

# Foster Care Associates Yorks and Lincs

Foster Care Associates Limited  
Europa Court, Sheffield Business Park, Sheffield S9 1XE  
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

Foster Care Associates Limited is an independent fostering agency, which has been registered with Ofsted since April 2007. The service operates from a registered office in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. The areas the agency covers include Sheffield, Doncaster, Leeds, Hull and Mansfield. The agency offers a range of foster placements, including permanent, long-term, short-term and parent and child. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 224 fostering households, which are caring for 320 children and young people.

**Inspection dates:** 21 to 25 January 2019

**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:** 14 March 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** none

## Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Children and young people who are looked after by carers from this agency are making exceptionally positive developmental progress. Children and young people report that they are safe and happy living with their foster families.
- Placement stability is a high priority in the agency. A high percentage of children and young people have been living with their foster families for over two years.
- Staff and foster carers demonstrate an excellent understanding and ability to manage children and young people's individual risks and vulnerabilities. This has resulted in enhanced safety and well-being.
- A well developed and highly innovative participation service is helping children and young people to access employment and training opportunities and positive activities within the agency and local communities.
- The highly competent and inspirational leadership team has very high aspirations for children and young people in the care of the agency.
- Foster carers and their representatives report that they feel highly valued by the agency. Training and development opportunities for carers are plentiful and all carers have completed their training, support and development standards in a timely manner.
- Highly effective monitoring and evaluation systems promote thematic learning opportunities and have brought positive improvements in enhancing placement stability and outcomes for children and young people.
- Allegations, complaints and safeguarding matters are managed expeditiously and effectively.
- Commissioners and social work professionals have provided highly positive feedback about the professional working relationships they have with foster carers and the agency, and the outcomes that this achieves for children and young people.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Some panel members have not had their performance appraised annually.
- A small minority of records did not sufficiently or explicitly outline how children and young people's cultural needs and preferences are met.
- The agency does not always receive the placing authority's care planning documentation in a timely manner. This is routinely followed up by the agency but not always swiftly escalated.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Assessment and appraisal of all staff involved in fostering work takes account of identified skills needed for particular roles and is used to identify individuals' learning and development needs. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 23.1) In particular, ensure that all panel members, including the chair, have their performance appraised annually.
- Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 26.5) In particular, ensure that entries relating to how children and young peoples' cultural needs and preferences are met are clearer and individualised.
- The foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority. ('Fostering services: national minimum standards', 31.2)

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children and young people are in well-matched, stable placements with families that provide secure and nurturing homes. Surveys conducted of children and young people's views of their placement were unanimously positive. One child said: '[Name of foster carers] are very kind, always listen to my problems and offer support when needed.' A high proportion of children and young people placed with this agency have been in their placement for more than two years. An increasing number of young people are 'staying put' with carers into early adulthood.

Carers report that the agency provides very high-quality support. One carer said: '[Name of social worker] is a fantastic social worker. She works incredibly hard to ensure that all matters are seen to when things are challenging. She is there to listen and advise. She is very thorough in all her recordings and has established good relationships with all members of our household.'

Children and young people are attending and achieving in their education settings. Educational attainment results considerably exceed the national average. The agency has directly provided opportunities for young people to engage in work-based placements and undertake voluntary employment opportunities. Some young people have been able to successfully secure employment through the innovative participation programme. This is exceptional progress.

Healthcare is excellent. Carers are using a wide range of specialist services to enhance health outcomes of children and young people. One child has just completed a speech and language programme with highly positive results. Another child, who had significant developmental delay, was noted by a grandparent to have made 'a staggering improvement' within a month of being placed with foster carers. Another child, who had considerable mobility issues, was supported to learn to walk within three months of being placed with carers.

Research-based practice is making a significant positive contribution to enhancing the lives of children and young people. The agency has moved to a model of group and individual supervision sessions. Carers report enhanced levels of support and considerable benefits in sharing the experiences, challenges and learning from peers. This contributes to securing stability of placements and enhancing outcomes for children and young people.

The programme of events that the agency offers to engage foster families directly is impressive. A recent fun day in 2018 was attended by 176 children and young people. Most of the children and young people placed engage regularly in community or agency activities. This helps children and young people to develop social skills and improve self-esteem and levels of confidence.

Permanence is a focus of this agency. The number of young people staying with the same carers is increasing every year. Currently, 28 young people are staying put, with plans in place for a further six in the very near future. Other young people have maintained contact with carers long into adulthood or have experienced permanence in other ways, through adoption or special guardianship. Leaders have very high

aspirations for care leavers to continue to be supported by this agency.

The agency and foster carers cater for and accommodate a variety of children and young people who have diverse backgrounds and cultural differences. Written paperwork could be enhanced to reflect the true nature of the support that is provided.

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

The agency is highly responsive to safeguarding matters. Leaders implement intensive monitoring and oversight of any high-risk situations. The agency engages very well with partners to ensure that there is an expeditious and well-coordinated, multi-agency response.

Allegations and complaints are very well managed. The agency is robust in challenging concerns about carers' practice through standards of care meetings. Any foster carers who have been through this process are referred to the panel to ensure that there is thorough oversight, which adds an extra layer of independent scrutiny.

Children and young people are not regularly missing from their homes. When this does occur, foster carers and agency staff work together to provide an effective response. The agency is proactive in seeking independent return interviews and evaluating the outcome of those interviews to aim to reduce or prevent further instances.

The agency is learning from disruptions, and unplanned endings have reduced considerably. Leaders ensure that when crucial information or risks have not been shared at the point of referral, these are fully explored and challenged appropriately with placing authorities.

Staff undertake routine unannounced visits to foster carers. Foster carers' homes are subject to an annual health and safety check. This provides an assurance that children and young people are receiving the high standard of care that the agency expects, while living in a safe environment.

Staff visit fostering households frequently. They provide carers with thorough supervision and good levels of support. In addition to seeing foster carers, staff also see the children and young people regularly. This provides children and young people with opportunities to speak openly about their care experiences.

All children and young people who responded to the survey reported that they feel safe with their foster carers. Foster carers complete mandatory training requirements to ensure that they provide safe care and have an awareness of safeguarding risks and procedures. The agency has responded to emerging safeguarding concerns and has already sourced and implemented training relating to criminal exploitation, knife crime and gang culture. The agency also facilitated an exploitation conference for all staff and foster carers to attend. This included speakers from a variety of agencies and learning from the victim's perspective.

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

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and extremely enthusiastic about providing the best possible outcomes for the children and young people looked after

by carers of this agency.

The registered manager and operational manager are highly experienced and qualified social care professionals with significant employment background in both safeguarding and fostering services. The agency has adopted an intrinsic culture of high aspiration for all children and young people to thrive in their fostering households and communities and in their adult lives.

Highly effective monitoring and evaluation systems promote thematic learning opportunities. These opportunities have brought positive improvements in enhancing placement stability and the outcomes for children and young people. Care planning processes are highly effective and supervising social workers routinely review the progress that children and young people are making. On occasions, there are delays in placing authorities providing care plans. The agency does routinely follow this up but could escalate their concern sooner to ensure that there is a swifter response.

Training and development for staff and carers are well developed. There is an enhanced offering to develop therapeutic parenting practice through a structured programme. Carers have found this highly effective in helping their journey from approval to becoming experienced and successful carers. Innovative participation and preparation for adulthood strategies have resulted in significant positive change to the lives of children and young people.

The central list of fostering panel members brings a diverse range of backgrounds and experience to the panel. The suitably qualified and experienced panel chair and the majority of members are independent of the agency. The panel provides sufficient independent scrutiny and rigorous challenge. Panel members have regular joint development days with staff from the agency. All panel members have had a recent appraisal of their performance, but this has not been maintained annually since the last inspection. A recommendation is made to enhance this area of practice.

The agency works extremely well in partnership with 23 placing authorities, many of which have provided extremely positive feedback about this service. One commissioner said: 'We have a very good working relationship and feel we can rely on their efficiency and commitment to providing the best outcomes for our young people.' Another commissioner said: '[Name of local authority] has a long-standing positive working relationship with the agency. We have a significant number of children placed with them, some of which are long-term and very settled placements.'

## **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:** SC038256

**Registered provider:** Foster Care Associates Limited

**Registered provider address:** Malvern View, Saxon Business Park, Hanbury Road, Stoke Prior, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 4AD

**Responsible individual:** Mark Costello

**Registered manager:** Timothy Clayton

**Telephone number:** 0114 2615750

## **Inspectors**

Nicola Thomas: social care inspector

Cath Sikakana: social care inspector





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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
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