

Regional Foster Placements

Regional Foster Placements Limited
Sapphire House, Roundtree Way, Norwich NR7 8SQ
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Regional Foster Placements is a privately owned independent fostering agency. It has six offices covering locations across the UK. This registered branch of the agency has carers located mostly in Suffolk and Norfolk, and those carers offer a range of short-term and long-term placements.

At the time of this inspection, Regional Foster Placements had 19 fostering households providing foster care to 20 children and young people in both short-term and long-term placements.

Inspection dates: 26 February to 2 March 2018

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: 6 July 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- The majority of children experience long-term placements.
- All children who should be are in education and they are learning.
- Children learn new skills that will be helpful to them throughout their life.
- Placement matching is considered thoughtfully and is sensitive to the needs of the carers' whole family.
- Assessments of the foster carers, their circumstances and their families are thorough and appropriately scrutinised.
- The foster panel is made up of a group of skilled individuals from a diverse range of social and professional backgrounds.
- The agency decision-maker's reasons for agreeing to approval are clear.
- Dedicated foster carers provide good-quality childcare.
- Foster carers receive good, reliable and consistent support from committed and hard-working supervising social workers.
- Foster carers receive good, thorough and child-centred supervision.
- Supervising social workers pick up on any areas of concern about the children or the care that they are receiving and address the issues promptly and fairly.
- The agency communicates effectively and has good relationships with other services.
- The registered manager knows the children and the service well. She is quick to take action to ensure that plans remain focused on the needs of the children.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- A further review of the statement of purpose is necessary to make explicit the additional support available to the carers and children from the agency.
- The review of the quality of care report requires additional information about the systems for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents and their placing authority.
- Information held in the children's case files is not sufficiently streamlined or organised should any child request access to the information that the agency holds about them.

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 fostering provider must revise the statement of purpose and notify the chief inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a)(b))	31/05/2018
Ensure that the system to review the quality of care provides for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority. (Regulation 35 (3))	31/05/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure information about each child is recorded clearly and in a way which would be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (National Minimum Standards 26.9)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

This agency is set up to ensure that every child placed has the greatest opportunity to form meaningful and positive bonds with their foster carers. Children integrate into the family and extended family network, and this helps them to build up relationships in the local community. Many children experience acceptance.

The majority of children live with their carers on a long-term basis or are permanently matched with them. A large number of the children are placed alone but the agency also successfully provides placements for siblings.

Children who are new to the agency are welcomed thoughtfully and sensitively. For example, children receive a welcome box that contains helpful resources describing what to expect from the agency. Also inside the welcome box is a handmade, individualised patchwork quilt and a stress ball to help to provide comfort and reassurance for children at times of significant change and upheaval.

Referrals received by the agency are carefully matched. The manager and supervising social workers are mindful of the carers' strengths when taking into account all of the information available from the local authority about the child. The agency is particularly sensitive to the needs of the carers' own children and family circumstances. This means that the agency makes placements when it believes that there is the greatest likelihood of success for all of the children living in the household.

The carer recruitment process is timely, thorough and robust. New carers are made to feel welcome when they are approved by the agency. One newly approved carer said, 'The assessment process was really in-depth. I was surprised by how much it covered and about how much I thought about things from the past.' Should the agency identify any concerns about a prospective carer's value base or circumstances, the applicants are sensitively counselled out of fostering. This means that the agency carefully and skilfully selects foster carers, ensuring that these adults can demonstrate that they are most likely to have the principles, commitment and tenacity to equip children with the skills essential for enriching life experiences.

Foster carers show determination. They strive to improve children's lives, and because of this children make noticeable progress from their starting points. Children take part in a wide range of age-related social and fun activities, including music, dance, sport and exercise. Children learn new skills, such as how to swim and how to ride a bicycle. Children's self-confidence and self-belief improves. One carer said, 'It makes me feel emotional to see through time how our children have made such progress.'

Children receive good support to remain in contact with their family of origin. Carers work creatively with the agency to find solutions to ensure that children can remain in contact with their siblings, and this helps children to maintain a sense of identity.

When children's and their carers' ethnicity or cultural experiences differ, carers are quick to take action and make connections in the wider community. For example, the carer for one child with no English language and who was seeking asylum quickly made a connection with foster carers from another agency who could speak to the child. This child-centred and creative approach helps to ensure that children's diverse and individual needs remain at the centre of the agency's activity.

Working alongside their supervising social workers, foster carers quickly identify children's health needs. All children have access to the appropriate range of health-related provisions, such as dentists and general practitioners. When children have unique or specific health-related concerns, they are taken by their carers to the relevant medical appointments to ensure that children access any specialist support that they may require. For the children, the result is an improvement in their overall health and emotional well-being. One child said, 'I just love it here. My carers always do everything that they can to help me.'

Foster carers recognise the critical role that they have in supporting children to attend education. All children who should be are accessing education. Foster carers attend school parents' evenings and help the children to do their homework. When children are struggling to manage in the classroom, foster carers liaise with other professionals and provide additional support to the children. The foster carers attend multi-disciplinary planning meetings and communicate with the virtual school headteacher when this is necessary. Children who have previously missed out on parts of their education or who have not previously experienced academic success make improvements and, for example, go on to sit GCSEs. More than one child has returned to sixth form to take A levels.

The agency has a small number of children who are 'staying put'. Children receive weekly pocket money and, in addition, receive weekly savings that are credited to their bank account. This demonstrates that the carers and the agency work seamlessly together to think about the children in the long term and to help them to prepare them for their futures.

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

The agency recruits carers in small numbers and does so with consideration. Some carers have moved on, for example to retirement, and so the numbers of households available to provide placements since the last inspection has not increased.

Children know how to complain and are confident that the help and support that they receive from the agency and their carers keeps them safe and reduces concern.

Committed and dedicated carers say that they feel very well supported by the supervising social workers and the agency. More than one carer said that their worker provides excellent support. Foster carers feel that they are appreciated members of the team. Carers say that they can approach any member of staff from the agency at any time for support and advice. One carer said, 'Every time I have needed to ask, "How do I deal with that?" there has been someone on the phone.'

This means that carers feel valued in their role.

In turn, children receive good support. In discussion with their supervising social worker and the placing local authority, foster carers set boundaries to help children to improve their behaviour at home and out in the community. The agency provides carers with information and resources about, for example, social media. This helps the carers to have a clearer understanding of the risks to children and to reflect on the effectiveness of their approach.

In situations when children experience difficulty or are in crisis, their foster carers accept the readily available help and direction from the agency towards finding child-focused solutions. This means that there is regular discussion between the agency and the foster carers about how to keep children safe and to ensure that strategies to manage behaviour are balanced, proportionate and subject to review.

Records show that physical intervention is rare and when this does happen circumstances are extenuating. For example, a carer physically stepped in to prevent a child from coming to significant immediate harm from traffic.

Incidents of children going missing are few and limited to a handful of children. Foster carers take decisive action to keep children safe and notify the relevant authorities when children go missing. Monthly reports and regular verbal updates from the carers ensure that in between supervisions, supervising social workers are aware of what has been happening in the child's life. The agency takes steps to ensure that placing local authorities fulfil their responsibilities to undertake return to home interviews. This helps the adults to understand the context and take protective steps when children go missing from care.

Allegations against carers are dealt with promptly and professionally. When the agency has any concerns about a carer's behaviour or capacity to parent effectively, managers and social workers take balanced action to ensure that matters are discussed professionally with relevant agencies and that any practice concerns are monitored. The agency consistently returns any carers to the panel in the event of any allegation or concern being raised. Routine and timely annual reviews ensure that the agency retains a clear overview of each carer's strengths, areas for development and any changes in their personal circumstances that are likely to have an impact on their capacity to foster. This helps to ensure that children are safeguarded effectively.

Foster carers consistently receive good-quality supervision in their own homes. The focus of discussion is firmly on ensuring ongoing support for the children in the household. When necessary, the supervising social workers are ready to have difficult conversations with carers, for example if they see that the child is being affected by any changes in the foster home.

The pre-approval process is robust. When possible, experienced foster carers and children who are looked after are involved in providing applicants with the benefit of their knowledge and experience about fostering. This helps to ensure that prospective carers fully understand the role of a foster carer.

The registered manager is also the panel adviser. She oversees the content and quality of reports before they are presented to the panel. The panel members are professionally diverse and there is good representation from the local community, including a foster carer and an adult who was previously a child looked after. The panel process provides effective scrutiny and professional curiosity. The reasons for recommendations and the rationales for the agency's decisions are recorded clearly. This helps to ensure that children receive help, support and protection from adults motivated to make a lasting difference to children's lives.

The supervising social workers and the registered manager provide the out-of-hours service. The staff know the carers and the children, and this enables them to provide personalised and robust support after hours and at the weekend.

The skilled supervising social workers and the registered manager are hard-working. They go over and above to offer additional support and, for example, volunteer to look after children to enable foster carers to take other children out. As a result, the children form good relationships with the supervising social workers. The supervising social workers make it their business to build relationships with the children when they visit the home to undertake announced and unannounced visits. One foster carer said, 'My supervising social worker has given her work mobile number to our child and said, "If you have trouble getting to speak to your own social worker, call me and I will always see what I can do to help you".' This provides another layer of help and protection for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, a new manager has registered with Ofsted. The registered manager was promoted from within the team. She has an excellent understanding of the fostering task and the agency's ethos. The manager's practice demonstrates her commitment to delivering good, reliable and effective services to children in foster care. She is thorough in her approach and strives to ensure that lessons are learned for the service when, for example, placements end in an unplanned way.

The agency has met the regulations and national minimum standards raised at the last inspection. For example, the agency has appointed a vice-chair for the panel.

The agency communicates effectively and strives to work well with other professionals. Placing authorities say that communication is good and that they receive regular feedback that helps them to make the necessary adjustments to any plans for the child, such as in relation to education or family contact.

The wider organisation is mindful of the importance of training and promotes this message to carers. Carers have the opportunity to access engaging and interesting opportunities. The annual training programme allows foster carers to set dates in the diary in advance. Carers' take-up of training is good and those carers who should have done so have met the training standard required. Sometimes staff and carers take part in training together and this helps to develop a shared understanding of important issues, for example in relation to managing risk when children are at risk

of sexual exploitation. On some occasions, older children are invited to attend training with the carers and staff, and this opportunity helps to improve the children's confidence and enhances their future potential for employability.

This small team works intensively to cover a large geographical area. Nonetheless, the team organises events for the children to take part in and enjoy across the year, including arts, crafts and days out. Regular seasonal newsletters keep children and carers up to date with what is happening. The registered manager is keen to meet with children and to hear about their experiences. However, the review report sent to the regulator does not make clear the system that the service uses to routinely consult with foster carers and placing local authorities. This shortfall has no direct impact for children. This is because during inspection it was evident that in addition to the annual review process, the agency does communicate with carers about the service and with children about their experience of foster care.

The children's guides are informative, colourful and available for different age groups. The information makes clear to children what to expect from the agency. The statement of purpose sets out what this independent fostering agency intends to deliver. The statement of purpose is reviewed by the registered manager. However, some staff have left and a further review is required to ensure that there is clarity for commissioners about the range of resources available to support placements.

Regular and routine supervisions and team meetings help to ensure that practice remains focused on improving outcomes for children. The registered manager has introduced some new systems that help to drive improvement. For example, she routinely quality assures initial form Fs and foster carer's files. This means that the manager has a good overview of the quality of work produced by supervising social workers and foster carers. When additional information is required, the registered manager seeks this out, ensuring that workers remain accountable for their practice. The agency uses both paper and electronic filing systems. Sampling of children's care files shows that information is not sufficiently streamlined, stored in a systematic way and, in some cases, recorded clearly. This has no direct impact on children in placement because this is a small agency, but it is not helpful should a child seek access to their files now or in the future.

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: SC442774

Registered provider: Regional Foster Placements Limited

Registered provider address: Old Auster, The Causeway, Mark, Highbridge TA9 4QF

Responsible individual: Joann Catterall

Registered manager: Sara Rayner

Telephone number: 01603 441 390

Email address: sara@regionalfosterplacements.co.uk

Inspectors

Rosie Davie, social care inspector

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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