associated risks. Educating children and young people on how to lead safer and more purposeful, positive and fulfilling lives underpins the fostering service's approach to safeguarding.

The children's education and development adviser's role is crucial within the service. Their role includes taking responsibility for educating children and young people about the risks to their safety and advising them how to be safer. The excellent initiatives in promoting children's and young people's safer behaviours include involving them in creative workshops and individual work on the wide range of the risks potentially facing them. As a consequence, children and young people develop an excellent awareness of a range of relevant risks that they may face. These include risks associated with social media and the internet, bullying, meeting new people and being groomed for various types of exploitation, missing from education and home, misusing illegal substances, engaging in criminal activities and self-harming behaviours.

Children and young people say that they have confidence that they would always be listened to, believed, reassured, helped and protected. They report having many adults around them whom they can trust with any concerns and anxieties that they may have. This trust has enabled children and young people to openly explore their vulnerabilities

and accept help and advice on how to be safe. Children and young people talk freely about their difficult and often traumatic past experiences. They recognise the impact of these experiences on their feelings and behaviours. Children and young people use the significant amount of support and guidance provided to them appropriately. As a result, they display a determination to free themselves from the negative influences of their past and build on their resilience and more constructive survival techniques.

The strong commitment of leaders and managers to safeguarding children and young people is evident in the resources that they have specifically allocated for this task. In addition to the extensive training opportunities, the fostering service has established the role of a safeguarding manager to champion the best safeguarding practice. This manager has received training on a wide range of safeguarding topics to an enhanced level. Care professionals from outside the fostering service comment positively about the safeguarding manager's contribution to safeguarding children and young people. They note that this approach means that foster parents display excellent safeguarding knowledge.

Foster parents have invaluable insight into children's and young people's behaviours and the issues that can influence them. They know what makes children and young people vulnerable and which strategies are likely to have the strongest safeguarding impact. They are highly skilled at building positive and trusting relationships with children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds and complexity of needs. They are able to keep consistent and firm boundaries while providing emotional warmth and care. Children and young people respond very positively to this approach.

The approach to risk management is proactive and firmly based in effective partnerships with the network of professionals. Early identification of risks, timely sharing of information and working in excellent partnerships with local authorities, police, health and education underpin the robust safeguarding practice. This has included swift sharing of concerns as they begin to emerge or are suspected. This has then enabled the professional network around the child to plan effectively and to safeguard the child at an early stage.

The fostering service's practice in relation to children and young people missing from care is commendable. As a result of excellent practices, many young people who used to go missing from their foster homes have stopped doing so. Each child and young person is given a leaflet designed by the fostering service, entitled 'Talk don't walk' that contains extremely helpful information. The children's education and development adviser conducts return home interviews with the children and young people who go missing from their foster families. The placing authorities see this initiative as a welcome addition to their offer. Young people say that they appreciate having a range of people to speak to. This enhances their feelings of safety and protection. In addition, the fostering service is spearheading smarter information-sharing with the police by developing a specific online information profile on each child and young person. If a child or young person goes missing from their foster home, the police will be able to access important information directly, such as the places that the children and young people frequent and people that they know. This innovative approach will ensure that relevant information is available without delay.

There is a strong awareness within the service of the risks associated with radicalisation. The safeguarding manager and the children's education and development adviser are the anti-radicalisation champions for the service. They have received and disseminated appropriate training and information to foster parents. Close working relationships exist with the police, the local 'Prevent' coordinators and schools. This helps to educate children and young people about the risks and supports them to develop resilience.

The assessment of potential foster families, their approval, supervision, training, support and annual reviews focus sharply on child protection and safeguarding. Independent assessors confirm that they are always given sufficient time to complete thorough assessments, explore any gaps and 'iron out any niggles'. They say that they never feel rushed or influenced into making any decisions in relation to the assessments. Independent assessors write comprehensive and analytical reports. An effective fostering panel with a highly experienced chair and decision-maker, who is external to this fostering service, add strength to safeguarding practice.

Managers utilise current research and display commitment to reflecting and learning from the foster service's own practice. Examples include where the placements of children were not successful or allegations against the foster parents were raised. The fostering service safeguarding manager has developed close and highly effective working relationships with designated officers and the Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

Following investigations of allegations against foster carers, the fostering service's independent reviewing officer acts as an independent advocate for them. Foster carers can use this advocate for extra support, in addition to the support already offered to them.

The arrangements for health and safety in this organisation are excellent. For example, foster carers receive expert advice and assistance on home security and improving the air quality in their homes and gardens.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leaders, managers, staff and foster families are exceptionally effective at enabling children and young people to transform their lives.

Children and young people have nothing but praise for the service. A young care-leaver said: 'They (the fostering service) always do everything they can to help us. They always ask us if there is anything they could do better. If we suggest anything, they will always try doing it. They must be outstanding.' Another young person said: 'This is an outstanding service. They (the fostering service) make it clear through everything they do that they really care.'

Staff members, foster carers, children and young people and various professionals provide unanimous positive feedback. They used words like 'impressive', 'unique', 'sophisticated', 'mature' and 'nobody else does that' to describe the outstanding nature

of the fostering service. Social workers say that this is the best fostering service that they have come across in their professional lives. Leaders and managers inspire with their vision, integrity and high levels of competency. Their enthusiasm and commitment have inspired a number of young people to choose a career in health and social care. The unique nature of the fostering service is no better highlighted than the fact that almost every staff member has previous fostering experience.

The fostering service fulfils its statement of purpose. Leaders and managers go to great lengths to find the best ways to help children and young people to have positive experiences and achieve their potential. Managers display passionate drive and vision and ensure that appropriate resources and sound professionalism are evident at all levels. This attitude permeates the fostering service and in particular, the outstanding care provided by its foster families. Clear lines of responsibility, excellent teamwork and a comprehensive framework of meetings ensure that the service is managed and monitored effectively and efficiently. The registered manager's in-depth knowledge of each individual child or young person exemplifies the fostering service's main focus.

Foster carers are respected as equal to everybody else within the professional network around a child/young person. The leaders and managers make sure that the foster families have all the support that they need in order to continue to develop their fostering competencies and resilience. They nurture fostering talent consistently and provide a highly supportive environment through effective induction, supervision, training and appraisals. Foster families also have access to additional psychological support provided by an experienced psychotherapist. Foster families feel supported and valued. A foster carer says: 'The fostering service would go to the end of the world to make you and a child happy.'

Leaders and managers have a strong commitment to providing the best possible service. They apply inspiration and skills to design bespoke projects that meet the needs of children and young people. Since the last inspection, numerous innovations have taken place, the latest being a launch of 'Be your future' project. This is an independent training programme specifically designed for young people as they grow towards adulthood. An external trainer is employed to facilitate the programme. Ten modules are delivered in a well-equipped environment. Young people also have access to relevant online training and information. Foster carers are involved in the programme by supporting young people to practise their newly acquired knowledge and skills in the family home environment. This is just one example of the service exceeding the national minimum standard. A young person who was admitted to the service in an emergency situation notes: 'I've been in care, since I was little. I've been in many places. I have never seen anything like this. It's better than anything anywhere else.'

Leaders and managers implement excellent strategies to ensure that children and young people play a crucial role in developing the fostering service. Children and young people have made significant contributions to the guides given to children and young people. The information in the guides is clear, meaningful and beautifully presented. The guides are of outstanding quality. Another example of outstanding practice is providing young people with leadership roles regarding the fostering service's own quality of care 'satisfaction' surveys. This approach secured an increased response rate

from stakeholders.

Leaders and managers work effectively in partnership with other professionals. Leaders, managers, staff and foster parents are prepared to actively challenge when the responses from other professionals are not as effective as they could be. The organisation advocates exceptionally well for children and young people. In addition to the specific roles already mentioned in this report, the organisation also employs an excellent development coach and has recently introduced a mentoring programme for children and young people.

The fostering service uses an online recording system effectively. The records are exceptionally detailed and clear. They are protected appropriately and shared on a need to know basis. The service is piloting a scheme for enhanced working together by providing remote, live access to one placing authority to their children's records.

Leaders and managers are fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their service. They acknowledge that the next step for further development is improving the quality of management summaries. This includes summarising the outcomes of the organisation's extensive annual audit or writing more evaluative, analytical and insightful six-monthly quality of care reviews.

The fostering service is exciting, innovative and progressive. Staff, foster carers, children and young people say that they 'love' being part of its community. A member of staff notes: 'I have creative freedom at work. Managers are so open. We bounce off ideas. There is a really healthy atmosphere.' A social work practice educator highlighted the sophisticated social work practice and the pioneering spirit as key strengths of the service. This was in particular in relation to enabling a staff member to undertake some ground-breaking work in providing a safe space for a child to explore their gender identity. This child received excellent, sensitive, thoughtful and effective support. This was also one of many examples of well-embedded excellent practice in relation to promoting equality and diversity. The independent assessors commented that the cultural diversity of prospective carers is another real strength. Newly approved foster carers who come from diverse backgrounds talk very positively about their experiences. They say that they feel respected, welcomed and included.

The fostering service also makes considerable contributions to the wider fostering sector and the development of fostering practice.

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 who 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: SC062695

Registered provider: Diverse Care (UK) Ltd

Registered provider address:

Diverse care (UK) Ltd
399-401 High Street
London E15 4QZ

Responsible individual: Keith Gorman

Registered manager: Sally Lyst

Telephone number: 0208 503 0305

Email address: info@diversecare.com; sallylyst@diversecare.com

Inspector

Seka Graovac, social care regulatory 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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