

# Wellcare Fostering Services

Wellcare Fostering Services Limited company number 04963908  
Suite 504, Olympic House, 28-42 Clements Road, Ilford, Essex IG1 1BA  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in the London Borough of Redbridge. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children. It is currently providing placements for four children in three fostering households. Seven fostering households are available in total.

**Inspection dates:** 4 to 7 September 2017

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>good</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 15 May 2013

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children experience good-quality nurturing care. This enables most children to progress educationally, emotionally and socially.
- A strength of the agency is their planned approach to placements. This enables children and foster carers to meet beforehand.
- Children have a sense of belonging within fostering households. They enjoy being part of a family, participating in family events and holidays.
- Children benefit from an extensive level of personalised support.
- Children benefit from good ethnic, religious and cultural matches.
- All children are in education and the majority have very high attendance rates and exceed educational expectations.
- Older children have the opportunity to remain with their carers into adulthood in 'Staying Put' arrangements.
- Children learn to manage their emotions and are helped to develop socially acceptable behaviour.
- Good partnership working with local authorities effectively focuses on protecting children.
- Leaders and managers are proud of children's achievements.
- Foster carers maintain extensive records which provide a meaningful evaluation of each child's journey.
- Monthly reports include the registered manager's comments, which demonstrates meticulous monitoring and oversight.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Improve the depth of exploration within the written assessments for foster carers.
- Ensure that a joint assessment is completed if a sole carer intends to share a child's care with relatives.
- The agency should provide appropriate training for safe caring for all members of the household.
- Foster carers' personal development plans are not routinely updated following investigations or placement difficulties.
- Staff performance appraisals do not include the views of children.
- Regulation 35 reports do not include all the required information.

## 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
The registered person must maintain a system for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. The system must provide for consultation with foster carers, children and their placing authority. (Regulation 35(1)(b)(3))	01/12/2017
Obtain the information specified in part 2 of Schedule 3 relating to a person applying to become a foster parent and their household. (Regulation 26(2))  This relates specifically to the foster carers' capacity to care effectively for children from any particular racial origin or cultural or linguistic background.	01/11/2017

### Recommendations

- Ensure foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience (NMS 20.5). In particular, following an investigation or placement breakdown.
- Ensure appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding (NMS 20.9).
- Ensure staff performance appraisals take into account the views of children (NMS 24.6).
- Where two people will be sharing the care of a child, whether they be a couple or any other partnership, they should be jointly assessed and approved as foster carers (Statutory Guidance, paragraph 5.31, page 44, The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services).

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children experience good-quality nurturing care, which promotes their best interests. All children are making some level of progress; for most children, this is significant. All children score their foster carers '10 out of 10'. A placing social worker also reiterated this score. Another placing social worker was very thankful for the foster carers' 'hard work,' stating that the children's 'feet have not touched the ground' since their placement began. A further placing social worker confirmed they were 'impressed with the carers.'

The assessments completed for prospective foster carers include relevant theories on how children thrive. However, the depth of exploration within assessments is variable and there is a need for greater consistency. An example seen was of an excellent assessment which clearly outlined the applicants' strengths. Other examples contained insufficient information regarding the applicants' capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin, or cultural or linguistic background. A foster carer had also been approved as a sole carer, although care would be shared with relatives. The responsible individual acknowledged the need for a joint assessment and for the assessment process to be more probing.

Children receive a good introduction to their new home. A strength of the agency is their planned approach to placements. This enables children and foster carers to meet beforehand. Children benefit from visits to fostering households prior to moving in. Children can also familiarise themselves with their prospective foster carers by reading their profiles. Planning meetings further enable children to contribute to decision-making and issues that are important to them. Delegated authority is also agreed, clearly outlining the responsibilities for decision-making.

Children have a sense of belonging in fostering households. They enjoy being part of a family, participating in family events and holidays. A child states that it is 'like living in a normal house'. Children make positive attachments, building trusting relationships with their foster carers. Children refer warmly to their foster carers as 'nan', 'aunty' and 'uncle'. A child describes their foster carers as 'friendly, caring and nice'. A placing social worker confirmed that the foster home was the 'best placement' for their child. They described these carers as 'proactive' and 'very cooperative', stating 'I wish there could be more carers like them.'

Children benefit from receiving an extensive level of personalised support. The responsible individual and registered manager are highly involved in their care. They take on the supervising social worker role. The responsible individual and registered manager routinely meet with children during supervisory visits to the children's foster homes. They take children out on social activities and also assist with transport arrangements. A child described the support they receive from the agency as 'excellent'.

Children receive care from proactive foster carers who strongly advocate for their needs. Foster carers purposefully challenge decisions which are not in the child's best interests. A foster carer highlighted that they 'are proud that children do not

give up despite the challenges'. A child praised their foster carers' 'general support', stating that they 'help you whenever they can'.

Children benefit from good ethnic, religious and cultural matches. This helps children to develop a positive personal identity, resulting in increased self-esteem and confidence. Children also enjoy attending a range of cultural events and learning about their heritage, which contributes to their feelings of self-pride. Children are able to follow their religious beliefs; this includes regularly attending places of worship. Children also receive monetary gifts from the agency, to celebrate religious festivals. A child highlights that they had the 'best Christmas ever'.

Children live in foster families which strongly promote their education. This includes the agency advocating for children to attend the best schools possible and for them to receive the required resources. All children are in education and the majority have very high attendance rates. Children use their local library. They enjoy reading for pleasure and being read to by their foster families. The majority of children are exceeding educational expectations and are aspirational about their future. Certificates from school celebrate their achievements. Professionals highlight that children are making 'great strides at school'. They confirm that children are 'achieving above national expected levels' and are 'progressing at an accelerated pace'.

Foster carers effectively manage contact with relatives and friends. They provide emotional and practical support to children. An example of this support is in relation to parental contact, where children can be let down at the last minute. Another example is assisting children with delivering Christmas and birthday cards to the parental home. Foster carers appropriately work in partnership with parents. A parent confirmed that foster care was the 'best place' for their child.

Children engage in meaningful social activities that take account of their talents and interests. Holidays and day trips enable children to explore historical places of interest and tourist attractions. They have fun at theme parks and beaches. Children regularly enjoy bowling, trips to the cinema and eating out. Children have the opportunity to meet together at Christmas and at summer events.

Children receive encouragement from their foster carers to lead a healthy lifestyle. They learn the importance of a nutritious, balanced diet and they receive support with their weight management. Exercise is part of the children's daily routines, and includes swimming, playing football, bike riding and walking to school.

Children receive good support with their health conditions and there are improvements in their emotional well-being. They are less anxious and now have the courage to access counselling. Children respond well to the continual encouragement and understanding that they receive from their foster carers. Children's strengths are recognised and, as one foster carer highlights, children are told to 'be the best that you can be'.

Children receive help from their foster carers to be independent. They assist with cooking, baking, tidying their rooms and other household chores. Children learn to budget, save and manage their money. Older children have the opportunity to remain with their carers into adulthood in 'Staying Put' arrangements. They attend higher education, which includes university. Children who have moved on maintain

their relationships with foster carers, which provides them with ongoing support.

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

Children benefit from effective safeguarding arrangements. Safe caring plans provide clear guidance to foster carers. In addition, safe household plans are personalised to each child. The responsible individual prides himself that children 'feel safe and settled in placements'. A placing social worker states that the agency 'has been proactive in ensuring that the children are appropriately monitored and that safeguarding issues are considered at all times'.

However, one incident highlighted the need for appropriate training in safe caring for all members of the household. The training provided does not currently clarify that other children in the household should not physically intervene during incidents.

All children have a risk assessment, which identifies potential difficulties and hazardous situations. A placing social worker highlighted that they are 'confident issues raised will be addressed'.

Foster carers educate children on the importance of personal safety and external risks. Examples are internet safety and the effects and consequences of alcohol, drug misuse and poor sexual health. A placing social worker praised the fact that foster carers are 'aware of children's vulnerability'.

Safeguarding issues are efficiently managed. Good partnership working with local authorities focus on protecting children. There are a number of examples of where effective responses have been taken to reduce the risk of potential child exploitation, such as from gangs. Children feel listened to and they are able to disclose issues of abuse. Foster carers are very attentive and promptly report any concerns. When necessary, agency staff request strategy meetings.

Children learn to manage their emotions and are helped to develop socially acceptable behaviour. Foster carers instil clear and consistent boundaries. As a consequence, children learn to follow instructions and adhere to rules. Children learn to manage their anger, reflect on their attitude and make better decisions. Children are more respectful; an example of this is swearing less and apologising when this happens.

There is a strong relationship with the local safeguarding personnel, and the responsible individual describes this as a 'fantastic resource'. This arrangement enables agency staff and foster carers to access an extensive range of training. Training covers a broad range of topics including raising awareness of the risks of radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, child trafficking and gang culture.

Children receive protection from a competent response to missing episodes. There is currently only one child who goes missing from their foster family home, primarily returning to their birth family. Foster carers keep in touch with the child and liaise with their parent. In addition, they have also gone out to look for this child. Leaders and managers promptly respond to such issues. They visit the foster home and request meetings to establish a co-ordinated way of working. This provides for consideration of additional support, which may be needed to ensure placement stability.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Children benefit from being placed in an agency which is managed effectively and efficiently. The agency has rebranded since the last inspection, which has resulted in building back up the number of available fostering households. The new motto promotes their vision to 'transform lives'. The responsible individual highlights the wish for 'quality rather than quantity'. Feedback from local authorities, foster carers and children is very positive. Shortfalls are minor and focus on improving the service. These relate to improving the quality assurance reports, personal development plans and staff appraisals.

Foster carers benefit from a wide range of training. A newly approved foster carer describes the initial induction as 'good' and 'extremely informative'. Personal development plans also highlight some of their future training needs. However, these plans are not routinely updated following investigations or placement difficulties. Foster carers appreciate the 24-hour support and monthly supervisory visits, regardless of whether they have children placed with them or not. A foster carer describes these visits as 'really helpful'. These visits offer an opportunity for reflective discussions, which enable foster carers to develop greater insight into their role. Foster carers also meet collectively at training and social events.

The registered manager has worked in social work for approximately 16 years. He has prior experience of being a registered manager for another fostering agency. A placing social worker described the registered manager as being 'accessible' and able to 'actively work through issues'. The registered manager prides himself on going the 'extra mile to provide support'. Due to the relatively small size of the agency, the registered manager also takes on the supervisory social worker role.

Staff benefit from regular training, supervision and annual appraisals. However, appraisals do not include the views of children, which is a missed opportunity to gain feedback on their practice.

Regulation 35 reports do not include all the required information. They do not include consultation with children, foster carers and placing authorities. Although this information is collated, it is not detailed in the regulatory quality assurance reports.

Leaders and managers are continually reflecting on their service and strive to be better. They recognise their strengths and they are aware of the areas requiring development. Leaders and managers state that their aim is to be an outstanding agency.

Leaders and managers have effectively addressed the recommendations from the last inspection. Children influence the agency through consultation and by regularly contributing to their foster carer reviews. The agency development plan has been updated and now clearly outlines required actions, barriers and progress. Feedback is regularly given to the other board member, which contributes to effective service monitoring.

The agency's statement of purpose clearly outlines its aims and objectives. This document is available on the organisational website. Children additionally have their own guide which provides them with relevant information regarding living in foster

care. Foster carers describe agency staff as 'very supportive'. A foster carer stated that they are 'proud to be part of the Wellcare Fostering Services family'.

Leaders and managers are proud of children's achievement. They succeed in building responsive relationships with children and their foster carers. Leaders and managers provide additional resources to support placements. An example is sharing the cost of a new school uniform. A foster carer highlighted that leaders and manager 'listen and take action'.

Leaders, managers and foster carers work in partnership with local authorities. They robustly challenge local authorities to ensure that the necessary documentation and resources are made available to fully address the identified needs of children. A social worker describes them as being 'a very supportive agency', praising the 'really good communication'. A placements officer comments on their long-standing relationship with the agency, highlighting that they are 'very open to dialogue'.

Foster panel recommendations, and the overall approval process, focus on decision-making which endeavours to reflect children's best interests. The fostering panel take its quality assurance role seriously. It appropriately defers decision-making and provides constructive criticism. This enables the agency to further improve. The foster panel chair is an experienced social care consultant. Central list members have a range of expertise, which include social work, health, education and fostering. There are plans to further expand the central list.

Children benefit from the extensive records that foster carers maintain, which provide a good overview of the children's lives. Daily logs and monthly progress reports provide a meaningful evaluation of each child's journey. Monthly reports also include the registered manager's comments, which demonstrates meticulous monitoring and good oversight. Records are promptly sent to the placing social worker, which enables efficient monitoring of progress and issues. Photographs also help to document memories and contribute to the child's life story work.

## **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 differences 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:** SC061984

**Registered provider:** Wellcare Fostering Services Limited company number 04963908

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**Responsible individual:** John Dilleyston

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## **Inspector**

Sharon Payne, social care inspector

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