

Greater London Fostering

The Quadrangle, 86 Romford Road, Stratford, London E15 4EH
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Greater London Fostering is an independent fostering agency. It provides a wide range of fostering opportunities for children from birth to 18 years. This includes emergency, short-, medium- and long-term and parent and child placements. The agency has 111 foster carers, who provide placements for 117 children. The agency also provides 'staying put' placements for 12 young people over the age of 18.

Inspection dates: 21 to 24 January 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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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	outstanding
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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: 11 January 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:

- Placement stability and educational attainment exceed the national average for children in care.
- Children benefit from having their own advocate, who is dedicated to befriending them and improving outcomes.
- An educational consultant provides research-informed interventions, which have helped children to avoid being excluded from school.
- Children have their own youth council, which has improved the focus of the agency and helped to change working practices.
- Children's experiences are enhanced through the agency providing breaks at a national holiday park and the funding of a book club to increase literacy levels.
- A high number of young people are choosing to remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements.
- Children benefit from the agency's strong safeguarding arrangements. There is meticulous monitoring of their placement stability and any causes for concern.
- A specialist intervention social worker assists with behaviour management issues, and concerns regarding placement stability.
- Managers and staff work exceptionally well with girls who are at risk of sexual exploitation, resulting in their improved self-esteem and self-worth.
- Children benefit from highly skilled foster carers, very experienced leaders and managers and an enthusiastic and child-focused staff team.
- The agency is actively contributing to the development of the fostering sector and there is a commitment to innovative practice and research.
- Foster carers and staff commented on the outstanding support that they receive. For staff, this includes generous personalised training and a well-being budget.
- An excellent development plan focuses on promoting positive aspirations and inspiring children and staff to believe in themselves and their future.

The independent fostering agency's area for development:

- Children's self-esteem is improving; however, several children have negative feelings about being in the care system. The agency has highlighted famous people who have been fostered, but more can be done to positively address children's feelings.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure children are provided with care that promotes all aspects of their individual identity. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', 2.1)
In particular, address children's negative feelings regarding being a child in care.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are thriving and growing in confidence within nurturing placements. One child told the inspector that they would score their foster carer '10 out of 10'. Another child's social worker stated that the support given to children was 'excellent'. Children enjoy good placement stability and their educational attainment is above the national average for children in care.

Children have told staff that they do not wish to be 'a statistic'. Staff have made efforts to promote famous role models who have been fostered. The agency has listened to children, and the theme for the year is 'promoting positive aspirations'. Although children's self-esteem is improving, several children have negative feelings about being in the care system.

Careful tracking of each child by the educational consultant helps to inform interventions. These interventions have assisted in preventing school exclusions, obtaining school places and the targeted spending of the pupil premium. Foster carers attend specialist educational workshops, enabling them to support children effectively. Children benefit from tuition, and from help with revision and with choosing their options.

Children are aspirational and they have realistic career goals, which include going to university. Currently two children are attending university, and another has recently graduated. The educational consultant is also establishing apprenticeships for those children who prefer this option.

Children benefit from access to their own advocate, who is dedicated to befriending them and improving outcomes. Children can discuss their feelings and engage in meaningful individual and group activities. Group events enable children to form friendships and to benefit from peer support.

Children are well informed about how to look after their mental and physical health and how to develop independent living skills. They are given help and support with educational choices and about what to do in their spare time. They are also given personal development support, which enables them to understand their own personalities and to build their emotional resilience.

Staff work in partnership with local authority social workers to ensure the best outcomes for children. Placing social workers appreciate the regular progress reports that they receive from supervising social workers. Staff also challenge local authorities to provide the necessary documentation and resources to assist in addressing children's identified needs.

This is an inclusive agency, where children's opinions are highly valued. Children have their own youth council, which has improved the focus of the agency and helped to change working practices. Children contribute towards staff recruitment, appraisals and activity planning.

Children receive care from highly skilled, very compassionate, emotionally intelligent and extremely child-focused foster carers. Children quickly feel part of their foster family and make positive attachments, fondly referring to foster carers as family. Foster carers assist with appropriate contact with birth family members. One child's social worker additionally praised the emotional support a foster carer gave to the child's birth parent.

Children's experiences are enhanced by the considerable range of social activities organised both by the agency and, independently, by their foster carers. Children go on holidays abroad with their foster carers and the agency also provides breaks at a national holiday park. Children have the opportunity to go to film premieres, meals out and the theatre.

Foster carers and staff help children to identify and pursue their talents and interests, such as martial arts and the performing arts. The agency is also funding a book club to increase children's literacy and the joy of reading.

Foster carers are recruited from diverse backgrounds, which include various cultures, same sex couples and young foster carers. Children who speak English as an additional language benefit from having translated information available to them. Children seeking asylum receive comprehensive support regarding their immigration status. Good attention is paid to religious needs, enabling children to follow their religious traditions.

Managers and staff have a strong commitment to helping older children make a smooth transition into adulthood. Older children learn independent living skills and they also receive relevant guidance from the agency. A high number of young people are choosing to remain with their foster carers under 'staying put' arrangements after they reach 18. Other young people maintain their relationships with carers once they move on. This provides them with valued ongoing support.

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

Children benefit from the strong safeguarding arrangements in place in this agency. Placement stability is closely monitored, as are any causes for concern. This ensures that issues are addressed promptly and purposefully.

A highly effective tracking and risk rating system ensures that risks for children are identified, understood and successfully managed. No children are currently missing from care. There are also no children involved in sexually exploitative relationships, criminal exploitation, radicalisation or extremism. Leaders and managers are taking a proactive approach in their development of a service for boys at risk of gang affiliation, particularly for those from Black and minority ethnic groups.

The agency works exceptionally well with girls who are at risk of sexual exploitation. In some cases, a contributory factor to the success of this work has been placing the girls outside of London. The agency is developing specialist placements in a coastal area and a supervising social worker has been recruited to support these foster carers.

Children reported that the highly effective work to address sexual exploitation has been life changing for them. One child told the inspector she had been 'troubled mentally', but due to her foster carers she had positively changed '100%'. Evidence was seen of girls having self-worth, a high self-esteem and clear career goals for the future.

Children feel safe and they learn the importance of healthy personal relationships, consent and internet safety. A local authority social work manager praised a foster carer for being proactive in protecting a child from further harm.

Children benefit from consistent, firm boundaries, which help them to develop socially acceptable behaviour. A specialist intervention social worker assists with behaviour management issues and any concerns regarding placement stability.

The agency appropriately safeguards children through its recruitment process, training and working practices. Complaints against foster carers, standards of care issues and allegations are appropriately investigated. Foster carers and staff benefit from safeguarding training. Staff and panel members also consider the learning that has been gathered from serious case reviews and research.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

This is a forward-thinking agency which is evolving at a significant pace to meet the needs of children. It is led by a confident, highly experienced management team. A foster carer stated that the agency was 'a pleasure to work for', and another highlighted that it was a 'fantastic agency'. A child's social worker stated that she was 'glad to have a child placed with the agency'.

The one requirement and the four recommendations from the last inspection have all been addressed. The registered manager promptly notifies Ofsted of any significant incidents. Children are now better protected by the improved risk management system. The contribution of foster carers' birth children in achieving a successful placement is now formally recognised by the agency. Birth children are also included in all events and they receive appropriate support. The views of children in foster care are valued and they now contribute to the staff appraisal process.

The agency is actively contributing to the development of the fostering sector and is committed to innovative practice and research. A director sits on the executive board of a national fostering provider association. The agency has contributed to the recent government review of the fostering system. The agency is also in the pilot

phase of a university study regarding the essential factors and interpersonal qualities of a supervising social worker in the fostering relationship.

Leaders and managers pride themselves on creating a fostering community where they know all of the fostered children and the foster carers. The excellent management monitoring system ensures that children's needs are prioritised. Leaders and managers regularly review and evaluate children's individual outcomes. This learning then influences all decision-making in the agency.

The fostering panel demonstrates a strong commitment to the welfare and best interests of children. The agency decision maker is appropriately challenging and further strengthens the panel process. The central list panel members have a wide range of expertise. The panel chair is a highly experienced social work professional. The fostering panel also constructively contributes to improvements within the agency.

Children receive support from foster carers who embrace their professional role. Foster carers use their expertise to influence the organisation in a positive way. Their input during training and recruitment events, initial visits and mentoring of new carers is invaluable. One of the foster carers has been nationally recognised for their outstanding contribution to fostering.

Children receive care from foster carers who have access to 24-hour support. Extensive, accredited training helps to equip foster carers for their task. Foster carers also have the flexibility of online training, evening courses and bespoke one-to-one training at home. The national vocational training for all new foster carers is in progress.

Enthusiastic and proactive supervising social workers support children and foster carers. Social work staff benefit from regular, reflective, individual supervision. The agency provides excellent support to staff through a personalised training and well-being budget. Newly qualified social workers also receive significant support through the organisation's participation in the assessed and supported year in employment programme.

The agency has a highly informative website and a strong social media presence. The fostering recruitment strategy uses digital marketing successfully and there are further plans to use digital communication to engage with children. Leaders and managers are aware of the agency's strengths and of the areas requiring further development. An excellent development plan focuses on promoting positive aspirations and inspiring children and staff to believe in themselves and their future.

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: SC035327

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Inspector

Sharon Payne, social care inspector



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