

Family Care Fostering

Family Care Fostering Ltd

60 School Lane, Bamber Bridge, Preston PR5 6QE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This agency is privately owned. It was registered in July 2012. At the time of the inspection, 54 approved fostering households were providing foster placements for 66 children and young people. This agency has a sub-office in Wolverhampton, whose work is included as part of this registration.

The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term
- respite
- parent and child

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 June 2017

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: 6 December 2013

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: None

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is requires improvement to be good because:

- The quality of foster carers' assessments is not consistently good.
- Foster carers do not always complete core training or specific training to help them meet the needs of children in their care.
- The agency's complaints records are poor. These are not logged in a central record and investigations and outcomes are not clear.
- The agency's monitoring systems are poor and central monitoring systems are not in place. Consequently, managers are unable to monitor children's attendance and performance at school, or matters relating to their health.
- High levels of staff turnover in the agency and poor records and monitoring make it difficult for the agency to access information, which means that pertinent issues may be lost.
- The agency's children's guide has not been reviewed for some time and contains incorrect details about who to contact if children are unhappy in their foster placement.
- A relatively inexperienced fostering panel has been unclear about its roles and responsibilities, which has resulted in confusing recommendations being made.
- Children's risk assessments do not always include details of pertinent issues or prompt update when required.
- Child-friendly profiles of foster carers are not completed. Consequently, some children go to live with their new families without any helpful information about them.
- Foster carers' attendance at support groups is poor, despite this being a requirement in their foster care agreement.
- Foster carers are sometimes unclear about the permissions that the local authority has delegated to them, as agreements are not in place.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- There is a suitably experienced registered manager in charge of the agency. He is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the agency and has a targeted development plan in place. He is beginning to effect change to practice in the agency. However, it is too soon to review the effectiveness of this.
- The agency employs a part-time therapist. This ensures speedy access to advice and guidance for agency staff and foster carers.
- The agency benefits from participation workers who provide individual support to children, and arrange activities and events.
- The agency works well with other agencies. Social workers speak positively about the agency.
- The agency supports permanency options for children and young people. This includes adoption and staying put.

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the national minimum standards. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Review of the statement of purpose and children's guide	18/08/2017
Ensure that the children's guide is kept under review and, where appropriate, revised. (Regulation 4(a))	
Education, employment and leisure activities	18/08/2017
Implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16(2)(a))	
Support, training and information for foster parents	18/08/2017
Ensure that foster parents are provided with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1))	
Independent fostering agencies—complaints and representations	18/08/2017
Ensure that a written record is made of any complaint or	

representation, the action taken in response to it, and the outcome of the investigation. (Regulation 18(4))	
<p>Employment of staff</p> <p>Ensure that all persons employed receive appropriate appraisal. (Regulation 21(4)(a))</p> <p>This relates to the appraisal of staff and members of the fostering panel.</p>	18/08/2017
<p>Assessment of prospective foster parents</p> <p>Ensure that when a person applies to become a foster parent and a decision is made to assess their suitability to become a foster parent, any such assessment is carried out in accordance with this regulation. (Regulation 26(1))</p> <p>This relates specifically to the quality of these assessments.</p>	18/08/2017
<p>Review of quality of care</p> <p>Ensure the quality of the system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and that this provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authorities. (Regulation 35(1)(3))</p>	18/08/2017

Recommendations

- Ensure that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. (National minimum standards 4.1)
Specifically, that young people's risk assessments contain pertinent information and are kept up to date.
- Ensure, unless it is an emergency placement, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. (National minimum standards 11.3)
- Ensure that the skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider. (National minimum standards 14.8)
Specifically, that members of the central list clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that foster care associations and/or self-help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported. (National minimum standards 21.4)

- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards 25.2)
- Ensure that entries in records, and decisions and reasons for them, are legible, and are signed and dated. (National minimum standards 26.5)
- Ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (National minimum standards 26.6)
Specifically, that records are clear on what work supervising social workers have engaged in with foster carers to help them manage children in their care; and that daily records are shared with young people when this is in line with the agency's policy.
- Ensure that arrangements for delegating authority from parents to the local authority and/or from the local authority to the foster carers, are discussed and agreed as part of the care planning process. (Guidance and regulations, volume 4: fostering services, page 16, paragraph 3.13)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: Requires improvement to be good

Many children are making good progress in their foster placements. All children are registered with an education provider. However, the registered manager was unable to comment on whether they are attending education full time or refusing to attend school and whether they are making the progress expected of them, as a monitoring system is not in place to review this information. Similarly, children are registered with healthcare professionals, but monitoring systems do not demonstrate when they have last had a medical or attended the dentist or opticians.

Individually, staff are able to give examples of positive outcomes that children and young people have achieved and this was evident during the inspection. One social worker commented, 'The agency has a proactive approach to education and makes sure they [the agency] have a voice in school.' The agency's therapist will work with teaching staff to ensure that the best approach is taken with some children who are struggling in this formal setting. Another social worker talked about the foster carer's determination to work with a child's school to enable a positive outcome with her healthy-eating plan. This has resulted in the child losing a significant amount of weight and now being able to engage in physical activities. As a result, there has been a huge improvement in her self-esteem.

Many children are settled with their foster families in permanent placements, allowing them to feel part of the family. This sense of belonging is helping them to thrive. Some children have had the benefit of the additional legal security of adoption. A number of young people have also been able to remain with their foster carers under 'staying-put' arrangements, thus allowing them to make a more gradual transition into independence, which is likely to lead to a more successful outcome.

The agency employs a part-time therapist. This ensures easy access to therapeutic support for foster carers and supervising social workers. This enables foster carers to deal more effectively with the challenging behaviours displayed by some children and young people. One foster carer commented, in the Ofsted survey returns, 'Knowing I need to keep a child near and reassure them, when they are in crisis, rather than sending them off to another room to calm down has helped my child to get through his issues quicker.' Foster carers value these helpful strategies.

While many placements end in permanency for children, the agency's disruption rates have increased over the last year and are now higher than the national average. However, managers initially struggled to identify the specific children involved in these disruptions due to the poor monitoring systems, and so have yet to investigate the reasons for the disruptions and identify any patterns or trends. Matching documents are not currently part of the child's record and do not always demonstrate clearly why the foster carer is the most appropriate match or what the agency can do to improve the suitability of the match. For example, the agency could provide the foster carer with additional training or assistance with contact

when this is some distance away from their home area.

Children have a number of opportunities to provide feedback to the agency and to express their wishes and feelings. Participation workers ensure that they visit every child after placement. They let children know about the opportunities and activities that are available. These include workshops, as well as days out together and an annual activity-based holiday. The agency also asks children to provide feedback for their foster carers' annual reviews. In addition, the agency ensures that children have access to an independent advocate, should they need one. One young person commented, in the annual survey undertaken by Ofsted, 'They have tried to help me change my social worker. They supported me in getting an advocate to help me.'

Whenever possible, staff arrange for children to visit their foster families before they move to live with them. However, foster family profiles are not available for children who are placed as a result of emergency situations. These simple profiles could be shared with children, if necessary electronically, and would help to lessen their anxieties about their move.

The agency has not engaged in the active recruitment of new foster carers for some time. The registered manager acknowledges that this is an area for improvement, but is also aware that he needs a stable staff team and solid foundation prior to committing to the growth of the agency.

Four completed assessments have been presented to the fostering panel in the last six months. These have been completed by independent assessors and have been of variable quality. In one case, the assessor had failed to explore key issues during the assessment. The fostering panel deferred the assessment for further work, which was undertaken by a different assessor. Although this assessor did make improvements to the report, some key issues remained unresolved. Ultimately, the family withdrew from the process, but a thorough assessment process should have identified and addressed the issues at an early stage in the process and not given the applicants false hope. The agency's quality assurance processes also failed in this instance.

Foster carers spoken to during the inspection said that they have been unsettled by the high turnover of staff over recent months, but they remained positive about the support that they receive. Examples of their comments include:

- 'You can always get to speak to someone if you need to.'
- 'My social worker listens to and takes on board any concerns I raise and supports this by representing and supporting me.'
- 'They are always there when you need them, but can also give you some space if required.'
- 'Communication with the fostering agency has been very effective. Everything was put in terms that are easily understood.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: Requires improvement to be good

Children say that they feel safe in their foster families. One commented in the annual surveys for Ofsted, 'They [The foster carers] are aware when I am upset, and they comfort me and make me feel safe.' Children receive information about how to make a complaint or raise any issues when they are initially placed with the agency's foster carers, as this is explained in the children's guide to fostering that they receive on placement. They also receive a pre-paid postcard, so that they can alert the agency to any worries. However, the person named as the agency contact no longer works for the agency and the contact details for the Children's Commissioner for England and Ofsted require updating. Participation workers hand deliver these leaflets to children and explain their content. However, despite this, children spoken to during the inspection were unsure if they had received this information. Inspectors did see that one young person had used the postcard system to express concerns about his foster family. However, the agency had not logged this as a complaint and no clear investigation plan and outcome were evident. Nevertheless, the young person's case records do demonstrate that action was taken to ensure that his concerns were addressed.

Annual unannounced visits take place when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit and help to ensure that children are receiving appropriate levels of care at all times. However, records of these visits are of variable quality and sometimes contain very limited information.

Safe care plans and risk assessments outline the specific risks for each individual young person. However, they do not always contain details about pertinent issues nor are they updated promptly when new concerns have arisen. Preventative strategies and clear action plans for foster carers are also not sufficiently detailed. Consequently, foster carers may not be clear about the specific action that they need to take in the event of a concern arising.

The agency's records in relation to complaints and allegations are poor. No central record is maintained, nor is there a clear investigation chronology and outcome. Consequently, it was difficult to ascertain the actual number of complaints and allegations that have been received by the agency. However, inspectors did identify some by case tracking, which evidences that the agency does take the appropriate action and liaises with other safeguarding bodies when issues arise.

Foster carers receive safeguarding training, so that they are alert to children's behaviours, and can pass on any concerns accordingly. They understand how a child's previous experiences may affect their presentation and understanding. The agency also ensures that foster carers receive training on de-escalation and restraint, if appropriate. Supervising social workers ensure that they access additional support from the agency's therapist if required. However, while alternative strategies are suggested, and are subject to discussion and review, this is not clear in the child's or foster carer's case records. This makes it difficult to monitor their effectiveness, may lead to confusion and repetition, and means that the young

person would be unable to gain an understanding of how the agency has tried to assist, if they were to choose to access their records in the future.

Foster carers have access to specific training to help them keep children safe, such as internet safety and radicalisation. One foster carer commented, 'I have teenagers in placement and the online safety training has helped me develop and understand how to safeguard my young people.' However, inspectors did identify an example where radicalisation concerns were evident for one young person, but the foster carers had not yet attended the specific training. This would ensure that they were alert to changes in his presentation and behaviour.

The agency undertakes safe recruitment of staff and fostering-panel members. A range of pre-employment checks and references ensure the integrity of those in employment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: Requires improvement to be good

A suitably experienced registered manager is in charge of the fostering service. He was appointed in December 2016, and received formal registration with Ofsted in April 2017. He is currently undertaking a management qualification. He worked as a practice manager in the agency for four months prior to this appointment. Two practice managers support him in his management role. A small team of qualified social work practitioners undertake the supervision of foster carers. They receive regular supervision to support them in their roles. This also enables them to reflect on their practice.

Annual performance appraisals also allow time for reflection, ensure that the agency addresses the development needs of staff, and include target setting for the coming year. However, some staff and fostering-panel members have not had a performance appraisal for over twelve months. Hence, allowing these issues to drift.

The agency's fostering panel meets at a geographically central point, between its two offices. The central list of fostering-panel members brings a range of experience, both professional and personal, to the panel. The agency has recently appointed a new panel chair, who is independent of the agency and is suitably qualified and experienced. However, he has yet to chair a panel meeting. The fostering panel membership is relatively new and there have been a number of panel chairs since the last inspection. Panel minutes indicate that the panel has been unclear about its roles and responsibilities, and that some recommendations have been confusing. The agency and new panel chair acknowledge this and recently a training event took place for panel members. This focused on their roles and responsibilities and learning from serious case reviews. However, the last panel meeting was in April 2017, so the panel members have not met since this refresher event, in order to evidence their learning.

The agency's decision-maker, who is currently an independent person outside of the agency, responds promptly to panel decisions and clearly lists her own reasons for

reaching her decisions. Panel members have access to training provided for foster carers, as well as online training. The agency is relaunching the 'secure base' model of therapeutic parenting later this year and panel members will also be attending this training. This will assist them when they are considering whether applicants have the skills to parent a child in foster care.

Most foster carers complete their training, support and development standards within their first year of approval. The agency then builds on their core understanding by providing a wide range of training opportunities, both taught and online. The agency also tries to ensure that its training takes place to suit the availability of foster carers, so training options include evening and weekend courses. However, many foster carers have not completed core training modules that the agency considers mandatory. This includes first aid, fire safety and food hygiene.

Foster carers say that the communication from the agency has improved over recent months. Foster carers receive a helpful email on a weekly basis, which includes all the information and updates that they may need. Previously, they may have been told about some of these things verbally, or via a number of different emails. Agency staff are now able to channel their issues via one agency representative who presents them to management in a weekly email. This ensures that foster carers know that all these details can be located in one place. The email includes details about training courses, activities and events, and reminders to produce or update documents. Foster carers say that this has been very helpful.

The agency utilises foster carer representatives, who act as a link between foster carers and the agency. This improves communication and ensures that staff have the opportunity of addressing minor issues quickly. These representatives host geographically based 'pods' or support groups. However, poor attendance at some groups is a concern, as foster carers simply choose not to attend, despite the fact attendance is a requirement in their foster care agreement.

The agency's system for monitoring the outcomes of children from the point of placement is yet to be well established. The agency has recently started to utilise its relatively new electronic system to do this, but abandoned its previous monitoring system some time earlier. Consequently, the progress that children have made is difficult to chart, although anecdotally staff are able to demonstrate some individual success stories.

Foster carers are aware of their rights of appeal through the independent review panel process and one such appeal has been made since the last inspection. The independent review panel upheld the original recommendation made by the agency's fostering panel to terminate the foster carer's approval. However, they did comment on the poor-quality-assessment of the foster carers and the need to ensure that foster carers have the opportunity to attend relevant training. It is disappointing that inspectors have identified concerns relating to both of these issues during this inspection.

While managers do audit case records, the agency's monitoring systems are not yet

fully effective. Inspectors found some documents to be missing. In addition they found poor-quality and illegible foster carer supervision records and records that did not indicate the author; they also noted (incorrect recording formats being used. Delegated authority agreements are not in place for all children, leaving foster carers in the position of having to seek agreement for minor decisions. Weaknesses in tracking and monitoring make it difficult for the agency to evidence the good work undertaken by the agency and its foster carers.

The registered manager completes three-monthly internal monitoring reports on the operation of the agency. However, these do not currently include all the information required by regulation. The registered manager does have a comprehensive development plan in place and is making progress in driving forward improvements. With the exception of a requirement relating to the effectiveness of the internal monitoring, the agency has taken action to address the requirements and recommendations made at the last inspection. This demonstrates its desire to learn and to develop the service.

Stakeholders describe the communication from the agency as good. Managers provide effective challenge when this is necessary. One commissioner commented, 'I have found (Name of fostering agency) to be receptive to working in partnership and supportive of the Local Authority's plan.' A social worker also commented, 'The agency has challenged the local authority when appropriate in the best interests of the child. For example, when family contact has been problematic.' This helps to ensure positive outcomes for children.

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: SC450903

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Inspector

Mandy Williams, social care inspector



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