

Phoenix Community Care

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Room 41/42, 639 Enterprise Centre, 639 High Road, Tottenham, London N17 8AA

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. The agency's original aim was to provide foster care placements for asylum-seeking young people and unaccompanied minors. The service has since broadened its scope, and now offers placements for mainstream children looked after, including sibling groups and parents with children. It is currently providing placements for 15 children and young people within eight fostering households. The agency has six other approved fostering households.

Inspection dates: 12 to 16 March 2018

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: 23 June 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 and young people make good and often significant progress from their challenging starting points.
- Children and young people experience a reduction in difficult behaviour. They are

engaged in education, and are well prepared for independent living.

- Children and young people receive individualised care from foster carers who build positive relationships with them. They receive a warm welcome, and are supported to integrate into the family and the community. As a result, children and young people feel that they are part of a family.
- Foster carers are finely attuned to the needs of the children and young people, and advocate for them.
- Children and young people state that they feel safe and can identify trusted adults who they can talk to. They benefit from the agency's strong safeguarding arrangements. Children and young people rarely go missing.
- Foster carers benefit from the agency's training and support, which in turn helps the children and young people. Foster carers deliver culturally sensitive care to children and young people of diverse backgrounds.
- Leaders and managers are themselves experienced foster carers, and have high aspirations for children and young people to thrive in their placements. Leaders and managers lead by example and are 'hands-on'.
- Leaders and managers promote a culture of learning and sharing good practice. Staff are provided with a wide range of training opportunities'. They also benefit from effective supervision. Staff say that they feel well supported by the leaders and managers, and love what they do.

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>The fostering service provider must not approve X as a foster parent unless –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) they have completed their assessment of X’s suitability, and (b) the fostering panel has considered the application. <p>(Regulations 27 (2))</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must not suggest prospective carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the carer has yet to be considered by the fostering panel.</p>	<p>15/04/2018</p>

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that children and young people are offered independent return home interviews when they go missing. (NMS 5.7)
- 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 foster panel and decision maker need in order to make an objective approval decision. (NMS 13.7)
- Ensure that risk assessments are detailed. (NMS 4.5)
- Ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in developing the fostering service. (NMS 1.7). In particular, ensure that the views of children and young people are considered for staff appraisals.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people receive individualised support from their foster carers, who build positive relationships with them. Children and young people state that they feel listened to, and belong in their foster families' lives. A child stated that there was nothing she wanted to change about her foster carers or the home she lives in. Another young person stated, 'They made me feel like part of the family.'

Children and young people receive a warm welcome. For example, in addition to the children's guide provided by the agency, children and young people are given 'welcome' books by their foster carers. Children and young people have opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities of their choosing. They participate in after-school clubs and enjoy holidays with their foster carers. Children and young people are helped to feel accepted for who they are. Their cultural heritage is respected and celebrated. Throughout their foster placements, children and young people are supported to understand that families come together in different ways. Their journeys and the memories made along the way are captured in life story books that help them to feel valued and promote attachment.

Children and young people make good progress from often challenging starting points. They experience emotional stability through consistent care. Foster carers help children and young people to develop the skills they need to manage conflict. They experience fewer upsets and are able to verbalise their difficult feelings. Children and young people also benefit from one-to-one work with the 'children's champion'. A social worker stated that his young person 'has come a long way' since being placed with his foster carers. His maladaptive behaviour has significantly reduced. Children and young people have access to specialist services such as child and adolescent mental health services. Children and young people are in good health and receive timely support to promote their physical health.

Children and young people attend school or other kinds of educational provision. They make good progress in their attendance and attainment. A virtual school advisory teacher stated that foster carers have challenged and advocated on behalf of the young person placed with them, ensuring that he was in the 'best possible placement'. The virtual teacher further stated, 'It was easy to see that there is real love in the family, and it has been remarkable seeing the transformation in their young person.' Another educational professional described foster carers as 'great role models', and commented on how one child's attendance, learning and behaviour had improved since being placed with the foster family.

Young people are exposed to new experiences that enhance their social skills and life chances. Young people learn independent living skills and receive appropriate levels of support to successfully transition from their foster placements. Unaccompanied minors and asylum-seeking young people benefit from effective individualised support to acclimatise to a new country. Young people who have transitioned from their foster placements to supported accommodation benefit from

the outreach support that they receive from the agency. 'Staying put' arrangements are promoted when young people are assessed to be appropriate for such a plan. Consideration is also given to the level of support the carers will need and what they can offer young people to promote their best interests.

The quality of assessments of prospective foster carers is comprehensive. However, there is room for improvement in a small number of assessments that contain limited analysis of the applicants' significant events as adults and the potential impact of these on their fostering capacity. Managers accept that robust oversight of the assessments is needed, and have implemented a plan to ensure consistency of quality.

The agency is careful to match children and young people to carers who can meet their assessed needs. The agency also carefully considers the impact of the placements on existing household members. Information is shared between the agency, placing authorities and foster carers. The agency works with the placing authorities to ensure that the services outlined in the placement plans are delivered.

On one occasion since the last inspection, the agency has put forward a carer who had yet to be approved by the foster panel. The assessment had been completed and was due to be presented at the upcoming panel. There were extenuating circumstances surrounding the placement and the placing authority knew the carer had yet to be approved, but agreed to the placement nonetheless. The placement was a positive one and met the needs of the children. However, only approved foster carers should be proposed for a placement match.

The agency provides good parent-and-child placements. Parents learn about stages of child development and how to look after their babies. Parents also have opportunities to be assessed on their ability to occupy a caring role in their babies' lives. Babies are kept safe. They benefit from routines and are helped to meet their developmental milestones.

Siblings are placed together and supported to reduce familial conflict. Foster carers understand and meet the needs of each individual child or young person within the sibling group. Children and young people are helped to understand each other better, and are encouraged to build positive relationships with one another.

Placement breakdowns are rare. Every effort is made to stabilise the placement and support and training are offered to carers in order to meet the needs of the children and young people sufficiently. On the rare occasions where the placement ends in an unplanned way, the agency assesses what could have been done differently to learn from the unplanned ending. Leaders and managers then implement the learning going forward, and make necessary changes to improve the service.

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

Children and young people receive good help and protection from their foster carers and the agency staff and managers. Children and young people state that they feel

'safe' in their foster placements, and are able to identify trusted adults who they can talk to about any concerns.

Risk factors associated with child sexual exploitation, self-harming, offending, going missing and other vulnerabilities are assessed and managed well by foster carers and the agency. Children and young people have updated risk assessments in place that identify specific actions to mitigate the risks. Foster carers and agency staff take effective action when immediate or emerging risks are identified. Overall, children and young people experience a reduction in risks both inside and outside of their foster placements. However, the quality of risk assessments varies, with some being more detailed about potential vulnerability factors than others.

Children and young people rarely go missing. When young people have gone missing, there has been a coordinated and consistent approach to missing episodes. Return home interviews take place, although it is not always clear if the children and young people are offered return home interviews with an independent person.

Investigations into serious incidents or allegations of harm are shared with the appropriate agencies, and are handled robustly in line with the statutory guidance. Allegations against foster carers are rare. One allegation has been made since the last inspection. It was appropriately managed by the agency, which worked in partnership with the designated officer and other professionals.

Keeping children and young people safe is embedded in the preparation and training of foster carers. The agency promotes safe care and makes at least one unannounced visit to the foster carers annually. Children and young people can speak with trusted adults without their foster carers being present. The agency obtains feedback from children and young people about their foster carers for their annual reviews. Their thoughts and feelings about their carers inform the agency's assessment of the carers. Consequently, children and young people feel heard and empowered.

Children and young people are helped to reduce their challenging behaviour. As a result, they experience positive relationships with peers and adults, and make progress in key areas of their lives. Where children and young people's well-being is negatively affected by the fact that they do not experience safe and beneficial contact with their family members, foster carers effectively advocate for the contact to be restricted'. When young people return to their families upon leaving care, they are able to use the strategies and coping skills they have learned from their foster carers to help navigate difficult familial relationships.

A social worker stated that she has 'no concerns' about the agency and that 'the foster carer has been doing a great job'. A placing officer stated that in all of the agency's placements she has dealt with 'the young people are well cared for', and described the agency as a 'caring fostering agency who take their role seriously'.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is highly experienced in fostering, both as a carer and a manager. Together with her deputy manager and staff, she ensures that the agency operates in line with the ethos of its statement of purpose. Foster carers describe the managers and leaders as 'inspiring', and state that the staff are 'very supportive'. Foster carers have access to 24-hour support, which in turn helps the children and young people placed in their homes.

Managers are finely attuned to the needs of the children and young people. They undertake visits to the foster homes, and speak with the children and young people to gather their views on the things that matter to them. Managers actively monitor the progress that children and young people are making in the key areas of their lives. The managers and staff of the agency care about each child as if they are their own, and this is modelled for the foster carers. Their commitment to supporting and guiding the carers to provide appropriate parenting is palpable, and leads to good outcomes for children and young people.

Supervision takes place regularly and staff benefit from the reflective practice in their sessions. Managers and leaders invest in their staff. Staff are challenged on their practice and develop their learning through supervision. Staff members state that they find supervision helpful in enhancing their learning. Managers regularly carry out audits. This helps to measure compliance and quality, keeping staff and carers accountable. The agency's training plan covers the necessary areas of development for staff and carers.

Foster carers enjoy support groups, social events and other opportunities to meet collectively. This allows for the sharing of good practice in caring for children and young people. Newsletters provide agency updates and information on the impact the carers and staff are having on the lives of the children and young people.

Central list members of the fostering panel have a range of skills which includes social work, health, education and fostering. The panel chair has extensive experience in working with young people, and is clear about the role of the panel. The fostering panel promotes safe and stable placements through robust challenge and scrutiny. This enables the agency to continually improve.

The managers' assessments of the agency's strengths and areas for improvement are thorough and underpinned by the national minimum standards. Managers routinely undertake a review of the quality of the fostering service. They have an effective monitoring system in place. Leaders and managers have addressed all of the requirements, and all but one of the recommendations, from the last inspection. The verbal and written feedback from children and young people is not yet a fully integrated part of staff appraisals.

Leaders and managers ensure that the agency is financially viable and meets the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose. The agency is properly staffed and safe recruitment is in place.

The views of social workers and other professionals are generally very positive regarding the partnership working that the agency undertakes in order to promote

the best outcomes for the children and young people. In addition to prompt information sharing, the agency staff problem-solve together and give feedback to one another. This means that children and young people benefit from the close relationships of those who are involved in their lives.

A social worker described his children's foster carers as 'outstanding' and stated that they are 'very supported' by 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: SC040334

Registered provider: Phoenix Community Care

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Responsible individual: Adrian Hawkes

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Inspector

Linda Kim-Newby: social care inspector



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