

# Futures for Children

Futures for Children Limited

62 London Road, Southend-on-Sea SS1 1PG

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency is part of the Futures Group. The agency provides support to 27 children and young people in the Essex, Suffolk and East London areas. The agency currently has 23 foster households. The fostering agency provides task-centred fostering, long-term placements, permanent placements and parent and child placements.

The fostering agency is in the process of moving its offices from Southend to Chelmsford. The manager has been registered since November 2015.

**Inspection dates:** 12 to 16 November 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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:** 29 June 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 children are consistently very positive about their carers and feel valued members of the family.
- The children feel prioritised and listened to, and they are able to talk about any worries that they have with their carers.
- The children make good progress due to the help and support that they receive.
- The children flourish in stable and nurturing homes where they feel safe and loved.
- The children experience positive and planned transitions, and many stay with their foster families into young adulthood.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Return home interviews are not always carried out when a child has been missing from home.
- Matching information is not sufficiently detailed or evaluated.
- Some carers require further training.
- Agency records are not consistently maintained to a high standard.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure where a child goes missing and there is concern for their welfare, or at the request of a child who has been missing, the fostering service arranges a meeting in private between the child and the responsible authority to consider the reasons for their going missing. (National Minimum Standards 5.9)

In particular, establish a system to prompt the arrangement of a return home interview after each missing from care event.

- Ensure the fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required. (National Minimum Standards 15.1)

- Support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. (National Minimum Standards 20.8)

In particular, ensure that all carers undertake training in first aid, behaviour management, medication, safeguarding, prevention of extremism and identifying and responding to child sexual exploitation.

- Ensure staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (National Minimum Standards 26.2)

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The agency has a thorough assessment process which ensures that only suitable people are approved as foster carers. The carers are child focused and are supported well by agency staff. The carers and agency staff work together with professionals to ensure that children receive the support that they are entitled to. External professionals hold the carers in high esteem. One said, 'She is the perfect foster carer. She gives him all the love, support and nurture he needs.'

The foster carers provide the children with the individual support that they need. This helps children grow in confidence and maturity, improving their resilience and self-esteem. One child said, 'I wouldn't say a word, and now I don't stop!' Another child said that the three best things about living with carers were:

- 'They take us out to nice places'
- 'They let us go out on our own to get sausage and chips'
- 'They watch films and play games with us.'

Children placed are well matched with foster carers who can meet their needs. Children flourish in stable, nurturing homes with carers. One carer said, 'I'm proud of him and how far he's come.' Matching documentation does not provide clarity on how gaps in the carer's background and skills, and children's needs, are bridged. This makes it difficult to evaluate the success or failure of placements.

The fostering family develops very strong bonds with children who feel cherished. One child said, 'She [the carer] is lovely. It's all the little things she does that show how much she cares for me.' Children participate in family events and consistently feel part of the family. For example, one child was a bridesmaid to the foster carer's daughter. These strong relationships help the foster carers support children during challenging situations. Carers are committed and persist through difficult and challenging circumstances. This gives children stable and continuous placements that contribute to their sense of belonging.

Foster carers support older children to prepare for independent living and ensure that they are fully involved in their plans. Many carers have continued to support children aged 18 years and beyond. This helps children have a smoother transition into adult life. One child who was previously fostered continues to live in the foster carer's family home with her baby.

Children are enrolled in education and making good progress. Foster carers have positive and encouraging attitudes to education. They support older children to continue with further education or secure employment. A virtual headteacher overseeing education said, 'The children have a stable base and are given the ability to thrive.'

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

The children enjoy nurturing, stable homes and benefit from clear and consistent

boundaries. One child said that the foster carers, 'Are a good sort of normal. They are special people in a nice way.' Another said, 'Really nice, patient, helpful and kind.' These positive relationships help the children feel safe and improve their emotional well-being and resilience.

Children's behaviours improve and physical restraint is not used. One social worker said, 'They have moved from frightened children to ones who feel safe and contained.' While carers have reduced behavioural incidents, they have not all received training in managing complex behaviour. This means they may have limited strategies in managing difficult situations.

Risk management is effective. Older children say that their carers effectively balance their ages with appropriate need for personal freedom, keeping their safety and well-being at heart. This balance helps children to develop personal safety awareness.

Children very rarely go missing. However, when they do the carers act as a caring parent, ensuring that the children return home safely. The carers also ensure that all professionals are alerted to aid the child's safe return. However, there is no clear system for carers to request a return home interview from the placing authority. As a result, few of these interviews take place, thus missing opportunities to gain a greater understanding of how to keep the children safe.

Carers have clear internet safety guidance. There is useful information on the agency website for them and the children to refer to. The majority of carers have undertaken training in safeguarding, including the prevention of and response to child sexual exploitation and/or radicalisation. Some carers have not had the training and, therefore, it is unclear whether all carers have a good knowledge of wider safeguarding issues.

Any safeguarding matters or concerns about quality of care are managed effectively in partnership with other agencies. Recruitment systems are robust. This ensures that children are safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment with the fostering service.

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

Equality and diversity is threaded through the service and children's needs are consistently prioritised. The agency recruits carers who share this ethos of putting children first. One social worker said, 'They're absolutely fantastic, carers go above and beyond for the children and they [the children] can see how much they care.'

The agency develops positive partnerships with local agencies. Agency social workers attend all meetings about the child. The agency raises any concerns about the child with other agencies to ensure that the child receives the support that they require. This provides advocacy for children and ensures that they get the appropriate amount of help.

The agency provides relevant and varied training for carers. Most carers undertake core training, such as medication, safeguarding, preventing radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and first aid. There are gaps in some carers' training that have the potential to undermine a carer's alertness to issues and their ability to respond

appropriately.

The staff are supported and their opinions valued. Regular team meetings, supervision, training and professional development discussions ensure that reflective practice is embedded.

Panel processes are challenging and effective with members who come from a variety of professional backgrounds and have appropriate life experience. Panel members are supported well, with regular training, appraisal and good administrative systems.

Staff and carers generally maintain records to a suitable standard; however, there is not always enough attention to detail. Documents, such as delegated authority agreements and documents referring to visits to carers, are sometimes unsigned, wrongly dated and do not always contain the required information. These records do not always make clear the actions that agency staff take to ensure that children are safeguarded and that they achieve positive outcomes.

The senior management team has clear aspirations to deliver a high-quality, child-focused and personalised service. There have been significant staffing changes in the agency and the number of carers has reduced. The management team has a good understanding of the agency's strengths and the challenges it faces. The agency has a clear improvement plan which it has begun to implement to reinvigorate the fostering service. These changes have created some negative feelings from long-serving carers about the agency. While carers acknowledge this, it has not affected the quality of children's 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:** SC057840

**Registered provider:** Futures for Children Limited

**Registered provider address:** The Masters House, College Road, Maidstone, Kent  
ME15 6YQ

**Responsible individual:** Nicholas Barnsby

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## **Inspector**

Joanna Heller: social care inspector



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