

# Sankofa Care Fostering Services

Sankofa Care Ltd

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a private independent fostering agency. It provides a range of fostering placements, including emergency, short- and long-term and bridging placements and parent and child placements.

At the time of this inspection, 21 fostering households provide care for 26 children and young people.

The fostering service has been without a registered manager since December 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 23 to 27 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:** 27 July 2015

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency requires improvement to be good because:

- The agency has been without a registered manager for over 12 months and this has been detrimental to the management of the service.
- Senior leaders do not understand the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. They have not addressed previous requirements and recommendations.
- Leaders do not have systems and processes in place to monitor the progress and experiences of children.
- Staff do not complete good enough matching and assessment processes prior to placing children with foster carers.
- The quality assurance is weak.
- Important documents, including the statement of purpose and the children's guide, are not up to date or used effectively.
- Some foster carers have not received the training, advice or guidance needed to meet the complex needs of parent and child placements.
- There are gaps in the agency's training programme.
- Managers fail to notify Ofsted of all serious events or concerns as required.

The independent fostering agency's strengths:

- Many children have made positive progress in relation to engaging in their education and improving their behaviour.
- Children are safe.
- The agency has recruited an experienced fostering professional to assess the agency's monitoring systems and standards of practice.
- Foster carers provide good-quality care and support to children who, in turn, make significant progress while in their care. Many children build positive and trusting relationships with their carers.
- The scrutiny and quality assurance role of the panel is robust, with records evidencing the rationale used when recommendations are made.

## 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— Keep under review and where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children's guide.</p> <p>Notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days and if the children's guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child's age and understanding).</p> <p>(Regulation 4 (a)(b)(c))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must review the statement of purpose and children's guide to ensure that both documents contain the correct information.</p>	22/10/2018
<p>The registered provider must appoint an individual to manage the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered provider must notify the Chief Inspector without delay of— the name of any person appointed in accordance with this regulation, and the date on which the appointment is to take effect.</p> <p>(Regulation 6 (1)(3)(a)(b))</p>	22/10/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>In particular, the fostering service provider must— Implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents.</p> <p>(Regulation 16 (1)(2)(a))</p>	22/10/2018

<p>The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.</p> <p>(Regulation 17 (1))</p>	22/10/2018
<p>The fostering service provider must ensure that all persons employed by them receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal.</p> <p>(Regulation 21 (4)(a))</p> <p>Specifically, when weaknesses are identified in an employee's performance, such as completing quality assessments, the fostering agency must ensure that the employee receives relevant training in a timely manner.</p>	22/10/2018
<p>The registered provider must maintain a system for–</p> <p>Monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>Improve the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purposes of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority.</p> <p>(Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b) (2)(3))</p>	22/10/2018
<p>If any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 7 takes place in relation to a fostering agency, the registered person must without delay notify the persons or bodies indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table.</p> <p>Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing.</p> <p>Regulation 36 (1)(2))</p> <p>Specifically, the registered person must, without delay, notify the regulator on the outcome of any investigation in a timely manner.</p>	22/10/2018

## Recommendations

- The fostering service must ensure that children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. (National Minimum Standards (NMS) 1.6)

In particular, ensure that the complaints system is easily accessible to children and provide for access to the Children's Commissioner.

- The fostering service must ensure that children are carefully matched to foster placements and that foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9). (NMS 11.2)
- The fostering service's written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer must set out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports must be accurate, up to date and include evidence based on information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information. The reports must be prepared, signed and dated by a social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager or another of the provider's fostering teams. (NMS 13.7)
- The fostering service must ensure that reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carer's ongoing suitability to foster. (NMS 13.8)
- The fostering service must ensure that areas of concern, or need for additional information, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review. (NMS 13.9)
- The fostering service must ensure that all foster carers, including all members of a household who are approved foster carers, are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, support and Development Standards for Foster Care. (NMS 20.2)
- The fostering service must ensure that there is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service. (NMS 23.1)
- The fostering service must ensure that any staff involved in assessing the suitability of persons to be foster carers are social workers, have experience of foster care and family placements work and are trained in assessment. (NMS 23:6)

## Inspection judgements

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

Children make good and steady progress and enjoy residing in their respective homes. Many have developed strong attachments with their foster families and have a very strong sense of belonging. Children develop good self-esteem and self-confidence.

Children receive personalised care that meets their individual needs and they are cared for safely. A social worker commented, 'X [child] is doing extremely well. For the first time he is flourishing in all aspects of his life. X's self-esteem has grown and he is now achieving in education and is learning to care about others.'

Foster carers understand the identified needs of children and how best these can be met. Children say that they feel listened to and have opportunities to participate in placement decision-making. Children are routinely supported and encouraged by their foster carers to attend their children looked after reviews and to participate fully in these meetings. This assists children's understanding of decision-making and planning for their futures.

Children benefit from living in stable placements. Sibling groups are able to remain together, which provides continuity and consistency in their lives. There is support for 'staying put arrangements' allowing for those children reaching the age of 18 to remain with their foster families.

Where there is placement instability, appropriate alternative placements are promptly identified and transitions are managed in a sensitive way. However, practice has not been consistently strong in matching children with foster carers who have the experience and knowledge to meet their needs. Furthermore, staff do not routinely evidence the rationale for matching children. For example, children with high levels of need have been placed with newly approved and inexperienced foster carers who had received little training.

The progress that children make in areas such as health and education is positive, despite carers not being able to evidence the appropriate paperwork. Foster carers value healthy lifestyles and promote exercise and healthy diets. Children who have learning and physical disabilities live with foster families who advocate for them and ensure that they have the right equipment and resources.

Children regularly attend school or alternative educational provisions. Children make good progress from their starting points and for some young people this progress is remarkable. For example, one child who was assessed as unable to cope with any educational provision due to his behaviour has now obtained a university place. Another child with significant literacy difficulties has recently had a short story published. Foster carers have demonstrated a strong sense of advocacy on behalf of children. However, the agency fails to formally monitor the attendance, progress and

achievements of children in education.

Children are able to pursue and enjoy a range of age-appropriate activities that promote the development of their confidence, social skills and social relationships. These include attending football and boxing clubs, involvement in dance clubs and going to the library.

Children are able to maintain family ties and this helps them to feel pride in their identity. Foster carers and the agency support children to develop appropriate relationships and have contact with significant people in their lives.

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

The fostering service considers safeguarding as a priority for all placements and holds this as central to its functioning and operation. The agency operates a culture of openness and trust.

Children have good relationships with foster carers and seek their advice, guidance and support when they are worried or concerned.

Children are provided with information on how to make a complaint if they are unhappy about any aspects of the care they receive. The children's guide advises them to contact a manager if they wish to complain. However, the guide does not currently include the contact details of external support agencies or information on the Children's Commissioner. Despite this shortfall, the agency is committed to helping children to access services that will advocate on their behalf.

A review of children's risk assessments highlighted a lack information on known and potential risks and they did not consistently include clear actions for foster carers to take. Staff do not routinely evidence how they assess and manage risk. As a result, the fostering service fails to provide carers with robust risk assessments to help them care for children. This has often led to the criminalisation of children where foster carers have used the police to manage children's poor behaviour.

Ofsted is not regularly informed of significant events that relate to the welfare and protection of children. When significant events are reported, the investigation and conclusion are not robust or timely due to incomplete safeguarding investigations.

The assessment of foster carers is an area of weakness. The fostering panel chairperson informed the inspector that assessment reports have not always provided sufficient information or analysis. This means that the panel members are unable to conclude that the potential carer(s) would be suitable for the role. In this respect, the fostering panel has played an effective role in ensuring that unsuitable applicants are not approved as foster carers. There have been concerns that assessments of some foster carers have not always considered all the information that is available.

The fostering service reviews the approval of foster carers on an annual basis.

Despite this, the first reviews are not presented in a timely manner and some reviews have failed to provide good enough information on safeguarding concerns.

Supervising social workers carry out announced visits to foster carers' homes on at least a monthly basis. However, with the continual change in staff, unannounced visits do not always happen within a year. The lack of regular unannounced visits increases risks to children in placement.

Foster carers understand and follow the procedures in the event of children going missing. Children are given advice and guidance on how to keep safe, and this includes keeping safe on the internet.

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

Since the last inspection in July 2015, there has been inconsistent management of the service. In the past two years, two managers have been appointed, but subsequently left prior to completing their registration to be registered as the registered manager with Ofsted. This has led to instability, inconsistency and ineffective management of the service. At the time of this inspection, the fostering service had not identified a suitable person to have oversight of the service. If this situation is not addressed, it will increase the negative impact on the fostering service and raise the risks to the welfare of children.

Staff are not well managed and leaders have not been clear in their communication with staff. This results in staff being confused about roles, responsibilities and boundaries.

Leaders are yet to devise and maintain effective systems and processes that provide managers with sufficient overview of the service's function and operation. Leaders have also failed to evidence the agency's internal quality assurance review process.

There have been significant delays in providing some essential training for foster carers. This included assessments, report writing and training for foster carers who are looking after complex parent and child placements. The inspector also identified that a number of foster carers had not achieved the training support and development standards within the required timescales. Despite this, foster carers said that the quality of training is improving, particularly now that an external trainer has been identified.

The fostering service fails to ensure that supervising social workers have personal development plans in place. As a consequence, managers were unable to evidence the provision of a training programme that supports the learning and development needs of supervising social workers.

Staff receive regular supervision. However, the relevant records do not evidence the promotion of staff development, reflection or learning. In addition, there is no evidence of managers holding staff to account for their practice.



Foster carers access a wide range of support. Foster carer representatives support, facilitate and encourage other foster carers. They help their peers to develop and improve their practice and advocate on their behalf. Monthly support group meetings, a buddy system and easy access to other foster carers are valued and have a positive impact.

Foster carers spoke well of supervising social workers and their commitment to children and themselves. However, they found the continual movement of staff caused instability and left them feeling unsure of procedures. A foster carer gave an example where they had been informed by one supervising social worker that the redecoration of a child's bedroom was suitable but was subsequently told by another supervising social worker to make changes.

Staff have been unsuccessful in ensuring that all foster carers produce appropriately written logs that provide an accurate and up-to-date account of the progress of children. Managers informed the inspector that training is in place to address this shortfall; however, poor and incomplete recording by some foster carers continues. The impact of this is significant as children may not have access to a full and complete record of their experience while living in care.

Another consequence of foster carers' poor recording is that it impacts negatively on managers' ability to track individual children's progress in key areas such as education and emotional well-being. The tracking of children's progress and experiences is therefore not effective.

The fostering panel is the key strength of the agency. It functions well and provides a clear audit of the assessment of foster carers. The fostering panel has a very experienced chairperson and decisions made by the panel adhere to clear procedures. Extensive consideration is given to the approval of foster carers. Clear reasons for recommendation of carers and their strengths are routinely reflected in the panel minutes.

The statement of purpose is not a true reflection of the work undertaken by the fostering service or the expertise, training and support given to foster carers.

Senior leaders do not recognise the strengths and weaknesses in the fostering service. In addition, the fostering service does not have a business continuity plan. An experienced fostering consultant has recently been recruited to evaluate the systems and processes of the fostering service with a view to develop a service development and business plan.

## **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:** SC386669

**Registered provider:** Sankofa Care Ltd

**Registered provider address:** 16 Edith Road, London SE25 5PQ

**Responsible individual:** Olivia Osei-Asibey

**Registered manager:** Post vacant

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## **Inspector**

Juanita Mayers, social care inspector



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