

Children Of All Nations (COAN)

Children Of All Nations Ltd

Weatherill House, New South Quarter, 23 Whitestone Way, Croydon CR0 4WF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a privately owned independent fostering agency based in London. It aims to meet a range of placement needs for children, including sibling groups and parents with children. The agency has 20 fostering households. The agency is currently providing placements for 28 children.

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 January 2018

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: 13 February 2014

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 service is let down by the lack of paperwork to evidence good practice, inconsistent application of the regulations and management oversight.
- A registered manager is needed to lead on embedding good practice.
- The acrimonious split in leadership and management has had an impact on the service.
- Details of supervisory visits with foster carers are not always put on the agency's electronic monitoring system. This also applies to written records of staff supervision.
- Record keeping and checks to help and protect children are not robust. Risk assessments are not available for each child.
- Staff recruitment records do not clearly evidence that all checks are in place and gaps in employment checked prior to employment.
- All children's files are not up to date. Foster carers do not consistently upload their logs concerning the children's lives. Staff do not consistently record conversations with children.
- Matching records do not evidence how gaps will be met. A proactive approach is not taken regarding care planning to support placements.
- A number of foster carer assessments do not clearly demonstrate how applicants will meet the needs of children.
- Panel members do not always receive the necessary information at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting.
- Children do not benefit from a children's guide which details how they can have access to supplementary information and support.
- Staff do not consistently inform Ofsted of all notifiable events. This practice does not enable Ofsted to have effective regulatory oversight.
- Quality of care review reports do not meet regulatory requirements. There should be a clear and effective monitoring system.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Children provide positive feedback on their foster families and they feel part of a family.
- Children benefit from nurturing placements, where they are settled and thriving. They are making good progress in relation to their starting points.
- Birth children embrace the fostering task. The agency is commended for their research, which focuses on the experience of birth children.
- Children benefit from a competent, culturally diverse range of foster carers.
- All children are in education and they have high attendance rates.
- Children are able to develop a positive self-view. They engage in meaningful social activities that take account of their talents and interests.
- Children receive good support with their health conditions and are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle.
- Children learn age-appropriate independent living skills. They learn to budget, save and manage their money.

- Children confirm that they feel safe. Since living in their foster homes, children's behaviour and their emotional well-being have improved.
- There are no major concerns regarding children going missing or being at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation.
- Foster carers and staff benefit from a diverse range of child protection and safeguarding training. This training covers topics which have significant cultural relevance.
- The small-family feel of the agency enables all staff to have an in-depth knowledge of the service, children and foster carers.
- Staff have a high level of competence and skill for their responsibilities.
- The fostering panel has provided an element of consistency throughout the organisational changes. This constructively challenging panel holds the agency to account.
- The agency has a good capacity to improve. The dynamic responsible individual demonstrates a heartfelt commitment, and there are clear plans for service development.

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 provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency. (Regulation 6 (1))	01/04/2018
Ensure assessments include all the information in Schedule 3, particularly skills, competence and potential, relevant to care for a child placed with them. (Regulation 26)	01/04/2018
<p>The registered person must maintain a system for</p> <p>(a) monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>(b) improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide Ofsted with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1).</p> <p>The system must provide for consultation with foster carers, children and their placing authority. (Regulation 35)</p>	01/04/2018
Ensure Ofsted are notified without delay of all notifiable incidents, detailed in Schedule 7. (Regulation 36)	01/04/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure the service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. All children should have an up-to-date risk assessment. (NMS 4.5)
- Ensure when matching where gaps are identified the placement plans sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (NMS 15.1)
- Ensure the children's guide includes information on how to contact the Children's Commissioner and how to secure an independent advocate. (NMS 16.3)
- Ensure foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. (NMS 21.8)
- Ensure staff are provided with regular supervision. (NMS 24.4)
- Ensure staff and fostering households follow the service's policy for the keeping of files. (NMS 26.2)

- Ensure all necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration. (NMS 14.3)
- The fostering service must demonstrate from written records that it consistently follows good recruitment practice. (NMS 19.2)

Inspection judgements

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

Children are thriving within nurturing foster placements. They describe their foster families as 'good'. The shortfalls in working practices do not have a detrimental impact on children's outcomes. The weaknesses identified need to be addressed to fully support children's experiences and progress. These relate to record keeping, matching and the assessments of prospective foster carers.

Record keeping does not consistently reflect good practice. A lack of prompt submission of records from foster carers is a recognised issue. A number of foster carers do not upload their logs to capture children's journeys and experiences; there is a plan of action in place to tackle this problem. In addition, supervising social workers do not consistently record their conversations with children. Some children's files are not kept up to date with their correct ethnicity and social worker details.

Although matching reports are in place for children, they do not evidence how gaps will be met and how issues will be addressed. Records do not demonstrate how the agency has worked with the placing authority to ensure that placements receive the necessary support. An example is an over-reliance on a foster carer's support system, instead of pro-active intervention from the agency. Records fail to evidence the additional training, resources or support required.

The quality of assessments is inconsistent, and timescales for getting information to panel members is not always followed. Assessors do not always include all the necessary details to inform the panel's decision-making. This particularly relates to clearly evaluating issues and outlining the skills, competence and qualities which make an applicant suitable for fostering. An assessment report was described by the fostering panel as having 'not done justice to the applicant'. There was also an occasion when additional information was only presented on the day the fostering panel sat.

All children are making good progress in relation to their starting points. Foster carers instil children with confidence and provide them with a level of stability. A child gave an example of feeling that they 'can achieve anything'. Another child stated they are 'happy with everything, so far'. A foster carer proudly described their foster child as going from 'strength to strength'. An independent reviewing officer praised a foster carer's 'continued efforts, hard work and commitment'.

Children enjoy being part of a family, participating in family events and going on holidays. Children provide positive feedback on their foster families, and foster carers proudly talk about their child. A placing social worker confirmed that a child had a 'sense of belonging' and 'a secure base with attachment figures'. An independent reviewing officer praised the 'love and security' provided by a foster carer, stating '[the child's] attachment is so positive.'

Birth children embrace the fostering task, with some acting as older siblings and mentors. Adult children also have access to training. The agency is commended for their research which focuses on the experience of birth children. Recommendations from this research has contributed to positive changes in agency practice.

The vast majority of children are from a minority ethnic heritage. Children benefit from a culturally diverse range of foster carers. Children seeking asylum receive support regarding their immigration status. A child also highlighted the help that they received in learning English. There is good attention to religious needs, enabling children to attend their places of worship and follow their religious traditions. Children also receive gifts from the agency in celebration of religious festivals.

Children live in foster families which promote their education. This includes foster carers strongly advocating for children to attend the best schools and for them to receive the required resources. All children are in education and they have high attendance rates. Schools, placing authorities and the agency itself celebrate children's achievements. A headteacher highlighted that a child had 'achieved a lot and should be proud'. Children's educational success is also rewarded within the agency and externally.

Foster carers manage contact with relatives and friends effectively. They assist with transport and supervising visits, and make an effort to get to know family members. Parents speak positively regarding the emotional and practical support provided to children. A child's social worker praised the fact that a foster carer 'sees the value of promoting contact and is proactive'. Children's social workers also describe foster carers as 'fantastic' and as having 'emotional intelligence'.

Children are able to develop a positive self-view. They engage in meaningful social activities that take account of their talents and interests. Children enjoy a range of new experiences and day trips. They have the opportunity to meet together at the agency's Christmas and summer events, and in groups throughout the year.

Foster carers meet children's health needs. Children receive encouragement to lead a healthy lifestyle. 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, and there are improvements in their emotional well-being.

Children learn age-appropriate independent living skills. In some cases this involves challenging sexist stereotypes, where children have referred to certain tasks as 'women's work'. 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. Children who have moved on maintain their relationships with foster carers, which provides them with valued ongoing support. The agency also marks their leaving with meaningful gifts.

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

Children confirm that they feel safe and they can identify various people they would

contact if they had concerns. There are no serious failures concerning the welfare of children and their parents. However, more attention is needed to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are robust. This relates to improving the Ofsted notification process, recruitment records and risk assessments. A social worker confirmed that foster carers 'provided a safe and caring environment'.

Leaders and managers do not always notify Ofsted of serious complaints in relation to foster carers and allegations. This practice does not enable Ofsted to have effective regulatory oversight of significant events related to children. In addition, not all children have an individual risk assessment, which identifies potential vulnerabilities, concerns and hazardous situations. Safe-caring policies help to ensure that the welfare and safety of children are promoted. Staff also undertake at least one unannounced visit every year to foster carers' homes.

Recruitment records do not consistently evidence safe recruitment practices. They fail to demonstrate the careful selection of all staff and members of the central list. Gaps in employment were not consistently noted on recruitment records. A member of staff and a central list member were employed or in post prior to the agency receiving all the required checks. They did not, however, work unsupervised with children. Sufficient checks were in place for fostering households.

Foster homes provide a stable base for children. Children benefit from consistent, firm boundaries, which helps them develop socially acceptable behaviour. Foster carers praise the 24-hour support they receive, particularly home visits, to assist with managing children's challenging behaviour. An example was given of incidents over the Christmas and new year periods.

Since living in their foster homes, children's behaviour and well-being has improved. Examples are of children no longer stealing, having sleeping problems or needing time out. A child said, 'I feel much less lonely than when I first came here.' Children are also more trusting and sociable, and some now feel able to engage with mental health services.

There are no major concerns regarding children going missing or being at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. Where there have been cases of children having unauthorised absences, these have been appropriately managed. The agency manages child protection allegations effectively. There is a good relationship with the local safeguarding personnel. This enables good access to training and relevant advice.

Foster carers and staff benefit from a diverse range of child protection and safeguarding training. This training covers culturally relevant topics, such as female genital mutilation, honour-based violence, witchcraft, gang affiliation and preventing radicalisation. Foster carers are able to consider risk from a cultural perspective, an example of which is not allowing the shaving of a newborn's head.

Children learn the importance of keeping themselves safe. They also have the opportunity of exchanging their knowledge with foster carers regarding online safety. An example is an older child helping with training foster carers on social

media. Foster carers enhanced their awareness regarding different messages, networks, and how children get around security controls.

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

Children receive care from an agency which has a dynamic owner who is also the responsible individual. A commissioner praised this individual, describing them as being 'passionate about looked after children'. The acrimonious split in leadership and management, whereby the previous registered manager and a director left the agency, has had a negative impact on the service. There is insufficient record keeping to evidence practice, inconsistent application of the regulations and a lack of management oversight. However, there are no systemic failures which are detrimental to children. Shortfalls relate to improving the quality of care reports, the children's guide, record keeping and staff and foster carer supervision. The agency is also in need of a registered manager.

The quality assurance system does not fully meet regulatory requirements. Staff regularly seek feedback from children, foster carers and placing authorities. However, this information is not included in their quality of care reports. Furthermore, there is insufficient monitoring and reporting of all Schedule 6 matters, although the bespoke computerised recording system assists with monitoring children's progress and evidences their positive outcomes. Staff also complete individual child quality service reviews for particular local authorities. Placing authorities also conduct their own contract performance review. A recent review commented on the agency's 'good customer care'.

The agency has a clear statement of purpose, which outlines its aims and objectives. Foster carers proudly highlight their belief in the agency's ethos of providing a service for all children. Children have their own guide. However, this does not include the contact details for the children's commissioner and independent advocacy services. The organisation's website also provides an overview of the service for interested parties.

There are shortfalls in staff and foster carers' supervision. Foster carers confirm that they meet regularly with their supervising social worker. A foster carer explained, 'It is not just supervision. She listens and supports me.' Records, however, did not evidence that all foster carers received regular supervision. Staff also confirmed that they receive regular supervision. However, written records were not on file for all supervisory social workers. In addition, there was no consistent evidence that all supervisory social workers were receiving the necessary leadership and direction to enhance their practice.

The small-family feel of the agency enables all staff to have an in-depth knowledge of the service, children and foster carers. Staff have a high level of competence and skill for their responsibilities. The agency contributes to the wider social care sector through offering placements to student social workers. This is in addition to their assessed supported year in employment programme for newly qualified social workers.

Leaders and managers have addressed the recommendations from the last inspection effectively. Children now play a more influential role in the agency. They have helped with developing and chairing their own group. Children also contribute towards organising activities, a children's newsletter and foster carer training. Foster carers have received specialist independent living skills training to enable them to support older children. This training gives foster carers the confidence to positively address children's transition into adulthood.

The responsible individual is a qualified social worker. She is highly regarded by children and foster carers. A child had an opportunity to meet a famous grime artist through the responsible individual's contacts. The responsible individual has good links with community organisations, and attends relevant conferences and forums to enhance their professional knowledge and influence the wider service development.

Staff endeavour to work in partnership with local authorities and make an effort to attend children's meetings. Placing authorities provide variable feedback. The majority of the feedback was positive, and the responsible individual is aware of the contentious issues. A children's social worker described the placements manager as 'well organised', and supervising social workers were described as 'great', 'very supportive' and 'overstepping the mark'. The latter relates to their heartfelt determination to consider and promote children's needs.

The fostering panel is committed to promoting children's welfare. The fostering panel has provided an element of consistency throughout the organisational changes. Central list members are gender balanced and have a wide range of relevant professional and personal expertise. The panel chair is a highly experienced social work manager who has a good understanding of their role. The fostering panel provides a strong quality assurance function. Foster carers comment that the panel made them feel 'at ease'. Foster carers also appreciated meeting panel members at the Christmas party. Central list members benefit from annual appraisals and training, and regular updates on legislation, research and serious case reviews. This enables them to make good decisions, which carefully consider children's best interests.

Children receive care from foster carers who have access to 24-hour support. Foster carers praised the outstanding support they receive, including practical support such as helping to take children to school, in addition to compassionately responding to personal needs. Foster carers receive a wide range of training, which includes face-to-face and on-line training. A foster carer described the training as 'fantastic' and 'second to none'. Vocational training for all foster carers is in progress, which ensures that their practice is of a recognised standard. Foster carers also benefit from group support meetings, which enable them to learn and share their experiences in an encouraging atmosphere. Foster carers state that they feel valued and that they appreciate the award ceremony, which recognises their own and children's achievements.

The agency has a good capacity to improve. A new manager has been identified and there is a committed, highly experienced staff team. The responsible individual is

acutely aware of the areas in need of development and has efficient plans in place to strengthen the agency. These include an active recruitment strategy to address the needs of children. There is also a constructively challenging panel, which holds the agency to account.

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: SC418371

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Inspector

Sharon Payne, social care inspector



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