

Shining Stars Fostering Agency Ltd

Shining Stars Fostering Agency Limited
The Lansdowne Building, 2 Lansdowne Road, Croydon CR9 2ER
Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Shining Stars Fostering Agency Ltd is an independent fostering agency that provides foster care placements for asylum-seeking children and young people, parent and child placements, individual and sibling group placements. The service supports emergency, short- and long-term placements.

The company's two directors have held the roles of the responsible individual and the registered manager since the agency registered with Ofsted in March 2016.

At the time of the inspection, the fostering agency had 41 approved fostering households with 63 children and young people in placement. Asylum-seeking children and young people make up 90% of the current placements. In addition, five young adults have continued to live with their foster families under the 'staying put' arrangements.

Inspection dates: 18 to 22 November 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: 21 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people receive exceptionally positive experiences from this agency. Highly skilled foster carers provide support that is tailored uniquely to meet the needs of the children and young people, no matter how complex these needs are. Children and young people receive high-quality care and thrive in their placements.

The careful matching of the children and young people with their foster families contributes to the stability in their lives. Other factors that underpin the stability of placements are the resilience of the foster carers and the extra support that they and the children and young people receive from the agency. One young person moved seven times in 10 months last year. He has been living with this agency's foster family since January 2019 and is making steady progress.

Children and young people reported that they are very happy living with their foster families. In many cases, the children and young people have developed a close bond with their foster family and this provides a firm foundation for their healthy future relationships.

Children and young people are fully involved in their foster families and receive highly effective emotional support from their carers and the agency's mentor. As the children and young people develop a feeling of belonging, their sense of security and identity also increases. This is a particularly significant step in the psychological development of those children and young people who may have left everything behind to seek asylum in this country.

The agency takes extreme care to welcome the children and young people and sensitively introduces them to their new families. A 'comfort box' full of carefully chosen items, such as a soft blanket, an interesting table lamp, a carved wooden box for memorabilia and a notebook with a beautiful pen, is prepared for the children and young people at the beginning of their placement. One foster carer said that when there are barriers in communicating in English, children and young people always understand the language of love, kindness and care.

One young mother, who is in care for the first time, said that being fostered was absolutely amazing. Another young person said that the best thing about being fostered is learning to respect oneself and others. A group of three siblings talked about going on a Mediterranean cruise with their foster family as the best thing that happened to them.

All the children and young people reported that they enjoy the agency's frequent social events which offer great fun and the opportunity to make friends. Some of the children and young people described the agency as their extended family and some referred to it as their 'community'.

The agency regards education as the key for increasing children and young people's life chances and securing a positive future into adulthood. The agency's education specialist works closely with the virtual headteacher to advocate for the children and young people's education and to provide additional expert support where needed. Children and young people make excellent progress in their learning, with two young people being offered places at university.

Children and young people have comprehensive opportunities to prepare for living independently. Eight young people have recently completed an independence programme, which was run by young adults who were former care leavers. When young people are ready to leave, the agency gives them a 'step-up box' to help them set up their new home, with a message that the staff are always there for them if they need support.

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

Robust safeguarding practices are fully embedded throughout the fostering service. Assessment, training, supervision, support and the review of foster carers focus sharply on their ability to keep the children and young people safer, and to provide them with what they need to succeed in life.

Children and young people reported feeling safe and protected. They have developed a sense of safety, despite the high levels of insecurity that many of them have experienced in the past and are still facing, for example not knowing the outcome of their application to remain in this country. Some of them reported that while their lives are on hold, their foster carers give them hope and strength to keep on going.

The agency's risk management processes are very thorough and highly effective in reducing risks to the children and young people's safety. Risk management plans are developed in consultation with children and young people and their foster carers. The agency's safeguarding lead officer makes sure that plans are frequently reviewed and individualised to promote the best outcomes for children and young people.

The agency helps children and young people to learn how to keep themselves safe. The safeguarding lead undertakes direct work with individual children and young people to help them to understand risks and to develop safer behaviours. A workshop for young people on gangs and knives was very well attended.

Children and young people have a thorough understanding of the risks to their safety. They have contributed to the development of the agency's safeguarding toolkit. This document provides succinct information on a comprehensive range of risks and on who to contact for advice and support. The toolkit includes topics such as physical protection of one's body, online safety, grooming, bullying, and misuse of alcohol and drugs.

Children and young people reported that they feel comfortable in talking about

anything with their foster carers and with any of the agency's staff. Children and young people can access additional support from external professionals who specialise in working with child victims of trafficking and modern slavery. Children and young people receive extensive support to address the underlying traumatic experiences that they have had. This helps to reduce their vulnerabilities and develop resilience.

The agency works closely with its safeguarding partners to keep the children and young people safe and to promote their welfare. Staff regularly attend multi-agency meetings. They share information appropriately and make a meaningful contribution to the local authority's intelligence gathering and to enhance safety of the young people in the area.

The frequency with which the children and young people go missing from care has significantly reduced for many of them, and for some, has stopped altogether. Staff ensure that placing authorities complete return home interviews after each instance of missing and challenge them when this does not happen. To make it easier for the local authorities, the agency has made an independent consultant available to be commissioned by the local authorities to undertake these interviews on their behalf.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Exceptionally competent social workers run this outstanding fostering service. Through leading by example, leaders and managers have created a culture of positive, respectful and supportive relationships. The agency champions the needs of asylum-seeking children and young people exceptionally well and aspects of this work are worthy of wider dissemination within the social care sector.

Leaders and managers have developed the role of a family support/participation worker. This worker focuses on helping asylum seekers to settle in their new families and supports them in their dealings with the Home Office. This staff member is multilingual and is able to speak to the majority of the agency's asylum-seeking young people in the language that they understand. He draws from his personal experience of being fostered while seeking asylum in this country and this brings an additional and positive dimension to his relationships with the children and young people.

The excellent promotion of diversity and equality is built into all aspects of the agency. Leaders and managers are highly ambitious about what the children and young people can achieve. This is regardless of their circumstances, past experiences, cultural backgrounds and their initial lack of knowledge of English language and customs. Documents are available in different languages and interpreting services are used regularly and to good effect.

To capture and maintain the interest of the children and young people, the agency's documents are colourful and beautifully presented. Leaders and managers have developed a wide range of guides to fostering, including a guide for the birth children of foster carers and a specialist guide about fostering asylum-seeking children and young people. Foster carers said that they and their whole family

received exceptional levels of support from this agency.

The agency is appropriately resourced to give children and young people the best possible chances to make positive changes in their lives. Supervising social workers have caseloads that allow them to spend time talking with foster carers and with the children and young people. The agency is run efficiently and benefits from a highly experienced office manager.

Robust monitoring ensures that the standard of fostering practices remains high despite the significant growth in carers. A detailed development plan demonstrates that leaders and managers have the courage to use innovative practices and a strong commitment towards continued improvement. The excellent fostering panel enhances and compliments the quality assurance processes.

Comprehensive training opportunities for staff and foster carers contribute to the continued development of their skills. Leaders and managers use learning from research and serious case reviews to strengthen practice. Promoting professional curiosity adds value to the agency's systems for staff's reflective supervision and annual reviews of their professional performance.

Leaders and managers have created a strong learning culture and have extensive links with universities. The responsible individual gives talks to students to help raise the profile of fostering within the social care sector. The agency provides placements for student social workers and is also involved in a research project that explores the role of a supervising social worker.

Leaders and managers have developed positive working relationships with placing authorities. Feedback from the commissioners and social workers was exceptionally positive. The agency was described as creative and innovative and 'always going the extra mile'.

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: 1224685

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Inspector

Seka Graovac, social care inspector



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