

Shared Care Services Limited

Shared Care Services Limited
119 Eastern Avenue, Redbridge, Ilford IG4 5AN

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Shared Care Services (Fostering Division) is an independent fostering agency. The fostering service specialises in providing foster care placements for disabled children. The service provides individual and sibling group placements, bridging, emergency, short-term and long-term placements. The agency also runs a domiciliary care service for children living with disability. This service can act as a support service to the fostering service.

The agency's aim is to recruit, supervise and support foster carers in meeting the needs of children looked after living with disability and complex medical needs. Currently, the service has 19 approved fostering households, with 13 children in placement.

Inspection dates: 28 January to 1 February 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected Good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers Good

The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 19 October 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:

- Foster carers are dedicated and offer good levels of care and support to children.
- Foster carers use their close relationships with the children to manage their behaviour effectively.
- Young people overcome significant challenges to gain confidence and make progress from their starting points.
- Each child is currently progressing well in school, benefiting from the consistency offered by placements.
- Multi-agency work is effective. The fostering agency works in close partnership with key professionals, such as treating doctors, to ensure that children receive the support they need.
- Placements benefit from good levels of planning and training for foster carers, enabling carers to meet the complex needs of children.
- The agency benefits from a supportive registered manager who knows each child and foster carer well.
- The agency has grown at its own pace and places emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of foster carers.
- Foster carers reported a warm 'family' style atmosphere within the agency, with a strong focus on mutual support and putting the needs of children first.
- The fostering panel is recruited from a broad range of professional backgrounds and offers good levels of scrutiny.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- This inspection notes minor shortfalls in relation to the notification of serious events to Ofsted, the range of carers recruited, training of foster carers, feedback from young people and panel minutes. These shortfalls do not affect the quality of care offered to children.

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>36: Notifiable events</p> <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>(2) Any notification made in accordance with this regulation which is given orally must be confirmed in writing. (Regulation 36(1)(2))</p> | 01/05/2019 |

Recommendations

■ 20: Learning and development of carers

Ensure that support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers, to assist them in meeting the specific need of the children they are caring for or expected to care for. (National minimum standards 20.8)

This is with specific reference to ensuring that foster carers receive training relevant to proposed placements.

■ 14: Fostering panels and the decision-maker

The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation. (National minimum standards 14.7)

Ensure that panel minutes reflect the wishes and feelings of children when difficulties occur in placement.

■ 13: Recruiting and assessing foster carers

Ensure that the fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. (National minimum standards 13.1)

■ 1: The child's wishes and feelings

Ensure that the wishes, feelings and views of children are taken into account in developing the fostering service. (National minimum standards 1.3)

Ensure that the views of children remain considered for staff appraisals and risk assessments.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are happy in their placements. They form close attachments to their carers and enjoy a range of new experiences such as holidaying abroad. In many cases, children overcome the significant challenges presented by their disabilities and make good progress from their starting points. This is supported by one allocated social worker, who said about a foster carer, 'She is an absolutely amazing carer. She has completely turned him around.'

Outcomes for children are positive. Of the 13 current placements, 10 have been agreed as long term by their placing authorities. Unplanned endings are rare. The agency supports children to stay with their foster carers after they are 18 under 'staying put' arrangements.

Children make good progress in education. Allocated teachers commented that children are 'thriving in placement, the difference is amazing!' Carers liaise with schools to try and reinforce learning in the placement, such as practising handwriting after school.

Children meet the goals and objectives that are outlined in their individual plans. Achievements include learning how to make a bed or learning to eat without support. Progress is warmly celebrated in life-story books.

Foster carers are committed to their role. They understand the impact of complex conditions such as autism spectrum disorder on children and the importance of consistency of care. One foster carer refused the offer of respite, for fear of unsettling her long-term placement.

Consistent boundaries help children to behave well in their placements. Children work with their carers to address poor behaviours, such as anger outbursts. Foster carers use their close relationships with the children to monitor key behaviours, such as eye movement to ascertain when children are struggling. A change of activity, or incentives such as increased access to game consoles, also works well.

Foster carers understand the importance of positive family contact for children. Carers support children to travel long distances and liaise promptly with allocated social workers when concerns arise. Foster carers work in partnership with birth parents where appropriate. In one placement, this involves a successful 'shared care'

arrangement for one child. Positive relationships support an increased understanding of early life history and consistency in behaviour management.

The agency empowers children and actively seeks their wishes and feelings. Where possible, children attend the fostering panel and annual reviews with carers. When communication is difficult, computer programs support children to make their voice heard.

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

Feedback from children spoken to during the inspection and from allocated social workers indicated that children feel safe. Carers understand their roles and strive to allow children to take appropriate risks.

Safeguarding is strong in this service. Staff work in close partnership with key agencies such as the host local authority to monitor and investigate concerns. Managers recently commissioned an independent assessment to investigate a recent allegation against a foster carer. This followed a request from the designated officer from the local authority.

The agency benefits from effective safeguarding monitoring systems. Children's risks are identified early and managed well. Risk assessments are generally good. Assessments incorporate the views of key professionals such as therapists. Assessments are reviewed regularly and reflect the progress achieved by children. However, at present, risk assessments and staff appraisals do not contain feedback from the children. This limits their effectiveness.

Carers value the support offered by the agency. One carer commented, 'They are always there for you, whatever time, day or night.' Supervising social workers attend training with carers and support their shared learning and development. Case files evidence supervising social workers supporting carers to think through behaviours and to develop resilience. This is reflected by the feedback from an allocated social worker: 'The placement would have broken down without the hard work of the agency.'

The agency has grown slowly since the last inspection. The registered manager prioritises the importance of recruitment and assessment. He visits each foster carer individually at home prior to each assessment. In addition, carers attend a two-day training course prior to a decision on commencing an assessment. This course offers a realistic insight into the expectations of the agency and prepares foster carers well.

Preparation for placements is generally positive. Planned placements occur with good levels of information and training for foster carers. Key issues such as the impact on birth children and the capacity of carers to attend high numbers of medical appointments are considered. Supervising social workers ensure that respite provision is offered regularly in order to maintain placements.

Training is bespoke and meaningful, such as a course on the administration of epilepsy medication. One foster carer is currently taking sign language classes to

support improved communication with two children in her care.

Some placements have been less successful. Difficulties have occurred when emergency placements have been made for children who exhibit more emotional and behavioural difficulties. Foster carers reported a lack of specific training on the different issues posed by children where disability is not their primary need.

Foster carers are empowered and advocate for children. One carer was concerned by the level of medication and sought a second opinion. Her concerns were upheld, and the medication level was adjusted to cater for the child's needs more appropriately. Another carer challenged a view that a child was unable to see and requested a further assessment. He is now able to identify basic outlines of shapes with the aid of glasses.

Foster carers are proactive when children go missing from home. This includes searching the local area and contacting family and friends. Managers push local authorities to provide independent return to care interviews.

Procedures are up to date and reviewed regularly. Key documentation is accessible to all children in formats such as Picture Exchange Communication System. Comprehensive guidebooks offer clear and simple explanations of some of the more complicated aspects of the fostering task, such as the legal status of children. This allows foster carers to advocate effectively for children.

The agency supports carers to adapt their homes. One carer added a downstairs toilet and wet room to meet the needs of one young person.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Management is effective. The registered manager is a qualified social worker with over 33 years' experience of working with disabled children. He has been in post since the opening of the agency and has achieved the required management qualification. Succession planning is positive. A supervising social worker is currently completing the management qualification.

The registered manager is valued by both staff and foster carers. One carer commented, 'We would be nothing without him, he is so important.'

The registered manager uses his good knowledge of the foster carers to inform planned placement matching. His experience helps him to consider key factors such as the effect of medication and the needs of birth children when assessing referrals. Good levels of pre-placement case information, coupled with close support from supervising social workers, promotes positive outcomes.

Management oversight is strong. Case files and risk assessments show good evidence of audit. Where placing authorities fail to support children effectively, managers intervene quickly. Recently, managers ensured that one child continued to receive long-standing specialist transport to school.

The agency has addressed all but one of the requirements and recommendations of the last inspection. A recommendation relating to the range of foster carers is repeated for this inspection. Foster carers still do not reflect the diverse nature of the local community. Managers are aware of this and are publicising the agency more widely. Despite this, one placing professional referred to the agency as 'careful and meticulous in recruitment'.

The agency benefits from a domiciliary care division within the organisation. Many of the foster carers were employed initially as support workers prior to assessment as foster carers. This experience offers a good grounding in meeting the needs of disabled children, such as training in safe handling. In addition, support workers continue to provide consistent respite support for foster carers.

Staff morale is positive. Staff report effective supervision and a challenging training programme. Supervising social workers report low caseloads, allowing them vital time to support carers and reflect on the needs of placements.

The fostering panel is effective. The panel offers a broad range of experience and includes teachers and social workers. Where concerns arise with regards to carers, effective action such as delaying or suspending approval is taken. Panel recommendations are specific and effective. The age group of approval for foster carers clearly reflects the skills and strengths of individual carers.

The panel chair has worked in partnership with the agency to improve the quality of panel reports. Panel members report feeling valued and appreciated. However, panel minutes are not consistently balanced. One recent recording failed to represent the impact on a child following a recent allegation in an effective manner.

Ofsted has not received any notifications of serious events. This is despite three recent allegations against carers.

Recruitment practice for foster carers and staff is safe. The agency has good systems in place for the vetting and recruitment of staff and others working on behalf of the agency.

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

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Inspector

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector



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