

Ownlife Fostering

Ownlife Fostering Limited

Premier House, 1 Cobden Court, Wimpole Close, Bromley, Kent BR2 9JF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a small, independent, privately owned agency. Ofsted granted registration in January 2013 for the agency to provide a full range of fostering services. It has 13 foster families, two of which were recruited in the last 12 months. It has 12 young people in placement, of whom five are in a single sibling group. Two placements are parent and child placements.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 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	requires improvement to be good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 15 June 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:

- This is a small agency with good levels of support for carers and young people. The service benefits from a committed and dedicated registered manager.
- Young people make positive progress in their placements and quickly form close attachments to their carers.
- Life-story work is a major strength of the agency. Life-story books contain professionally taken photographs and input from the carer and young person involved.
- The fostering panel offers consistent levels of scrutiny and monitors the development of the agency effectively.
- Carers are proactive and supportive. They quickly access education provision and offer good quality care.
- Young people are safe in their placements. Carers seek creative means of safeguarding them, such as the sharing of social media accounts.
- The service meets young people's identity needs. The matching process promotes successful, stable placements.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Staff turnover is too high, limiting the development of relationships between carers and supervising social workers.
- Training for foster carers does not meet the specific needs of the foster placements, for example the risks of sexual exploitation of young people.
- Further shortfalls were identified in the guidance for foster carers on the physical restraint of young people, absence of a formal referral form in the agency, tracking of educational achievement by the agency, notification of one event to Ofsted and the make-up of the fostering panel. These shortfalls do not adversely affect the quality of care offered to young people.

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>12: Arrangements for the protection of children</p> <p>The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy which—</p> <p>(a) is intended to safeguard children placed with foster parents from abuse or neglect. (Regulation 12 (1)(a))</p> <p>This policy is to offer specific guidance and the strategies to be used by foster carers in the event that physical intervention is required</p>	25/07/2018
<p>17: Support, training and information for foster parents</p> <p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support. (Regulation 17 (1))</p> <p>This is to offer specific training on child sexual exploitation, self-harm and restraint.</p>	25/07/2018
<p>16: Education, employment and leisure activities</p> <p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(2) In particular the fostering service provider must— (a) implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents. (Regulation 16 (1) (2)(a))</p>	25/07/2018
<p>36: 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</p>	25/07/2018

table.	
(2) Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36 (1) (2))	

Recommendations

- Ensure that all foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement. (National Minimum Standards 3.8)
- Ensure that the number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for. (National Minimum Standards 14.8)
- 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. (National Minimum Standards 15.8)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency recruits skilled, committed carers who come from diverse backgrounds. They are well equipped to meet the needs of the local community within which they are located. This allows young people to remain close to their schools and family support networks.

Foster carers value the support and guidance offered by the agency. They view the registered manager as the main fulcrum of the agency and describe her as extremely supportive. One carer commented, 'You always hear a familiar voice when you need it.' Foster carers report that the assessment and approval processes are positive. One carer described the process as 'therapeutic' and a good, realistic introduction and preparation for fostering.

The agency strives to support carers and their families. Supervising social workers creatively try and engage the birth children in the planning process. Social workers use games such as 'Welcome to my Family' and interactive worksheets to engage and support birth children. In addition, the agency provides further support to foster carers following the placement, to assess the impact of the placement and their readiness for a further placement.

Carers are extremely committed to young people and are consistently child centred. Where possible, carers attempt to keep in touch with young people when they leave the placement. Recently, one carer limited her honeymoon holiday as, 'I would miss the kids too much.'

Young people enjoy good levels of planning and preparation for their placements. Only a few young people experience disruption or placement breakdown. Despite this, the agency is lacking a formal referral form to further inform placement decisions. Staff pay good attention to the individual matching needs of young people. Placement documentation gives clear guidance to carers as to the specific needs of each young person, such as communicating with young people who have a learning disability. This enables young people to settle quickly and begin forming relationships.

Positive feedback from placing social workers supports the quality of planning and preparation for placements. One commented, 'There is really positive care and a good flow of information.' Another social worker commented, 'His behaviour has significantly improved since his arrival in the foster placement. His teachers say he is a transformed child.' Young people spoken to during the inspection indicated that they were 'very happy' in their placements.

Young people enjoy a broad range of activities and learn new social skills from a supportive, consistent primary carer, such as managing their emotions. The agency provides joint activities such as a recent trip to the bowling alley, which allows carers and young people to develop their relationships with other foster carers, young

people and the staff from the agency.

Behaviour is good, and carers understand the value of consistency and evidencing respect for young people. Young people respond positively to the clear boundaries set by their foster carers. Agreements and expectations are appropriate and encourage young people's good behaviour. The agency provides additional support to carers to manage behaviours and improve their understanding of the source and triggers for behaviour. In some cases, this has prevented placement disruption and helped carers process their feelings.

Life-story work is a major strength of the fostering agency. Life-story books and memory boxes are carefully prepared, using professionally taken photographs. Well-planned work helps young people understand their difficult histories and develop relationships with their foster carers.

Young people make good educational progress. Carers understand their roles and use their own individual expertise and connections to proactively seek education provision. Engagement with school is integral to young people establishing positive routines and raising their self-esteem and confidence. Carers support young people with homework and provide supporting materials such as revision books. When young people achieve in education, the agency sends a congratulatory card. These cards are stored in memory boxes and used in life-story work to encourage young people to consider the positive impact of the placement. At present, the agency is not able to effectively monitor and evaluate the progress of young people in education, limiting a full assessment of progress during this inspection.

Young people know how to complain and have easy access to independent advocacy. The agency has received one complaint since the last inspection. Following an investigation, managers and carers considered the lessons learned for future placements.

Staff proactively engage outside agencies. A local charity recently provided each young person with a personalised blanket celebrating their interests and hobbies, such as their favourite football team. Young people were delighted with their blankets.

Independent skills work is positive. A comprehensive workbook guides carers. This is of particular use in parent and child placements, supporting access to benefits and maternity grants.

Young people enjoy safe and managed contact with friends and family. Where appropriate, young people make their own arrangements. If contact is not meeting the needs of young people, foster carers intervene quickly to inform the professional network. Such an approach ensures that care planning is responsive to the needs of young people.

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

Safeguarding is inventive and proactive. Carers regularly discuss the issues around

staying safe in the community and online. One young person shares social media passwords with her foster carer and permits the use of a 'tracking application' on her smartphone to allow her foster carer to locate her quickly. Case records show foster carers intervening effectively to remind young people of the risk posed by negative peer groups and staying out late at night.

The agency acts promptly to meet the changing needs of placements. When a young person arrived in the placement pregnant, the fostering agency acted quickly. The agency ensured the completion of necessary assessments to enable her to stay long term. This ensured full support for the young person at a particularly vulnerable and stressful time.

Levels of missing behaviour are low. Carers understand the agency policy and the expectation to safeguard young people. Young people use their positive relationships with foster carers to keep in contact with them when not in the placement.

Advocacy for young people is strong. Carers appropriately challenge placing authorities for therapy and for improved housing provision when young people move on. This resulted in one young person moving to a significantly improved property on leaving the placement.

In general, safeguarding policies are strong. However, the behavioural management policy offers limited insight and guidance on how to support young people in crisis. The policy recognises that in extreme circumstances carers may need to physically intervene to protect young people, however the policy and the agency offer no guidance or training as to how this can be achieved safely.

Multi-agency work is strong. The fostering agency has strong and effective working partnerships with other agencies. These include children's social workers, designated officers, school personnel, and the police. Communication between all parties is consistent.

Risk assessments are of good quality and inform care practice. For example, risk assessments might lead to increased levels of observation for some young people. Assessments allow young people to take safe and managed risks.

When risk levels rise the agency takes strong action. Multi-agency meetings explore new means of support quickly. The agency readily provides support for carers at key times of difficulty such as night-time routines, and offers specialist help to young people, such as therapy. The agency reviews the effectiveness of the support regularly and ensures that young people are safe.

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

The agency benefits from a committed and dedicated registered manager. She is highly experienced, a qualified social worker who has been in post since 2014. She understands the strengths and weaknesses of the agency, and a focused, realistic development plan is in place. The registered manager has a keen desire to 'develop

the fostering task'. She is highly valued by the staff team and foster carers, who describe her as the 'linchpin' of the agency.

Staff turnover is high. Since the last inspection, five supervising social workers have arrived and subsequently left the agency. This has resulted in the registered manager covering work normally allocated to supervising social workers. One fostering panel member described the registered manager as 'stretched'. This has limited the development of the agency and the relationships between foster carers and staff.

The agency has complied with one of the two recommendations from the last inspection. The agency has succeeded in recruiting new and skilled foster carers. Development has not diminished the close and supportive nature of the agency.

Concerns remain regarding the make-up of the fostering panel, and this recommendation is repeated for this inspection. The panel lacks the input of young adults with direct experience of the care system. In addition, its membership does not reflect the ethnically diverse community which it serves. This limits the panel's ability to scrutinise the assessment, review and recruitment of foster carers.

Managers ensure that there are strong mechanisms in place for challenging local authorities when statutory timescales are missed, thus avoiding issues of drift and delay. Managers are thoughtful and reflective when placements do not go well. If disruption occurs, evidence and assessment for possible future placements are noted.

The fostering service's statement of purpose is comprehensive and kept up to date. It outlines the service's aims and objectives. The two children's guides provide young people with creative and clear information in age-appropriate language. The agency provides a guide for parents of children in care to allay fears and anxieties and promote partnership working.

Training provision is variable. Despite all carers accessing a national vocational qualification at level 3, the training provision does not meet the specific needs of the placement. Carers state that they would benefit from specific training on placement-specific issues such as self-harming behaviour exhibited by young people. This shortfall leaves carers and young people vulnerable.

The agency has successfully recruited a placements officer and a senior supervising social worker to work with young people. In addition, the agency closely monitors disclosure and barring service information. The fostering agency has sound systems in place for the safe vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the agency. These processes are comprehensive and confirm that staff, foster carers and members of the central list are suitable to work with vulnerable young people.

The agency failed to notify Ofsted of a significant safeguarding event. This limited the exchange of key information among agencies and affected the preparation for this inspection. This shortfall did not place young people at risk of harm.

Case files and records show strong evidence of management oversight. Files reflect the strong, child-centred ethos of the agency. They are compiled using key social work theories such as attachment to reflect the progress of young people and the development of their relationships with their foster carers.

Supervision of carers is positive and uses tools such as storyboards. Consequently, carers are able to follow their thought processes and reflect on their actions. Carers report excellent levels of support from all of the staff in the office, such as the office manager who monitors care plans and case recordings.

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: SC454491

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Inspector(s)

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector
Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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