

Acorn Care (NE) Limited

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33 Kellaw Road, Yarm Road Business Park, Darlington, County Durham DL1 4YA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Acorn (NE) Limited fostering service is a privately operated independent fostering agency. It offers long-term, task-centred and short-term placements to children and young people with a range of needs. At the time of this inspection, the agency had 18 approved fostering households, 27 children and young people in placement and one staying put arrangement.

The fostering service has been registered since 2013.

Inspection dates: 5 to 9 August 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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	good
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The independent fostering agency provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 23 August 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children and young people are carefully matched with foster carers who provide a warm and welcoming environment. The consistent, therapeutic parenting provided helps children and young people to re-establish trust in adults and introduces stability into their lives.

The agency provides excellent support for placements. This ensures that children and young people receive good care. The agency's outcomes tracker gives the agency and carers a visual representation of children's and young people's progress. Additionally, input from the agency's clinical psychologist provides foster carers with support and guidance in maintaining positive environments for children and young people in which to live.

Foster carers are trained in therapeutic parenting. This is the basis of the agency's support and informs the regular case consultations that take place with the agency and foster carers. The support and help are delivered in a timely way. A foster carer stated, 'Whenever I need them they are always there, either in person or at the end of a phone.'

Children and young people are fully included in their foster families. They are supported to consistently achieve high levels of attendance at schools and colleges. This means that they can learn and make progress from their starting points. Foster carers are ambitious for the children and young people placed and try to promote the importance of education and personal development. A young person said, '[Name] likes me to be as independent as I can be and supports me to develop my confidence. She makes me feel confident.'

The agency's foster carers work well with placing social workers, ensuring that they are part of the team around the child. They play an active part in planning for children and young people. Professional relationships are positive and respectful. A social worker said, 'We as a team work well together. Communication is good. It is a real team effort.'

The agency undertakes a rigorous assessment of prospective foster carers. Information gathered can lead to further consultation with the clinical psychologist before taking an informed view. This means that the agency is mindful of finding the right foster carers to ensure that children and young people are more likely to be safe and nurtured appropriately within foster families.

The agency is not consistently ensuring that the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are considered in developing the service. This limits the agency's ability to improve the care that it provides.

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

Children's and young people's risks and behaviours are identified, understood and managed. They are effectively safeguarded by diligent foster carers and the agency's comprehensive oversight and support of placements.

Careful consideration is taken to ensure matching of children and young people with fostering families. This ensures that children's safety and welfare is promoted in all foster placements. Safer caring policies are updated regularly. However, the agency does not always ensure that children's and young people's risk assessments are individualised. This means that areas of risk could be missed within the assessment process.

The agency's monitoring and supervision of placements is very good. Close working relationships with foster carers and professionals from a range of agencies keep children and young people safe from potential harm.

The foster carers receive relevant safeguarding training and understand their roles in protecting children and young people. Open and transparent communication with the agency and respective local authorities ensures that children are protected.

Children and young people rarely go missing and where this does occur, it is well managed and monitored by the agency. Foster carers use effective de-escalation techniques, which form part of the therapeutic parenting model, to ensure that children and young people are protected from harm.

The agency ensures that any safeguarding concerns are immediately shared with the respective local authorities and safeguarding officers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The agency is managed effectively by an experienced and suitably qualified registered manager. The service provided is child-focused and leaders and managers are passionate about improving the outcomes for the children and young people who they place with their foster carers.

The agency is appropriately staffed and is supported by highly efficient administrative systems. Workloads are manageable, and this gives staff time to support the foster carers well. The staff receive regular supervision that enables them to reflect on their practice and the progress that children and young people make in their fostering families. The staff attend relevant professional training associated with their personal development. Additionally, foster carers and staff participate together in the agency's therapeutic parenting programme, which is delivered by the clinical psychologist.

The registered manager has effective working relationships with a range of associated professionals. She challenges placing authorities when there are gaps in information and delays in providing documentation. On occasion, foster carers have not always had the child's most up-to-date care plan. The level of dialogue, planning

and consultation with placing authorities in response to the situation has ensured that foster carers can respond to children's and young people's needs. This ensures that children and young people can settle quickly into families.

The manager provides a formal, monthly monitoring report to the directors. This means that senior management members can overview the service appropriately. However, the monthly monitoring report and annual report required by regulation do not include consultation with foster carers, children and young people or their respective local authorities. Additionally, they have not been provided to Ofsted. This means that the service is not sufficiently evaluated as it does not take into account external and independent views.

The panel is chaired by an experienced professional. The panel is thorough in its consideration of the information presented. The panel provides effective, child-focused quality assurance of the work carried out by the agency. The administration of the panel is efficient, and the members receive information in a timely manner. The minutes provide the agency decision maker with the basis on which to make an informed decision.

The requirement and recommendations at the last inspection have been addressed. The agency has also been mindful of some issues in relation to the development of the service. As a response, they have appointed an additional member of staff with a specific task to promote engagement with foster carers, local authorities and children and young people.

The agency's staff are mindful of promoting peer support among their foster carers but as yet they have been unable to generate sufficient interest in any self-help group for foster carers. This is an area for improvement.

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 registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and</p> <p>improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency.</p> <p>The registered person must provide the Chief Inspector with a written report in respect of any review conducted for the purpose of paragraph (1) and, on request, to any local authority.</p> <p>The system referred to in paragraph (1) must provide for consultation with foster parents, children placed with foster parents, and their placing authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the placing authority). (Regulation 35 (1)(a)(b)(2)(3))</p>	27/09/2019

Recommendations

- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', paragraph 1.7)
- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Specifically, staff should ensure that children's and young people's risk assessments are individualised. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', paragraph 4.1)
- Peer support, foster care associations and/or self-help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported. ('Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards', paragraph 21.4)
- 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', paragraph 31.2)

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: SC463071

Registered provider: Acorn Care (NE) Limited

Registered provider address: 33 Kellaw Road, Yarm Road Industrial Estate,
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Responsible individual: Julie-Ann Foxton

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Inspector

Michael Dack, social care inspector



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