

SWIIS Foster Care Limited

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Unit 5, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, Leeds LS12 6AJ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

A private provider operates this agency. The agency provides foster care placements for several placing authorities. A range of placements are provided, including short-term, long-term and respite care. The agency is responsible for the recruitment, training and support of foster carers.

At the time of the inspection, the agency was providing placements for 45 children and young people, in 34 foster carer households.

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since December 2015.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 June 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: 17 August 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's and young people's individual needs are met in high-quality, stable, secure and carefully matched foster placements. The children's and young people's positive attachments with foster carers and birth children develop from firm foundations.
- Children and young people feel valued, loved and treated like family.
- The agency is highly responsive and promotes good working-together practices with placing authorities and other services, particularly when children and young people present with risk-taking behaviours.
- Children's and young people's education is actively promoted. Many make good progress from their starting points in their educational placement.
- Children and young people enjoy a wide range of fun, exciting and varied social activities that broaden their minds and create lasting memories.
- Foster carers receive regular supervision and support, including mandatory and bespoke training, which helps them to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.
- Leaders and managers are visible, strong and fair, and have effective oversight of the agency. Their child-centred experience and knowledge help them to understand the service's strengths and to tackle weakness. This supports improvement in outcomes for children and young people.
- Local authority social workers and other professionals speak highly of the communication with the agency. They report very good-quality foster placements and placement support.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Overall, children's and young people's individual needs are met in high quality, stable and carefully matched foster placements. Children's and young people's specific cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic needs are promoted, which supports their positive identity and self-esteem. A foster carer said that she tells the child in her care how beautiful she is every day.

Children and young people feel valued, loved and treated like family. A foster carer said: 'We are able to offer our teen the family demographic he will remember from a secure and safe time in his life. Our younger sibling group is loving life within our family unit. We have built secure bonds through activities and a loving and stable relationship.' Consequently, many children and young people thrive from their starting points, having formed some enduring bonds with their foster carers and birth children. The quality of the relationships between children and young people, their foster carers, the manager and agency staff are positively engaging. Regular social events involving children and young people, foster families and agency staff are inclusive, and provide happy occasions and fond memories for all.

The agency and foster carers are highly aspirational for children and young people to reach their educational potential. All children and young people have an educational placement with an average attendance of 97.85%, compared to the national average of 95.7%, with good attainment levels. Foster carers report some excellent relationships with schools and take an active interest in children's and young people's progress. Proactive and effective education support from the agency's education officer, direct and indirect, supports the agency and foster carers to advocate on behalf of the children and young people, ensuring that they have the appropriate information and support. Furthermore, the education officer is raising the awareness of agency staff and foster carers about issues such as the exclusion process and personal education plans. Potential barriers to children's and young people's learning is overcome by the proactive interventions.

There are currently no young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Young people accessing further education and training are helped to reach their goals, further improving their future economic prospects. Children and young people are prepared so that they develop independence skills irrespective of their age, which enables them to do more for themselves.

The agency supports foster carers to help the children and young people live healthy lifestyles and improve their physical, emotional and psychological health outcomes through their access to primary and specialist healthcare services. Children and young people who have additional needs are well supported by their foster carers. The carers are knowledgeable about specific health conditions and the impact these may have on the child's or young person's emotional and psychological well-being and behaviour. Such insightful knowledge and experience helps foster carers to inform the children's and young people's care plans in conjunction with other

professionals. The advice and support offered to older young people helps them to make informed choices and understand issues around sexual health, drugs, alcohol and smoking.

Young people who are exploring their personal identity receive the right help to access services without judgement. Clinical support offers foster carers consultation opportunities to help them to stabilise placements through difficult times. Despite the setbacks experienced by some foster carers due to challenging placements, they demonstrate huge amounts of resilience. Integral to achieving this level of resilience is the support of the agency, which listens to and supports foster carers, and enables them to persevere under such circumstances.

Placement support is highly effective in engaging children and young people in a range of fun and interesting activities. A placement support worker provides excellent support to foster carers, maintaining placements and making a significant contribution to improving children's and young people's progress and experiences. Although placement stability is high, unplanned endings have been handled with care by the agency to minimise any distress to children and families. The registered manager's analysis of the reasons for placement breakdowns, her subsequent recommendations and the holding of disruption meetings inform service developments.

Children and young people enjoy a wide range of social activities, such as holidays to close and faraway places, roller skating, horse-riding, various sports, surfing and other exciting and creative activities that provide hours of enrichment. These activities also broaden children's and young people's minds, create lasting memories and allow them to excel. Foster carers actively support and facilitate children's and young people's contact with families and other important people in their lives, but only if this is an appropriate and safe option.

Consultation and participation with children and young people is excellent. The participation group is in its third year and remains motivated to promote the credible voice of the child. The group was involved in the recruitment of the registered manager and staff. The group has also recorded an impressive rap about their experiences in foster care. The group supports a range of social and celebratory events that inform service developments in fun and effective ways. Members of the participation group recently visited the organisation's fostering agency in a different region to help the children, young people and staff to develop their own participation group. Some exceptionally good ideas have come from the group and will help other children, young people, foster carers and their birth children, now and in the future.

Children and young people know how to complain, and issues raised by them are listened to, taken seriously and acted on.

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

Children and young people receive good help and protection. This is because the agency takes its safeguarding role very seriously by placing children and young

people firmly at the centre of safe practice. The agency's strength in being proactive promotes good working-together practices with other professionals. It also allows the agency to challenge other professionals without fear or favour when the safeguarding responses from other professionals have fallen short of expectations.

Suitable recruitment, vetting and assessment of prospective foster carer households ensure that children and young people live in safe and secure foster homes. Foster carers receive relevant safeguarding training that raises their awareness to promote and protect children and young people from the known risks to their health, safety and welfare.

Regular home visits to foster carer households include unannounced visits that make sure that the safety, standard and quality of placements remain high. Children and young people are observed during the visits. Safe-care policies clarify household expectations. Similarly, individual safe-care policies and robust risk-management plans help foster carers to implement the agreed strategies to manage some children's and young people's presenting risks associated with alcohol, drugs and other risky behaviours. Such interventions and strategies are maintaining some particularly challenging placements.

Children and young people are not regularly missing from their foster homes. Those who do go missing benefit from well-coordinated responses that reduce further incidents. No children and young people are known to be at risk of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation or extremism, although foster carers remain vigilant and will report any suspicions or concerns.

Some young people watched an agency-commissioned participatory play. It was facilitated by a theatre group examining a range of social, health and well-being issues, such as grooming, child sexual exploitation, domestic violence and homophobia. Watching the play had the desired effect of helping the young people think about their safety. Typical comments included: 'Makes you think about being safe and looking after yourself.' Also, 'I wouldn't share photos on my phone' and 'It was good.'

Children and young people can talk to their foster carers about any worries or concerns, as well as identifying other trusted adults. The representatives of the children's and young people's participation group express no hesitation in talking to a trusted adult if a child or young person discloses concerning information to them.

Foster carers rarely use physical intervention to manage children's and young people's challenging behaviours. However, when intervention has taken place, the registered manager closely scrutinises the incident reports to satisfy herself that the interventions are safe and proportionate. Additional support is provided to foster carers in the event of any gaps in their knowledge arising from the interventions. This protects the children and young people from harm and their foster carers from the risk of allegations.

Allegations against foster carers or concerns about standards of care in fostering households are sensitively and fairly handled by the agency. Rigorous annual review

mechanisms show how the agency remains certain that children and young people live with foster carers who can keep them safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are visible, strong and fair. Leadership is highly aspirational, supportive, creative and resourceful, and keeps children and young people at the heart of service delivery. The high standards are promoted throughout, which is improving the lives of many children and young people living with foster carers. A professional stakeholder said that the agency is 'a good, professional organisation'. Another professional described the agency as, 'philanthropic', referring to its caring and ethical characteristics.

A qualified, experienced and committed registered manager effectively and efficiently manages the agency. She has raised the bar by successfully tackling some historical staffing issues and inconsistent practice from some social workers and foster carers that did impact on the quality of service. A newly developed, skilled, competent, motivated and stable staff team shows passion and commitment to deliver a high-quality service that helps children and young people to achieve the best possible care and outcomes.

The agency staff speak highly about the quality of management support and the registered manager's open door policy. Agency staff report good peer support and regular team meetings that keep everyone up to date with the current fostering households. Manageable caseloads and the use of independent social workers to carry out initial visits and prospective foster carer assessments help the staff to focus on supporting carers as well as they do. The staff's knowledge about foster carers and the children and young people in their care is impressive, helping the staff to be responsive to the carers', children's and young people's needs. Regular supervision, annual appraisal and training opportunities inform the staff's practice. Staff feel that they work very well as a team. One agency social worker said: 'This is the best job I've ever had. We care.' Another said: 'The team that I work for embody the true meaning of teamwork. It is a pleasure to work at an office that is well organised, supportive, and caring of staff. Our team put children first.'

All foster carers, without exception, report excellent advice and support from the agency during stable times, and during extremely challenging or difficult times. A foster carer said: 'My supervising social worker is very supportive, but the whole team is available if necessary.' The foster carers confirm that they feel like part of the team and feel respected. Foster carers value the on-call out-of-hours facility and training and development opportunities. New initiatives, such as the introduction of the Connect group, bridge newly approved foster carers to the agency and support and nurture them to transition into the larger foster carer support group.

A range of effective management monitoring systems and insightful analysis of data and consultation feedback inform service developments and help the registered manager to identify any trends and patterns, and quickly rectify any shortfalls. Concerns about the standards of care, complaints, and serious incidents are taken

very seriously and resolved in a manner that promotes children's and young people's best interests.

The registered manager meets at regular intervals with the local authority commissioner to ensure that there is a full appraisal of the placements. Children's and young people's social workers speak highly of the communication with the agency and report very good quality placements and placement support. One social worker said about one foster carer household: 'They provide top quality care. If we could clone them, we would.' Appropriate action taken by the agency ensures that there is effective challenge to local authorities when they fall short in their duty to supply relevant care planning information to the agency. This includes following escalation procedures and referring to commissioners.

The fostering panel is robust. It is chaired by an experienced and competent chair who, along with the strong agency panel advisor, enables the panel to carry out its quality assurance role with rigour and appropriate challenge. They will not make a recommendation without full clarity of information so are not afraid to disagree or defer recommendations to the agency decision maker. The administration for the panel is efficient. Coherent panel minutes give a good insight into the panel proceedings, the quality of the assessments and reviews, and the rationale for making the recommendations.

The agency shows capacity to improve as it has met the recommendations raised at the previous inspection.

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: SC358729

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Inspector

Jacqueline Malcolm: social care inspector



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