

Young People at Heart Limited

Thames Enterprise Centre, Princess Margaret Road, East Tilbury, Essex RM18 8RH

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

The registered office is in Essex. This not-for-profit independent fostering agency is expanding, and is recruiting carers in Essex, Suffolk, Thurrock, Kent, the East London Boroughs, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. The agency offers emergency, short-term, long-term, permanent and a small number of parent-and-child placements. Some young adults can stay put with their foster carers when they reach 18.

The manager registered with Ofsted for this agency in April 2017.

Inspection dates: 14 to 18 January 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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: 7 March 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is good because:

- Children thrive, as they receive good, nurturing care.
- Children have the opportunity to try new experiences and have fun.
- Children attend school and receive help to make progress with their learning.
- Some children live with their brothers and sisters.
- Children receive help and support to see their families.
- Children feel safe and included in their foster family's extended network.
- The panel provides good and effective professional scrutiny.
- The panel minutes are clear about the process followed in the panel meeting.
- The agency decision-maker offers continuity. The written reasons for agreeing carer approval are clear.
- The registered manager is experienced and has an excellent understanding of children's emotional needs.
- Supervising social workers are experienced and offer excellent levels of support.
- The foster carers are very happy with the agency.
- The offer of training for staff and foster carers is good.
- The opportunities for the children and foster carers to meet with one another socially are helpful to the children.
- The work undertaken by the participation worker makes a positive difference to children's lives.
- The responsible individual, who is the founder of the agency, is actively involved in this service.
- The directors ensure that the children benefit from being placed in the service.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- The decision-maker must be a senior person who works within the fostering service.
- Panel members must have the opportunity to attend training with fostering staff at least annually.
- Not all of the quality assurance processes regarding written information are satisfactorily embedded.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering services' staff. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 23.10)
- Ensure the fostering service decision maker is a senior person within the fostering service. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 23.12)
- Ensure the manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 25.2)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Since the last inspection, this agency has continued to expand. A number of carers have transferred in from other agencies. This means that many foster carers have significant experience, and the children have the security of long-term placements. Some carers offer a 'staying put' option, when it is possible. This provides additional stability and more time to help young adults to prepare for their next steps and independence.

All children benefit from nurturing and supportive relationships with their carers. Children are welcomed into the extended family network. This acceptance ensures that children are provided with the best opportunity to develop and to reach their potential. A carer said, 'I feel that it is a privilege to have some small part in helping the children to have a better life.'

Children have fun. The staff and the foster carers are very good at recognising children's achievements. The agency proactively celebrates children's success. For example, the directors write personal letters to children. The developing role of the children's participation worker ensures that the views and wishes of the children remain central to everyday practice. A recently introduced, 'Day in the life', which is a one-to-one session, provides every child with dedicated time to talk about their daily routine and their experiences of being in foster care. The information that is captured is shared. This helps the adults supporting the child to know how best to make small adjustments to the care arrangements for the benefit of individual children. This ensures that children are valued, and improves their feelings of self-worth.

All children of school age are in education. Children receive significant help from their carers to help them to sustain their education placements and make progress at school. Children receive encouragement to take part in after-school activities, to develop friendships and to do their homework. The positive addition of an experienced educationalist ensures that the agency takes a proactive role in advocating for every child at personal education planning meetings. This approach ensures that every child receives the help and support with their education that they are entitled to.

Children receive good help and support to remain in contact with their extended family. Some children live with their brothers and sisters. Foster carers and agency staff support local authority plans. By providing any additional extra help that the children may need, the agency 'goes above and beyond' to ensure that they benefit. For example, the services of a therapist are commissioned when children and their carers need extra help to understand the impact of trauma.

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

Children said that they feel safe and that they can readily identify trusted adults to turn to. One child said, 'My carers give me comfort.' The children spoken with at this inspection named their foster carers as their 'go-to' adults for support.

The agency has not received any complaints. Allegations made about carers are investigated transparently. The appropriate information is shared quickly with the relevant designated officer. Carers receive additional independent help and support, if they would like this. This ensures that issues are dealt with fairly.

The fostering panel has the capacity to meet at different office locations. This mobility offers some flexibility within the agency and reduces the travelling for applicants and approved carers who are busy looking after children.

Panel members are diverse in experience and social background. This helps to ensure a broad range of professional curiosity when considering applications. The experienced panel chair plays an important role in ensuring that there is effective feedback about the quality and content of assessments. Panel minutes provide an excellent and clear record of both the process followed during each panel and the questions asked of applicants and approved carers. This helps to demonstrate the reasons for recommending approval or continued approval.

The arrangements for foster carer annual reviews and unannounced visits meet requirements. Since the first inspection, the agency decision-maker has continued in role. He has effective insight into the role of a foster carer, and the written agency decisions are clear. Nonetheless, the role sits with some independence from the agency. For example, managers missed an opportunity to discuss with the agency decision-maker the implications for the agency of placing five brothers and sisters in one foster home. This example had no direct impact on these children.

Individualised risk assessments and safer caring policies ensure that the supervising social workers help carers to identify potential behavioural concerns. The agency recognises and takes action when high-risk behaviours, such as repeated instances of children going missing, become too challenging to manage in a foster placement. This ensures that children receive the right support from the most appropriate service.

Foster carers provide children with an enormous amount of help and support. The carers receive excellent levels of support and supervision from their allocated supervising social workers. A foster carer said, 'I could not have asked for better support.' Supervising social workers attend the children's reviews with the foster carers, which helps to ensure that the needs of the children and the local authority's expectations about the children's care plans are understood.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, there has been change at the agency. One example is that the first registered manager has moved on. The current manager registered with

Ofsted in April 2017. He has significant relevant experience of leading and managing fostering services. His therapeutic and supportive approach ensures that the needs of the children remain central to practice.

The regulatory shortfalls identified at the first inspection in 2016 are met. Ofsted receives relevant information from the agency, as required by regulation.

The responsible individual, who is also the founder of the agency, has a hands-on role within the organisation. At least annually, he visits carers in their homes to talk about how the service could be improved. This means that the children and the carers know him and can provide live feedback. A carer said, 'The agency said that young people are at the heart, and that is exactly what happens here.'

Since the last inspection, experienced supervising social workers have been recruited. The staff receive regular supervision and have the opportunity to talk, for example in team meetings, about how the agency ensures that foster carers help children to progress. Supervising social workers work closely with the managers to identify creative solutions and to ensure that every child is receiving the appropriate help and support from all agencies, including the child's placing authority. This means that the children's experiences are at the centre of discussions across the service. A member of the team said, 'We all want the children to have positive childhoods so that they can go on to be successful adults.'

The agency values learning. The service currently has a social work student. The agency offers ample opportunities for staff and carers to access training. All of the staff and carers can access online courses. In addition, coffee mornings with invited speakers, combined with face-to-face training, help to ensure that staff and carers have regular opportunities to think together about the diverse needs that different children have. However, panel members have not had the opportunity to participate in an annual training day with the agency staff. This is particularly significant because the agency is growing, and this shortfall does not ensure that there is opportunity for panel members and staff to reflect on the function of the panel.

Regular communication and quarterly board meetings ensure that the directors and managers share ideas and maintain an overview of service developments. Alongside helping the agency to grow, the registered manager has continued to supervise and support some foster carers. This is of significant benefit to the carers and the children. However, as a result, the registered manager was unable to demonstrate how the records written by the staff are monitored. This has minimal impact currently, because the service is small. Nonetheless, effective quality assurance processes should ensure that information is being recorded accurately and in ways that are helpful to children.

This is a not-for-profit agency, which means that the children benefit. For example, the directors, who are members of one family, both ensure that each child has savings and offer to pay for swimming lessons and to buy every child a bicycle. The responsible individual has recently recruited a placements manager. One reason for this is because the geographical reach of the agency is increasing. For example, in September 2017 a second office opened in Herefordshire. The responsible individual

plans to make an application to Ofsted to register this office to ensure that children, foster carers and staff benefit from local managerial oversight as the agency expands and continues to evolve.

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 difference 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: SC486913

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Registered provider address: 36 Rosslyn Park, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 9QZ

Responsible individual: Gary Cox

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Inspector

Rosie Davie: social care inspector



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