

Barnardo's Brighton & Hove Link Plus

Barnardo's
Bizspace Knoll Business Centre, Office Unit C2, 325–327 Old Shoreham Road, Hove
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Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Barnardo's Brighton & Hove Link Plus independent fostering agency is a jointly funded project between Brighton & Hove City Council and Barnardo's. The service provides short-break foster care to disabled children and young people. There are 17 carers, with 16 children and young people receiving a service.

Placements include overnight stays, weekend/week breaks, and for a few children, full-time foster care. A small number of fostering households are dual registered with the adult shared lives scheme. As some young people become adults, they are able to continue to stay with their existing foster carers.

Inspection dates: 4 to 8 March 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: 30 November 2015

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This independent fostering agency is outstanding because:

- Support to children is bespoke and nothing is too much for the team.
- Children's lives significantly improve through the care that they receive.
- Matching is very thoughtful and is in children's best interests.
- Foster carers are child-centred, dedicated and strong advocates for children.
- Foster carers and parents feel part of the agency and help shape its development.
- Training is focused on meeting the individual needs of children.
- Strong partnership working with all relevant agencies is evident.
- Tenacious advocacy by staff helps to ensure that children's voices are heard.
- The staff team is dedicated, passionate and child-centred.
- A 'children's rights' approach underpins the work of the agency.
- Inclusivity of children is key to the ethos of the whole staff team.
- Staff are empowering and enabling of children, parents and foster carers.
- There is specialist knowledge provided by a very experienced staff team.
- Participation work within the agency is innovative and inspiring.
- Children, foster carers and parents contribute to the development of the agency.
- Strong safeguarding practice is embedded within the culture of the agency.
- The panel is very effective and is reflective of the safeguarding practice in the agency.
- Quality assurance mechanisms continue to be improved upon.
- The registered manager is inspirational in their vision for the agency.
- Aspirational leadership ensures that high standards of care are maintained.
- The registered manager and responsible individual promote continual improvement.

The independent fostering agency's areas for development:

- Children's risk assessments should include the strategies that are in place to address identified risks.
- The agency's complaints procedure needs to be updated to provide clarity in relation to complaints being investigated outside of the line management structure.

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

Recommendations

- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment. (National minimum standards 4.5)
In particular, ensure that assessments reflect the strategies that are in place to mitigate the risks.
- The registered person has provided the service with a written policy and procedural guidelines on considering and responding to representations and complaints in accordance with legal requirements and relevant statutory guidance. (National minimum standards 25.11)
In particular, ensure that this includes specific information-sharing guidelines, where complaints are investigated outside of the agency's line management structure.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This small agency provides excellent care based on inclusivity. The staff team has a strong value base which focuses on children's rights. Children, parents and foster carers are involved in planning the focus of support for children before the care starts. With a new tool to assist in this process, staff are enabled to involve children in a way that meets children's individual needs. The matching of children with carers is well thought through, with planned visits to help the child and the carer develop a relationship. This is supported by the agency's detailed information regarding the child.

Safe caring plans are completed by staff which reflect the detailed information held by the agency. This ensures that carers have a thorough understanding of each child's needs. Foster carers demonstrate a strong commitment to the care of the children. Supported by a thorough understanding of the children's physical and emotional health needs, carers provide excellent individualised care. Carers contribute significantly to the progress children make in their health needs, which are often complex. The care is child-centred, and no potential barrier is seen as insurmountable. This reflects the social model of disability which underpins the agency's values and approach to supporting children.

Foster carers provide enduring care for children which persists even when behaviour that may challenge the carers is present. Children are settled and respond positively to the care they receive. This was observed during a visit to one child in placement where the child has been supported, by their carer, to sleep throughout the night. Another older child was appreciative of the support they had received in developing their independence skills. Parents consistently provided extremely positive feedback about the care their children receive.

Parents are respected by staff for their understanding of their child's needs. Foster carers and staff support parents through visits and attendance at meetings. There is strong partnership working with host and placing authorities. Social workers spoke highly of the care and support that are provided by the agency to each child. Foster carers' experience and skills are valued by parents, agency staff and social workers.

There have been continual improvements in the recording on children's files. This includes the recording of the administration of medication, which is important due to the children's health needs. With the introduction of an online system, carers are able to upload recordings in a timely way. This benefits children as staff have the information at the time. The online system has been introduced quite recently, so the changes have not yet been fully embedded.

Supervising social workers provide great support and supervision to new and existing foster carers. Supervision is detailed and provides space for carers to reflect on the care they provide. The individual learning and development needs of foster

carers are very well understood. Training is identified which specifically meets the needs of the children. One foster carer commented on the specialist training that had been sourced to help her to further develop an understanding of the needs of the child she cared for. This was being delivered to all carers and partner agencies during the period of this inspection.

Advocacy for children is particularly effective across this agency. Foster carers, staff and the management team are all strong advocates for the children who access the service. There is a deep understanding of the children's wishes and feelings, which are often communicated through gestures or the children's behaviour. The agency as a whole is effective in understanding non-verbal communication. Through observing and being with children, carers and the staff team ensure that children are central to all care planning. This specialist knowledge enables children to be heard and understood.

Children's participation is seen as integral to the agency. The children's guide is available in a number of different formats to ensure inclusivity. There are brilliant examples of participation events for children and young people. These include a project focusing on the emotional well-being of the siblings of children who access the service. Another project involved a carer and young people being interviewed for a television news bulletin.

One young person has directly contributed to the work of the wider organisation. They spoke positively about the impact of this and how they felt listened to and part of the 'Barnardo's family'. The meaningful participation of children was reflected in the successful achievement of the 'Hear by Right' Gold Award. This was jointly awarded to the organisation's projects in the area. The agency has also written a published article on the engagement of children in the service. This demonstrates the agency's children's rights-based approach.

The joint fostering panel, with the partnering host local authority, continues to work well. This collaborative working ensures that an effective process is in place for the approval of foster carers. This is supported by the appointment of a new panel chair who brings a wealth of experience to the role. Ongoing training for panel members is provided alongside agency staff. This supports shared learning and development. The agency has strengthened further the effectiveness of its monitoring and oversight through the appointment of an independent reviewing officer.

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

There is a strong culture of excellent safeguarding practice within the agency. This includes consistency in the safer recruitment checks undertaken in relation to foster carers, staff and panel members. The rigorous vetting process that was undertaken to assess the suitability of a 'family and friends' carer was another example of strong practice.

Where there have been any concerns in relation to carers or their relatives, strong safeguarding measures have been developed in response. The agency consistently

works effectively with the child's placing authority to ensure that effective safeguards are in place. This includes representation at all child protection meetings.

Children's individual needs are understood through the individual safe caring plans that are in place. The individual risks identified for each child are assessed, with effective strategies put in place to minimise these. These were not fully updated for one child to reflect their changing needs. However, this did not impact on the child, who received a significant level of support which provided strong safeguards, over and above what would have been expected of the agency. There is a clear and effective procedure in place for responding to children who may go missing. In the rare event that this happens, the agency ensures an effective response by carers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The agency is led by an inspiring registered manager who is supported by a very experienced team leader. The registered manager leads a team that is aspirational for children through the inclusive approach to the care and support that are provided. The whole staff team understands the children, their parents and foster carers well. This is evidenced by the consistently positive feedback provided by parents and carers, who felt fully involved in the agency through the consultation forums that are in place.

The registered manager has a real understanding of the strengths of the service. They, together with the responsible individual, seek continual improvement of the service. The staff team feels valued and respected for their professional expertise. The agency seeks to improve the experiences of children through the development of the service. There is genuine ownership of this from the foster carers, through to the staff and the leadership team. This impacts positively on children through the insightful practice and thoughtful care that is provided to them.

Carers feel very well supported by their supervising social workers and the management team. They feel part of the agency and able to voice their views. There has been one complaint, made by a foster carer, since the last inspection. This was fully investigated outside of the line management structure, which was appropriate due to the nature of the complaint. Where a complaint is responded to in this way, clearer guidance is needed in relation to information sharing within the organisation. This did not impact on the effectiveness of the response to the complaint.

Staff receive high-quality, reflective supervision which is comprehensive. Learning and development are promoted well within the agency and wider organisation. Staff have lead roles within the wider organisation and represent the agency in relation to these. The article developed for a sector-specific publication, focusing on valuing the voice of the child, is one example of a staff member's wider involvement in research.

The recommendations of the last inspection have been fully met. The monitoring systems have been further enhanced by the development of child-centred measures for tracking individual progress and outcomes. The registered manager has further developed the quality assurance systems in response to learning following training. This has resulted in the appointment of an independent reviewing officer who

provides additional effective oversight of the quality of care provided.

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: SC045651

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Inspector

Maria Lonergan, social care inspector



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