

Safehouses

Safehouses Limited

Keystone Innovation Centre, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1JD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this independent fostering agency

Safehouses is an independent fostering agency. It is part of the Outcomes First Group. Safehouses provides a range of foster placements including parent and child placements, and placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children with disabilities. The agency has 23 fostering households and 35 children live with foster carers.

The manager registered in September 2014.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 26 to 29 April 2021

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	good
---	------

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

Date of last inspection: 10 July 2017

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 who are fostered with this agency make very good progress in their foster homes. They feel part of the families they live with and, in some cases, their extended families. This helps children to feel valued and welcomed.

Some children can stay with their foster families after they reach 18. This provides them with valuable support into their early adulthood and continues the feeling of being a valued part of a family.

The agency provides very good support for foster carers. Several carers said how much they value this and that there is always someone they can speak to. This support helps carers to provide good foster homes even when situations become challenging.

Supervising social workers see children regularly and have good relationships with them. This means that children have someone outside of their foster home who they can speak with. It also helps the agency to keep the child at the centre of what it does.

Agency staff and foster carers support children well. They recognise and respond well to the children's individual needs and their very specific backgrounds and religious and cultural needs.

The agency supports foster carers to meet children's emotional needs and, in some cases, works with other agencies to help make sure that children get the support that they need.

Foster carers help the children to do well in their education. One child, whose first language is not English, is making good progress in learning English, and another child has been helped to think about their further education options. Foster carers help children to build and develop appropriate friendships at school. The support to form good friendships helps children to prepare for independence as it will give them support networks.

Foster carers help children to develop their interests and join clubs. This has been limited by restrictions due to COVID-19, but foster carers are doing what they can as restrictions ease.

When children have breaks from their foster family, the agency manages this in a way that provides consistency for the children. It is well planned and, for children, it is like going to stay with a member of the extended family.

The agency has recently started a children's participation group. While it is still in its early stages, the workers running the group have begun to think about how this can be used to get feedback from children. The workers are passionate about

developing this group. Foster carers' birth children can also join the group. Foster carers value the agency's support and recognition of their birth children.

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

Children feel safe in their foster homes. The work that foster carers do helps children to understand about risks and become safer.

Foster carers help children to understand about risks from the internet and to use it more safely. Because of the strong relationships that children have with their foster carers, they can more easily speak to their foster carers about any concerns, such as inappropriate internet contacts.

The agency has put on training for children about safe internet use. In one case, foster carers helped a child to understand and manage internet risks so that she can now have a mobile phone and keep in contact with her friends on social media.

Agency staff and foster carers have training in safeguarding, including areas such as understanding radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. This has helped them to recognise and respond to concerns including exploitation, radicalisation and honour-based violence. In turn, this has helped to protect children.

Supervising social workers help foster carers to understand children's behaviour and attachment issues. They also use behaviour management plans and work with outside agencies to help foster carers support children to manage their behaviour.

Foster carers work with schools to address issues for children who bully or are bullied. This helps to make sure that these issues are dealt with appropriately.

Safety issues are looked at as part of foster carer assessments and reviews. Mostly, these are effective, but in one case some elements of the health and safety checklist had not been completed and this had not been identified. The agency took prompt action once this was identified during the inspection, but not having addressed it sooner limited the safeguards to some degree.

A recent assessment of a potential foster carer went to the foster panel without full and up-to-date information. The panel had not fully evaluated the impact of a new relationship for a prospective foster carer, or the criminal record of the person that the foster carer had entered a relationship with. Also, the agency had not sought advice from its medical advisor for some identified issues. This meant that the panel could not make a recommendation on the foster carer's suitability. Although the process was stopped at panel, the failure to fully consider some issues and provide a full report did not provide a strong safeguard.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The registered manager inspires her staff. The staff value her support and leadership and the example that she sets. Staff are very happy to work for the agency. The agency's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was thought out well,

so that people have been safeguarded and supported and children have been able to keep in contact with friends and families as much as possible.

Children are at the centre of the work that the agency does. The registered manager has good oversight of the agency. She is a hands-on manager and this works well in this agency.

The registered manager uses trackers on the information technology system to monitor outcomes for children. Her active involvement in the work of the agency also gives her a good oversight. The views of children and foster carers are welcomed and help to identify areas for improvement. The new organisation that the agency is part of has completed an audit which has informed the development plan for improvement.

There has been a thorough response to the requirements and recommendations made following the last inspection.

Foster carers are pleased to be part of the agency. Many have been with the agency for a long time and have provided children with long, stable family homes. Careful matching of children with families helps to avoid breakdowns and disruption for children. When necessary, the agency arranges stability meetings to look at ways of supporting children to live with their foster carers.

The agency promotes equality and diversity. It has provided opportunities for foster carers and staff to take part in discussions about race and discrimination. This helps to raise people's awareness of these issues so that they can better look after children who may be subject to them.

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.

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home and health, and that safety checklists are completed fully. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 10.3)
- The registered person should ensure that written reports on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer set out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker need to make an objective approval decision. The reports should be accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. ('Fostering services: National minimum standards', 13.7)

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: SC036888

Registered provider: Safehouses Limited

Registered provider address: Atria, Spa Road, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 4AG

Responsible individual: James Flanagan

Registered manager: Joy O'Brien-Miller

Telephone number: 01953 885215

Email address: fostering@safehouses.org

Inspectors

Clive Lucas, Social Care Inspector

Paula Edwards, Social Care Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021