

# Five Rivers Family Placement Service

Bates Business Centre, Church Road, Harold Wood, Romford, Essex RM3 0JA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Five Rivers Child Care Limited is a national independent fostering agency that operates a number of fostering services in England. This independent fostering agency is a social enterprise, therefore it does not have shareholders but invests any profits in its own services.

The London and Essex branch of Five Rivers carries out the recruitment, assessment, training and approval of foster carers, and provides ongoing support to foster carers. The agency provides placement opportunities for children looked after by a number of local authorities.

At the time of this inspection, the London and Essex service had 38 fostering households, providing placements to 49 young people.

**Inspection dates:** 30 April to 4 May 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 **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 11 March 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:

- Children and young people make excellent progress from their starting points in all areas.
- Foster carers provide warm, nurturing care.
- Young people feel safe and learn to make safer choices due to the care that they receive.
- Supervising social workers provide excellent support and supervision to foster placements.
- The agency uses a range of innovative participation activities to gather and make use of the views of young people.
- Young people described in glowing terms the positive difference that being in their foster families has made to them.
- The agency makes good, thoughtful decisions when matching placements.
- The leadership and management team has excellent oversight of the service.
- The registered manager promotes a strong learning culture that holds the well-being of young people at the heart of decision-making.
- The agency panel is very experienced and provides constructive feedback on the quality of foster carer assessments.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Improve record keeping to better evidence practice in relation to supporting young people to make progress and stay safe.
- Ensure foster carers follow the agreed procedures in relation to the storing, recording and administration of medications.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that individual risk assessments clearly identify areas of vulnerability, levels of danger and the interventions in place to keep young people safe. (NMS 4.1)
- Ensure that foster carers follow the agency's agreed policy in relation to the administration and handling of medications. (NMS 6.1)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people consistently speak highly of the care and support that they receive in their foster families. One young person described how the 'love and support' that she experiences from her carers has made her feel 'like someone new'. She now has high aspirations for her future and is achieving excellent results in education.

Foster carers and young people appreciate the quality of support provided by the agency's supervising social workers. Foster carers say that support is there 'whenever I need it'. The agency works effectively with professional networks and advocates strongly to ensure that the needs and experiences of young people remain at the heart of care planning.

Foster carers access a wide range of face-to-face training. They describe this as relevant and thought provoking. They feel that it helps them to understand and meet the needs of young people. New foster carers described a thorough, thoughtful induction process. One foster carer said of the agency, 'they made sure I started at the right pace and didn't bite off more than I could chew'.

Foster carers actively seek and receive specialist support when caring for young people with more complex health and emotional needs. A psychologist provides expert insight and helpful strategies to support young people and placements to work through challenges. This means that some young people who previously struggled to settle in care have been able to benefit from long-term, stable placements.

The fostering panel is highly experienced. It makes recommendations to approve foster carers only if members are satisfied that they have full information based on good-quality, evidenced-based assessments.

Young people experience warm, nurturing care. They are encouraged to learn the life skills necessary to thrive in adulthood. They gain the confidence to become more independent, because they have a secure, safe base from which to take chances and learn from mistakes. Young people often remain with their foster families beyond 18 and many return to visit their foster carers long after they have left.

Foster carers understand the importance to young people of contact with birth families. They work hard to develop positive relationships with parents and relatives. They provide emotional and practical support to promote positive contact.

The agency is particularly innovative and proactive in seeking young people's views and involving them in service development. Young people take part in the recruitment and training of foster carers. They have also created a range of materials to help, inform and support young people who are new to fostering. The media projects that young people have undertaken have made an excellent contribution to helping to promote diversity and equality within the service.

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

Foster carers know the young people well and display appropriate levels of worry and concern about their safety and well-being. They share concerns promptly with the agency and placing social workers. Foster carers take effective action to help young people to make safer choices. However, individual risk assessment records do not always reflect the quality of help and support that is provided in practice.

Agency social workers work in partnership with professional networks to safeguard young people. Foster carers and agency staff report that 'they are never alone when facing difficult situations'. There is always a social worker and a manager on call to provide advice and support.

Young people are generally well behaved and benefit from secure, caring relationships in their foster homes. Foster carers are currently undertaking extensive training in therapeutic childcare. They use positive strategies to encourage positive behaviour. Young people benefit from healthy lifestyles, structured routines, fair boundaries and positive relationships with carers. This has a positive impact on their experience of care, health and safety. It also helps them to make progress in education.

Young people receive the treatment and support that they need to stay healthy. However, foster carers do not consistently follow the agency's procedures in relation to the handling and administration of medication.

The agency operates robust procedures in relation to the recruitment of agency staff and foster carers. It carries out statutory checks at agreed intervals to ensure that no unsuitable adults gain access to children and young people. Supervising social workers regularly conduct checks, including unannounced visits, to ensure that young people are safe in their foster homes.

Young people know how to raise concerns and are regularly consulted on how they are experiencing care. The registered manager responds well to concerns and complaints. He ensures that concerns are followed up and that any learning from mistakes is used to improve practice.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The registered manager is suitably experienced and qualified for the role. He has transformed the service since the last inspection and successfully addressed the significant number of requirements and recommendations arising from the last inspection.

The agency has significantly increased both the number of carers and young people in placement. Without exception, staff and carers commented on the improved levels of support and direction provided by the registered manager. As a result of this outstanding leadership, more young people are making better progress in all areas and making safer choices. This is particularly true of those young people who

present more complex behaviours.

Placing social workers and commissioners single out the registered manager for praise. They consistently report on his professionalism, knowledge and ability to keep a strong focus on the best interests of young people.

The registered manager has excellent monitoring systems in place and has keen oversight of practice. Foster carers and agency staff comment that he is accessible, listens to their views and provides excellent support and advice.

The responsible individual of the service provides close support to the registered manager. He maintains good oversight of the quality of care. They work effectively as a team and ensure that strategic decisions are informed by frontline practice and the experiences of young people.

The leadership team has high expectations of staff and carers. Leaders have high aspirations for the quality of care provided and the outcomes for young people. The agency is particularly innovative in the way that it encourages young people to participate in its service. Leaders are involved in service development and also contribute to the national agenda through media projects and attendance at national consultation events.

The practice and culture of understanding and celebrating diversity are outstanding. The agency works with carers and young people to actively challenge discriminatory behaviours. It creates a safe space for all to discuss how their own beliefs and values may influence decisions and behaviour. The young people have produced a range of media resources to explore and discuss barriers to inclusion. To illustrate but one example, their short film on 'careism' explores the often unhelpful attitudes that young people in care face. It highlights personal experiences and gives a helpful insight into how young people have overcome difficulties and achieved success.

## **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 difference 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:** SC036616

**Registered provider:** Five Rivers Child Care Limited

**Registered provider address:** 47 Bedwin Street, Salisbury SP1 3UT

**Responsible individual:** Martin Leitch

**Registered manager:** Gordon Chinchen

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## **Inspector(s)**

Lee Kirwin, social care inspector





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