

# Family First Fostering Agency

Family First Fostering Limited

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Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Family First Fostering Agency is an independent fostering agency based in East London. The agency offers a wide range of placements, including short- and long-term placements, planned, emergency and respite care. At the time of the inspection, the agency had 47 fostering households and 78 children and young people in placement. Almost three quarters of the children and young people are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Additionally, six young adults were living with their foster families under the 'staying put' arrangement.

**Inspection dates:** 20 to 24 November 2017

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

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

**Date of last inspection:** 26 November 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:

- This agency is characterised by its ethos of valuing equality and diversity, its anti-discriminatory attitudes and its nurturing relationships.
- The agency provides a culturally sensitive fostering service and promotes the social integration of children and young people.
- The registered persons closely monitor the service. They are transparent in their communications with external professionals. They value feedback from others and are open to learning.
- The registered persons provide strong and effective leadership. They inspire staff by exemplifying good-quality social work practices and the utmost dedication to children and young people.
- The agency is managed competently and efficiently.
- The agency has an effective and robust fostering panel that makes a real contribution to the safeguarding and overall effectiveness of the agency.
- The agency recruits skilled, emotionally warm and resilient foster carers from different cultural backgrounds. They bring their diverse life experiences and professional histories to fostering.
- The agency has a good reputation and positive working relationships with many local authorities.
- Matching practices are strong and have resulted in many stable and effective placements. Some placements have become permanent.
- The agency's risk management practices are comprehensive and robust, and are effective in helping children and young people to stay safe.
- Children and young people experience a good family life. They experience stability in their lives and develop feelings of belonging.
- Children and young people receive individualised support and have their needs met.
- All children and young people are in education. They are committed to their learning and make good progress.
- Children and young people have good opportunities to access a wide range of recreational, cultural and sporting activities.
- Foster carers support children and young people to maintain and develop positive relationships with their birth families.
- The agency has implemented an effective 'staying put' policy.
- The registered persons are smart business leaders. Excellent planning and high aspirations underpin their success.
- The agency has been effective in attracting new families to fostering.

- Despite the immense rate of growth since the agency's registration, good practices across the provision have been sustained.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The health and safety reports do not take into account any necessary adaptations to the environment or special equipment used by disabled children in some fostering households.
- The quality of information that children get about their foster carers before arrival is variable.
- The contact details of the children's rights director, included in the agency's children's guide, are inaccurate.
- Foster carers do not always engage with their learning and development plans.

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

### **Recommendations**

- The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children. (National Minimum Standards, 10.5) In particular, the fostering agency should demonstrate that staff check that any adaptations to the physical environment remain safe and that any lifting equipment has been serviced as required.
- Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, 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) In particular, the agency should achieve consistency of good practice in relation to this.
- The children's guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their independent reviewing officer, the children's rights director, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate. (National Minimum Standards, 16.4) In particular, the agency should make sure that the information about the children's rights director is accurate.
- The foster carer's personal development plan is reviewed and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated. (National Minimum Standards, 20.6) In particular, the agency should demonstrate that foster carers engage in training throughout the year, in line with their personal development plans.

## Inspection judgements

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

Children and young people experience a good family life. All children and young people who contributed to the inspection said that they were happy living with their foster families. They said that they felt safe and were well cared for. They talked positively about their foster carers.

The agency recruits skilled, nurturing and resilient foster carers who come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The foster carers bring a wealth of knowledge to fostering that they have gained from their life experiences and professions, such as those related to social work, education and health. A social worker said of particular foster carers: 'The carers show insight and compassion, as well as determination to support the child during the difficult time.' Another social worker said about a different foster carer: 'I find (X) to be an excellent carer who is child-centred and very proactive in her approach.'

The agency's robust matching underpins the stability of placements, and placement breakdowns are rare. The great majority of children and young people have settled well in their placement and they have developed close relationships with their foster families, as well as feelings of belonging. Some of them have chosen to call their foster carers 'Mum' and 'Dad'. They have established trust and have bonded with their foster carers. For the children and young people who have experienced multiple placement breakdowns, in particular, this is a sign of great progress.

Foster carers support children and young people to maintain and develop positive relationships with their birth families. A grandparent said: 'My grandson is more to them than a foster child. He is a part of their family. They love him.' One mother commented at the statutory review that her son had two families and that she was pleased about this.

The agency's foster carers are able to meet the needs of children and young people who are in their care. These include children and young people who have profound disabilities and other complex needs. At the time of the inspection, unaccompanied asylum seekers accounted for 73% of placements in this agency. The cultural match between these young people and their carers means that foster carers are able to speak to the young people in their first language. At the same time, the foster carers help children and young people to learn English language, understand British values and adopt British cultural norms and ways of life. Children and young people receive good support to continue with their religious practices and learn to respect diverse faiths and views.

The agency organises regular social events for foster families. Children and young people have good opportunities to access a wide range of recreational, cultural and sporting activities, and to develop their interests, hobbies and social skills. The agency is a corporate annual holder of tickets for a local premier league football club. Going to football matches is very popular with the children and young people.

The agency exemplifies positive and nurturing relationships. It facilitates children and young people's engagement in charitable work, which enables them to develop altruistic attitudes and empathy. One young person told the inspector that he was working hard on developing his social skills and personal presentation. He said that he wanted to be a kinder person than he was previously. This was a great step forwards for somebody who used to engage in intimidating and criminal behaviour before being placed with his foster carers. Some children and young people who used to engage in self-harming behaviours have stopped, and children and young people who experimented with illegal substances previously have stopped taking drugs and drinking alcohol.

Children and young people get a warm welcome when they come to live with their foster families. When the move is planned, they have the opportunities to visit the family beforehand and get to know them. One teacher wrote to the agency to say how impressed she was with the social story introduction book that the foster carers had prepared to welcome a boy who has special learning needs into his new home. This was an example of excellent practice. However, the quality of the information about foster carers that is available to children and young people is variable. The written guide to the agency that they receive does not provide correct information about the children's rights director

All children and young people are in education. They are committed to their learning. Their school attendance and engagement are good. They are working hard to catch up after not been in education or because English is an additional language for them.

The agency provides online training for young people on fire safety, equality and diversity and food hygiene. The agency also facilitates various workshops for children and young people to help them develop their life skills and promote their independence.

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

Good safeguarding arrangements are in place to protect children and young people and promote their health and welfare. These arrangements and staff's good safeguarding practices have been effective in keeping children and young people safe. There have hardly been any serious safeguarding incidents since the last inspection.

The agency's risk management practices are comprehensive, robust and effective in helping children and young people to stay safe. Each foster family has their own written safe care plan. These plans are reviewed at least annually and every time a new child or a young person joins the foster family. Additionally, each foster child or young person has a clear and detailed individual risk management plan. Supervising social workers ensure that all risk management plans are followed in practice and reviewed on a regular basis, or if new concerns emerge.

The foster carers and staff take any safeguarding concerns seriously. In collaboration with other professionals, they take actions to minimise any risks to the

safety of a child or a young person. An example of this is how the agency supported a young person after she went missing from a placement for the first time. On her return, the young person disclosed information that suggested that she might be groomed to be sexually exploited. The relevant professionals from the local authority and the agency met and agreed joint strategies to protect the young person, and the young person engaged with a mentor who specialises in child sexual exploitation. On a daily basis, the foster carers have continued to reinforce messages about healthy and unsafe relationships, influences and power dynamics. The young person has not gone missing again. She is talking with professionals and is safer.

Positive relationships between foster carers and children and young people underpin good safeguarding in this agency. One child wrote in the Ofsted online survey: 'If feeling unsafe, I would tell my foster parents first because I trust them.' Other children and young people echoed this in their conversations with the inspector. These are some of the comments that children and young people made during the inspection:

'They help, protect and speak to me about dangers and how to be safe.'

'I can talk to the staff about my feelings and problems.'

'When we had a problem at school, I told my foster carer. The next day she came to the school with us and spoke to the teacher. Since then, all bullying has stopped.'

All children and young people who contributed to the inspection said that they felt safe in their foster family homes. Despite their traumatic past experiences, they have developed feelings of safety, security and trust. As many of them are asylum seeking children who have continued to face insecurities about their futures, their development of these feelings is even more remarkable.

The agency has a strong focus on keeping children and young people safe when recruiting, assessing, preparing and training foster carers. The agency's robust fostering panel makes a crucial contribution to ensuring that the agency has skilled carers who are able to offer safe care. Supervising social workers' regular announced and unannounced visits to foster families contribute to the continued evaluation of the effectiveness of the safeguarding practices.

The annual health and safety reports demonstrate that the agency makes sure that the physical environment in which foster children and young people live is safe. However, these reports do not include checks on any adaptations that have been made to the environment to accommodate disabled children and young people or the special equipment that they use, such as hoists. There has been no negative impact of this weakness. Accidents are rare and there have been no significant ones.

The agency has developed good working relationships with key safeguarding partners, such as the lead officer for preventing radicalisation and extremism in the borough and the lead safeguarding officer. The registered manager ensures that any allegations against foster carers and concerns about the professional conduct of staff and carers are followed up robustly and in collaboration with the relevant safeguarding partners.

The agency sends regular updates to foster carers on current safeguarding issues. In the wake of the recent incidents in London, some staff have attended training on acid attacks and have shared relevant safety information with foster carers. The foster carers have spoken to the young people about minimising the risk and what to do if they become a victim.

The agency also organises workshops for children and young people that cover safeguarding topics. An example of this is a workshop on the risks of social media. These events also give children and young people the opportunities to talk about their experiences and contribute their views to the development of the safeguarding culture and the agency as a whole.

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

The registered persons provide strong and effective leadership and have created a culture of high expectations. They continually strive to do their best to help children and young people to have positive experiences and achieve good outcomes. Well-organised and richly illustrated individual case records show clearly that the agency has made a difference in the lives of children and young people.

The registered persons are visible leaders. They inspire staff by exemplifying the good quality social work practices and the utmost dedication to children and young people. The arrangements for providing out-of-hours support demonstrate this clearly. The supervising social workers provide on-call cover for their foster carers 24 hours a day. If they do not respond, calls are diverted to the registered persons' mobile numbers. Foster carers receive the support and advice they need at any time of day or night. One foster carer said: 'The whole team is incredibly supportive and knowledgeable. We know that we can obtain help and advice 24 hours a day.' Another foster carer said: 'I don't feel like a number. I feel like they really know me.'

The leaders and managers are highly committed to implementing the government's 'staying put' policy. If it is in the young person's best interest, they remain living with their foster carers after they have technically reached adulthood. The commitment of the agency and foster carers to young people overrides the loss of money that comes from losing a fostering place.

The registered persons have a wealth of experience and relevant qualifications. They manage the agency competently and efficiently. A team of administrators makes a contribution to the smooth running of the agency. Regular all-staff meetings facilitate good communication, cohesion and a strong team spirit. Clear and comprehensive written policies, procedures and guidance are in place to enable consistency of good practice. All staff receive regular supervision and reviews of their individual performance.

The agency has a comprehensive programme of training in place. This includes face-to-face and online training. Foster carers can obtain online diplomas on various topics, such as autistic spectrum disorders, cognitive behaviour therapy and child behaviour. Some foster carers commented that the training was excellent in terms of what was on offer as well as being of very good quality. Regular foster carers'



support groups provide the opportunities to share fostering experiences and review fostering practices. One foster carer said: 'We have free and frank views about what is or is not working. They (the registered persons) are always open to new ideas.'

Each foster carer has an individual learning and development plan that is reviewed on an annual basis. However, some foster carers have not been engaging with the training on offer. The agency is aware of this and is taking actions to ensure that the supervising social workers discuss the foster carers' learning and development on a more regular basis.

The registered persons monitor the effectiveness of the agency closely. Through regular quarterly meetings with the agency's independent decision maker and the fostering panel chair, they secure the independent experts' contribution to the review and development of the agency's policies and practices. The registered persons are transparent about the fostering service they offer and the areas for improvement. They value feedback from others and are open to learning. They send comprehensive monitoring reports to Ofsted on a regular basis.

The agency's statement of purpose puts anti-discrimination and inclusion at the centre of their activities. The ethos of valuing the equality and diversity permeates the agency. The agency provides a culturally sensitive fostering service and promotes children and young people's social integration.

The registered persons are smart business leaders, and under their direction the agency has grown significantly. At their first inspection, they provided placements for six children and young people. Four years later, they have 78 children and young people in placement. Despite this immense rate of growth, they have sustained good practices across the provision.

Excellent planning underpins the agency's success. When the registered persons identified that more placements were needed for unaccompanied asylum seekers from Albania, they focused on recruiting foster carers from that background. A detailed development plan for the agency is in place.

The agency has a good reputation and positive working relationships with many placing authorities. The placement officers from three local authorities reported consistently that the agency worked in effective partnerships with the local authorities and provided effective placements.

## **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:** SC453181

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## **Inspector**

Seka Graovac, social care inspector



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