

# Child Focus Fostering Agency

Sherico Care Services Limited

2–4 Balmoral Road, Leyton, London E10 5ND

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a private fostering agency. It has 25 foster carers in 15 fostering households, and currently provides placements for 20 young people.

**Inspection dates:** 16 to 20 October 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:** 22 November 2013

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:**

None.

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The agency does not maintain effective systems to gather information in order to monitor the outcomes and progress of young people.
- The agency fails to undertake regular reviews of the quality of care. This means that managers lack the oversight that they need to identify the shortfalls and strengths of the service.
- Annual reviews of foster carers do not always take place and, when they do, the assessments and reports are not of a consistently good standard.
- The agency does not consistently demonstrate how supervising social workers intervene in order to meet the assessed needs of young people in relation to health and education.
- The agency policy in relation to handling complaints does not specify how complaints are recorded.
- The agency does not consistently update Disqualification and Barring Service (DBS) checks in line with the frequency identified in its own safeguarding policy.
- The agency fails to routinely make use of the views of young people to inform service development.

The independent fostering agency's strengths :

- Young people speak positively about the care that they receive. They report feeling safe, and some young people make good progress.
- Most foster carers are very happy with the support that they receive from supervising social workers.
- The agency provides excellent opportunities for foster carers to undertake training in a range of relevant areas, including child protection.
- Feedback from placing social workers is consistently positive. They feel that the agency works well in partnership with them and that foster carers provide good placements for young people.
- The agency has recently recruited new supervising social workers. They have made a positive contribution to the service, and recording has improved in recent months.
- Some young people are supported to 'stay put' and remain with their foster families beyond their 18th birthday.
- The agency pays close attention to the cultural needs of young people when making placements.

## 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
<p>Reviews and terminations of approval</p> <p>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.</p> <p>When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable, and</li> <li>seek and take into account the views of—               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the foster parent,</li> <li>any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child’s age and understanding), and</li> <li>any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable, and</li> <li>the terms of the foster parent’s approval continue to be appropriate.</li> </ul> <p>In order to meet this regulation, the agency must ensure that reviews take place at least annually. The reports of the annual review must be informed by evidenced based assessment and consider all relevant areas. The annual review process must ensure that carers continue to be suitable and that they are making a positive difference to young people.</p> <p>Regulation 28(1), (2), (3)(a)(b)(i)(ii)(iii), (4)(a)(b))</p>	<p>01/03/2018</p>

<p>Review of quality of care:</p> <p>The registered person must maintain a system for— monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority).</p> <p>Regulation 35(1)(a)(b), (2), (3))</p>	<p>01/03/2018</p>
<p>Notifiable events.</p> <p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.</p> <p>Regulation 36(1))</p>	<p>01/01/2018</p>
<p>Education, employment and leisure activities.</p> <p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular the fostering service provider must— implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>Regulation 16(1), (2)(a))</p>	<p>1/01/2018</p>

## Recommendations

- Ensure that the views of young people are used to inform service development. (National minimum standards (NMS) 1.7)
- Ensure that interventions to meet the assessed health needs of young people are consistently identified in agency support plans and discussed with foster carers in supervision. (NMS 6.5)
- Ensure that the educational achievements of young people are considered as part of the foster carer annual review process. The agency must also collect data in relation to education attendance and achievements in order to monitor the progress young people are making. (NMS 8.7)
- Ensure that the agency policy in relation to handling complaints is explicit in

describing how the agency records the circumstances, investigation and outcomes of both formal and informal complaints. For the avoidance of doubt, the agency should record more serious complaints, even if they are reported in an informal way. (NMS 21.11)

- Ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 26.2).

This relates to the records in relation to individual support plans and foster carer annual review reports.

- Ensure that the service can demonstrate that it consistently follows good recruitment practice. This includes checking any gaps in employment, dating and signing reference verifications and obtaining proof of address. (NMS 19.2).
- Ensure that DBS checks are carried out in line with the frequency identified in the agency's policy. At the time of this inspection, this is every three years. (NMS 13.5)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

The agency does not have effective systems in place to monitor the progress of young people. This means that it is unable to demonstrate that all young people consistently make progress from their starting points. It does not, for example, gather detailed information in relation to the attendance and attainment of young people in education. This means that it cannot be sure that all young people are receiving the support and help that they need to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The annual review of foster carers is an important mechanism for ensuring that foster carers maintain high standards of care and make a positive difference in the lives of young people. However, the agency does not always ensure that these reviews take place. In addition, the reviews are not of a consistently high quality. In one example, the reports on a foster carer were identical for two consecutive years. In another example, the independent social worker review for a foster carer did not consider the educational outcomes of the young people in placement. This means that foster carers are sometimes assessed as being suitable to continue to foster without any reference to the experience, progress and welfare of the young people in placement with them.

The quality of annual reviews for foster carers is inconsistent. Some reviews were informed by good supervising social worker reports and good, evidenced-based assessment by the independent reviewing social worker. These reports also carefully considered the views of young people and placing social workers as part of the assessment.

Foster carers are, on the whole, very positive about the support provided by the agency's supervising social workers. One foster carer described how the agency social worker was always available when she needed support. Another foster carer noted how the supervising social worker had spent several hours at the foster home, supporting her to manage a challenging situation.

Foster carers have access to a range of suitable and relevant training. Most of the training is face to face and facilitated by experienced trainers. Foster carers comment positively about the quality of the training on offer. The agency collects information about who attends training. However, this information is not organised in a way that makes it easy to monitor and check that all foster carers have had recent, relevant training.

Supervising social workers provide regular support and formal supervision to foster carers. They usually offer advice and guidance to help foster carers to meet the assessed needs of the young people. However, this is not always the case and, in one example, it was not clear in the young person's support plan, or through the agency's supervision records, how they were being supported in relation to a health issue. In another example, the agency's individual support plan for a young person

had not been updated. The identified strategy to support them in their education was not relevant, because the young person was no longer attending education.

The young people who shared their views with the inspector were overwhelmingly positive about their foster carers. One said (of their foster carers): 'they are amazing, they are really supportive. If I am feeling down, they talk to me.' This young person went on to say that she had improved her attendance at education and no longer self-harmed. Another young person appreciated the fact that her foster carer gets on well with her mother. She felt that her foster carer's support made it possible for her to see more of her mother and meant that she would soon be able to return to live with her. One young person felt that her foster carer treated her better than any other foster carer whom she had lived with. She described how she is able to talk to her carer when she is upset. She added that she felt part of the family and that the home was 'nice and comfy'.

Placing social workers gave positive feedback about the quality of care offered to young people. One placing social worker described how the foster carers had established good rapport with a young person and 'went above and beyond to support them'. They commented that the agency worked effectively in partnership with them and attended all relevant professionals' meetings.

The agency has a range of foster carers to meet the cultural and faith needs of young people. Most young people are well matched in this regard. The agency has a strong ethos in terms of promoting diversity and equality. This means that young people are placed in families that understand and respond to the individual needs in respect of their culture and faith.

Several young people have successfully moved on to independent living from their foster homes. Some young people remain with their carers into adulthood.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

There is a lack of management oversight in relation to the quality of care and safeguarding practice. This creates vulnerabilities in safeguarding systems and the potential for mistakes to go unnoticed. For example, the agency records did not clearly identify who the back-up carers are for each foster family or to what extent the support network may be directly involved in providing care for young people. The agency's own policy states that DBS checks for back-up carers are renewed every three years. However, these checks are not always undertaken in line with this policy.

The inconsistent quality of foster carers' annual reviews means that the agency misses an opportunity to evaluate how well foster carers promote the well-being of young people. In one example, the supervising social worker's annual review report did not assess safeguarding or outcomes in relation to the health of young people.

The agency does not always follow safe recruitment guidance. In one example, gaps in employment for a supervising social worker were not explored. Although the

records evidence that the references had been checked and verified, they are not always signed or dated. In addition, the agency does not always evidence that it has obtained any proof of address of panel members. This creates a risk that the agency employs staff who are not suitable to work with vulnerable young people. All staff are suitably qualified, have suitable references and are checked with DBS to ensure that they are of good character.

The fostering panel is effective in supporting safe recruitment and approval of foster carers. Members closely examine form F assessments to ensure that they are of good quality. Foster carers undergo a thorough assessment and all relevant checks are completed to ensure that they are suitable for the role. The panel also meets to consider allegations raised by young people or any concerns about the quality of care provided. It makes recommendations on how concerns can be addressed in order to ensure that foster carers continue to provide safe care for young people.

The agency takes care to ensure that young people are matched to carers who can meet their needs. Each young person has an individual risk assessment that identifies areas of vulnerability, and a clear safety plan is in place to reduce the risk of harm. These risk assessments are comprehensive, and are regularly updated while actions to keep young people safe are carried out.

Foster carers act in line with procedures in response to young people who run away or go missing from care. Most young people do not go missing, and some young people reduce such behaviour as a result of the care and support that they receive. Foster carers display genuine commitment to young people and provide a nurturing, caring environment. This helps young people to feel cared for and to feel safe.

The agency works effectively in partnership with placing authorities in response to concerns and allegations. It shares all relevant information in a timely manner and ensures that all concerns are investigated in an impartial way. The agency usually notifies Ofsted when serious incidents occur, but on one occasion this did not happen. This incident was managed effectively and no harm occurred as a result of this oversight.

The agency carries out regular health and safety checks to ensure that the home environment is free from hazards, thus avoiding preventable harm.

Young people know how to complain. Supervising social workers spend time with them when they visit. The views of young people are regularly sought to ensure that their experiences of care are known and understood. However, the agency's policy in respect of handling complaints is unclear about how complaints will be recorded. This means that the complaints process is not as transparent as it needs to be to ensure that all concerns are adequately addressed.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be**



## good

The registered manager post is currently vacant. The acting manager recently resigned and the agency is actively seeking to recruit a new manager. The current arrangements are that the responsible individual will provide management support and assume day-to-day management of the agency. She is a qualified social worker and suitably experienced for this role. The responsible individual was not available to facilitate this inspection. This task was undertaken by the agency's quality assurance manager.

The absence of adequate systems to monitor the quality of care provided to young people has had a significant impact on the judgement in all areas of this inspection. The agency was unable to demonstrate that it has sufficient oversight to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the service. One management report on the quality of care was available for inspection. This report did not relate to recent practice, nor did it provide any clear evaluation of how young people are supported to make progress in key areas such as health and education. The agency does not demonstrate how the views of young people are used to improve the service. In summary, the agency is unable to demonstrate how its interventions are making a positive difference for all young people in placement.

The agency has improved recording in some areas in recent months. The supervision of foster carers is clearly evidenced, and risk assessments are of good quality and regularly updated. Despite this improvement, some shortfalls remain in relation to support plans not being updated, and foster carer annual review reports not being undertaken or being of poor quality. This demonstrates that the agency's quality assurance systems are not fully effective. The agency does not comply with all of the relevant regulations and standards.

Supervising social workers comment positively on the support and guidance that they receive from senior staff. They say that they had regular, formal supervision with the previous manager and confirm that arrangements are in place for this to continue with the new interim manager. Staff meet regularly as a team, and take part in reflective practice and peer-learning sessions. This helps them to share good practice and keeps their knowledge in key areas, such as safeguarding, up to date.

Placing social workers give positive feedback in relation to the agency's ability to work effectively in partnership with them. When the needs of young people are not being met in accordance with their relevant care plans, the agency provides a constructive challenge to the professional network. This helps to ensure that care planning remains on track and is informed by the agency's own assessment as to how young people are responding to the support offered to them.

The agency is undergoing a significant transition period due to the resignation of the previous registered manager and because of changes to key personnel in recent months. The quality assurance manager indicated that the agency is prioritising its efforts to ensure that the quality of the day-to-day care of the young people is maintained. The positive feedback from young people during this inspection suggests that they feel supported and have a positive experience of care in their foster

families.

The agency organises a range of events for young people and foster carers. Young people are supported to enjoy a range of positive activities. Furthermore, foster carers have access to a useful support network to share their experiences.

The agency has made some improvements in response to the shortfalls identified at the last inspection. The agency now notifies Ofsted when serious incidents occur (with one exception). Current practice in relation to using the views of young people to inform staff appraisals was not tested. This is because all of the supervising social workers had been in place for less than one year, so they have not yet had an appraisal.

## **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:** SC036628

**Registered provider:** Sherico Care Services Limited

**Registered provider address:** 2–4 Balmoral Road, London E10 5ND

**Responsible individual:** Veleta Hayles

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector**

Lee Kirwin, social care inspector



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