

Foundation Fostering Limited

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Acorn Business Centre, Office 7, Roberts End, Hanley Swan, Worcester WR8 0DN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This private agency has 37 carers in 22 fostering households who care for 31 children. Ofsted re-registered the agency in December 2017 because it changed to a limited company.

Inspection dates: 2 to 6 July 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

inadequate

The independent fostering agency is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: N/A

Overall judgement at last inspection: N/A

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The monitoring of the service is not sufficiently thorough to prevent and address shortfalls. This poses a potential risk to children's welfare.
- Quality assurance exercises lack the necessary analysis to improve the service systematically.
- Reports to Ofsted lack essential information, which impedes efficient regulation.
- Some foster carers have not undertaken mandatory training within reasonable timescales. The manager is not aware of the scale of this and other shortfalls, such as the training and appraisal of panel members and the supervision of 'second' carers.
- The records of staff recruitment procedures do not reflect best practice. This means that some of the decisions lack clarity.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Children experience positive placements in which they receive appropriate care.
- Children settle into their placements and form strong relationships with their carers. Consequently, children make good emotional progress, which helps them in all areas of their lives.
- Managers and staff work positively with other agencies.
- Children feel happy and safe with their carers.
- Several households have shown particular skill with children who arrive along in this country.
- All children receive educational support, and carers and staff help to remove obstacles to their education.
- Children take important steps towards independence by learning budgeting and other skills.

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
Provide foster parents with such training as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them. (Regulation 17(1)) This is with regard to such training being completed within a reasonable timescale.	15/11/2018
Ensure that panel oversees the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider. (Regulation 25(4)b) This is with regard to panel only making a recommendation when full details are available.	13/09/2018
Ensure there is a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and for improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency. (Regulations 35(1)(a)(b)) This is with regard to monitoring all the required matters in sufficient detail to meet the needs of the agency and Ofsted.	13/09/2018

Recommendations

- Ensure that appointees to the role of registered manager who do not have the management qualification enrol on a management training course within six months, and obtain a relevant management qualification within three years, of their appointment. (NMS 17.3)
- Ensure the fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. (NMS 19.2)
- Ensure that current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. (NMS 21.11)
This is with regard to recording all representations and complaints.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The overall experiences and progress of children require improvement because of organisational shortfalls. Nevertheless, the outcomes for most children are positive. The vast majority of children enjoy settled placements and good relationships with their carers. Children routinely express their views to carers, supervising social workers, local authority workers and directly to the agency. The adults listen to and act on children's opinions. For example, if children wish to move on, foster carers and staff liaise closely with the placing social workers to discuss and review this. Some children contribute their views about agency procedures, such as the staff recruitment processes. Similarly, staff and carers challenge other professionals to promote children's interest.

A significant proportion of carers look after children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. Often, carers are a suitable cultural or religious match for the children. The carers and supervising social workers show skill and understanding in this specialist area of work. In particular, they help children understand and accept their legal situations. This helps vulnerable children stay safe and avoid radicalisation by remaining engaged with their support networks. One placing social worker said, '[Our team has] a lot of experience of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and I'd place [with this agency] again in a heartbeat.' Carers help children from all backgrounds to understand the equal status of women in society.

Children, carers and social workers note the marked improvement in children's emotional well-being. This is the basis of their progress in areas such as physical health, social confidence and sporting skills. One boy said, '[I feel] warm and glowy here – the last placement felt sharp.' His social worker said that the foster carer immediately understood the boy's needs. The independent reviewing officer for another child noted the carer's emotional warmth. Children show good progress with their personal care skills and general health.

Foster carers act firmly to address issues and ensure that children make progress with their education. The use of the education premium and tutors, for example, has helped one young man get onto the college course of his choice, which was previously unlikely to occur. Another young person gives credit to his carer for helping him obtain an apprenticeship, which has substantially improved his prospects.

Carers help children prepare for independence. They are particularly sensitive to the fact that children from overseas may have no external support network when they reach adulthood. In order to help young people as much as possible, the agency is supporting a young man to create a package of advice for others who are preparing to move on.

Children receive acknowledgements for their success from the agency. For example,

one young man was pleased to receive a certificate when he passed his driving theory test. Carers are happy to see that the agency provides the same recognition to that of their own sons and daughters. Receiving praise improves children's self-esteem and confidence.

Nearby authorities have placed nearly all the children. No children have a poorer service because they live away from their home area.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The help and protection of children are not at a consistently good standard. Some carers have not completed the mandatory training about managing challenging behaviour, and the agency approved one household without carrying out sufficient checks on extended family members who stay in the foster home for long periods each year. These issues mean that children are not protected sufficiently well and contribute to this judgement area of requires improvement to be good.

Carers understand the risks faced by children and apply clear boundaries. For example, setting house rules, agreeing on home-times and the use of social media. In the vast majority of cases, this provides a secure base for children. Some older children choose to resist such efforts. In those cases, carers and staff liaise well with other agencies to arrange children's smooth transitions to other placements. Carers also help older children who are at risk of disappearing if they lose their right to remain in this country. One carer said, '[Whatever their backgrounds and reasons for being here], they are children first.'

The manager and his team keep track of the changing levels of risk that children face. This guides their efforts to provide extra support. For example, the manager speaks with children to help them understand issues and consequences. Foster carers appreciate this additional input to support children.

Children are rarely at risk of significant harm caused by going missing from their carers. When such incidents occur, carers liaise with other agencies to minimise the risk to children. No incidents of radicalisation have occurred, and carers are aware of this sort of threat. Carers approach difficult subjects sensitively. One carer judged that her foster child would benefit from the support of another adult. This simple step served to remove the boy's fears.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

The agency is growing steadily through personal recommendation. Independent assessors bring new carers to panel promptly. However, in one case, the decision-maker agreed to an approval and a child was placed in a household about which the agency had insufficient information. In order to complete the assessment within timescales, the agency did not satisfy itself about the relationships in the household or the backgrounds of all the family members. This is a serious shortfall that potentially compromises children's welfare.

Monitoring of the service by the manager and the responsible individual is not sufficiently strong. For example, they do not know whether panel members' training and appraisals are up to date, whether supervising social workers routinely speak to so-called second carers, or the scale of the shortfall in foster carers' training. This has led to deficits in both areas. The monitoring reports that Ofsted receive are not evaluative and omit important information. In addition, the lack of transparency hinders Ofsted's ability to effectively regulate the service and contribute to its improvement.

The manager addresses concerns raised by carers and others adequately. However, the records of the actions taken in response and the outcome are not sufficient to show how the service has improved. Some concerns raised by other people, such as those from a local authority, did not trigger the complaints procedure at all.

The manager is an experienced registered social worker and manager. Ofsted registered him for this service in December 2017. He is undertaking the necessary diploma in management. The manager has taken managerial responsibility from the previous manager-owner, who remains actively involved. Staff are pleased with the management team and appreciate the recent improvements in communication. For example, the supervising social workers now meet regularly in the office.

From a legal perspective, this service started again in December 2017. Nevertheless, the manager has addressed the sole recommendation from the last inspection, which was in 2014. Consequently, the agency completes annual reviews of carers thoroughly. The agency is meeting its aims and objectives. In particular, the promotion of a core methodology is gradually taking hold. This means that staff and carers try to make children's placements as stable as possible. The agency promotes social diversity extensively. This is represented by its membership of the Equality Register and its approval by the Department of Work and Pensions as a 'disability confident employer'.

The operation of panel and the standard of panel minutes are satisfactory in most regards. However, the agency is considering refinements to the minutes to ensure that attendees' roles are clear.

The agency follows satisfactory recruitment practices that include the direct involvement of children. However, other evidence of best practice is missing. It is not clear from records who completed the interviews or when. The conclusions of the interview panel are not stated in the records. This means that the recruitment processes are not undertaken with sufficient care.

The manager has undertaken surveys of carers and children. These have given useful information about the quality of the service. However, although the manager acts on certain issues, it is not clear what lessons have arisen from these large exercises.

The agency has identified shortfalls in foster carers' completion of training. For example, some carers have not completed mandatory courses after several years. Although the agency has improved its expectations of carers, there is a shortfall. The

agency panel, reviewing officer, supervising social workers and the manager are gradually addressing these matters, for example by giving carers personalised assistance.

Staff keep track of each child's progress and are working on more sophisticated ways of recording this. When necessary, foster households receive valuable additional support from the social work assistant or sessional workers. This improves children's social and recreational skills. As a result, one child now uses public transport and has joined a cricket club. Another has progressed further and manages his own budget.

Carers are predominantly pleased with the service. However, some express dissatisfaction with the training programme, which the manager is gradually improving. One new carer reflected the views of the majority by saying, 'They [staff] are genuine – it's the most important thing. I can be open, which fills me with optimism.' Carers enjoy meeting each other and sharing ideas and solutions to children's difficulties. However, the support groups have ceased. The manager has set up a new programme to resume this source of support to carers.

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

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Inspector

David Morgan, social care inspector



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