

Child Focus Fostering Agency

Sherico Care Services Limited
2–4 Balmoral Road, Leyton, London E10 5ND
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

This is a private fostering agency. It has 15 fostering households and currently provides placements for 14 children.

The agency does not currently have a registered manager. The new manager has submitted an application to Ofsted to be registered.

Inspection dates: 8 to 12 April 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	requires improvement to be good

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

Date of last inspection: 16 October 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children live in stable and secure foster homes. Children are carefully matched with families who can meet their needs and help them to settle. Ten of the 14 children in foster homes have lived with the same foster carer for over a year. Some children have stayed in the same foster family for much longer and four of them have remained in their homes beyond the age of 18 under 'staying put' arrangements.

Children share trusting and positive relationships with their foster families and with their foster families' supervising social workers. Supervising social workers visit regularly and know the children well. The agency's social workers and foster carers attend all important meetings and advocate well for children to ensure that their needs are met. One social worker said, 'I'm really happy with the agency; they are committed and pro-active, chasing me up to ensure tasks are done.'

Foster carers receive good-quality training which helps prepare them to provide sensitive care. Foster carers spoken to described receiving training on a monthly basis and regular support visits from supervising social workers. One foster carer said, 'The agency advocates well for children; they do support me to help children make progress.'

The staff have improved their understanding of children's views and have been proactive in incorporating these views into practice. The new manager has appointed a 'children's ambassador' and is beginning to establish a children's council. The children's ambassador has attended the agency's management meetings, and has given advice on the revision of the children's guide and suggested activities for fun days. In addition, the new manager telephones children every month when she is auditing children's files, to seek their views on how well the agency is doing.

Children enjoy and benefit from having the many life experiences their peers enjoy, including football, swimming and after-school clubs. In addition, the agency facilitates quarterly forums to allow foster families to come together and enjoy socialising. There are four 'fun days' planned for this year, when foster families are invited to bring foster children and their own children to a planned activity. This enables families to develop relationships and gain support from one another. The agency publishes a regular newsletter for foster families and children, and actively requests their feedback. Children's achievements are celebrated with a 'child of the month' feature.

New placements are well planned for children where possible. One child who was moving in during this inspection had a tea visit and an overnight stay prior to moving in. When children need to be admitted in an emergency, they are welcomed, and a placement planning meeting is held as soon as possible to ensure that their needs are known and met.

The agency supports children to learn independence skills and encourages them to

live independently. The agency recognises that for many children, leaving care at 18 is too soon, and it therefore supports these children to remain living with their foster families until they are ready to live independently.

In most cases, the agency recruits, assesses and prepares foster carers well so that they have a good understanding of fostering and how to meet the needs of a fostered child. This enables placements to be secure and ensures that stability remains a key strength of the agency. Despite this, a small number of assessments are below the expected standard. Gaps in information and confusion about recommendations made by the fostering panel have not always been identified by the quality assurance process, and mean that children may be placed with foster carers whose ability to meet their needs has not been fully explored.

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

Children spoken with said that they feel safe and that they like their foster homes and carers. Children are enabled to develop relationships with foster carers, which has helped them to feel safer and to talk about issues that worry them.

A strength of this agency is ensuring that it receives detailed information from the placing authority prior to placement. It is evident from the risk assessment and matching process that consideration is given to presenting risks, how these risks are triggered and what strategies can be used to reduce risks for children.

Foster carers said that they feel well supported to respond to children who go missing from home or who get involved in risk-taking behaviours. Consequently, foster carers feel confident that they know what to do and how to address children's challenging behaviours. Incidents of children going missing have reduced in number significantly for one child through placement-stability meetings, clear curfew times and expectations of behaviour, and the use of signed agreements.

Foster carers and the agency staff demonstrate a good knowledge of the risks that children can face within the community. The supervising social workers support foster carers to understand risks, and guide them in talking to children about how to keep themselves safe. Regular training for foster carers on relevant safeguarding subjects also helps them to update their understanding of risks for children. All foster carers have access to procedures for reporting children missing, and can contact a duty social worker outside of office hours if needed.

Children are being supported to take age-appropriate risks. This helps children to learn how to keep themselves as safe as possible, for example while learning to travel independently to school. Foster carers gain the trust of children through relationship building. Children are encouraged to give foster carers additional contact details and check in with them regularly when they go out in the community independently to spend time with friends. This gives the children a level of independence, while minimising risks.

Foster carers also receive ongoing training to meet the training, support and

development standards. This helps foster carers to understand the various areas of safeguarding and behaviour management that they need to know in order to meet children's needs. For example, foster carers attend secure base and attachment training and therapeutic training.

Robust recruitment processes ensure that necessary checks are undertaken to help prevent unsafe people from being allowed to care for vulnerable children. The agency continues with safer caring by undertaking the appropriate matching of children for placement, updating risk assessments and devising safe caring plans for children in their foster homes. There is evidence of regular supervision for foster carers and unannounced visits taking place to check on foster homes and to see and talk to children alone.

In most cases, staff follow the procedures for reporting allegations and concerns about child protection. Where procedures have not been followed within timescales, the new manager has addressed concerns promptly through the staff disciplinary procedures. Over the past year, the agency has brought several foster carers back to the fostering panel to consider issues regarding standards of care, and has appropriately addressed poor-quality care and practice by deregistering carers or by providing additional training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The agency has been without a registered manager for some time. Despite the agency having a named manager covering the management post, there have been several changes of manager since the last inspection in October 2017. Since December 2018, there has been a new manager in post and her application is currently in the process of being considered by Ofsted.

The agency's ability to develop, and to sustain this development, has suffered due to inconsistent management. There has, for example, been a decline in the recruitment of foster carers and the development of systems/processes which would help the agency to improve. Agency workers and foster carers indicated that the changes of management have not been conducive to creating good systems and improving the efficiency of the agency.

Some shortfalls in the oversight and monitoring of practice were seen during inspection, for example in regard to the recording and checking of the fostering panel's recommendations, minutes and the agency decision-maker's decisions. The statement of purpose requires updating as it currently holds some incorrect information about services and staffing. The agency website also requires updating to reflect these changes.

Despite these shortfalls, no children have been placed at risk of harm and the agency has concentrated on supporting foster carers and the children they are looking after.

Despite the obvious difficulties, the new manager, with the support of the quality assurance manager, has begun to implement better systems to improve and monitor practice. For example, the new manager has established a tracking system to help her understand children's progress in education/employment/training. This monitoring tool has helped the agency to identify whether children are making progress and where there are concerns, support has been offered. In the six-month monitoring period, there has been a significant increase in the number of children who are now in employment, education and training.

The new manager, supported by the quality assurance manager, has worked hard to meet the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection and this has largely been achieved. Some minor shortfalls were found in recruitment practice. Although information is sought, the consistency in storing recruitment information should ensure compliance with the general data protection regulation. In addition, any official documents should be verified by a senior member of staff in the agency, and original documents removed, returned or destroyed as relevant.

There is a newly implemented system for the independent review of foster carers' annual reviews. This is an independent arrangement and will help ensure a more objective reviewing process. Recent reviews carried out under this new system include feedback contributions from children and professionals using the service, and are well recorded.

Leaders and managers are beginning to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the agency. The agency development plan is good and has realistic ideas for further developing the service. The new manager is in a good position to continue to develop more consistent practice.

There are good professional relationships within the agency team. Team members are supportive of one another, and are keen to develop the agency and move it forwards. Staff feel supported and said that they receive regular supervisions. Staff also said that they find the managers accessible, and feel optimistic that there will be better consistency now there is a new manager in post.

The agency's fostering panel is made up of members who have diverse skills and knowledge. It is promoting safe, secure and stable placements; however, it needs to be more robust in ensuring that assessments are checked for inconsistencies, while providing more rigorous oversight and asking questions where such inconsistencies exist. The fostering panel must improve its quality assurance function and offer better gatekeeping for the overall service.

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>The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.</p> <p>If, taking into account any recommendation made by the fostering panel, the fostering service provider are no longer satisfied that the foster parent or the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, or that the terms of the approval are appropriate, they must (subject to paragraph (8)–</p> <p>give written notice to the foster parent that they propose to terminate, or (as the case may be) revise the terms of, the foster parent's approval (a "qualifying determination"), together with their reasons and a copy of any recommendation made by the fostering panel; and</p> <p>in any case where the fostering service propose only to revise the terms of the foster parent's approval</p> <p>provide a statement setting out whether the fostering service provider considers that the foster parent or members of the foster parent's household (including any children placed there) may have additional support needs as a result of the proposed revision and, if so, how those needs will be met and</p> <p>request the foster parent's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms.</p> <p>In a case falling within paragraph (7)(a), where the fostering service provider receive the foster parent's agreement in writing to the proposed revision of terms, the fostering service provider may proceed to make their decision, taking into account the statement referred to in paragraph (7)(a)(i), notwithstanding that the period referred to in paragraph (7)(b) has not expired.</p>	<p>12/07/2019</p>

<p>As soon as practicable after making the decision referred to in paragraph (9), (9a), (10)(b) or (11), the fostering service provider must give written notice to the foster parents stating (as the case may be)–</p> <p>the revised terms of the approval and the reasons for the revision.</p> <p>(Regulation 28(7)(a)(i)(ii) (9a)(12(c))</p> <p>Specifically, this is in relation to ensuring that any changes to the foster carer approval and conditions are reviewed by the fostering panel and formally approved by the agency decision-maker.</p>	
<p>The fostering service provider must keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide, notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days, and if the children’s guide is revised, supply a copy to each foster parent approved by the fostering service provider, and to each child placed by them (subject to the child’s age and understanding).</p> <p>(Regulation 4(a)(b)(c))</p>	<p>12/07/2019</p>

Recommendations

- Panel/s provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 14.1)
- The agency record must show the date on which each check was completed and who carried out the check. The DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) must be kept in secure conditions and be destroyed by secure means as soon as it is no longer needed, in line with the DBS code of practice. Before the disclosure is destroyed, records need to be kept as described above. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 19.4)
- The fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for foster carers and those working (including volunteers) for the fostering service which includes: (c) checks to confirm qualifications which are a requirement and those that are considered by the fostering service to be relevant. (‘Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards’, 19.3)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and

young people 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: SC036628

Registered provider: Sherico Care Services Limited

Registered provider address: 2–4 Balmoral Road, London E10 5ND

Responsible individual: Veleta Hayles

Registered manager: Post vacant

Proposed manager: Joanna Francis

Telephone number: 0208 558 7569

Email address: enquires@cffa.org.uk

Inspector

Christine Kennet: social care inspector



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