

Fostering Support Group: London Office

Fostering Support Group Limited
5th Floor, Yeoman House, 63 Croydon Road, London SE20 7TS
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

First established in 1989, Fostering Support Group provides fostering services in the Kent and London area.

The agency provides emergency, short- and long-term foster placements for children of all ages who have a range of care needs. They also provide parent and child placements.

There are currently 25 fostering households with 35 foster carers. There are a total of 25 children and young people in placement.

The registered manager of the agency was registered with Ofsted in September 2017.

Inspection dates: 30 July to 3 August 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: 28 September 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:

- The registered manager is very experienced; she is ambitious, sets high standards and has a clear vision for developing the service.
- Foster carers are committed, resilient and skilled. They provide stable placements and produce positive outcomes for young people.
- Young people are happy in their foster families. They feel safe, well cared for and part of the family.
- Agency staff provide excellent support to young people and to foster carers.
- The fostering panel supports the agency to ensure that high standards are maintained in respect of the recruitment and approval of foster carers.
- Placing authorities appreciate the high standards of care provided to young people. They value the professionalism and dedication of agency staff.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the agency. Concerns are quickly identified and action is taken to promote the welfare and safety of young people.
- Some young people have made exceptional progress as a result of the care and support they receive.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Improve management monitoring systems to enable better oversight of the educational outcomes for young people.
- Ensure that foster carers are routinely trained and receive guidance when caring for young people who have health conditions that can result in serious risks to health.
- Provide young people with accessible profiles of foster families.
- Update the young people's guide to make it more relevant, welcoming and accessible.
- Ensure that foster carers' supervision records demonstrate how they are supported to help young people achieve their full potential in education.

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

Recommendations

- **Managing effectively and monitoring**
Ensure that systems are in place to monitor all records to ensure compliance with the agency's policies in order to identify patterns and trends. (National Minimum Standards (NMS) 25.2) In particular, monitor how often supervising social workers speak to young people alone, their attendance in education, how often return home interviews take place when young people go missing and identify when key documents, such as personal education plans, care plans and education, health and care plans are not on case files, and take all reasonable steps to address any shortfalls in these areas.
- **Promoting good health and well-being**
Ensure that foster carers are provided with training and guidance to provide appropriate care if looking after children with complex health needs. (NMS 6.8) In particular, any health issues that carry significant risk should be identified in the young person's risk assessment with a clear plan as to how to reduce risk and respond to crisis.
- **Preparation for a placement**
Child-friendly foster carer profiles should be produced to provide information to young people prior to placement. (NMS 11.1)
- **Statement of purpose and children's guide**
Update the children's guide to make it more accessible, relevant and welcoming to children. Include information about staying put arrangements. (NMS 16.3)
- **Promoting educational attainment**
Agency social work intervention should demonstrate a clear focus on educational attainment, such as identifying strengths, and subjects where more help and support may be needed. (NMS 8.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Young people are healthy. They are encouraged to make healthy lifestyle choices and receive treatment and advice whenever they need it. Young people participate in a range of positive activities. They are encouraged to develop and pursue interests and hobbies. This inspection was carried out during the summer holidays and many of the young people were away, enjoying holidays and days out with their foster families.

All of the young people have a suitable education placement and the vast majority are achieving positive results. A number of young people have part-time jobs in the holidays and this prepares them well for future employment. Despite these positive outcomes, foster carers' supervision records do not always demonstrate that agency social workers have a clear focus on educational achievement. This is a missed opportunity for young people to do even better in their education.

Young people feel included as part of the family. One young person described how being part of the family has 'made everything better'. A parent living with her baby in foster care described her foster carer as 'a really caring person – anybody would be lucky to have her'. The foster carer summed up their relationship as 'this is the daughter I never had'. A parent of a child living in foster care said, 'His carers are amazing, they turned his life around.' She went on to say that the foster carers ensure that she is kept informed and involved in decisions about her son's care.

Foster carers are consistently positive about the support that they receive from the agency social workers and manager. One described her supervising social worker as 'absolutely brilliant'. Foster carers report that the agency social workers are responsive, knowledgeable, respectful and extremely helpful. They gave several examples of their workers going above and beyond to provide high levels of support when things get difficult.

Young people report that they feel listened to. Their feedback about their experiences in foster care is consistently positive. However, the views of young people are not always obtained to inform foster carer annual reviews. The agency is working hard to find innovative ways to ensure that young people get to share their views to improve this situation.

Young people have a positive experience of family life and are encouraged to develop skills for independence. Foster carers teach independence skills at the right level for each young person and provide a safe space for them to make mistakes and build confidence. Some young people stay with their foster families beyond the age of 18. Most young people move on from foster care in a planned way and many of them continue to return to their foster carers for support long after they have left.

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

Young people report feeling safe in their foster families and the communities they live in. Young people seldom go missing or abscond. When they do, the foster carers take prompt action to find them and encourage their safe return. The agency works effectively in partnership with the professional network in order to protect young people from harm. Foster carers report that in times of crisis the agency staff are responsive and provide the necessary advice and support whenever they need it.

The agency gives careful consideration to matching young people to their foster families. They only place young people if they are confident that the foster family can meet their needs. Foster carers report that they get good information prior to placement and that they are never put under pressure to accept referrals. Young people coming into the service do not currently have access to foster family profiles. Matching would be further improved if this was put in place so that young people can better understand what to expect.

Foster carers have positive relationships with young people and show genuine care and affection. Young people feel a sense of belonging and this helps them work with the rules and expectations in the home. Foster carers stick with young people through difficult times. Young people appreciate this; they enjoy stability in their foster family and make safer choices as a result of this.

The agency works closely with child and adolescent mental health workers. This means that they have a good understanding of each young person's needs. They use this understanding to find helpful ways of supporting young people who are struggling to adjust to living away from their birth families. A placing social worker described how foster carers worked through difficulties and made a huge difference to the young person living with them. He feels that this young person, who previously experienced several placement breakdowns, now has a much more positive future ahead of him as a result of living as part of a caring, stable family.

Foster carers have excellent training. They understand the risks and vulnerabilities that young people face. They are vigilant and take prompt action to keep young people safe. Foster carers were very positive about recent training that they had undertaken on how gangs operate, the way young people can be groomed and how to intervene to keep young people safe. They now feel better equipped to spot the dangers and support young people to stay safe in the community.

The registered manager and supervising social workers are experienced, qualified practitioners. They have good oversight of safeguarding practice and provide high levels of support when young people are at risk.

The agency maintains high standards in relation to recruiting staff and foster carers. They undertake detailed assessments and checks. This ensures that only people who are suitable and competent are permitted to provide care and support for young people. An experienced fostering panel provides a high level of scrutiny to ensure that these standards are maintained.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager is a very experienced practitioner and manager. She is a qualified social worker and holds a level 5 diploma in the leadership and management of social care. The registered manager is confident, competent and provides constructive challenge when necessary to agency staff and the wider professional network.

The registered manager is an excellent role model and leads an effective team. She advocates strongly for young people and ensures that the needs of young people remain central to care planning.

Foster carers and agency staff consistently describe the service in positive terms and feel that it is improving. They describe the registered manager as being accessible, knowledgeable and supportive.

The registered manager knows the foster carers and the young people well. She closely monitors placements and has good oversight of safeguarding practice. The registered manager ensures that foster families provide high standards of care. Management monitoring systems do not currently take into account all available information, such as education attendance and whether relevant plans for young people are on file. This would enable the service to spot any trends and respond to any shortfalls.

The registered manager is an effective strategic leader. She advocates strongly for the service within the wider company. The registered manager has ensured that the fostering services have a stronger presence within the company and that they are more closely linked in order to share good practice and support one another. She links closely with national fostering forums to ensure that she stays up to date with practice developments and legislation.

The registered manager has a clear vision and a strong child focus to further improve the service and outcomes for young people. She has developed a service improvement plan to provide more flexible, specialist support to carers and young people. The registered manager has introduced new systems to gather the views of young people. She has also improved the quality of training in response to feedback from foster carers.

All areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been addressed. Practice in relation to recruitment checks has been strengthened. The registered manager now makes good use of regular, formal supervision with her line manager. In a relatively short time in post, she has made a positive and significant impact on the service.

The young people report positive experiences of living with their foster families and make positive progress in all areas. Foster carers feel welcomed and a sense of belonging as part of a 'family'. They value the support provided by the agency and make excellent use of foster carer support groups to learn from each other and share their insight with the agency.

Supervising social workers value the supervision, training and support that they get. They have a strong focus on young people and work with sensitivity and skill to make sure that families can offer high standards of protection and care.

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: SC388487

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Inspector

Lee Kirwin, social care inspector



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