

Beta North Ltd trading as Evolve Fostering

Suite 4, First Floor, Avenue House, Newton Aycliff, County Durham DL5 4DH

# Assurance visit

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This independent fostering agency was formerly known as Beta Care Services. From 1 September 2020, the trading name changed to Evolve Fostering. The agency has been registered with Ofsted since 2012 and operates in the north-east of England. The agency provides emergency, respite, short- and long-term foster placements. At the time of the assurance visit, 31 children were being cared for in 21 approved fostering households.

The manager registered with Ofsted in February 2018.

**Visit dates:** 18 and 19 March 2021

**Previous inspection date:** 12 March 2018

**Previous inspection judgement:** Good

## Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This assurance visit was completed remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The inspector interviewed the registered manager, responsible individual, agency decision-maker, and supervising social workers. Independent feedback was obtained from the fostering panel chair, social workers, foster carers and children. To gather information for this visit, records were received via email and the inspector had access to the provider's computer database.

## **Findings from the visit**

### **The care of children**

The agency has continued to steadily recruit foster carers. The agency staff know their foster carers and children well. This means that there is good matching of children with their carers. Foster carers and the children feel involved in this process. As a result, there are a high number of children living in their long-term homes. This helps children to feel part of the family and experience stability in their lives. One child said, 'It is really good. Brilliant. They are like a real mum and dad.'

During the first COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, foster carers supported children so that they could study at home. After a couple of months, the agency staff, in conjunction with the placing authority, assessed that it was safe for the children to return to their education provisions. Since that time, the children have continued to attend their schools and colleges.

When the children were at home during the restrictions, the agency staff helped the foster carers to keep the children occupied. The supervising social workers set competitions for the children to enter. This included decorating the best Easter bonnet, Christmas card making, and making a meal for £3. The photographs sent by the carers show the fun the children had in entering these competitions. This also ensures that the children feel part of the agency.

During the COVID-19 national restrictions, it was not possible for the supervising social workers to have face-to-face supervision with the carers and children. Foster carers said that this did not interfere with the high level of support they received from their supervising social workers. The leaders, managers and supervising social workers provide an out-of-hours service which gives foster carers 24-hour support. This provision helps to maintain the stability of the foster placements.

The foster carers meet with the agency's psychologist to speak about the children they are caring for. This includes reflective group discussions. This offers foster carers a safe environment in which to discuss their experiences of caring for the children and the challenges that are presented, and allows for an open sharing of ideas. Foster carers receive peer support from each other and are provided with coping strategies. No children have had to leave their home in an unplanned way.

Children maintain family time with parents and others who are important to them, making use of video conferencing when restrictions were in place. Individual risk

assessments make sure that as soon as it is safe to do so, face-to-face visits take place.

The children usually have the opportunity of meeting up with each other at the agency's planned events. However, this has not been possible due to the pandemic restrictions. To maintain friendships, when permitted, the foster carers arrange informal events so the children still get to see their friends from other foster families.

## **The safety of children**

The assessment process for prospective foster carers is thorough and the necessary checks and references are completed. This helps to make sure that only those who are safe to do so become foster carers. The manager and responsible individual quality-assure the reports. This leads to better-quality, detailed and evaluative reports.

When there are concerns about children's risk-taking behaviours, such as an increase in missing-from-home episodes, the manager attends meetings of professionals. This provides a multi-agency approach to risk management. The children have safer care plans, which are reviewed and updated. Additionally, children have risk assessments and risk management plans when there are specific risk-taking behaviours, such as when a child does not regularly return home on time. This gives carers a clear understanding of what steps they should take to keep a child safe.

Additionally, there are detailed and individualised risk assessments for each child, to look at the risks presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Areas such as health, education, emotional well-being and placement stability are explored. This makes sure that a holistic approach is taken when looking at the impact the pandemic is having on each child and their carers.

Children have access to the agency's online training hub. The children complete training on topics such as eating disorders, first aid, drug and alcohol awareness and the COVID-19 outbreak. These sessions help to educate the children in areas that affect their lives.

The agency notifies Ofsted of any significant events. The manager follows safeguarding procedures in a timely way to ensure that quick action is taken by placing authorities.

## **Leaders and managers**

Due to the small size of the agency, the leaders and manager know the foster carers and children well. Foster carers enjoy working for the agency because of its size and welcoming family feel. Several people spoken to described the agency as being a professional organisation.

The leaders take an active role in the agency and are described as being committed to achieving positive outcomes for children. One foster carer said, 'The on-call managers have messaged me if they know we've been having a difficult day, offering their support ahead of time. And any little request is acted upon by whichever person within the company you ask. All are approachable and knowledgeable.'

Fostering panels met at the same frequency and quoracy during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. These panel meetings took place by video conferencing, and continue to be remote meetings. The fostering panel process is a robust one and the fostering panel members are thorough in their exploration of the assessing social worker's report. The panel chair said, 'We are a very strong panel. Everyone has a strong sense of independence. Safeguarding practice is strong. We demonstrate professional curiosity.'

The experienced agency decision-maker receives detailed panel minutes. This helps her to make a timely decision with full clarity of information regarding the safe approval of foster carers.

The agency provides its carers and staff with a wide-ranging training programme. During the different pandemic restrictions, face-to-face training was not possible, but a variety of online e-learning opportunities have been made available. The agency staff feel supported and enjoy regular supervision. As the managers are often in the staff office, this provides the chance for staff to have informal discussions. Foster carers feel a part of the agency, and one said, 'We are highly impressed with the support and professionalism of the agency.'

The leaders and managers have met the requirements and recommendations from the last full inspection.

## **Independent fostering agency details**

**Unique reference number:** SC448211

**Registered provider:** BETA North Limited T/A BETA Care Services

**Registered provider address:** 73 Duke Street, Darlington DL3 7SD

**Responsible individual:** David Bartlett

**Registered manager:** Charlotte Wake

## **Inspector**

Tina Ruffles, Social Care Inspector

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