

Foster Careline

Foster Careline Limited

Suite F10, The Business Centre, Oaklands Office Park, Hooton Road, Hooton,
Ellesmere Park CH66 7NZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned fostering agency has recently been taken over by a larger national organisation, Five Rivers Child Care Limited. Five Rivers Child Care Limited was established in 1989 and has vast experience in providing fostering, residential and education services. The agency continues to operate under its original name and company registration. There have not been any changes to the premises, the registered person or staff team.

The agency offers a range of foster placements, including permanent, long-term, short-term, parent and child and emergency. At the time of this inspection, the agency has 23 fostering households who are caring for 24 children and young people, which includes seven parent and child placements.

Inspection dates: 29 January to 2 February 2018

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| Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account | good |
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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: 21 November 2014

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 feel safe and happy in their foster families. They benefit from warm, nurturing care, which helps them to develop positive attachments and a strong sense of belonging.
- Foster carers' proactive and effective care and support are helping children to progress in all areas of their lives.
- Children rarely become involved in risky behaviours, for example going missing from home. When they do, the foster carers and the agency staff take suitable action to minimise harm and prevent reoccurrence.
- A committed team supports foster carers extremely well. Consequently, carers feel valued and very much part of the agency.
- Some children benefit from living alongside their brothers and sisters. When this is not possible, foster carers support children to keep in touch with their family in a planned and safe way.
- The agency has successfully supported many parent and child placements. On a number of occasions, foster carers have enabled parents to continue to care for their children in their own homes.
- The agency benefits from effective leadership.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Improve the children's guide.
- Secure all necessary documentation to assist in the matching and placement planning.
- Improve the detail in the Form F and foster carer review reports.
- Consistently meet the timescale for the recommendation of a prospective foster carer's approval.
- Improve risk assessments so that they identify all known risks and vulnerabilities for individual children and adults placed with the foster family.
- Improve monitoring systems to ensure that all documentation is comprehensive and up to date.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the children's guide provides information on how a child can contact their independent reviewing officer. (NMS 16.4) In particular, provide such information in a way that enables the child to contact their reviewing officer independently.
- Ensure that prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe. (NMS 15.2)
- Ensure that the written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate and up to date. (NMS 13.7) In particular, detailing any concerns and the considered terms of approval in the form F report.
- Ensure that the fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the foster carer's application to be assessed. (NMS 14.4)
- Ensure that the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (NMS 4.5) In particular, ensure that risk assessments identify all known risks and vulnerabilities for individual children and adults placed with the foster family; and, risk assessments effectively set out the actions to be taken to reduce risk and potential harm.
- Ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. (NMS 25.1) In particular, monitoring and evaluating how the agency complies with each child's care plan, including individual education and health plans, for example.
- Ensure that the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service 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. (NMS 25.2) In particular, the monitoring of the agency's matching matrix, placement plans and risk assessments to ensure that they are comprehensive and kept up to date.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children undoubtedly benefit from consistent, nurturing care. Foster carers and the team invest in getting to know each child extremely well, which helps them to respond to children's individual needs competently. The agency is committed to promoting stability and permanency whenever possible. Several children benefit from long-term, stable placements.

The agency has successfully recruited foster carers who can provide sibling groups with long-term placements. Consequently, many children benefit from living alongside their brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the agency has supported children to remain living with their parents by providing good-quality parent and child placements. Each child's needs and their future are clearly the agency's priority.

Staff and foster carers have high aspirations for the children in their care and they work tirelessly to promote children's learning and development. Foster carers work collaboratively with teachers, mentors and social workers. All school-age children are attending suitable full-time education and making noticeable progress. One child's predicted GCSE grades rose by two grades after moving in with his foster family. With foster carers' diligent support, some children's behaviour at school significantly improves, thus enabling them to maintain full-time education.

Children benefit from having opportunities to try new activities and adventures that enhance their confidence and enrich their life experiences. Children enjoy attending a variety of activities, which include sports, arts and crafts and holidays abroad with their foster families.

Children benefit from improved health. Foster carers work closely with specialist teams, such as child and adolescent mental health services and independent therapists. This expert advice and guidance supports foster carers to provide children with stability and improved emotional health.

Foster carers understand how important it is for children to continue relationships with significant people, such as parents, relatives and friends. Carers support children to keep in touch with important people in a safe and planned way.

Professionals provide positive feedback on the agency. A professional said, 'The agency is very approachable. Pauline (registered manager) is excellent in trying to assist with the correct match. She has great patience with social work decision-making and is willing to hold placements until the social worker is ready... All in all, a great team.'

Foster carers seek children's wishes and feelings on a daily basis, finding out about their likes, dislikes and interests and responding to them accordingly. However, there is little evidence of the agency consulting with children to make sure that their views are included in general service development. Nevertheless, plans are in place

to improve this. A new children's participation strategy is due to be launched in April 2018. These plans are extremely detailed and have been successful in other fostering services within the company. How they are embedded within this service has yet to be tested.

The agency supports foster carers well. This is achieved through monthly supervision, 24-hour support and regular carer-support groups. All of the carers consulted with spoke highly of the agency and their supervising social workers, reporting that there is always someone available when needed. Carers were enthusiastic about becoming part of a larger organisation, recognising the benefits that this will bring, such as broader training opportunities and access to a wider range of resources.

Generally, matching is effective. The number of long-term, successful placements reflect this. Staff know the carers and their household members extremely well and use their knowledge to inform matching decisions. However, the agency's matching documents and placement plans exclude essential information, for example the reasons why previous placements broke down. Additionally, the manager and team do not rigorously chase missing information and documents from the placing authority, such as statutory care plans. As a result, foster carers are not always provided with comprehensive written information on children's needs and backgrounds. This can potentially hinder the foster carer in providing a safe, caring environment that promotes the needs and welfare of everyone living or visiting the household.

The assessments of prospective foster carers' suitability to foster can improve. On one occasion, a prospective foster carer's assessment was not completed within the recommended timescale of eight months. What is more, this assessment lacked rigorous exploration of an applicant's family history and potential safeguarding matters. Additionally, foster carers' assessments and review reports do not consider the foster carers' terms of approval, such as type of placement, and the number and ages of children. These shortfalls weaken the agency's decision-making, approval and matching process.

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

Children's welfare and safety are priorities of the agency. All children are extremely settled and they feel safe and secure. High-risk behaviours, such as going missing from home, child exploitation and substance misuse are not currently an issue for this agency.

Safeguarding training, which includes child protection, going missing from home, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, is compulsory for staff and foster carers. Additionally, children's safety is routinely discussed at staff and foster carers' supervision, carer support groups and team meetings. As a result, the team and carers are alert to potential risk and they understand their roles and responsibilities in protecting children.

Allegations against foster carers are extremely rare. However, when a safeguarding

concern is raised about a foster carer, the agency takes appropriate action. Information is swiftly shared with all relevant professionals to make sure that the matter is thoroughly investigated. Effective partnership working with safeguarding professionals is enhancing children's welfare and safety.

Relationships between carers and children are very positive. Carers build strong bonds with children and provide them with clear boundaries, which help children to manage their behaviour and to be clear about expectations. Additionally, the behaviour management training provided to foster carers equips them with the knowledge and skills to de-escalate situations, which reduces the need for carers to use physical intervention or restraint.

Children's welfare and safety is enhanced through consistent safer recruitment practice. Panel members and agency staff are rigorously vetted by the agency before they are appointed.

Safeguarding practice can be strengthened with improvements in the agency's written risk assessments and safer caring plans. These documents lack significant information and overlook some areas of potential harm. For example, a risk assessment for a parent and child placement did not provide clear guidance to the foster carer on the action to be taken should the parent return home under the influence of a substance. Furthermore, there was no safer caring plan in place to guide the carer on important matters, such as sleeping arrangements and visitors to the home.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes in leadership, including changes in the ownership, the registered person and the responsible individual. The team and foster carers spoke positively about these developments and welcome the benefits that come with being part of a larger national organisation, for example enhanced training opportunities and access to a wide range of resources.

The registered manager has worked for the agency since June 2014. She started with the agency as a supervising social worker and was promoted to service/registered manager in 2017. She is a qualified social worker and has extensive experience in children's social care and fostering. She is currently studying for the required management qualification.

Without a doubt, the registered manager is child-focused, putting children's needs and welfare first. Children's measurable progress and placement stability clearly demonstrate this. Foster carers, children, staff and other professionals speak highly of her and the support that she provides across the agency.

Staff benefit from regular professional supervision and annual appraisals. They said that their manager is always available when they need support and guidance. Staff are suitably qualified and receive ongoing training. Often, staff training is undertaken alongside the foster carers' training, which enhances consistency and

continuity in the care and protection provided to the children.

Carers benefit from monthly supervision and well-attended carer support groups. They also make good use of the out-of-hours support service, particularly when they have a concern about a child's safety. Carers enjoy a varied training programme, which also provides them with further opportunities to meet up with other carers, reflect on their practice and share new ideas.

Parent and child foster carers provide detailed monthly progress reports to the placing authority. These reports are extremely valuable to the agency, placing authority and the child and parent because they clearly reflect the child and parents' progress. However, progress reports are not completed for all children, and the agency is missing an opportunity to document and evidence each child's foster care journey and progress. The manager acknowledged this and intends to introduce progress reports for all children in their care.

Monitoring systems need to improve to enable the manager to monitor all aspects of the agency's performance, for example how many children have an up-to-date care plan or personal education plan available on their files. Similarly, the manager does not routinely check the agency's documents, such as placement plans, risk assessments and safer caring plans. As a result, shortfalls in these documents go unnoticed and foster carers are not being provided with comprehensive written guidance on how to care for and protect the children living and visiting their home. The manager acknowledged that monitoring systems will need to develop, particularly as the agency grows. Plans are in place for the introduction of a new electronic recording system that will support the manager's monitoring of the agency.

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: SC408585

Registered provider: Foster Careline Limited

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Inspectors

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