

# Fostering Changes Life

Fostering Changes Life Limited

138 Rochdale Road, Bury BL9 7BD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this independent fostering agency

This privately owned independent fostering agency was registered in May 2020. The agency provides the following types of foster placements:

- emergency
- short term
- long term
- respite.

At the time of this inspection, the agency had eight approved fostering households, with an additional family having been approved and in the process of transition from their previous agency. These families were caring for 11 children.

The registered manager has been in post since the service was registered.

This inspection involved both on-site and off-site inspection activity. Foster carers and children were enabled to take part by video calls.

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: 24 to 27 May 2021

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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:** not applicable

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** not applicable

**Enforcement action since last inspection:** not applicable

## **Inspection judgements**

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children live in stable and secure foster families. Only one child has moved on from her foster carers in an unplanned way since the agency was registered. The majority of children are in long-term foster placements, allowing them to feel part of the family. This sense of belonging helps them to thrive. One child commented in response to a recent Ofsted survey: 'I feel very safe and know my foster family care about me and only want the best for me. My foster carer always stands up for me and supports me all the time.'

Children are fully involved in usual family activities and events. However, there have been limitations to social activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's individual interests and talents are actively encouraged, such as an interest in animals or gymnastics. Children also learn to swim while in foster care. Such opportunities help to improve children's self-confidence and social skills. The agency has also hosted two family events in its first year of operation, although these were both held virtually due to the pandemic. On one occasion, all the children were sent a package containing a mug, as well as paint and paintbrushes. They were able to decorate their mugs together. They then enjoyed the hot chocolate and marshmallows that also accompanied the mug. A number of children talked enthusiastically to the inspector about this activity and proudly showed off their mugs.

Without exception, all foster carers involved, both those spoken to directly during the inspection, and those that contributed their views in writing, were positive about their experience with the agency. At the present time, all approved foster carers have transferred from other independent fostering agencies, so are able to compare their experiences. One foster carer said: 'They are a friendly, caring, compassionate, happy and supportive team. They explain everything to you.' Another commented: 'All the staff go above and beyond to support me as a carer and also the children in my care. I believe that being a small agency, we are made to feel like family. During lockdown, my family was looked after and supported very well; we did not have to worry or feel anxious. They were always there to help, which was extremely positive and comforting.'

Children's social workers report positive working relationships with the agency. The agency also consults with children's social workers when considering placing another child with the same foster carer. This helps to ensure that the needs of the children placed are compatible. However, some important documents were missing from

children's files, such as medical consents and placement plans. Furthermore, in some instances, documents were marked as received but on further exploration they were incomplete or incorrect. The manager has yet to develop an auditing system which would help identify these issues swiftly, or an escalation policy to ensure that such matters are not left to drift. The agency is not therefore able to ensure that foster carers have all the information they require to enable them to provide appropriate care for each child.

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

Children say that they feel safe and secure in their foster families. The agency ensures that each child receives a children's guide to fostering when they move into their foster home. This ensures that they have essential information, such as contact details for their social worker and how to raise any concerns about their care, presented in a child-friendly format. Supervising social workers also see children regularly, so that they are able to monitor their progress. Children spoken to during this inspection knew the agency staff and said that they could speak to them if they had any worries.

Supervising social workers carry out unannounced visits to foster carers annually. This means that they can be assured that children are receiving high-quality care, even when the foster carer is not expecting a social worker to visit. During the restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, such visits have been conducted by video call, taken place on the doorstep or in the foster carers' garden. This has helped to ensure that children are safe and well.

Each foster carer compiles their own safe caring policy. This outlines the rules and expectations for all those living in the family. A child-specific policy is then agreed when a child is placed. This helps to reduce the potential for misunderstandings.

Children rarely engage in risk-taking behaviour. They do not routinely put themselves at risk by going missing from home, engaging in substance misuse or putting themselves in situations where they could be vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. Risk assessments are completed at the time of matching. However, these do not always highlight known behaviours of concern and the best strategy for managing this behaviour. This would ensure that foster carers respond consistently and in the most effective way to presenting behaviour.

This inspection identified some shortfalls in relation to the recruitment of staff and members of the fostering panel. References have not always been taken from the individual's employer when they have previously worked with children, to confirm why this employment ended. Gaps in employment have not always been thoroughly explored and copies of qualifications have not been viewed for panel members. Although verification calls are made to referees, these have limited effectiveness, as they are not being used to clarify issues or seek confirmation that there are no safeguarding concerns. Consequently, the agency's recruitment practice does not always ensure the integrity of those employed to work for the agency.

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

The registered manager is suitably qualified and experienced. She has substantial experience of fostering, both as a practitioner and a manager. She is well respected by staff and foster carers.

This is a new and still developing service. As such, the manager has had many competing demands, which has resulted in some tasks being overlooked. However, both the registered manager and the responsible individual demonstrate a passion for delivering a high-quality service that improves outcomes for children.

The fostering panel is appropriately constituted, with an experienced panel chair. However, despite the panel being operational for nine months, they have yet to appoint a vice-chair. This leaves the panel at risk of cancellation if the chair were unable to attend. The panel provides a robust quality assurance role, ensuring that foster carers are only approved when its members are satisfied that all the necessary checks have been performed adequately. However, this has sometimes resulted in foster carers' approvals being deferred for the agency to provide additional information. This is difficult for applicants and highlights the need for a more robust quality assurance process on the part of the agency, to prevent this happening. There is no system currently in place for panel members to provide formal feedback to the agency on the quality of reports being presented to panel. The agency decision-maker makes her decisions promptly, clearly listing her own reasons for reaching her decision. This ensures a clear audit trail of decision-making.

Quality assurance and auditing are areas for development. The agency has not always ensured that it has all the required basic information prior to starting an assessment of foster carers. Health and safety information has also sometimes been overlooked. This is because many of the foster carers were known to supervising social workers previously, prior to transferring to the agency. As a result, supervising social workers have not ensured that there is a clear record of all required basic information.

The registered manager produces quarterly review reports on the quality of care and operation of the agency. However, these have not been sent to Ofsted as required and are not robust enough to identify shortfalls in practice. Similarly, the agency's statement of purpose has been updated, but a copy has not been sent to Ofsted. Furthermore, the copy on the agency's website contained the wrong address in the event of a complaint being made to the agency. The agency does not currently have a clear development plan. This would help to drive forward improvements in a timely manner.

A small team of qualified supervising social workers undertakes the assessment and supervision of foster carers. Social workers have manageable caseloads and are in weekly contact with their foster carers. This ensures that they have the time to offer meaningful support to their foster carers and to contribute to the stability of placements.

Social workers receive regular supervision. Supervision is reflective and decision-making is clear. However, case work decision-making is not currently recorded on the foster carers' records. The registered manager also receives professional supervision from an individual independent of the agency, enabling her to keep up to date with developments in fostering. Social workers feel well supported by the registered manager. One commented: 'I am not only proud to say that I work for them, but I feel very much part of the staff team and most of all I feel valued and listened to.'

A range of training opportunities are available to approved foster carers. These have primarily been online courses, as a result of the pandemic. However, some essential courses have not been prioritised for completion in the first months following approval. This includes attachment and trauma, therapeutic parenting and behaviour management. However, the majority of foster carers have completed their training, support and development standards, prior to joining this agency.

## 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—</p> <p>keep under review and, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and children’s guide, and</p> <p>notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. (Regulation 4 (a)(b))</p>	9 July 2021
<p>The fostering service provider must not—</p> <p>employ a person to work for the purposes of the fostering service unless that person is fit to do so.</p> <p>For the purposes of paragraph (1), a person is not fit to work for the purposes of a fostering service unless that person—</p> <p>is of integrity and good character,</p> <p>has the qualifications, skills and experience necessary for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>is physically and mentally fit for the work they are to perform,</p> <p>and full and satisfactory information is available in relation to that person in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 1. (Regulation 20 (1)(a) (3)(a)(b)(c))</p>	9 July 2021
<p>Subject to paragraph (5), the fostering service provider must constitute one or more fostering panels, as necessary, to perform the functions of a fostering panel under these Regulations, and must appoint panel members including—</p> <p>one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the panel is absent or that office is vacant (“the vice chairs”) from the persons on the central list. (Regulation 23 (4)(ii))</p>	9 July 2021

<p>The registered person must maintain a system for—</p> <p>monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals, and 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 purposes 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>	<p>9 July 2021</p>
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## Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that children’s safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. This refers specifically to children’s risk assessments, including clear strategies to manage known risk-taking behaviours. (National minimum standards 4.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the written report on the person’s suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision-maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up to date and include evidence-based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third-party information. (National minimum standards 13.7)
- The registered person should introduce a system for panel to provide quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel. (National minimum standards 14.2)
- The registered person should ensure that support and training are made available to foster carers, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for. This refers specifically to providing training on attachment and trauma, therapeutic parenting and behaviour management in a timely way. (National minimum standards 20.8)
- The registered person should regularly monitor all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service’s policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring. (National minimum standards 25.2)
- The registered person should ensure that entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third-party information and are signed and dated. This

refers to casework discussions and decisions being recorded on the individual case record. (National minimum standards 26.5)

- The registered person should ensure that 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. (National minimum standards 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:** 2586729

**Registered provider:** Fostering Changes Life Limited

**Registered provider address:** 138 Rochdale Road, Bury BL9 7BD

**Responsible individual:** Raymond Porter

**Registered manager:** Shirley McGaffin

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## **Inspector**

Mandy Williams, Social Care Inspector

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