

Safehouses Fostering

Safehouses North Limited

The Fleece, 41 Oldham Road, Denshaw, Saddleworth, Oldham OL3 5SS

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Safehouses Fostering is a small fostering agency. The service recruits, approves and supports a range of carers who provide short and medium to long-term care for children of all ages. They also have carers who can accommodate parent and child placements.

On 9 November 2018 the agency was purchased by Five Rivers Child Care Limited. This is a national independent child care agency providing integrated care packages of fostering, residential, education and assessment and therapy services across England. Five Rivers is a social enterprise, with the founder still residing as CEO, reinvesting their surplus in children's futures.

At the time of the inspection, there were 32 approved fostering households with 40 children in placements. The manager has been in post since 2012 and was registered with Ofsted in 2014.

Inspection dates: 19 to 23 November 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The independent fostering agency provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the independent fostering agency contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 6 July 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- The quality and effectiveness of the service has remained consistently high since the last inspection in 2015.
- Foster carers, and the children and young people that they care for, receive high levels of support. This includes regular sessions with the agency's psychologist and play therapist.
- Children and young people live in safe and stable placements in which they make excellent progress due to being matched with the right foster carers, with whom they develop positive relationships.
- Work with birth parents is exceptional. The agency works collaboratively with parents and teaches them meaningful ways to nurture their children.
- The views and wishes of children and young people are highly valued and are acted on when it is appropriate to do so.
- All the children and young people placed are in full-time education and many are achieving well with their studies. Healthcare and social needs, especially those of a complex nature, are given high priority.
- Foster carers receive excellent support from the agency; new foster carers are prepared well for taking on the role.
- Children and young people are supported to maintain a positive understanding of their racial, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Children and young people and their carers receive practical and emotional support from the agency and enjoy regular social occasions to relax, have fun and celebrate alongside staff, leaders and managers.
- Leaders and managers are inspirational and passionate about improving the experiences and outcomes for all children and young people.
- Leaders and managers, carers and staff make excellent use of published research. As a result, children and young people make sustained progress in their overall development. Leaders, managers and key staff share their learning in research beyond the agency.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The outcomes for children and young people are consistently positive.

The children and young people build trusting, secure relationships with their carers, and are treated with respect. The children and young people develop positive relationships with the carers' children and other relatives. The children and young people have a voice in their placements and they are clearly listened to by the fostering agency.

Children and young people live in safe environments and make significant progress in their development, health, education and family relationships. Placements are extremely stable and very well supported, and very few unplanned endings occur. All the children and young people speak very positively about the agency and their placements. They told the inspectors:

- 'They [carers] are very helpful.'
- 'My carers are really kind and I get to go to the stables and do Morris dancing.'
- 'My carers are very approachable and easy to talk to and I like them a lot.'
- 'I am well looked after and treated very well.'

The agency uses specific models of therapeutic care to deliver support to foster carers. A trained psychologist and a therapy worker are available in the agency. They help the carers to understand how children and young people, who have experienced trauma, often show development and attachment difficulties and use behaviour as a means of communication. Carers benefit from this support, as they use methods of intervention that clearly help the children and young people. The carers can reflect on their own experiences and provide conscious and empathic support to the children and young people.

The commitment of existing and prospective foster carers to the youngsters in their care is exemplary. There are many examples of applicants who prepare well for their role and of how specific training is delivered to all carers. Foster carers, as a group and individually, told the inspectors that these arrangements give them confidence and a better understanding of the children and young people's needs.

The agency meets the specific identity and religious needs of children and young

people by expertly matching them with foster carers who fully understand and support these needs. Supervising social workers research specific family histories and cultures and they share this information with their colleagues in the agency. This benefits the children and young people and their families, strengthens relationships and enables them to keep their cultural heritage.

Work with birth parents is very good. The agency strives to support birth parents and to teach them meaningful ways to nurture their children. Children and young people benefit from sensitive, child-friendly life-story books, which explain their early life effectively and show their progress through their journey in placement.

The agency has effective partnership working with placing authority social workers and commissioning teams. This ensures that children's and young people's care plans accurately reflect their individual needs and that the care that they receive will enhance their life chances.

One social worker said: 'Children and young people really do benefit from stable placements and the all-round support they receive. The staff are always quick to respond to any requests made and they offer a very high level of support to the children and young people and foster carers.' And a commissioner said: 'I have had a good relationship with the agency and the registered manager over several years. I feel they work well and are thorough when it comes to assessing suitable carers and matching children and young people.'

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

The need to safeguard and protect children and young people from harm is prioritised across all aspects of practice. A strong safeguarding culture ensures that leaders and managers and staff regularly update their knowledge and skills in keeping children and young people safe. Foster carers share this commitment and quickly identify any signs that a child or young person could be at risk of harm.

A highly effective approach to risk management ensures that the agency places the need to minimise risk to children and young people at the forefront of practice. This begins from initial placement planning and continues into the actual placement itself. Social work staff are particularly effective and creative in ensuring that risk assessments and safer carer plans are individualised and extremely detailed. The staff team consistently reviews documentation through discussions with foster carers, children and young people to identify any necessary changes with regard to behaviours.

Leaders and managers, staff and foster carers are not complacent when children and young people appear to be settled and are not displaying concerning behaviours. Forward thinking is utilised to anticipate and develop strategies for preventing behaviour that could potentially cause a placement disruption. With the support of the staff, foster carers can maintain placements so that they can provide children and young people with planned endings, even in difficult situations.

Children and young people's lives are unquestionably improved by the agency's excellent safeguarding arrangements. Research-informed practice focuses on giving children and young people the best start in life through the formation of strong attachments. The focus on early permanence and matching ensures that children and young people have the security, stability, love and a strong sense of identity and belonging that enable them to flourish. A foster carer described the management oversight and the support in the child's case as, 'the whole package'.

Children and young people spoken with during the inspection all reported feeling safe and said that they feel able to discuss any issues or concerns with their foster carers or agency staff. Training opportunities for foster carers are impressive. Both foster carers and older young people living in foster families benefit from the agency's extensive training programme. Several foster carers reported that the quality of training is excellent, and that the agency will always supplement the programme with individual specialist training to support the needs of a child or young person.

The agency has an extremely well-considered staff and foster carer recruitment strategy with a strong emphasis on child protection and safeguarding matters. From the point of application, rigorous and effective checks prevent unsuitable people from being recruited or having the opportunity to harm children and young people, or place them at risk.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is exceptionally well led by a suitably qualified and experienced registered manager. She is supported by a manager who maintains oversight of the quality assurance and commissioning functions. The agency is sufficiently staffed by a stable and committed team of supervising social workers, teachers, fostering support workers, administrative workers and fostering panel members.

There is a good range of expertise among the panel membership. The fostering panel provides strong oversight. This results in an agency with highly competent and skilled carers, motivated to provide the highest standard of care to children and young people.

Staff and carers feel engaged, valued and supported. They report high levels of management support and training. This has resulted in the team and carers being recognised with national awards for the care they provide to the children and young people. Staff are consistent and highly committed to this agency. Staff and carers described the agency as a family. They are enthused by new and exciting initiatives.

The strengths and weaknesses of the agency are well known to the leaders and managers, as is evident in their comprehensive monitoring reports. These reports provide insight into how leaders and managers improve, develop and monitor the agency by responding to shortcomings that have been identified by children and young people, foster carers and the staff. The agency's practice is reflective, and

considers any changes to legislation, good practice guidance and up-to-date research. This is reflected in the fostering agency's website and the statement of purpose.

The agency's statement of purpose is a detailed and comprehensive document that accurately outlines the aims and objectives of the fostering service. The children's guides are well written and there are creative summaries, in DVD format, of the services provided by the agency. These are easy to understand and appropriately child-focused.

Following the last inspection, the agency has succeeded in addressing the one requirement and the three recommendations.

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: SC066668

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